

**Exploring the transition of track and field athletes
from Grade 12 to first year university**

By

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Abstract

Many talented high school sport performers continue their studies at tertiary institutions; therefore, it is important to create awareness of the challenges faced by these athletes during the transition from school to university. The current study explored the transitional experiences, including the barriers and facilitators experienced by student track and field athletes during their transition from Grade 12 to first year university at Stellenbosch University. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight first-year student-athletes (three men/ five women), respectively participating in track, field, and combined events, who made the transition from high school (Grade 12 in 2019) directly into their first year at Stellenbosch University the following year (2020). This allowed for retrospective accounts of their high school experiences, as well as concurrent feedback about their experiences during the first few months of their first year at university. The interview script guided the participants to discuss their transition, covering multiple domains of their lives (i.e., athletic, psychological, psychosocial, academic/vocational, financial, and legal). Student-athletes are simultaneously transitioning from junior-to-senior level competition and from high school to tertiary education, negotiating the change into adulthood, building new and mature relationships, and becoming emotionally independent. They are reliant on financial support from family, universities, or the sport's governing body. The study was exploratory and utilized a descriptive phenomenological qualitative research design. The Developmental Model on Transitions faced by athletes, as well as the Holistic Athletics Career Model became the lens through which the research questions were framed, and the findings and discussions were presented. The Covid-19 pandemic broke out just before these interviews were conducted. The pandemic caused unforeseen disruptions on a global scale and led to drastic changes to the 2020 academic and sporting year. The student-athletes underwent concurrent transitional experiences across multiple domains. The qualitative findings revealed seven overarching themes, namely facilitators, transitional experiences, and barriers within the academic, athletic, psychosocial, psychological, financial, and legal domains. The Covid-19 pandemic as the second transition, and support mechanisms available to student-athletes were also discussed. Each of the themes consisted of numerous subthemes and categories of codes. The domains cannot be viewed as separate entities. They must be

considered as cross-domain transitional experiences and how their interaction influences the life of student-athletes. The labels of experiences either being barriers and/or facilitators depend on the individual perceptions held by the student-athletes and how they were able to negotiate the situation at hand. The student-athlete's perceived identity depended on their motivation towards their academic and athletic pursuits. Their identities fluctuated throughout the academic year depending on the priority of the task at the specific timepoint. The Covid-19 pandemic caused a shift toward a stronger student identity because of the cancellation of sport events, the inability to train outside during the national lockdown and a subsequent increase in time to focus on studies. The support structures and systems provided by Maties Sport, if used optimally, would facilitate the student-athlete's athletic performance, and enhance their personal growth and development and success across multiple life domains.

Keywords: Holistic Athletics Career Model; Dual career; student-athletes, Covid-19; Cross-domain experiences

Opsomming

Baie talentvolle hoërskool sportpresteerders gaan voort met hul studies by tersiêre instelling en; daarom is dit belangrik om bewustheid te skep van die uitdagings wat hierdie student-atlete in die gesig staar tydens die oorgang van skool na universiteit. Die huidige studie het die oorgangservarings ondersoek, insluitend die hindernisse en fasiliteerders wat deur studente-baan- en veldatlete ervaar word tydens hul oorgang van Graad 12 na eerstejaar aan die Universiteit Stellenbosch. Semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude is gevoer met agt eerstejaarstudent-atlete (drie mans/vyf vroue), wat onderskeidelik aan baanitems, velditems en gekombineerde items deelgeneem het, wat die oorgang van hoërskool (Graad 12 in 2019) direk na die eerste jaar aan die Universiteit Stellenbosch die volgende jaar (2020) gemaak het. Dit het voorsiening gemaak vir terugwerkende weergawes van hul hoërskool-ervarings sowel as gelyktydige terugvoer oor hul ervarings gedurende die eerste paar maande van hul eerste jaar op universiteit. Die onderhoudskrif het die deelnemers in staat gestel om hul oorgang te bespreek, wat verskeie domeine van hul lewens dek (d.w.s. atleties, sielkundig, psigososiaal, akademies/beroepsgerig, finansiël en wetlik). Studente-atlete beleef terselfdertyd die oorgang van junior- na seniorvlakkompetisie en van hoërskool na tersiêre onderwys terwyl hulle die verandering na volwassewording bestuur, nuwe en volwasse verhoudings bou en emosioneel onafhanklik word. Hulle is aangewese op finansiële ondersteuning van familie, universiteite, of die sportsoort se beheerliggaam. Die studie was verkennend en het 'n beskrywende fenomenologiese kwalitatiewe navorsingsontwerp gebruik. Die Ontwikkelingsmodel oor Oorgange wat atlete in die gesig staar, sowel as die Holistiese Atletiekloopbaanmodel was die lens waarbinne die navorsingsvrae gestel is en die bevindinge en besprekings aangebied is. Die Covid-19-pandemie het uitbreek net voordat hierdie onderhoude gevoer is. Die pandemie het onvoorsiene ontwrigtings op wêreldwye skaal veroorsaak en gelei tot drastiese veranderinge aan die 2020 akademiese en sportjaar. Die student-atlete het gelyktydige oorgangservarings oor verskeie domeine ondergaan. Die kwalitatiewe bevindinge het sewe oorkoepelende temas aan die lig gebring, naamlik fasiliteerders, oorgangservarings en hindernisse binne die akademiese, atletiese, psigososiale, psigologiese, finansiële en regsdomene. Die Covid-19-pandemie as die tweede oorgang, en ondersteuningsmeganismes beskikbaar vir studente-atlete is ook bespreek. Elkeen van die

temas het bestaan uit talle subtemas en kategorieë van kodes. 'n Mens kan nie die domeine as aparte entiteite beskou nie, maar moet die kruisdomein-oorgangservarings oorweeg en hoe hul interaksie die lewe van die student-atlete beïnvloed het. Die etikette van ervarings wat óf hindernisse en/of fasiliteerders was, het afgehang van die individuele persepsies wat die student-atlete gehad het en hoe hulle in staat was om die situasie op hande te onderhandel. Die student-atleet se waargenome identiteit het afgehang van sy/haar motivering vir hul akademiese en atletiese strewes. Sy/haar identiteit het deur die akademiese jaar gewissel na gelang van die prioriteit van die taak op die spesifieke tydstep. Die Covid-19-pandemie het 'n verskuiwing na 'n sterker studente-identiteit veroorsaak as gevolg van die kansellering van sportbyeenkomste, die onvermoë om buite te oefen tydens die nasionale inperkings en 'n daaropvolgende toename in tyd om op sy/haar studies te fokus. Die ondersteuningstrukture en -stelsels wat deur Maties Sport verskaf is, indien optimaal gebruik word sal die student-atleet se atletiese prestasie fasiliteer, en sy/haar persoonlike groei en ontwikkeling en sukses oor verskeie lewensdomeine bevorder.

Slutelwoorde: Holistiese Atletiek Loopbaanmodel; Dubbele loopbaan; studente-atlete, Covid-19; Kruisdomein-ervarings

Contents

<i>Chapter One: Introduction</i>	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Aims.....	7
1.3 Objectives.....	7
1.4 Purpose	7
<i>Chapter Two: Literature Review</i>	9
2.1 Introduction	9
2.2 Transitions.....	11
2.2.1 Transitional Theories.....	18
2.3 Track and Field	21
2.3.1 Performance Demands.....	21
2.4 Secondary Education (High School).....	23
2.4.1 Academic Requirements.....	24
2.5 Higher Education (University).....	25
2.5.1 Student-athletes	25
2.5.2 Student-athletes’ Identities	27
2.5.3 Student Athlete Requirements	28
2.6 Barriers and Facilitators	30
2.7 Stellenbosch University.....	34
2.7.1 Academic Support	34
2.7.2 Psychotherapeutic and Support Services.....	35
2.7.3 Maties Sport.....	35
<i>Chapter Three: Research Methodology</i>	38
3.1 Introduction	38
3.2 Researcher’s Positioning.....	38
3.3 Study Design	39
3.4 Duration of Study.....	39
3.5 Ethical Aspects	40
3.6 COVID-19 Pandemic.....	40

