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INTRODUCTION

AIM, METHOD, OUTPUTS
AIM

The aim of WP3 is to get a detailed insight into the crucial competencies, elements and processes professional players* have and need in order to optimise employability and employment.

METHOD

A quantitative methodology with active and former professional football players was used.

- Online questionnaire: Athletes’ Competency Questionnaire for Employability (ACQE)**

OUTPUTS

Insight into the crucial competencies, elements and processes professional players have and need in order to optimise employability and employment.

- Background information
  - Sample characteristics
  - Education & Development
  - Career
  - Wellbeing

- Challenges and barriers

- Competencies
  - Importance (How important is this competency for your successful transition to a new post-playing career?)
  - Possession (What is your current level of possession of this competency?)

* A professional is a player who has a written contract with a club and is paid more for her/his footballing activity than the expenses she/he effectively incurs. All other players are considered to be amateurs.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS, EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT, CAREER, WELLBEING
805 players started the questionnaire of which 282 completed it (completion rate = 55.4\%)

78\% of players in this study were male

Players in this study came from 33 different countries worldwide

48\% of the players were aged between 22-29. 3\% of the players were younger than 22 and 39\% were older than 29

- 68\% of players were still active in professional football
- Half of the players were engaged in the highest football division
- Almost half of the players (45.39\%) played for the national team
MIND THE GAP

EDUCATIONAL DIPLOMA

- 26% of the players have a secondary school diploma as highest completed degree.
- 74% of players (have) engage/engaged in further education, be it college, university or vocational training.

Diploma

- High school diploma: 26%
- Baccalaureate/A-level: 16%
- Vocational qualifications: 9%
- Bachelor’s degree: 24%
- Master’s degree: 11%
- Other: 14%

(n = 282)
ACTIVE PROFESSIONAL PLAYERS

PREPARING FOR A POST-PLAYING CAREER WHILE PLAYING PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL

27% Of active players were engaged in a dual career, football & education, during the research

19% Of active players were engaged in a dual career, football & employment, during the research
DUAL CAREER FOOTBALL & EDUCATION

“THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAYERS’ ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT IS NOT ONLY IN THE ADDED VALUE OF AN ACADEMIC DEGREE, BUT ALSO IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETENCIES THAT RETIREES CAN USE TO ENHANCE THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PROFESSIONAL OCCUPATION AFTER RETIREMENT FROM FOOTBALL.”

- PAUL WYLLEMAN, 2019

Diploma aimed for by active players combining football & education

28% of active players combining football and education, aim for a bachelor’s degree.

(n = 53)
35% of active players reported to be employed full-time next to their professional football career. 42% of active players combining professional football with another employment are self-employed.

Employment status of active players in a dual career football & employment

- 35% Full-time employed in another career next to my football career
- 65% Part-time employed in another career next to my football career
- 30% Self-employed
- 28% Employed in a private organisation
- 42% Employed in a public/state organisation

(n = 36)
• 18% of active players do not have any idea about their plans after their playing career.
• 49% of active players indicated to have an idea/a few interests of what they want to do after their professional football career.
• Only 33% of active players are confident about their plans for the future.
• Of those active players being confident about their future plans, more than half did already undertake specific actions in the context of their choice.
MIND THE GAP

REASONS NOT TO PREPARE FOR A POST-PLAYING CAREER

50% of active players reported that they have not yet started to prepare for the transition out of professional football

n = 193
The main reason for active players not to prepare for a post-playing career was the wish to focus on their playing career, followed by the perception that their transition to a new career is too far away to think about.

(n = 95)
53% of former players were forced to retire from professional football following an injury, end of contract or health reasons. Among the reasons to retire voluntarily, the main reason was the wish to start a post-playing career (22%).

*Please note that participants were able to select multiple answers.*
FORMER PROFESSIONAL PLAYERS IN A POST-PLAYING CAREER

46% of former players in this study did retire unexpectedly from professional football

n = 89
70% of players indicated that they did not find the transition process difficult.

(n = 89)
87% of former players did prepare for their post-playing career while still playing professional football.

(n = 89)
Similarly to active players, 43% of former players indicated they had an idea/a few interests for their post-playing career while still playing. 43% of former players were confident about what they wanted to do after their playing career. 28% of former players even indicated they already had undertaken actions in the context of their plans for a post-playing career.

(n = 89)
MIND THE GAP

45% of former players in this study needed more than 6 months to adjust to post-playing life

n = 89
65% of the former players indicated to be completely satisfied or satisfied with their football career.

(n = 89)
While 74% former players indicated to be satisfied or very satisfied with their post-playing life, 1 out of 7 former players indicated to be dissatisfied with their post-playing life.

