

“I just enjoyed that I was learning something new”: the experience of an International female rugby player

Francesca Cavallerio and Katrina McDonald

This chapter aims to portray the experience of an elite female rugby player, Paola, examining her journey from the start of her career – moving from football to rugby – through the experience of playing internationally and finally starting to consider retirement and a career in coaching. Paola’s story was collected adopting a method of narrative inquiry, the life story interview (McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2013), which facilitated the gathering of detailed information about her sport career experiences through a series of consecutive interviews.

Paola is a 31-year-old athlete. While the focus of the chapter will be on her athletic career, it is important to keep in mind that throughout her experience Paola was also a PhD student, initially, and a sport coaching lecturer, later on. She started playing rugby at 25 years old, being immediately fast-tracked into the elite level. Learning to adapt to a completely new environment and a different sport culture was challenging and further challenges are currently on the horizon, as disappointment and deselection forced Paola to reflect on her life choices, where rugby might take a different position in the future.

Rugby is respected as one of the sports across the world where men and women play under the same laws. The development of women’s rugby is not well documented, full of stories of resistance: from a school game for boys in the UK to the inclusion of the sport in the 2016 Olympic Games with both male and female Rugby Sevens teams, with the Women’s Rugby World Cup officially recognised by World Rugby only in 1998. The development of the sport has attracted women from various nations, including developing ones. At the same time, it also pushed the boundaries of this once amateur sport and, in the lead up to the World Cup in Ireland in 2017, saw more financially supported players than ever before.

Theoretical lens

Transitions through and out of sport have been widely recognised as a challenging and potentially stressful experience for many (Lally, 2007). Much of the literature in this area emerged from the field of sport psychology and sees these transitions as *normative* and *non-normative* events (Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler, & Coté, 2009). The former are moments such as moving up through age categories, moving from recreational to professional level, or retiring from sport (when

planned); the latter are unexpected events that can happen during the athletic career (e.g., injury, deselection; Stambulova et al., 2009). This unpredictability has been related to the increased challenges athletes face when dealing with these episodes, and the negative emotions stemming from them (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). Difficulties encountered by athletes include decreased self-confidence, emotional difficulties such as depression and eating disorders, and substance abuse (Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Papathomas & Lavalley, 2006; Stirling, Cruz & Kerr, 2012). Initially conceptualised as single events, clearly delimited in time, transitions are nowadays described as being dynamic, more like a process than a unique event (Wylleman, Rosier, & De Knop, 2016). Moreover, the perspective from which these processes have been studied moved from simply focusing on the sport-specific career, to encompassing different aspects of athletes' life, adopting a holistic point of view (Wylleman & Lavalley, 2004). The Developmental Model of Transitions Faced by Athletes (Wylleman & Lavalley, 2004) identifies several areas in an individual's life (e.g., academic, psychosocial, athletic), each with their own challenges and transitions, and it highlights how experiences happening in one area of an athlete's life, can impact the others.

Literature in the area of transitions in sport has increasingly focused on retirement from sport, and specifically on the role played by self-identity during this final transition (Lally, 2007; Lavalley & Robinson, 2007; Sparkes, 1998; Warriner & Lavalley, 2008). Identity has been defined as a 'multidimensional view of oneself, that is both enduring and dynamic' (Lally, 2007; p. 86). Individuals can have numerous dimensions, but when one becomes dominant (e.g., athletic dimension), investment in it means neglect for the others. This phenomenon, known as identity narrowing or identity foreclosure (Markus, 1977), represents a risk factor for identity issues following the loss of the dominant dimension (e.g., athletic retirement). These difficulties have been identified in many competitive athletes, especially when retirement was not being planned and prepared, like in the case of severe injuries or deselection from a programme (e.g., Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Sparkes, 1998).

The psychological nature of the majority of studies looking at transitions in sport in the literature meant that the metaphors more widely used are those of 'acquisition' and 'transfer', which underpins the idea of learning through sport as a simple cognitive activity (Barker-Ruchti & Schubring, 2016). In other fields though, learning is now understood as a process that is mainly experienced on a subconscious level, based on relationships, and inevitable when there is a change in circumstances (Hodkinson et al., 2008). This learning process adopts the metaphor of *becoming*,

which underlines the idea of learning through social practices, such as taking part in sport (Hodkinson et al., 2008).