3.7 Participants	40
3.8 Procedures	42
3.9 Interview Procedure	43
3.10 Data Analysis	46
<i>Chapter Four: Findings</i>	49
4.1 Context of the Research	49
4.2 Qualitative Findings	51
4.2.1 Facilitators, Transitional Experiences, and Barriers in the Academic Domain ...	51
4.2.2 Facilitators, Transitional Experiences, and Barriers in the Athletic Domain.....	64
4.2.3 Facilitators, Transitional Experiences, and Barriers in the Psychosocial Domain	78
4.2.4 Facilitators, transitional experiences, and barriers in the psychological domain.	91
4.2.5 Facilitators, transitional experiences, and barriers in the financial and legal domains	101
4.2.6 The Covid-19 Pandemic as the Second Transition.....	105
4.2.7 Mechanisms of Support Available to Student-athletes	114
<i>Chapter Five: Discussion of Findings</i>	116
5.1 Introduction.....	116
5.2 Description of the Research Process	116
5.3 Discussion of the Findings.....	116
5.3.1 Facilitators, Transitional Experiences, and Barriers in the Academic Domain.	116
5.3.2 Facilitators, Transitional Experiences, and Barriers in the Athletic Domain	123
5.3.3 Facilitators, Transitional Experiences, and Barriers in the Psychosocial Domain	132
5.3.4 Facilitators, Transitional Experiences, and Barriers in the Psychological Domain	140
5.3.5 Facilitators, Transitional Experiences, and Barriers in the Financial and Legal Domains	147
5.3.6 The Covid-19 Pandemic as the Second Transition	151
5.3.7 Mechanisms of Support Available to Student-athletes	158
<i>Chapter Six: Conclusions, Limitations and Future Research</i>	159
6.1 Introduction	159
6.2 Conclusions	160

6.2.1 Objective one.....	160
6.2.2 Objective two.....	160
6.2.3 Objective three.....	161
6.2.4 Objective four.....	162
6.3 Delineations of the Study	162
6.4 Delimitations of the Study	163
6.5 Limitations	163
6.6 Practical Recommendations.....	164
6.7 Recommendations for Further Research.....	165
6.8 Reflection.....	166
References	167
Appendices	178
Chapter One: Introduction	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Aims.....	7
1.3 Objectives.....	7
1.4 Purpose	7
Chapter Two: Literature Review.....	9
2.1 Introduction	9
2.2 Transitions.....	10
2.2.1 Transitional Theories.....	18
2.3 Track and Field	20
2.3.1 Performance Demands.....	21
2.4 Secondary Education (High School).....	22
2.4.1 Academic Requirements.....	23
2.5 Higher Education (University).....	25
2.5.1 Student-athletes	25
2.5.2 Student-athletes' Identities	26
2.5.3 Student Athlete Requirements.....	27
2.6 Barriers and Facilitators	28
2.7 Stellenbosch University.....	33

2.7.1 Academic Support	33
2.7.2 Psychotherapeutic and Support Services	34
2.7.3 Maties Sport.....	34
Chapter Three: Research Methodology	37
3.1 Introduction	37
3.2 Researcher’s Positioning.....	37
3.3 Study Design	38
3.4 Duration of Study.....	38
3.5 Ethical Aspects	39
3.6 COVID-19 Pandemic.....	39
3.7 Participants	39
3.8 Procedures	42
3.9 Interview Procedure	43
3.10 Data Analysis.....	46
Chapter Four: Findings	48
4.1 Introduction	48
4.2 Context of the Research	48
4.3 Qualitative Findings	50
4.3.1 Facilitators, Transitional Experiences, and Barriers in the Academic Domain ...	50
4.3.2 Facilitators, Transitional Experiences, and Barriers in the Athletic Domain.....	63
4.3.3 Facilitators, Transitional Experiences, and Barriers in the Psychosocial Domain	77
4.3.4 Facilitators, transitional experiences, and barriers in the psychological domain.	90
4.3.5 Facilitators, transitional experiences, and barriers in the financial and legal domains	100
4.3.6 The Covid-19 Pandemic as the Second Transition.....	104
4.3.7 Mechanisms of Support Available to Student-athletes	113
4.4 Conclusion.....	114
Chapter Five: Discussion of Findings	115
5.1 Introduction.....	115
5.2 Description of the Research Process	115
5.3 Discussion of the Findings.....	115

5.3.1 Facilitators, Transitional Experiences, and Barriers in the Academic Domain .	115
5.3.2 Facilitators, Transitional Experiences, and Barriers in the Athletic Domain	122
5.3.3 Facilitators, Transitional Experiences, and Barriers in the Psychosocial Domain	131
5.3.4 Facilitators, Transitional Experiences, and Barriers in the Psychological Domain	139
5.3.5 Facilitators, Transitional Experiences, and Barriers in the Financial and Legal Domains	146
5.3.6 The Covid-19 Pandemic as the Second Transition	150
5.3.7 Mechanisms of Support Available to Student-athletes	157

Chapter Six: Conclusions, Limitations and Future Research	158
6.1 Introduction	158
6.2 Brief Background	158
6.3 Outlining the Literature	158
6.4 Conclusions	159
6.4.1 Objective one	159
6.4.2 Objective two	160
6.4.3 Objective three	160
6.4.4 Objective four	161
6.5 Delimitations of the Study	162
6.6 Limitations	162
6.7 Practical Recommendations	163
6.8 Recommendations for Further Research.....	164
6.9 Reflection.....	165
References	167
Appendices	177

List of Figures

3.1: The 10-point athlete, student-athlete, student identification scale	45
4.1: A student-athlete's 2020 first semester (due to the Covid-19 pandemic) compared to the planned 2020 first semester	50
4.2: Facilitators, transitional experiences, and barriers in the academic domain	53
4.3: Facilitators, transitional experiences, and barriers in the athletic domain	65
4.4: Facilitators, transitional experiences, and barriers in the psychosocial domain	79
4.5: Facilitators, transitional experiences, and barriers in the psychological domain	91
4.6: Facilitators, transitional experiences, and barriers in the financial and legal domains	101
4.7: The Covid-19 pandemic as the second transition	106
4.8: The mechanisms of support available to Stellenbosch University student-athletes.	115

List of Tables

3.1: Participant self-ratings on the athlete-student scale, and hours per week spent on various academic, sport, and social activities	41
4.1: Factors considered by the participants in deciding to attend university	51
4.2: Factors considered in the decision-making process of choosing which university to attend	52

Abbreviations

ASA:	Athletics South Africa
B.Sc.:	Bachelor of Science
DC:	Dual Career
DPTFA:	Development model on transitions faced by athletes
HP:	High-Performance
IMAS:	Integrated Medicine and Science for High-Performance Sport
LTPD	Long-Term Participant Development
NCAA:	National Conference Athletics Association
NQF:	National Qualifications Framework
NSC:	National Senior Certificate
PACER:	Persistence, Authenticity, Commitment, Empathy and Resilience
PSO:	Private Student Organization
PST:	Perceived Psychological Skills Training
SA:	South Africa
SAQA:	South African Qualifications Authority
SASA:	South African Schools Athletics
USA:	United States of America
USSA:	University Sport South Africa
WA:	World Athletics Federation
WADA:	World Anti-Doping Agency

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Many talented and elite sport performers continue their studies at tertiary institutions; therefore, it is important to create awareness of the challenges faced by these student-athletes. Student-athletes are individuals enrolled for tertiary academic programmes and who participate in organized competitive sport (Comeaux *et al.*, 2011). Universities are becoming increasingly popular for athletes to attend as they can provide the necessary support and flexibility for athletes to continue their sporting careers, whilst also obtaining tertiary qualifications (Brown *et al.*, 2015).

Focussing on South Africa (SA), high school pupils must achieve the minimum entry requirements (usually based solely on academic performance) for acceptance into a South African University. For example, to study at Stellenbosch University, students must have obtained “a National Senior Certificate or Independent Examinations Board school-leaving certificate as certified by Umalusi with admission to bachelor’s degree studies”. This means the learner must “obtain a mark of at least 50% in each of four school subjects, have written the National Benchmark Tests” and meet all programme-specific requirements set out in the programme outlines of the respective faculties (Stellenbosch University, 2019).

Apart from having to perform academically to obtain entry into university, high school athletes participate in sport practices after school and in competitions, which may require travelling, potentially resulting in absence from school. These pupils may also be involved in cultural activities, extra classes, or tutor sessions to keep up to date with their schoolwork.