**(n = 89)**

- **Very satisfied:** 43%
- **Satisfied:** 31%
- **Neither dissatisfied, nor satisfied:** 12%
- **Dissatisfied:** 9%
- **Very dissatisfied:** 4%
MIND THE GAP

CURRENT SITUATION
FORMER PROFESSIONAL PLAYERS

76% of the former players are engaged in a post-playing career.

(\( n = 89 \))
MIND THE GAP

93%
Of the former players in this study who found a post-playing job, were **full-time** employed

7%
Of the former players in this study who found a post-playing job, were **part-time** employed
From all former players in a post-playing career (n=68), 59% were employed in a private organisation.

**Employment status former players**

- Self-employed: 6%
- Employed in a private organisation: 59%
- Employed in a public/state organisation: 7%
- Other (please specify): 28%

(n = 68)
CAREER SUPPORT IN OPTIMISING PLAYERS’ TRANSITION INTO A POST-PLAYING CAREER

54%

OF PLAYERS STATED NOT TO RECEIVE SUPPORT TO OPTIMISE THEIR TRANSITION INTO A POST-PLAYING CAREER.
The 3 main reasons for not receiving support according to the players were:

- Support was not available
- Support was not relevant
- There was no need for such support

Please note that participants were able to select multiple answers.
46%

OF PLAYERS RECEIVED SUPPORT TO OPTIMISE THEIR TRANSITION INTO A POST-PLAYING CAREER.
MIND THE GAP

TYPES OF SUPPORT

129 players stated they received different types of support (ranked from most received to less received):

- Study opportunities
- Awareness raising via team visits
- Individual coaching
- Workshops
- Mental health support, interest test and support in finding a job
- Funding/scholarships and help with CV building and/or cover letter
- Financial advice

Please note that participants were able to select multiple answers.

Types of received support

(n = 129)
Of the players that received support, 70% indicated that the support was provided by the players' associations.

Please note that participants were able to select multiple answers.
“MY UNION WAS A GREAT HELP IN MAKING ME EXPLORE. GRADUALLY I FIGURED OUT I WANTED TO BE A TEACHER.”

- THOMAS KORTEGAARD
WELLBEING
SATISFACTION WITH LIFE SCALE (SWLS)*

Players completed the SWLS, evaluating their perceived satisfaction with their life as a whole, by answering five statements using a 7-scale scoring system (1 – ‘strongly disagree’ to 7 – ‘strongly agree’):

- I am satisfied with my life
- The conditions of my life are excellent
- In most ways, my life is close to my ideal
- So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life
- If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing

Once the players assigned a score from 1-7 to each of the statements, a final score was tallied up with an indication of how satisfied they are overall with life:

- Extremely dissatisfied (5 - 9)
- Dissatisfied (10 - 14)
- Slightly dissatisfied (15 - 19)
- Neutral (20)
- Slightly satisfied (21 – 25)
- Satisfied (26 – 30)
- Extremely satisfied (31-35)

Most participants indicated they are satisfied or extremely satisfied with their life. Significant differences between active and former players were found: the number of active players that has stated to be 'slightly satisfied' with their lives is significantly higher than that of former players; at the same time, the number of former players that has stated to be “extremely satisfied” with their lives is significantly higher than that of active players.

*Purple indicates a significant difference between active and former players.

(n = 282)
No significant differences were found between players who received support in their transition process and those who did not receive support.

(n = 282)
Descriptive statistics indicate that players who received support in their transition process agreed to a greater extent with all statements than players who did not receive support. A significant difference was found between support and not-supported players for the statement ‘So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life’.

*Purple indicates a significant difference between players who received support in their transition process and those who did not receive support.

(n = 282)
Players’ Social Network

Descriptive statistics show that both active and former players are quite satisfied with their network of friends and the quality of it. Former players are significantly more satisfied with the frequency of meeting their network of friends than active players.

*Purple indicates a significant difference between active and former players.

(n = 282)
PLAYERS’ SOCIAL NETWORK

Descriptive statistics show that both supported and non-supported players are quite satisfied with their network of friends and the quality of it. Both groups indicated a limited satisfaction with regards to the frequency of meeting their network of friends. Supported players are significantly more satisfied with their network of friends and its quality.

*Purple indicates a significant difference between players who received support in their transition process and those who did not receive support.

(n = 282)
CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

PLAYERS’ PERCEIVED CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS IN THEIR TRANSITION TO A POST-PLAYING CAREER
Players reported that most of those challenges were perceived as only slightly a barrier in preparing for the transition into a post-playing career.