As outlined in chapter 4, Hodkinson and Sparkes' (1997) sociological theory of career development brings forward the concepts of *horizons for action* (i.e., how a learning culture and an individual's background and experiences indicate what individuals perceive they can *become*) and *horizons of learning* (i.e., how individual dispositions to knowledge and learning preferences shape a person's orientation towards learning; Bloomer & Hodkinson, 2000) and the idea of 'turning points'.

Therefore, when individuals experience changes, their horizons need to be reshaped to fit the new situations. This process of change and adaptation, and the following experience of learning as becoming, is portrayed in this chapter through Paola's story. Her learning journey through sport is presented in the following sections: firstly, her first year moving from football to rugby (24-25 years old). Secondly, her experience being selected and then deselected to play for her Country (26-30 years old). Lastly, Paola's current experiences as a rugby coach and a Premier League player (30-31 years old). Paola realised herself, during her interview, how each of these times provided a great amount of learning experiences, which changed her into the person she is today.

Should I kick, or should I throw?

Paola is a European athlete who was born in [Country X] but grew up with her parents in [Country Y], which to her is "home". She moved to [Country X] again to complete her Masters' degree and has been living there ever since. At the age of 11, she started to play football and did so for about 10 years. At the age of 24 years, she started to grow bored of the sport and annoyed with her club coach, with whom she felt she was not improving any further and who was not selecting her to play often. Paola had never played rugby before, but when she was 25, a friend from University invited her:

...one of my best friends was like "oh, why don't you try rugby, we've got this friendly game for like freshers", and they didn't have enough people, so they needed more people to make up... she said, "come along and have a go at it". So...they didn't teach me anything about how to play or how to tackle...but I knew a little bit of rugby beforehand because I watched it on TV and I really enjoyed it, even though I didn't really know that women's rugby was a thing, to be honest. So, I knew the rules, and I had a rugby ball before then, so I knew how to pass and stuff... So I played in that game and it was...ha, it was like full-contact game and the first time somebody ran at me and I was supposed to tackle I just tried

to shoulder barge her, as you do in football...that wasn't very successful, so then they scored a try and someone in my team taught me how to tackle in the try area, behind the posts...so I learned how to tackle taught by another teammate...during a game, basically!

Paola really enjoyed playing, as she was naturally gifted for the sport, and soon started training with the freshers' team (i.e., new people) at the University. The social side of rugby immediately surprised her:

Because I was a postgraduate I was older than other people, when...it was like I didn't want to make friends. I was like "I have all my friends already, I am not interested in the social side of the game, I just wanna give it a go, like try and learn a new sport"...but then rugby people are so...like friendly and supportive, there's something about the game, 'cause you have to... like...touch people in quite intimate places, first you like hit people hard and then...yeah, it's basically like hugging and stuff...and, I just made friends without even trying to.

Nowadays, Paola still mentions her best friends all being from rugby, so she clearly got involved into the social side of the game, starting to create important emotional bonds, which increased the pleasure she was feeling every time she played. Compared to her football experience, she felt appreciated in rugby, by both teammates and coach, and she enjoyed learning new things:

The captain at the time was like "yeah, you can do this, you've got so much potential" and so I just kept doing it and ended up being good at it without really knowing what I was doing! [...] I can't remember when I gave up football completely, I just remember that I was enjoying rugby...I just enjoyed that I was learning something new. There are so many rules to learn, and different positions so I was learning different roles...so much to learn and I really enjoyed it. It gave me more than football, that I had been playing for something like 10 years, and I wasn't feeling like I was progressing...I just wasn't really enjoying it that much, so... I kinda switched.

Changing sport did not only mean that Paola had to learn new rules and roles, it also meant she had to start training her body differently, teaching it new ways of working (out):

Training wise...yeah... you have to learn and go to the gym. I never really used to go to the gym before I took up rugby... training for football it's just more running, and they would just insert some training in the football session. Also, I wasn't playing like at a high level there? I find it much more in rugby, that people, even if not at high level, are going to the gym, to just get stronger and stuff? [...] I remember when I was starting I had like pain in the biceps area...someone in my team said that maybe that's because my arms weren't strong enough. So, I was like "Ok, I obviously need to get a bit stronger!" That kind of started the process of getting me into the gym and getting quite stronger.