Performing well academically, may afford a learner with future career options, as it increases their options to enrol for academic courses at university (Ellis, 2016). Although this is the case, research has shown that many student-athletes do not hold their academics as high on their priority list as they do their sport (Hickey & Kelly, 2008). Most high school athletes spend considerable time and effort to earn a university sport bursary. According to the National Conference Athletics Association (NCAA, 2013) a small number of athletes will make a

university team in their first year. This number is estimated at an average of five percent of high school athletes in the United States of America (USA) (Gayles & Baker, 2015). Previous participation in high school provincial rugby was a strong influencer when high school pupils made decisions regarding their career aspirations and future studies at tertiary level (Ellis, 2016). The same tendency may apply to other sporting codes as well, as there are greater support and rewards when competing at a higher level.

A large proportion of rugby players drop out of their sport between the end of high school and entry into university, as many players are forced to give up their sporting aspirations due to failing to gain entry to tertiary institutions, clubs, or provincial teams (Baillie, 1993; Ellis, 2016). There are various pathways talented athletes take when leaving high school. Some athletes put all their energy into making their sport their professional career and, therefore, do not pursue further academic studies. However, the likelihood of an athlete successfully transitioning into a professional sporting career directly after high school is very slim, with only 0.2% of high school athletes successfully making this transition (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

When student-athletes start their tertiary studies, they need to obtain a specific level of academic performance to be able to participate in university sporting activities. Student-athletes are expected to be full time students who make annual progress towards completing their degrees. Failure to make acceptable academic progress and maintain a minimum credit average may result in them not being eligible for sport participation (Gayles & Baker, 2015). The following extract is taken from the 2020 Constitution of University Sport South Africa (USSA), which defines a Bona fide student (i.e., a student athlete who is eligible to compete at Varsity Athletics and USSA Championships) as:

- a) “Students officially registered with a member club of USSA at a higher education institution recognized by the appropriate national academic authority in the country (i.e., Department of Higher Education and Training) for a programme of at least 120 South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) credits on National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Level 5 and approved by that institution’s senate. This includes bridging courses, although only one (1) attempt at completing any bridging course will be allowed at any institution. Students enrolled for bridging courses must have a matriculation endorsement or a certificate

of exemption issued by the Matriculation Board. This excludes students who are enrolled for short courses or are registered for courses or modules or units of study that are less than 120 SAQA credits”, and

- b) “Students actively involved in pursuing his/her academic career, i.e., attending lectures, submitting assignments, writing tests and examinations in order to be promoted to the next level of study” (USSA, 2020: 4).

Further clauses contained in the constitution do not apply to first-year students.

The 2019 Varsity Sport Athletics Playlist booklet stated:

“In order for any undergraduate student to qualify for participation in any of the varsity sports tournaments in a particular calendar year, that student must have completed at least 60 SAQA credits on the NQF level 5 in the previous year (running from January to December) in which the student was enrolled for a Qualifying Programme” (Varsity Sport Athletics, 2019: 5-6).

This implies that student-athletes need to pass at least 50% of their modules to remain eligible for participation in subsequent years. In addition to experiencing similar academic stress to non-athlete students, student-athletes experience stress to perform in their sports activities as this may affect their selection into teams and the continuation of their bursaries (Gayles & Baker, 2015). The transition from high school to university is generally seen as stressful and demanding for students (Comeaux *et al.*, 2011). The transition process is often experienced as lonely and stressful, as these students also undergo social adaptations. In comparison to general students, student-athletes have the additional demands of balancing academics, sport, and social aspects of their lives (Gayles & Baker, 2015).

University is a step-up from high school. According to Watt and Moore (2001), a student-athlete’s day will include the normal daily routine of a student (e.g., attending classes and practical’s, finishing off assignments, attending social events) with additional sport-related demands (e.g., training sessions, gym sessions, seeing the physiotherapist/ sport psychologist, traveling to competitions, attending team meetings). It is essential that students become independent adults (e.g., prioritizing time, budgeting, class schedules, and other aspects of

independent living) (Parker *et al.*, 2004). A large proportion of an athletes' time is devoted to developing their sporting careers, with less time to develop other aspects of their lives (Aquilina, 2013). Comeaux *et al.* (2011) reported that student-athletes dedicate a lot of their time to their sport or sports-related activities, which leave very little time for academic endeavours compared to regular students.

Student-athletes undergo simultaneous transitions at once; academic, athletic, psychosocial, and psychological development. These transitions may be perceived as stressful, as several strains from competing factors are placed on them (Brown *et al.*, 2015). These multiple domains place time and energy demands on the student-athlete. Subsequently, they may find it challenging to balance all the domains in their first year at university (Gayles & Baker, 2015). It is also important to note that the transition from high school to university coincides with the athlete's transition from age group youth sport to the senior competitive level. During this transition, athletes attempt to become mastery level performers. A university environment that can facilitate this transition will aid in the development of such athletes (Brown *et al.*, 2015).

The academic transition (high school to university) often involves moving out of the family home into a flat or student residence closer to the university, living further away from friends and family, and having new personal and academic responsibilities (MacNamara & Collins, 2010). The transition also involves establishing new relationships, as well as a change in the existing relationships with friends, family, and parents (Parker *et al.*, 2004).

The athletic transition (from development to mastery performer level) may cause the athlete to struggle meeting on-field (e.g., training) and off-field (e.g., parental) expectations (Brown *et al.*, 2015). In addition to moving from a junior to senior age group, a considerable amount of time is spent during their final year of high school meeting with new coaches and training groups to make informed decisions. These decisions include various options regarding the best facilities and coaching, as well as visiting potential campuses, gyms, athletics tracks and other facilities (MacNamara & Collins, 2010).

The psychosocial transitions often influence the nature of relationships with parents (Brown *et al.*, 2015). Parents provide vital emotional support for athletes who must negotiate through these transition periods. Yet, when moving to university, an athlete's access to this support may decrease and parental influence may be substituted with other sources of social support, such as teammates, friends, or coaches (Falls & Wilson, 2013).

During the psychological transition from late adolescence to early adulthood, individuals face numerous developmental tasks that shape their identity. These include accepting one's body, managing the expectations, and taking responsibility for oneself, making independent decisions, and becoming self-sufficient (Keller *et al.*, 2007; Brown *et al.*, 2015). Although student-athletes will experience challenges in these domains, it is critical for them to strike a balance between these domains and to avoid role engulfment (Gayles & Baker, 2015).

These transitions also occur on the financial and legal levels. At the financial level, athletes (or the athlete's family) must spend money and incur extra costs to develop their athletic careers in both the initiation and development stage. When the athlete reaches the mastery stage, there may be a reduction in the amount of money spent on them or even a growing potential for them to make money due to sponsorship deals etc. Simultaneous to the financial transition is the legal transition. This refers to the athlete's status of being an "amateur" or a "professional" (Wylleman & Lavalley, 2004).

A transition can be described as an event or moment, which brings not only "a change in assumptions about oneself" (Schlossberg, 1981: 5), but also "a social disequilibrium that goes beyond the ongoing changes of everyday life" (Wylleman *et al.*, 2004: 3). Transitions should be regarded as a series of events where individuals must implement coping mechanisms to balance the new demands they are facing, with the resources available to them (MacNamara & Collins, 2010). Various sport transition theories have been proposed. Stambulova's (1997, 2003) athletic career transition model, Wylleman and Lavalley's (2004) developmental model on transitions faced by athletes (DPTFA), as well as Wylleman's (2019) Holistic Athletics Career Model are briefly discussed below.

Stambulova's (1997; 2003) athletic career transition model depicted transitions as a process that combines an individual's effort to cope with a set of demands through the utilization of internal (e.g., the athletes' skills, knowledge, attitudes) and external (e.g., social support) resources. Certain barriers (e.g., an athlete's lack of skills, interpersonal conflict) may inhibit a successful transition. If the individual effectively overcomes the demands placed on them, they have transitioned successfully. To the contrary, a crisis transition occurs when the individual ineffectively copes with these demands and an intervention or mobilization of special resources is required. A crisis-transition can lead to several symptoms, a reduction of self-esteem, numerous forms of emotional discomfort and heightened sensitivity to failures. These normally run parallel with a stagnation/decrease in sport results (Stambulova, 1997).

Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) DPTFA consider these transitions holistically. This model takes a "beginning-to-end" viewpoint and reflects the developmental, as well as the "interactive, nature of normative transitions at athletic, psychological, social, academic, and vocational levels" (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004: 8). The DPTFA was expanded in 2013 to include the financial domain, in a version renamed the Holistic Athletics Career Model (Wylleman *et al.*, 2013). This model was further expanded to include the legal domain (Wylleman, 2019). The adapted model approaches all aspects of the athletes' lives and includes the following domains of development: the athletic, psychological, psychosocial, academic/vocational, financial as well as a legal level (Tekavc *et al.*, 2015; Wylleman, 2019). These two sport transitional theories will become the lens through which the research questions will be framed.