Players reported lack of financial resources, lack of a long-term perspective and lack of support as the most important barriers in preparing for a post-playing career.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Total (mean)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of financial resources</td>
<td>2.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of long-term perspective</td>
<td>2.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support from organisation or professionals</td>
<td>2.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational problems</td>
<td>2.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time constraints</td>
<td>2.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties with your (new) identity</td>
<td>2.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-confidence issues</td>
<td>2.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injury</td>
<td>2.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social pressure</td>
<td>2.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support of friends/family</td>
<td>1.98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1 – Not a barrier at all to 5 – Certainly a barrier)

(n = 282)
While active players reported lack of financial resources, time constraints and lack of support from organisation or professionals as the most important barriers, former players indicated motivational problems, lack of financial resources and lack of long-term perspective as the most important barriers.

*Purple indicates a significant difference between active and former players.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Active Players</th>
<th>Former Players</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support of friends/family</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>2.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injury</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>2.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social pressure</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time constraints</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>2.79*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-confidence issues</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>2.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support from organisation or professionals</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>2.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties with your (new) identity</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of long-term perspective</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of financial resources</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational problems</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>3.15*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( n = 282 \)

(1 – Not a barrier at all to 5 – Certainly a barrier)
Players reported that most of those tasks were only slightly a challenge in preparing for a post-playing career. Players indicated figuring out what kind of job to look for, creating a useful network and exploring personal interest as the most important challenges.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure out what kind of job to search for</td>
<td>2.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a network that is useful for employment</td>
<td>2.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore own personal interest regarding a post-sport career</td>
<td>2.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop competencies needed for the job you are interested in (e.g., by reading, training, education)</td>
<td>2.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare for a job interview</td>
<td>2.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a CV</td>
<td>2.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1 – Not challenging at all to 5 – Very challenging)

(n = 282)
Figuring out what kind of job to search for and exploring personal interests was mentioned by both active and retired players as one of the main challenges. However, where active players listed creating a useful network as one of the main challenges, former players indicated the development of competences needed for a job.

*Purple indicates a significant difference between active and former players.

Active vs. former players’ perceived challenges

- Develop a CV: 2.59* (Active), 2.14 (Former)
- Prepare for a job interview: 2.56 (Active), 2.32 (Former)
- Develop competencies needed for the job you are interested in (e.g., by reading, training, education): 2.74 (Active), 2.47 (Former)
- Explore own personal interest regarding a post-sport career: 2.96* (Active), 2.57 (Former)
- Create a network that is useful for employment: 2.65 (Active), 2.74 (Former)
- Figure out what kind of job to search for: 3.12 (Active), 2.89 (Former)

*(n = 282) (1 – Not challenging at all to 5 – Very challenging)
COMPETENCES

PLAYERS’ COMPETENCIES REQUIRED TO OPTIMISE THEIR EMPLOYABILITY IN ORDER TO MAKE A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION TO A POST-PLAYING CAREER.
“AS A PROACTIVE APPROACH, PLAYERS SHOULD, WHILE STILL ACTIVE IN FOOTBALL, DEVELOP THOSE COMPETENCIES THAT CAN OPTIMISE THEIR TRANSITION INTO A POST-PLAYING CAREER.”

- PAUL WYLLEMAN, 2019

Although employment and financial security are essential to most retiring or retired athletes, the athletes also need to have the needed competencies and skills if they are to ensure finding and maintaining employment postsport career.

The importance of former elite athletes’ academic development is not only in the added value of an academic degree but also in the development of competences that retirees can use to enhance the development of a professional occupation after retirement.
The Athletes’ Competency Questionnaire for Employability (ACQE), an instrument for measuring the competencies required for athletes to optimise their employment and employability (Smismans et al., 2020), was used in order to get an insight into the players’ internal resources. Such an instrument can assist athletes in monitoring their competencies and career needs (e.g., Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006), and help career support providers to structure their work with active and former professional players (Baron-Thiene & Alfermann, 2015; De Brandt et al., 2018).

The ACQE consists of 28 items (i.e., skills, attitudes, knowledge) summarised in four overarching competencies required for active and former players to optimise their employment and employability:

- Career & Lifestyle Management
- Career Communication
- Career Resilience
- Career Engagement & Flexibility


** As outlined above, several studies investigated the competencies athletes require to cope with the different career phases leading to employment in a new career. To date, however, no valid and reliable instrument exists that measures the competencies athletes require to optimize their employability. Such an instrument can assist athletes in monitoring their competencies and career needs (e.g., Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006), and help career support providers to structure their work with active and former professional players (Baron-Thiene & Alfermann, 2015; De Brandt et al., 2018). The aim of this paper was therefore to develop and initially validate an instrument that measures athletes’ competencies required to optimize their employability across different phases of athletic retirement. Two studies were conducted to develop and provide initial validity for this instrument. Validation of the Athlete Competency Questionnaire for Employability (ACQE). Cultura, Ciencia y Deporte (in press).
ATHLETE COMPETENCY QUESTIONNAIRE FOR EMPLOYABILITY (ACQE)

Measuring active and retired athletes’ competencies required to optimise their employability.