Becoming stronger was an experience that Paola feels changed her "inside out", not just from an outside perspective. The change in her body, and the ways her body was being used in her new sport, impacted her psychologically as well:

There's a whole body image and a whole "body living the sport" going on there... I mean, even just the little things in rugby, like we wear short shorts? In football we wear long shorts. I remember thinking like "OMG, these shorts look SO small!" I felt so self-conscious, I could see my thighs! But now I love short shorts! I guess they have just become part of the...well, I learn that... yeah, I'm just comfortable now. But also, like, you use your whole body so much more, and in a quite aggressive way in rugby? So, there's that as well, like...body confidence? And being comfortable enough to be really close to other people's bodies...like you have to keep them on your shoulders, and then stuff like scrums, you place your face next to people's bums...ahah! And even, related to that, stuff like...in football people don't tend to shower after the game? In rugby they do! Because you get really muddy, and then people shower and come out of showers and...like, people are naked! At the start I was just worried about that! I had to be naked in front of people! But nowadays that's become such a normal thing, and overall with my body I like going to the gym and being strong and I'm also kind of proud of seeing how good I can make my body in terms of strength and muscles. I would have never done that before, I think.

Paola's experience of transitioning from football to rugby, although happening later in her life, had a huge effect on her identity and personal development. She found herself not only learning new technical and tactical aspects related to the game, but also to relate herself to new - often younger - friends in social circles, and mostly to see her body under a new light, which positively affected her self-confidence.

Analysis

Paola's entrance in the rugby environment affects her horizon for action and horizon of learning, which had become stale in football, but were re-energised by a new enthusiasm for learning the game of rugby. This change developed through an *initiating turning point* (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2015), which is an event made possible by other people's intervention (i.e., her friends inviting Paola to the freshers' game). Following the initial involvement with rugby, Paola falls into a confirmatory routine, which is a routine that endorses decisions taken in the past (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997), in this case moving from football to rugby. Paola's transition from one sport to another can be understood through the concept of learning as becoming within a transitional process of boundary crossing (Hager & Hodkinson, 2009). Previous authors looked at learning transfer through the metaphor of participation (in sport, in our case; Lave & Wenger, 1991), where the new learner appears so integrated in a social process of learning that she loses personal history and individual agency (Billet, 2001). Learning as becoming, on the other hand, maintains the learner's agency, and highlights the process of learning as social as well as embodied (Hodkinson et al., 2008). This holistic perspective of learning integrates practical, physical, cognitive, and emotional learning.

Through Paola's *becoming* experience, moving from a football to a rugby player, several aspects are highlighted: firstly, there is a cognitive aspect of her learning, which relates to the new technical and tactical information she receives and has to store, understand, and put into practice. Soon Paola's horizons start transitioning from an athlete who knows the rules of football, to one who knows rugby's laws, understands, and can implement them. Her enjoyment of the game is enhanced through her learning experience (Balyi & Williams, 2010) and this enjoyment enhances her motivation to participate in the game, illuminating the close relationship between horizons for action and horizons of learning. Secondly, Paola quickly finds herself immersed in the social world of rugby, making friends despite her thinking of "not needing them" and an age difference. The open and friendly environment embraces Paola as part of the group. As a consequence, she starts getting used to and adhering more and more to the '*horizon for rugby*': from the "short shorts" to the "people are naked!", Paola becomes accustomed to the ways of rugby. The last aspect of Paola's becoming experience relates to the embodied aspect of learning (Shilling, 2016), which emphasises the connection between cognitive, practical and sensory knowledge in the process of learning. The cultural/cognitive aspect of "short shorts" and "naked people in the shower", together with a new-

found engagement with physical training in the gym and with weights, meant Paola's body became stronger, better shaped for the game, but at the same time also a source of confidence, something she grew used to, and something to be proud of. The development of Paola's horizons for action started by the process of becoming a rugby player impacted her horizons of learning far more than just in sport, giving new shape to her personality, with increased self-confidence and pride in her strong body.

Interestingly, Paola's story seems to defy the common idea of gender-role conflict, which women athletes playing a 'masculine sport' appear to be expected to experience (Allison, 1991). Existing research (e.g., Fallon & Jome, 2007; Howe, 2010; Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar, & Kauer, 2004) discusses the idea of uneasiness, struggles, and emotional pain stemming from the idea of violating cultural norms and expectations in relation to body image. Paola's cultural learning through rugby though seems to have the opposite effect, as her horizon of learning evolves to appreciate and take care of her body more than before. This experience aligns with literature on the notion of *positiveness* of body satisfaction, which increases the more women's bodies appears to adhere to the physical requirements of each sport (Russell, 2004).