A paucity of research exists into the combined effect of athletic and academic pursuits and the impact of such stressors upon the student-athletes' ability to combine their sport and educational endeavours (Cosh & Tully, 2014a). Barriers to successful transitions include time-management challenges, fatigue, attendance-monitoring and financial concerns. If the transition is unsuccessful, this may lead to success in one endeavour, with the other being sacrificed (Cosh & Tully, 2014a). McFarlane (2014) stated that university student-athletes are a special and unique population and highlighted the importance of academic, personal, and athletic support for them. This supports the need to identify barriers and facilitators faced during the transition

period from high school (grade 12) to first year university, and to provide the necessary support for a successful transition to university.

1.2 Aims

The study aimed to:

- Explore the experiences of Stellenbosch University student track and field athletes during their transition from Grade 12 to first year university.

1.3 Objectives

The specific objectives were to explore the:

- Academic, athletic, psychological, psychosocial, financial, and legal experiences of Stellenbosch University student track and field athletes during their transition from Grade 12 to first year university,
- Barriers and facilitators experienced by these individuals during this transition,
- Notion of being a “student-athlete” versus being an “athlete-student”, in other words establishing why these participants are at university, and
- Knowledge about and utilisation of the available support structures and mechanisms set in place to effectively support these student-athletes.

1.4 Purpose

The primary researcher is a South African student-athlete who underwent the same transition a few years ago. She completed the B.Sc. undergraduate programme in Sport Science, followed by the B.Sc. Honours programme in Biokinetics at Stellenbosch University, whilst simultaneously competing as an elite track and field athlete in the 200m and 400m. She faced many obstacles during her own transition and, therefore, the inspiration to complete this study came from her desire to find a way to make the transition smoother and easier for future student-athletes. In line with Wylleman’s (2019) Holistic Athletics Career Model, student-athletes experienced their own unique challenges across various domains during the transition from high school to first-year university. Participation in university sport has the potential to ease this

transition, as well as facilitate growth and development, however, there should be a balance between all the domains.

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that could assist track and field student-athletes in making the transition process from grade 12 to first year university less daunting. The information gathered could possibly inform high school pupils of what they could expect during their transition to university sport, as well as what will be expected of them at university. The student-athletes' knowledge and utilisation of the various support structures available to them was also explored.

Participation in university sport has the potential to ease the transition from high school to university, as well as facilitate growth and development, however, there needs to be a balance between sport and academics (Gayle & Baker, 2015). It makes sense that athletic pursuits take priority over academic development in the short term, but it may not be maintainable in the end, because not all athletes will achieve their sport aspirations (McGillivray & McIntosh, 2006; Ellis, 2016). This study could benefit high school administrators and family members in assisting student-athletes to prepare themselves for the transition from high school to university and may assist university administrators and coaches to facilitate the process to ensure the necessary support for a smooth and successful transition.

The information gained through this research, may inform the student-athletes of what may be expected of them before they enter university. They may subsequently be better prepared and have the necessary support, to have a more positive experience during this transition process. This could potentially lead to higher retention in sport, more success in their sport in their first year at university and higher retention in university in general.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Once athletes have completed high school, they usually select one of the following three pathways: i) they focus solely on their sport, which is known as the linear pathway; ii) they prioritize their sport but keep up with their studies, i.e., the convergent pathway or iii) they see both their sport and academics as equally important and pursue both, known as the parallel pathway (Stambulova *et al.*, 2021). Student-athletes (individuals enrolled in university and who participate in organized competitive sport (Comeaux *et al.*, 2011)), either follow the convergent or the parallel pathway. The pathway taken by student-athletes depends on various factors, including their motivation, the way they identify themselves, their health and wellbeing, and lifestyle (Stambulova *et al.*, 2021).

The transition from high school to university can affect students differently. Some see the experience as revitalising; they can easily adjust to the new social and intellectual challenges they face, as well as adapt to the new environment. Other students may find it overwhelming and end up feeling stressed by the new demands (Comeaux *et al.*, 2011). Finding the balance between academic, social, and athletic demands while undergoing this transition is often challenging (Gayles & Baker, 2015).

Three conditions are necessary to aid the student, both in learning and personal development, whilst transitioning through university life. Firstly, they must be open to growth, unless the individual is ready to make changes they will not occur. Secondly, challenges must occur within the student's environment. Without challenges that interrupt the individual's equilibrium, they will not receive the stimulation required for more complex thoughts and actions to deal with new situations that arise. However, there is a fine balance, as too much of a challenge may lead to negative effects on the student's learning and personal growth (Gayles & Baker, 2015). Challenges may occur when there is a lack of balance between athletic, social, and academic aspects. The social domain is usually sacrificed to prioritise the athletic and academic aspects (Collins *et al.*, 2016). The incorrect perception of a transition, underestimation of a challenge or seeing a challenge as more difficult than it really is, can lead to a more difficult overall

experience (Drew *et al.*, 2019). Thirdly, support is essential to maximize learning and development. As stated before, too much support as well as too much of a challenge can be damaging (Gayles & Baker, 2015). It is important that the athlete is challenged as this fosters their development, however, aiding the athlete to prepare for these challenges, being present to support the athletes through the experience and encouraging positive evaluation and reflections on their experiences are the keys to a successful outcome (Collins *et al.*, 2016).

Stambulova and Samuel (2019) pointed out some of the negative consequences associated with an athlete's inability to transition successfully. These consequences include early dropout from sporting activities, substance abuse and mild mental illness. Coping successfully with both sport and non-sport transitions, can lead to a long and successful sport career as well as better adjustment to life after sport. The researchers continue to state the importance for coaches, managers, parents/ guardians, and sport psychologists in aiding the athletes in their preparations for the career transition they will most likely face, as well as instilling effective coping mechanisms (Stambulova *et al.*, 2021).

The Long-Term Athlete Development model (Bayli & Hamilton, 2004) was adopted in South Africa and rebranded as the Long-Term Participant Development (LTPD) seven-stage model to meet the needs and requirements of sport development in the country. The goal is to promote both mass participation and excellence throughout the country, the LTPD outlines different stages and capabilities that aid the above goal. Physical literacy results from the first three stages in the model, namely, active start (occurs in foundation phase, grade R to grade three), FUNDamentals (occurs in the intermediate phase, grade four to grade six), and learn to train (occurs in the senior phase, grade seven to grade nine). These three stages provide the foundation for the development of fundamental movement skills, sport skills, ability to read the environment, and decision-making skills. Whereas the train to train, train to compete, and train to win stages result in excellence. The train to train and train to compete both occur in the final phase of high school, from grade 10 to grade 12. The train to win stage occurs once the athlete is out of school. The athletes that follow these three stages are performance oriented, they are pursuing a high-performance training environment and the desire to compete at a high level. The goal for the seventh stage in the model is to transition to the active for life stage (the goal

is mass sport participation), this can be done at any age (occurs after the completion of the first three stages) and this stage reflects lifelong participation in some form of physical activity or sport (SASCOC, 2012).

2.2 Transitions

As explained in chapter one, a transition is an event or combination of events which brings not only “a change in assumptions about oneself” (Schlossberg, 1981: 5), but also “a social disequilibrium that goes beyond the ongoing changes of everyday life” (Wylleman *et al.*, 2004: 3). The predictability of the event, the development context (life domain) in which it occurs, as well as the outcome characterises the transition (Wylleman *et al.*, 2004; Stambulova & Samuel, 2019; Stambulova *et al.*, 2021). There are three types of transitions, namely normative, non-normative and quasi-normative (Stambulova & Samuel, 2019; Stambulova *et al.*, 2021). Normative transitions are characterised by their predictability and the ability to anticipate the transition, for example an individual exiting one stage of life and entering another (Schlossberg, 1984; Wylleman *et al.*, 2004). The athlete can plan and, therefore, be prepared for these types of transitions (Stambulova *et al.*, 2021). These transitions can be optimised through career guidance and support (Tekavc *et al.*, 2015). The transition from junior-to-senior level, from competing at a provincial level to competing at a national level, or from competing in sport to retiring from sport, are all normative athletic transitions (Wylleman *et al.*, 2004; Tekavc *et al.*, 2015). Transitioning from primary school to high school, or from high school to university are examples of normative academic transitions (Tekavc *et al.*, 2015; Stambulova *et al.*, 2021).