CAREER & LIFESTYLE MANAGEMENT
Organise, balance and stay committed to the combination of professional and private life

CAREER COMMUNICATION
Career awareness and interpersonal competencies to communicate effectively and build a supportive network

CAREER RESILIENCE
Recognise, understand and manage emotions and control and cope effectively with adversity and pressures of daily life

CAREER ENGAGEMENT & FLEXIBILITY
Be fully engaged at work and adapt to changing environments and situations
MIND THE GAP

Use your time efficiently
Make your own responsible choices
Goal-oriented
Dedication to succeed

Create a professional network
Communicate ideas clearly
Maintain relations with important others
Asking advice to the right people at the right time

Career & Lifestyle Management
6 items*

Career Communication
8 items*

ACQE

Career Resilience
9 items*

Career Engagement & Flexibility
5 items*

Regulate emotions in different situations
Use setbacks as a positive stimulus
Cope with stress effectively
Understand your own emotions

Identify yourself with the organisation's culture
Be flexible and change career plans if necessary
Curiosity to explore career opportunities
Willingness to do more for your organisation than your direct responsibilities

*items represent skills, attitudes and knowledge

(Smismans et al., 2020)
Players received an email with an access link to the 28-item ACQE. Players completed the ACQE evaluating their perceived importance and possession of competencies on a 5-point Likert-type scale by answering the following questions:

- How **important** is this item for you to successfully transition into a post-playing career?
- What is your current level of **possession** of this item? ('1-very poor possession' to ‘5-very strong possession’)

I am able to collaborate with colleagues
I am aware of my own strengths and limitations
I am goal-oriented
I believe in my own ability to overcome challenges
I am willing to do more for my organisation than my direct responsibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top 5 ranking possession</th>
<th>Lowest 5 ranking possession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. I am able to collaborate with colleagues
2. I am aware of my own strengths and limitations
3. I am goal-oriented
4. I believe in my own ability to overcome challenges
5. I am willing to do more for my organisation than my direct responsibilities

1. I cope with stress effectively
2. I engage in in-depth discussions in my work
3. I am curious to explore career opportunities
4. I am able to be flexible and change career plans if necessary
5. I am able to create a professional network
MIND THE GAP

FORMER PLAYERS

Top 5 ranking possession
1. I am able to collaborate with colleagues
2. I am aware of my own strengths and limitations
3. I identify myself with the culture of my organisation
4. I am goal-oriented
5. I am able to lead a group of people

Lowest 5 ranking possession
1. I am able to create a professional network
2. I remain self-confident after mistakes
3. I use my time efficiently
4. I am able to be flexible and change career plans if necessary
5. I am curious to explore career opportunities
A significant difference was found between active and former players. For all the 13 items showed in the graph, former players perceived their possession of the competencies listed significantly higher than active players.

* items = skills, attitudes, knowledge

(n = 282)
Players reported an average to strong possession of the four competencies required to optimise their employability. The players’ average perceived possession in relation to the perceived importance awarded to the four competencies highlights the need for players to (further) invest in their competency development to maximise their chances for a successful transition into a post-playing career.

### Average perceived importance & possession of the 4 ACQE-competencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACQE - Competencies</th>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>Possession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career &amp; Lifestyle Management</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>3.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Communication</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>3.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Resilience</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>3.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Engagement &amp; Flexibility</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>3.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(n = 282)
Players reported an average to strong possession of the four competencies required to optimise their employability. Descriptive statistics indicate that former professional players perceive their possession of the four competencies stronger than active professional players. No significant differences were found between active and former players with regard to the four competencies.

Active vs. former players’ perceived possession of competencies

- **Career Engagement & Flexibility**: Former Players - 3.73, Active Players - 3.51
- **Career Resilience**: Former Players - 3.78, Active Players - 3.65
- **Career Communication**: Former Players - 3.73, Active Players - 3.55
- **Career & Lifestyle Management**: Former Players - 3.79, Active Players - 3.63

(*n = 282*)

('1-very poor possession' to '5-very strong possession')


Smismans, S., Wylleman, P., De Brandt, K., Defruyt, S., Vitali, F., Ramis, Y., ... Cecić Erpič, S. (2020). From elite sport to the job market: Development and initial validation of the Athlete Competency Questionnaire for Employability ( ACQE ). *Cultura, Ciencia y Deporte*.