The rollercoaster which is 'playing for your country'

A year into playing rugby, Paola was immersed in it, playing both for her University and for a club. One day she received an invitation for the selection of a Sevens' team of exiled players (i.e., players from her "home" country who were not living there) and she decided to give it a go:

The email said, "If you are interested just email us and come along to this training day in [city]". I thought "Ok, I'll do that, why not? See what it's like..." I was also really keen on learning new stuff, 'cause I was still very new. Then the day arrived, and I was really nervous, not really sure what to expect. I got the train to [city], and there were only 8 people there! We just did some training and stuff, but like a couple of people there already played for the National team. I was like "OMG, that's crazy!"

After that first experience, Paola was not immediately selected, but started being invited to a few more training sessions in her "home" country. Every time she would throw herself into the adventure, looking forward to learning and developing as a player, until she unexpectedly found herself playing against her same "home" country just to help some friends:

They gave me someone's trainers that were too small for me! So, off I went and played against them. And we actually scored a try against them! Which is unbelievable! And then I got speaking to their players after that and they recognised me from the trials and were like "Oh you know, you should come along to the 15's stuff. I saw the coaches there, who also obviously remembered me and was like "You should come up to the 15's stuff later" and I was "yeah, yeah", not really believing they would have invited me.

But in the following months, Paola actually received an invitation to the Friday games called "[Country Y] Series", and soon found herself invited to the national team's training camps:

I think they liked that I had only been playing for a year, because it meant that they could...like I had this sort of physical attributes almost...the potential, you know? So, they could see that they could train me in a way that suited them.

Paola started playing internationally and, after a couple of years, she was selected to play for her "home" country in the Six Nations. As Paola herself admitted, this was a huge learning experience: not only she was challenged technically, she also had to learn to organise her life – and her new job as a University lecturer – to fit around the huge physical, organisational, and emotional burden of the experience:

Obviously, you're representing your Country and everyone's very proud of you and it makes you very proud of yourself. You put everything into every game that you play, you're in camp for like a few days beforehand but you actually build up to it [the Six Nations] through the whole season, from September right through to January, with everything focused towards that. Then the few days before you're really focusing on the game and what you're gonna do to win and each time we think we're gonna win - because you play to win - and then we end up losing heavily each time. You build yourself up so much and put everything into it and you almost feel like you're letting people down, and yeah, it's like a massive come down basically. And then for example I had to come back here and deliver a lecture. I once got back at 10:30 at night after being on three flights after the game, and I had made the mistake to teach at 9am the day. I hadn't prepared anything and stayed up until after midnight preparing my slides and when I started the lecture there were like 20 people there

and I was just, “This is miserable, huh”. So, yeah, it's just like massive highs and then massive lows, and then up again I guess, after not much time.

After a second experience in the Six Nations, playing with a new coach and in an environment with an overall climate that Paola enjoyed more than before, her name disappeared from the list of those selected to play:

I do really like the culture they've got at the moment and think he's good, but he's not very good at communicating and I don't think he's going to select me, basically. That's what he's been like the past two years, I've not been selected, and he's not really communicated that to me or given me concrete reasons why. He said it was just “preference”. So, yeah, even though I like the way he is like, the atmosphere and the culture that he created in the team, personally it's not really worked out that well for me, probably because I'm not living there [*i.e., Country Y*].

After years of emotions and sacrifices, Paola found herself at a turning point after receiving an invitation to a camp for exiled players and realising she was not sure she was interested in getting involved:

The previous year, before the Six Nations I had done all the training and I was part of all the training camps and I was really fit...I did everything they asked of me. We had this test challenge, which is like a running test and I had the best time of any of the forwards and the second-best time in the whole squad and I still didn't get selected. Yes, I know there's a lot more to blame than just fitness, but it seemed to be quite a big thing they wanted to improve for the whole squad, so we could play at a higher tempo for longer... I put everything into it, I don't think I could have done anything differently and I still didn't get selected. And they didn't even tell me that, so you find out reading about other people having been selected and your friends have to come up to tell you. So - you know - I know how much effort that takes and, well I don't really have a lot of motivation to do that again. This way of doing, it really killed my desire to be part of it [National team].

Despite the sadness and disappointment for this situation – still painfully raw – Paola realised that she was lucky because she had developed an identity that went beyond rugby. She had her PhD, a

job, a career, and she knew these were important aspects of a balanced life, which not all the players had, with some of them being professional athletes with nothing outside of the sport.