Important events in an individual’s life that do not occur in a set plan leads to a non-normative transition. Examples of non-normative transitions in an athlete’s life include injuries, which ends their season or career, losing their personal coach, a family member dying, the termination of a significant relationship, being removed from or not being selected for a team (Wylleman *et al.*, 2004; Tekavc *et al.*, 2015; Stambulova *et al.*, 2021). This transition is characterised as unpredictable, unanticipated, and involuntary and there is a greater risk for a crisis outcome (Wylleman *et al.*, 2004; Stambulova *et al.*, 2021). The hope or expectation of events, which eventually did not occur are known as non-events (Schlossberg, 1984), and fall under the category of non-normative transitions. Making the squad, but not being selected for the final

team, or training for an event for years and not being able to participate in said event are examples of non-events (Wylleman *et al.*, 2004).

Recently, a new category of predictability has been introduced, namely the quasi-normative transitions. This include transitions that are predictable for specific categories of athletes, and the athlete can prepare for these in advance. The relocation of elite athletes to a high-performance centre to cater for their needs or cultural transitions for transnational athletes fall under this category (Stambulova & Samuel, 2019; Stambulova *et al.*, 2021).

The second characteristic of a transition is the developmental context or life domain in which it occurs. These include development in athletic, psychological, psychosocial, academic, vocational, financial, and legal levels (Wylleman *et al.*, 2004; Wylleman, 2019; Stambulova *et al.*, 2021). Dual career transitions (concurrent transition in sport and education or occupation) are included here (Stambulova *et al.*, 2021). The third characteristic is the outcome of the transition, i.e., whether the outcome is classified as successful or as a crisis. A successful transition occurs when the demand of the transition is well met. A crisis occurs when the athlete is unable to cope effectively with the transition, and an intervention is needed (Stambulova & Samuel, 2019). The challenges of transitions (in all areas of development, not limited to the sport domain) are perceived by athletes as interfering factors. These interfering factors influence the athlete both psychologically and psychosocially, and lead to academic, professional, and economic repercussions (Maulini *et al.*, 2020).

A holistic and multidimensional approach must be taken when looking at the transition of student-athletes. This approach must consider the multiple layers influencing a student-athlete's life, as a change in one layer will inevitably lead to a change in other layers (Stambulova *et al.*, 2021). Student-athletes undergo many changes during their transition from grade 12 to their first year at university. These include a change of coaches, change of place of residence, which goes together with living away from home for the first time, change in roles in their lives, as well as becoming more independent from their parents (Drum *et al.*, 2014; Collins *et al.*, 2016). Students are confronted with several developmental factors. These include, but are not limited to becoming competent, managing their emotions, becoming independent, and establishing

one's identity. External stressors may affect the student in this transition, including pressures to perform both academically and athletically, adapting to new roommates, and family struggles (Drum *et al.*, 2014).

This transition period for student-athletes can be particularly challenging as many transitions occur at once, both in their athletic and non-athletic domains (Drew *et al.*, 2019). In the athletics domain, the athlete undergoes four stages throughout their lifetime. The first stage is the initiation stage. In this stage, athletes are introduced to the sport and talent identification occurs. The second stage is the development stage, which brings about an increase in specialization in the sport and time spent training. In the third stage, the mastery stage, the athlete has reached the highest level of proficiency in their sport. The fourth stage is the discontinuation of competitive sport (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

Looking specifically at university student-athletes, the first athletic transition they undergo is the junior-to-senior transition. In track and field, a junior is considered as an athlete who is 18 or 19 years old. As a student competing at university competitions, athletes are expected to compete against students of any age (the cut-off age for Varsity athletics and World University Games is 25 years old; however, there is no cut-off for the USSA Championships). Therefore, although most first year students are 18 or 19 years old and still juniors, they are already undergoing the junior-to-senior transition.

This transition usually occurs when the athlete progresses from junior (under-20 (19 years old)) to senior (all age groups) competition. The athlete transitions from being at a junior elite level to the bottom level of senior athletics. An increase in competition levels and intensity of practice sessions may be experienced, and these changes may be demanding both physically and mentally (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004; Drew *et al.*, 2019). The transition often extends over multiple years, with athletes continuously being challenged and experiencing feelings of uncertainty (Stambulova *et al.*, 2009). Stambulova *et al.* (2009) noted that this transition is often the most difficult transition within their athletic careers. A combination of all these challenges (concurrent transition in the academic domain, moving from high school to university, as well as the movement of athletes from the adolescence phase into young adulthood) often lead to

athletes being unable to cope with the associated demands, resulting in an unsuccessful transition (Drew *et al.*, 2019).

Many athletes do not progress to the next age category in this transition (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). It is important to note that the athlete's level of performance has an impact on whether the transition is successful. Junior athletes with a high world ranking are more likely to remain in elite senior sport, whereas junior athletes who did not reach the same achievements are more likely to drop out (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004; Hollings, 2013). Van Zyl (2022) mentioned the following reasons why athletes struggle to transition successfully from the junior to senior international participation; lack of support from the national sport federation, the number of injuries the athlete sustained, the plateau in athletic performance, and the conflict between the academic and athletic demands. Whether a student-athlete will perform successfully as a senior athlete may depend on how they are able to manage and overcome the demands experienced during these concurrent transitions (Brown *et al.*, 2015).

The second transition within the athletic domain is determined by the organizational characteristics of competitive sport. When organized sport is embedded in the educational system (e.g., South African track and field), athletes are challenged when moving from high school to university sport. When organized sport is embedded in a club system, athletes may experience transitions from local sport clubs to provincial and national teams (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

Simultaneously, there are various transitions within the non-athletic domain. The transitional development in the various non-athletic domains influence the development of the individual in the athletic domain and vice versa. Childhood, adolescence, and adulthood are stages included in the psychological domain (Pummell *et al.*, 2008). Looking at the psychological development, student-athletes are negotiating the change from adolescence into young adulthood. Adolescence brings about several developmental tasks that the individual must negotiate. Building mature relationships with individuals of both sexes, identification with societal roles and moving towards emotional independence from elders are some of these tasks (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Psychological transitional demands include the establishment of one's own

motivation, individuals learning how to look after themselves, and taking responsibility over one's life. Additionally, accepting one's physical appearance helps shape the student-athletes' self-identity (Brown *et al.*, 2015).

It is crucial for adolescents to develop their self-identity (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004; Pummell *et al.*, 2008). In the years at university, a peak in the student-athletes' perception of the importance of their sport has been witnessed. This may influence a student-athletes' self-identity (Brown *et al.*, 2015). Participation in competitive sport can significantly influence their self-identity. When an individual identifies strongly with their athletic identity, they may not consider other career, education, and lifestyle options. When an individual commits to a role without exploring other roles, it is called identity foreclosure. Having a strong athletic identity or strong identity foreclosure can cause a lack in coping strategies, which are essential during career transitions. This leads to a more difficult adjustment to psychological transitions than those individuals without a strongly developed athletic self-identity (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

There is a reasonable possibility that individuals with a strong athletic identity may experience greater perceptions of stress, as their performance and identities are closely linked. Therefore, subpar performances may have a greater impact on the self-esteem of these individuals than those who identify less with their athletic role (Pummell *et al.*, 2008). The development of a multidimensional self-identity, and how athletes cope with cognitive and competitive readiness developmental tasks is, therefore, essential for the progression of athletes from one athletic stage to the next (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Bantjes *et al.* (2020) found that 26.2% first year South African students failed to progress to their second year of studying at university. This study emphasised the need to consider student's mental health and to prioritise campus-based student health services.

Social development occurs throughout the specific life stages and transitions. Relationships with other people play an important role in this development. Children need to learn how to play nicely with other children, adolescents need to build new and mature relationships with peers, as well as become more emotionally independent, whilst adults must establish more

stable and permanent relationships (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Pummell *et al.* (2008) highlighted that as an athlete matures there are changes in the significant social agents. There is a need to develop independently from family attachments, whilst a shifting in social focus to peers and non-related adults occurs.

Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) noted that the support from significant others in an athlete's life is crucial. The stage of the athlete's athletic career determines their social network, which usually includes coaches, parents, and peers. The importance of the athlete's relationships with parents and coaches is reiterated by the network termed the athletic triangle (the athlete-parent, athlete-coach, and coach-parent) or the primary family of sport. The quality of the relationships in the athletic triangle may influence whether young athletes transition onto the next athletic level. The parental and coach roles change over the various stages of athletic development (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Access to parental support may be reduced when transitioning to university, and this vital emotional support may be replaced by other sources in the student-athletes' lives (Falls & Wilson, 2015). The need for key parties (including coaches, parents, significant others, and management) to slowly step back from a leading role and shift into a more supportive role before the athlete undergoes this transition to university is desirable. This allows the student-athletes to develop and combine skills that enables them to cope more independently with the various challenges they face whilst negotiating the transition (MacNamara & Collins, 2010).

The coach-athlete relationship can contribute to an unsuccessful transition to the next athletic stage. It has been shown that the coach's behaviours can result in high anxiety and burnout in their athletes. Burnout in high school athletes is related to the lack of social support and positive feedback, and the athlete not being involved in decision-making (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). MacNamara and Collins (2010) highlighted the importance of the coach in aiding and educating the athletes in becoming more involved and accountable in their athletics career. At university level, burnout is related to a win at all cost attitude and a lack of empathy and praise from the coach. Conflicting or problematic coach-athlete relationships and psychological abuse by coaches are additional contributors to athlete career termination (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

Regarding the academic and vocational transition, the current study will focus on the transition from secondary education to higher education. An individual may undergo several transitions throughout their lifespan, namely the transition into primary education (at six or seven years old), the transition into secondary education (at 12 or 13 years old), the transition into higher education (at 18 or 19 years old), the transition into training for a vocation or into an occupation and transitioning into a postgraduate phase or phase of lifelong learning (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004; Plummer *et al.*, 2008). Individuals need to adapt to various challenges in these phases, which include role shifts, how they are expected to behave, social network memberships, support resources (both personal and social), and stress coping mechanisms due to uncertainties about their abilities to accomplish all these tasks. The individual takes on a dual role, both that of a student and an athlete, and invests time and energy into developing potential in both these areas (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). There is less supervision at university (higher education) compared to high school (secondary education) and an increase in independence at university is witnessed. This increased freedom at university, compared to the more structured environment of high school, imply that student-athletes need to have a more personal involvement in the development of their academic careers (MacNamara & Collins, 2010). Aquilina (2013) reiterated this finding, noting the increased freedom associated with attending university meant that the students are required to be actively involved in their academic coursework to be successful. Student-athletes must attend and commit time to their academic activities. Due to a lack of time and fatigue from sporting commitments, student-athletes have more academic problems than their non-athlete peers. The choice of study programmes and subjects, as well as the academic performance largely determines what happens after graduation. Those athletes who did not make a successful transition into professional sport often decide to study further. By remaining a student-athlete the individual does not need to focus on finding a job, may get financial, logistic, and coaching support by the university, and if they follow an extended degree programme, they have more time to focus on their preparation for major competitions such as the Olympic Games (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

Finally, the nonathletic domain comprises of financial and legal levels. Financially, athletes (or their families) need to spend money and incur extra costs to develop their athletic career in both the initiation and development stage. Money is for example spent on coaching fees, buying sport

equipment, or renting facilities for extra training. When the athlete reaches the mastery stage, there may be a reduction in money spent as there may be a potential to make money due to sponsorship deals. The financial pressure placed on families or the need for athletes to make money to support their families place a huge burden on their sport involvement (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). The reality is that few athletes can make a living solely out of sport (Aquilina, 2013). During the initial phase the athlete relies on their family for financial support. During the development phase the athlete relies on their family and the sport's governing body. During the mastery phase the athlete relies mainly on the sport governing body, the government, or National Organizing Committee. At the start of the discontinuation phase the athlete again relies heavily on their families for financial support. As this phase continues financial support is obtained from an employer. At the same time, there is a legal transition, referring to the athlete's status of being an "amateur" or "professional", determined by whether the athlete receives financial rewards for their athletic achievements (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

If all the domains are developed well, university sport participation may potentially ease the transition from high school to university. Participation in university sport has the potential to facilitate growth and development for the individual (Gayles & Baker, 2015). Both the athletic and non-athletic transitions are demanding on the student-athlete and these demands may increase exponentially (Drew *et al.*, 2019).

2.2.1 Transitional Theories

Transitional theories are helpful to understand the experiences of student-athletes as they move from high school to university (Gayles & Baker, 2015). Various transitional theories have been proposed. The current study will focus on Stambulova's (2003; 2016) athletic career transition model, and Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) DPTFA, which was later revised and is now known as Wylleman's (2019) Holistic Athletics Career Model.

Stambulova's athletic career transition model was developed in 2003 and has continuously evolved into the 2016 model. The model concentrates on the transition processes, and how the many components (e.g., the demands, resources, barriers, and coping mechanisms) interact with each other to achieve various transitional pathways and outcomes (e.g., successful transition,

crisis-transition, and unsuccessful transition) (Stambulova & Samuels, 2019; Stambulova *et al.*, 2021). It defines the transition process as the ability of the individual to cope with their transitional challenges by using the relevant coping mechanisms while considering person-related (internal) and environment-related (external) resources and barriers. The outcome of the transition and relevant pathways depends upon the individual's ability to cope effectively (Brown *et al.*, 2015). The predicted primary transition outcomes described in this model are a successful transition (the most favourable transition pathway) and a crisis transition. When the individual experiences the right amount of challenge with adequate coping resources and mechanisms, they can cope effectively with the transition and the transition is deemed to be successful. Characteristics of this outcome include improved performance in sport and/or other domains and feeling well adjusted when reflecting on the transition (Stambulova & Samuels, 2019; Stambulova *et al.*, 2021).

When the individual copes ineffectively with the transition, a crisis transition occurs. The causes of this outcome include the absence of resources, an excessive number of barriers, and ineffective coping mechanisms (Brown *et al.*, 2015; Stambulova & Samuels, 2019; Stambulova *et al.*, 2021). Lower self-esteem, permanent emotional discomfort, uncertainties in decision-making and behaviour, are examples of subclinical symptoms associated with a crisis transition. These subclinical symptoms, as well as the athlete's apparent need for intervention characterise a crisis transition (Brown *et al.*, 2015; Stambulova & Samuels, 2019; Stambulova *et al.*, 2021).

A crisis transition has two secondary outcomes. The first is the "delayed" successful transition, this is the favourable transition pathway, and occurs if the transition intervention is effective. The second is an unsuccessful transition, the unfavourable transition pathway, when the individual is unable to cope with the demands of the transition. This outcome is associated with the early dropout of athletes, overtraining, drug and alcohol abuse, or other negative consequences. Crisis prevention, crisis coping, and negative-consequences coping are three inventions outlined in the model (Stambulova & Samuels, 2019).

Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) proposed the DPTFA. This model looks at the athlete's career from beginning to end and focuses on the interaction and development of the normative

transitions in the athletic, psychological, social, academic, and vocational domains. The model consists of four layers and includes the age at which the transitions usually occur. The top layer represents the athletic phases and transitions an athlete goes through during their career, namely the initiation, development, mastery, and discontinuation phases. The transitions in the athletic domain include the transition into organized competitive sport (at six to seven years), the transition into a more concentrated training and competition programme (at 12 or 13 years), the transition into elite level sport (at 18 or 19 years), and the transition of the discontinuation of competitive sport (around 28 to 30 years).

The second layer of the model represents the psychological domain. The normative development stages in this domain consists of childhood (up to 12 years old), adolescence (13 to 18 years old), and adulthood (19 years and older). Competitive readiness is a developmental task associated with childhood, whereas self-identity development occurs during adolescence. The third layer reflects the social development of the athlete and is related to the individual's athletic involvement (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). The changes that occur in this layer include changes in the athletic family, relationships with fellow peers, the coach-athlete relationship, marital relationships, and relationships with significant others (Wylleman *et al.*, 2004). During childhood, social interaction and support is primarily from parents, siblings, and peers. During adolescence to early adulthood, it is primarily from peers, coaches, and parents. During adulthood social interaction and support is provided by the athlete's partner and coach. Once discontinuation from sport has occurred, the athlete's family tends to be the main source of social support.

The final layer in this model represents the academic and vocational domain. It contains the stages and transitions that occur in this domain. The individual transitions into primary education (at 6 or 7 years), into secondary education (at 12 to 13 years), into higher education (at 18 or 19 years), and finally they transition into vocational training or a professional occupation. It was noted that individuals may transition into an occupation at an earlier stage and that the model reflects the predictable sport career of an athlete (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). The DPTFA was later adapted into the Holistic Athletic Career Model, which included

an additional layer, namely the financial domain (Wylleman *et al.*, 2013). The model was further expanded to include the legal domain (Wylleman, 2019).