Analysis

Paola's career as a rugby player developed quickly, moving from a confirmatory routine to a *contradictory* and *dislocating* one (i.e., a routine which expresses regret and disappointment, and in which Paola disagrees with what is required from her – for example to keep training and putting effort without being selected, or not receiving a clear rationale for her de-selection). Initially, she experiences some *structural turning points*, initiated by external structures related to the institutions involved (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). For example, when she is selected to play for the National team and she starts taking part in all the training camps and the preparation for the Six Nations, and also when she finishes her PhD and has to move from playing University rugby to Premier League rugby. In contrast, the experience of de-selection falls under the *forced turning point* category, as it is determined by the actions of others (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). As a consequence of the experience of de-selection, Paola is also creating a (partially) *self-initiated turning point*, when she is considering not joining the newly created group of exiled players who are planning to train again. Her decision is based on the disappointment of not having been selected for the recent Six Nations, but also on previous learning, knowing how much effort getting into shape requires – and being aware of the emotional risks related to lack of selection.

Paola's horizon for action as an international rugby player is closing down, due to deselection and maybe even age, when in her 30s she feels it is hard to keep up against young 18-year-old players. She is struggling to see herself training again as hard as she did previously, and to imagine herself in an environment that – despite the positive coaching climate – has proved to be missing clear communication, which Paola highly values. Meanwhile, Paola feels lucky because she knows she can see new horizons for action related to her experience as a club player (and captain), as well as to her professional career in academia. The idea of horizons for action in relation to turning points in an athlete's career can also be linked to narrative studies of athletic career and retirement (e.g., Cavallerio, Wadey, & Wagstaff, 2017; Douglas & Carless, 2006).

Douglas and Carless (2006) identified three main types of narratives athletes fall under in their career: *performance*, *relational*, and *discovery*. Athletes' whose only horizon for action concerns their sport, who do not develop any other interests or relationship outside of it, fall under the

performance narrative. Those whose horizon for action involve participating in sport in order to be with another person (e.g., best friend) fall under the relational narrative, while those whose horizons comprehends different sides of their identity (e.g., athletes, students, friends) represent the discovery narrative. Cavallerio et al. (2017) highlighted a potential link between the narratives of athletes' career, and the ones identified following retirement: *entangled* (from a performance narrative), *making sense* (from a relational narrative), and *going forward* (from a discovery narrative). Paola's awareness of "everything else she has" beyond rugby, places her in the latter narrative, where athletes are able to see themselves in new situations, and to develop new horizons for action. This narrative is the most sought after by athletes following retirement, as it tells a story of successful adaptation to a new life. Paola's story sees her developing new horizons for action when she opens up to the new experience in rugby, which in turns affects her horizon of learning (e.g., from a 'horizon for running' in football training, to a 'horizon for upper body strength' in rugby) and the way she feels more confident in herself and her body. Once her rugby career seems to draw to a close, the positive past experiences appear to help Paola to believe in the importance of keeping her horizons open, rather than looking back. It is also possible that Paola's initial upbringing, moving between two countries, allowed her to develop horizons for action and of learning that were flexible, allowing space for change, development, and discovery. Finally, maybe due to her late start as an elite rugby athlete, Paola had a chance to develop different horizons before her involvement at high level in sport, which seem to protect her from low functional narratives.

Learning to pay it forward

During the first years of her career as a rugby player, Paola completely devoted herself to playing, both at University and club level, and then internationally. Over the past few years though, Paola started coaching a local University rugby team, using her previous experience in football and the understanding of coaching developed through her PhD. In the interviews, she discussed how this addition to her life provided one more layer "of interest" for rugby, as she started using what she was learning in different ways:

I gained a great amount of technical knowledge or tactical knowledge through being coached. Also, from the last coach, I learnt about the culture and the atmosphere of the systems that they created, which is very practical stuff. I mean, I catch myself noticing those things and almost storing them up for my coaching, or like...even though it's sort of transferred more into actual

training, but also just the way things are run, generally. That was the first thing I started to realise I was thinking “I would do that when I'm coaching” or when I come to be in charge of something - like a head coach – sometimes when I am training at my club there is some particular stuff that we'll do or like key points and I'll be like “yeah I'm gonna use that or remember for when I coach”. Even when I am training with [Country Y] actually, it's more the...not necessarily technical stuff but just like the activities that we do there, those are things you can take, adapt, and use.