2.3 Track and Field

Athletics is a combination of track and field events, and includes running, walking, jumping, and throwing events. In running, there are sprint events, hurdles, middle and long distance, race walks and marathons. Jumps include high jump, long jump, triple jump, and pole vault. Throwing events include javelin, discus, shot put and hammer throw. There are also combined events, namely heptathlon for women and decathlon for men. The heptathlon consists of seven events (day 1: 100m hurdles, high jump, shot put, and 200m sprint, and day 2: long jump, javelin throw, and 800m). The decathlon consists of 10 events (day 1: 100m sprint, long jump, shot put, high jump, and 400m sprint, and day 2: 110m hurdles, discus throw, pole vault, javelin throw, and 1500m) (Venkat, 2021).

Track and Field, commonly referred to as athletics in SA, is governed worldwide by the World Athletics Federation (WA). SA is a member of WA. The governing body of athletics in SA is Athletics South Africa (ASA). ASA reports to the South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee. ASA implements all WA rules in their affiliated events. The ASA Rules and Regulations state that to be eligible to compete in SA or any WA affiliated country, an athlete need to be registered to an athletics club and possess an ASA license number, agree to follow the rules set by both ASA and WA, and must not have been declared ineligible by either ASA or WA (ASA, 2019). Just to note, the club an athlete is registered to must be in the area where they permanently reside. Students living on or close to the university campus, must use this residence and not that of their parents or guardians. Student-athletes must negotiate this additional change when they relocate.

2.3.1 Performance Demands

Specifically looking at track and field, athletes must meet the qualification standards to compete at national and international competitions. For national competitions such as the South African National Senior Championships and/or South African U16, U18 and U20 Championships, athletes must achieve the ASA National Championships Entry Standard. Athletes must qualify

before the stated date for each competition to be eligible for selection. Once the qualification period has ended, each province will select their teams. Athletes must have met the qualifying standards for the event, as set by ASA. The criteria include that they must be in good standing with their province and have participated in the necessary competitions set by their province. These performances should be achieved during competitions organised or sanctioned by ASA in conformity with WA Rules (ASA, 2022).

For international competitions such as the WA Junior Championships the 2020 criteria stated, “only athletes aged 16, 17, 18 or 19 on 31 December 2020 (born in 2001, 2002, 2003 or 2004) may compete. The maximum number of events in which a youth athlete (born in 2003 or 2004) can compete is two individual events plus one of the relays. If the two individual events are track events, only one of these may be longer than 200m”. Each country may enter a maximum of two athletes in each event (relay not included), the athletes must achieve the entry standard stipulated by WA, the entry standard must be achieved during a specific period for the performance to be valid, and the performance must be achieved at an official competition organized in conformity with WA rules (World Athletics, 2019).

There are various opportunities for athletes to compete in their sport. In grade 12, most of the athletes will be 18 years old, with some being 17 and others 19. The U17 athletes will still compete in the youth category, whereas the 18 and 19 athletes fall under the junior category. The two national competitions in SA that these athletes strive to compete in are the South African School Athletics (SASA) competition and the ASA age group Championships. The athletes need to attend regional (e.g., Boland Central Championships) and provincial trials (e.g., Boland, Western Cape Schools, Western Province Championships) to be selected for the final provincial team (e.g., Boland, Western Province Team) to compete at these competitions. Athletes can also compete internationally at the African U20 Championships and World U20 Championships. The requirements to be selected for this team include competing at the ASA age-group Championships, being ranked in the top two in the country, and achieving the qualification standard set. If the top junior athletes meet the qualification standards, they can also be selected for the senior competitions (e.g., ASA Senior Championships, African Senior Championships, World Senior Championships). First year student-athletes, if they still fall

under the junior category, can compete in the ASA age-group Championships. In addition, they can compete at ASA Senior Championships (all age groups competing together), varsity athletics (cut off 25 years old) and USSA Championships. Athletes must compete at the ASA Senior Championships to be eligible to compete at the African Championships, World Championships, Olympic Games, etc. Athletes must compete at the USSA Championships to be selected for the World University Championships (cut off 25 years old), except if they present a medical certificate.

2.4 Secondary Education (High School)

High school learners value sport participation highly (Gayle & Baker, 2015). External motivation, such as an increase in recognition and rewards, can influence sport participation. An increase in self-confidence and a higher popularity in the school environment can stem from this recognition (Gayles & Baker, 2015). Sports participation for high school learners has been shown to be beneficial. Athlete learners perform better academically than non-athlete learners, they have lower dropout rates from high school, and increased interest in attending university, subsequently leading to university registration (Marsh & Kleitman, 2003). Leadership qualities may also increase through sport participation. The leadership roles that an athlete (both in high school and university) may take on include good communication skills with teammates and coaches, presenting oneself with role model qualities, including good behaviour and work ethic, having relationships, and understanding with fellow learners, and captaining their sport team (Gayles & Baker, 2015).

There are some challenges faced with sport participation, more specifically for athletes who are particularly gifted. These athletes may become overly dedicated to their sport from a young age, participate in their specific sport all year round, and in doing so sacrifice other important activities. Subsequently, these athletes spend most of their high school life on efforts to receive a sports bursary to go to university (Gayles & Baker, 2015). Different from the university academic experience, high school athletes are checked-up on in their academic experiences, they undergo homework checks, mark checks, and must attend compulsory study sessions (Gayles & Baker, 2015). Athletes attending high school may face challenges relating to the rigidity of the high school system. These challenges range from school attendance being

compulsory, which leads to a restriction in the time the athletes can train. There is also less time available for the athlete to attend extra tutor sessions due to being away at training camps and competitions (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

2.4.1 Academic Requirements

Grade 12, known as matric in SA, is the final year of school before seeking employment or studying further. To graduate from high school a learner must obtain the National Senior Certificate (NSC). The requirements to obtain the NSC are that learners must study at least seven subjects, which include two compulsory official SA languages, and Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy, Life Orientation and three elective subjects. To pass matric the learner must obtain 40% or more. The average mark received by learners in a subject is around 55%. All marks are accumulated, and an average mark is then given to the student. This mark is stated on the learner's NSC. The NSC uses a level system, with seven levels, starting at level one and finishing at level seven (Department of Basic Education, 2021).

The following extract was taken from the Northern Cape Department of Education (2022), and displays the level system, as well as the minimum pass requirements:

“Level 7: 80 - 100% (Outstanding achievement)

Level 6: 70 - 79% (Meritorious achievement)

Level 5: 60 - 69% (Substantial achievement)

Level 4: 50 - 59% (Moderate achievement)

Level 3: 40 - 49% (Adequate achievement)

Level 2: 30 - 39% (Elementary achievement)

Level 1: 0 - 29% (Not achieved - Fail).

Pass Mark:

- Home Language: Level 3 (minimum 40%)
- First Additional Language: Level 2 (minimum 30%)
- Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy: Level 2 (minimum 30%)
- Life Orientation: Level 3 (minimum 40%)
- Two subjects (Electives): Level 3 (minimum 40%)
- Remaining Subject (Elective): Level 2 (minimum 30%).”

The matric learner's academic marks dictate whether they can study further for a higher certificate, a diploma or a bachelor's degree. For a higher certificate, a minimum mark of 30% in the language of learning at the chosen institution is required. For a diploma, a minimum mark of 30% in the language of learning at the chosen institution is required, as well as an achievement rating of three or better on the level system above in four recognised 20-credit subjects. Lastly, for a bachelor's degree, a minimum mark of 30% in the language of learning at the chosen institution is required, as well as an achievement rating of four or better on the level system above in four recognised 20-credit subjects. All three of these higher education options include additional requirements specific to the programme choice made by the student (Department of Basic Education, 2021).

2.5 Higher Education (University)

2.5.1 Student-athletes

A typical university student is confronted with stress from both the academic and social domains. Furthermore, the student-athlete must negotiate factors related to their sport (Drum *et al.*, 2014). These include a change in coach and training programme, a new training environment, increase in training load, competitions, pressures related to lifestyle and dealing with identity issues (MacNamara & Collins, 2010). A distinction can be made between student-athletes and general students in that the student-athletes must learn to balance athletic, academic, and social demands of the university experience (Gayles & Baker, 2015). The differences between being a general student and being a student-athlete goes beyond the fact that only one group plays a university sport (Watt & Moore, 2001).