Coaching has taken over a particular role in Paola's life, especially in recent times, which saw her motivation to continue training wavering after the tough disappointment of missed selection. Despite the treatment she received “killed her motivation to participate”, Paola is still playing nationally at club level, and she explains:

The other thing is just wanting to be involved! I continue being involved at a high level because I want to keep collecting more knowledge to help with my coaching as well.

Paola's learning experience as a player is not just influencing her coaching knowledge and style, but it is also working the other way around, with her experience as a coach influencing her role as a rugby player:

Well, [name of the club] made me captain this year and I think that has potentially a bit to do with the fact that they know I can analyse the game... take a step back and provide feedback to people. I think it's probably because of the way I interact with people, which I think partly comes from coaching...well, teaching I suppose as well!

Paola's motivation to coach is also related to a reflection on her own experience and how she is hoping to allow future girls to walk down a similar path, to somehow give back what she received:

Take the girls I coach at the moment... they're like... I don't know...they see me as a major role model! Yeah, it's good, at least I feel proud, but a little bit like... I'm just a player like you! But then I suppose that's why I got interested in coaching in the first place, because I mean that could have been me...these girls could be me... just started playing at Uni and then ended up playing international rugby and that's pretty amazing! So, I figured out if someone else could do that, that would be cool!

Analysis

The third phase of Paola's athletic career to date highlights what we could call *horizons for re-invention*, which refer to horizons for action and horizons of learning that encourage an *evolutionary* routine (i.e., characterized by successful movement from one career to another; Hodgkinson & Sparkes, 1997) brought about by *self-initiated turning points*. Paola explains how the decision to start coaching related to her passion for rugby, but also her choice of doing a PhD in education, pushed her to evolve further in her experience as a rugby player. By becoming a rugby coach, Paola started to learn to look at things (e.g., her experiences as a rugby player) differently, asking herself critical questions, and trying to 'store' the information in order to be able to use it when coaching herself. On the other hand, her new role as a coach also impacted her game, because she developed a more analytical approach and an ability to interact and communicate with the (other) players. In turn, this experience impacted her horizon for action, as she became the captain of her club's team, seeing the skills developed for one role recognised and valued for another one.

While Paola's initial horizon for rugby was to play and win, now her horizon of learning is more instrumental – she participates in order to develop her coaching. This highlights once again the flexibility of Paola's learning as becoming, where she is able to deal with a negative situation (i.e., non-selection) in a way that still constitutes a resource for her personal development.

Conclusion

Throughout Paola's career in rugby, from her beginning as a 'late starter', through the different stages, her horizons for action and horizons of learning have constantly evolved. Her initial experience with rugby, arriving at an older age than the usual involvement in sport, heavily impacted her development, as an athlete and as a person. Through the process of learning as becoming, Paola's athletic life changed due to her increased technical and tactical knowledge of the sport, but even more thanks to the new social and embodied experiences in the rugby culture that she was immersed in. A further turning point for Paola arrived when she was selected to play for her Country's 15 team. She learnt to manage the physical and emotional requirements to play at high level, as well as balancing the time dedicated to training and playing with the other commitments she had, first the PhD and then a job in academia. Finally, when dealing with the

experience of deselection, Paola had to revise her engagement with rugby. Becoming a coach provided a way for her to expand and shift her horizons of learning and horizons for action, by investing time and effort in a new career, which allows her to still enjoy her sport but also to prepare for a future retirement from playing.

Paola's story is unique to her situation, but the key lessons that she experienced can help others understand their own journey through sport, and the learning that takes place. It also highlights the importance 'reinvention', so that individuals' education through *becoming* can continue.

References

- Alfermann, D., & Stambulova, N.B. (2007). Career transitions and career termination. In G. Tenenbaum, & R.C. Eklund (Eds.), *Handbook of Sport Psychology* (3rd ed., pp. 712-736). New York: Wiley.
- Balyi, I., & Williams, C. (2010). *Coaching the young developing performer*. Leeds: Coachwise.
- Barker-Ruchti, N., Lindgren, E. C., Hofmann, A., Sinning, S., & Shelton, C. (2015). Tracing the career paths of top-level women football coaches: turning points to understand and develop sport coaching careers. *Sports Coaching Review*, 3(2), 117-131.
- Barker-Ruchti, N., & Schubring, A. (2016). Moving into and out of high-performance sport: The cultural learning of an artistic gymnast. *Physical education and sport pedagogy*, 21(1), 69-80.
- Billett, S. (2001). Learning in the workplace: Strategies for effective practice.
- Blinde, E. M., & Stratta, T. M. (1992). The "sport career death" of college athletes: Involuntary and unanticipated sport exits. *Journal of sport behavior*, 15(1), 3.
- Bloomer, M., & Hodkinson, P. (2000). Learning careers: continuity and change in young people's dispositions to learning. *British educational research journal*, 26(5), 583-597.
- Cavallerio, F., Wadey, R., & Wagstaff, C. R. (2017). Adjusting to retirement from sport: narratives of former competitive rhythmic gymnasts. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 9(5), 533-545.
- Douglas, K., & Carless, D. (2006). Performance, discovery, and relational narratives among women professional tournament golfers. *Women in sport and physical activity journal*, 15(2), 14-27.
- Fallon, M. A., & Jome, L. M. (2007). An exploration of gender-role expectations and conflict among women rugby players. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 31(3), 311-321.
- Hager, P., & Hodkinson, P. (2009). Moving beyond the metaphor of transfer of learning. *British Educational Research Journal*, 35(4), 619-638.

- Hodkinson, P., Biesta, G., & James, D. (2008). Understanding learning culturally: Overcoming the dualism between social and individual views of learning. *Vocations and learning*, 1(1), 27-47.
- Hodkinson, P., & Sparkes, A. C. (1997). Careership: a sociological theory of career decision making. *British journal of sociology of education*, 18(1), 29-44.
- Howe, P. D. (2001). Women's rugby and the nexus between embodiment, professionalism and sexuality: An ethnographic account. *Football Studies*, 4(2), 77-92.
- Krane, V., Choi, P. Y., Baird, S. M., Aimar, C. M., & Kauer, K. J. (2004). Living the paradox: Female athletes negotiate femininity and muscularity. *Sex roles*, 50(5-6), 315-329.
- Lally, P. (2007). Identity and athletic retirement: A prospective study. *Psychology of sport and exercise*, 8(1), 85-99.
- Lavallee, D., & Robinson, H. K. (2007). In pursuit of an identity: A qualitative exploration of retirement from women's artistic gymnastics. *Psychology of sport and exercise*, 8(1), 119-141.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge university press.
- Markus, H. (1977). Self-schemata and processing information about the self. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 35(2), 63.
- McAdams, D. P., Josselson, R., & Lieblich, A. (2013). *Identity and story: Creating self in narrative*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Papathomas, A., & Lavallee, D. (2006). A life history analysis of a male athlete with an eating disorder. *Journal of loss and trauma*, 11(2), 143-179.
- Russell, K. M. (2004). On versus off the pitch: The transiency of body satisfaction among female rugby players, cricketers, and netballers. *Sex roles*, 51(9-10), 561-574.
- Shilling, C. (2016). Body pedagogics: Embodiment, cognition and cultural transmission. *Sociology*, 51(6), 1205-1221.
- Sparkes, A. C. (1998). Athletic identity: An Achilles' heel to the survival of self. *Qualitative health research*, 8(5), 644-664.
- Stambulova, N. B., Alfermann, D., Statler, T., & Coté, J. (2009). ISSP position stand: Career development and transitions of athletes. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 7, 395-412.

- Stirling, A. E., Cruz, L. C., & Kerr, G. A. (2012). Influence of retirement on body satisfaction and weight control behaviors: Perceptions of elite rhythmic gymnasts. *Journal of applied sport psychology*, 24(2), 129-143.
- Strauss, A. (1962). Transformations of identity. In A.M. Rose (Ed.) *Human Behaviour and Social Processes: an interactionist approach*. London: Routledge.
- Warriner, K., & Lavallee, D. (2008). The retirement experiences of elite female gymnasts: Self-identity and the physical self. *Journal of applied sport psychology*, 20(3), 301-317.
- Wylleman, P., & Lavallee, D. (2004). A developmental perspective on transitions faced by athletes. In M. Weiss (Eds.), *Developmental sport and exercise psychology: A lifespan perspective* (pp. 507–527). Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology.
- Wylleman, P., Rosier, N., & De Knop, P. (2016). Career transitions, in R. J. Schinke, K. R. McGannon, & B. Smith (Eds.), *Routledge international handbook of sport psychology* (pp. 111-118). London: Routledge.