Both student-athletes and students need to negotiate multiple facets during the transition from high school to university and may face challenges both inside and outside the university experience (Comeaux *et al.*, 2011). The student is deemed to have adjusted or adapted to university when they can meet both the academic and social demands (Gayles & Baker, 2015). The transition to university is often accompanied by the student or student-athlete moving away from home. This move brings about additional adjustments (social, emotional, and psychological) in their lives (MacNamara & Collins, 2010).

During this transition, a common occurrence is the separation of the student from their parents. This separation is referred to as separation-individuation, which is defined as the student's development in their own sense of self, whilst balancing the need for individuality with family connectedness (Drum *et al.*, 2014). Separation-individuation may also occur at an earlier stage for those who attend boarding school in primary school/ high school allowing these individuals to develop their sense of self by themselves at a much younger age. These individuals may therefore not find the transition to university as traumatic compared to their peers who are leaving the house for the first time. The relationship the students have with their parents affects their adjustment to university. Being emotionally independent from a parent is beneficial for the student, as the individual does not need constant approval, and support from their parents (Drum *et al.*, 2014). Women may be at greater risk when it comes to the need for approval and support from parents, further leading to adjustment issues in university (Drum *et al.*, 2014). Drum *et al.* (2014) explained that the reason for this heightened risk was that in comparison to men, women tend to place more value on relationships with family members and having close bonds.

Student-athletes often form strong emotional bonds with their coaches. This bond can delay the movement of the student-athlete to a more independent state of mind. There is often limited decision-making for student-athletes as they have a very structured schedule of team meetings, training sessions, class schedules and volunteer activities (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001). Students who presented with high levels of self-efficacy (believing in their own ability) and achieved top academic averages in high school were optimistic about attending university and were able to adjust better to university (Drum *et al.*, 2014).

Being a university student-athlete may be held in high regard, however, it comes with extra stressors, which regular students do not have to negotiate. It may come as a shock to student-athletes who performed during high school and are now dealing with the pressures of having to prove themselves at university level. Not only does the student-athlete have to excel in their sport, they also must do well in their studies. Doing well in both sport and academics is often a requirement to maintain their sporting bursaries (Drum *et al.*, 2014).

2.5.2 Student-athletes' Identities

The following definition of a student-athlete was used within the context of the current study. Student-athletes are individuals who are enrolled in university and participate in organized competitive sport (Comeaux *et al.*, 2011). Snyder (as cited by Comeaux *et al.*, 2011) defined four types of students according to their role commitment: the scholar athletes, the pure scholars, the pure athletes, and the non-scholars/ non-athletes. The scholar athletes can meet the demands of both their academic and athletic roles as they are equally invested in both domains. The pure scholar is fully committed to their academic role, leaving very little time for athletics endeavours. The pure athlete, however, prioritises their athletic role, with very little commitment to their academic role. The final type is the non-scholar/ non-athlete; this individual is not committed to either the academic or athletic role, but rather takes part in other extracurricular activities within the university (Comeaux *et al.*, 2011). A student-athlete who identifies as a pure athlete may experience role conflict and consequently withdraw from their academic role, which could lead to involuntary withdrawal from the university (Comeaux *et al.*, 2011).

This was reiterated by Yukhymenko-Lescroart (2014), who stated that student-athletes are challenged with balancing both academic and athletic demands to be considered successful as students and athletes. This results in them identifying themselves primarily as students or as athletes (or both). Yukhymenko-Lescroart (2014) described four categories of how student-athletes may perceive themselves. They may view themselves mainly as students (also known as a pure student), mainly as an athlete (also known as a pure athlete), mainly as a student who participates in athletics (student-athlete), or as an athlete studying towards a degree (athlete-student), or as both. They continue to state that a student-athlete puts more value on being successful in the academic domain than in the athletics domain. Success in the athletic domain is the focus for athlete-students, with success in the academic domain coming in second place (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2014).

Yopyk and Prentice (2015) stated that the student-athlete identity is task-dependent and can change from moment to moment. This change was dependent on the thought process of the individual while doing the task and the reason for doing it. They noted that during the athletics

season, the focus was more on the athletic identity as the athletes were competing and attempting to qualify for competitions. There was a shift towards a more student identity closer to the exam period (Yopyk & Prentice, 2015).

The university institutional culture and residence culture all play a role in the student experience at the various universities and may aid in the identity sculpting of the individual. Shen and Tian (2012) referred to both the academic culture and campus culture of universities. The academic culture consisted of the academic outlooks, academic spirits, academic ethics, and academic environment. The campus culture can be characterized by the individuality (the social culture, the existing form and historical origin of the university), academic feature, an open environment (learning, creating, and sharing new ideas), as leading the progression of social culture, variation and integration of different cultures leading to a diverse environment, and the creation of a new culture by new ways of thinking (Shen & Tian, 2012). Institutional culture has been defined as the combination of the values, attitudes, the type of interactions, and the memories of a university, known by those who have been employed or studied in the environment through their lived experiences (Steyn, 2007). Specific to South Africa, Adonis and Silinda (2021) investigated the institutional culture and transformation post-1994. They did note that at historically white universities, there is a slow pace in transformation at these universities which has resulted due to racism. Shen and Tian (2012) state the importance of universities sticking to their missions. Stellenbosch university states the following as their mission “Stellenbosch University is a research-intensive university, where we attract outstanding students, employ talented staff and provide a world-class environment; a place connected to the world, while enriching and transforming local, continental and global communities” (Stellenbosch University, 2023). Maties sports mission is “to foster excellence in both the academic and sport performances of talented student-athletes, and to promote social cohesion and engagement for an active lifestyle amongst all staff and students” (Maties Sport, 2023).

2.5.3 Student Athlete Requirements

The following statement was made in chapter one but will be repeated for context. In SA, the student-athletes must fit the definition of being a “Bona fide student”. Bona fide student-athletes are eligible to compete in the Varsity Athletics and USSA Championships. A student-athlete

cannot only apply themselves on the sport field, as they must achieve a minimum requirement to compete for the university.

The following extract was taken from the 2020 USSA Constitution, and gives a more detailed requirement of what is needed to be eligible:

- a) “Students officially registered with a member club of USSA at a higher education institution recognized by the appropriate national academic authority in the country (i.e., Department of Higher Education and Training) for a programme of at least 120 South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) credits on National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Level 5 and approved by that institution’s senate. This includes bridging courses, although only one (1) attempt at completing any bridging course will be allowed at any institution. Students enrolled for bridging courses must have a matriculation endorsement or a certificate of exemption issued by the Matriculation Board. This excludes students who are enrolled for short courses or are registered for courses or modules or units of study that are less than 120 SAQA credits” (USSA, 2020: 4).
- b) “Students actively involved in pursuing his/her academic career, i.e., attending lectures, submitting assignments, writing tests and examinations in order to be promoted to the next level of study” (USSA, 2020: 4).

Furthermore, the 2019 Varsity Sport Athletics Playlist booklet stated:

“In order for any undergraduate student to qualify for participation in any of the varsity sports tournaments in a particular calendar year, that student must have completed at least 60 SAQA credits on the NQF level 5 in the previous year (running from January to December) in which the student was enrolled for a Qualifying Programme” (Varsity Sport Athletics, 2019: 5-6).

This implies that student-athletes need to pass at least 50% of their modules to remain eligible for participation in subsequent years.

2.6 Barriers and Facilitators

In this study, a barrier was defined as something that inhibited the participant from achieving their goals and a facilitator as something that aided the participants in achieving their goals. Student-athletes are expected to attend all their classes, make progress towards the completion of their degree programmes, as well as attend training sessions, and competitions (which involves time away due to traveling to competitions) (Gayles & Baker, 2015). Student-athletes often feel exhausted and must deal with the emotional and physical pain of acute injuries or managing chronic pain (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001). This often leaves little time for involvement in the social domain. Research has shown that gains in both cognitive and affective development is associated with social involvement, especially in comparison to their non-athlete peers (Gayles & Baker, 2015). Transitioning student-athletes may find it difficult to balance academics, athletics, and social interaction, since there is a constant negotiation happening between the three domains (Comeaux *et al.*, 2011).

Howard-Hamilton and Sina (2001) noted that failing to balance these domains may lead to increased stress levels, psychological problems, the individual becoming dissatisfied with themselves and no longer being eligible to compete in sport. Student-athletes undergo a dual career (DC), meaning they focus on both sport and academics/work simultaneously (Stambulova *et al.*, 2021). DC athletes face many challenges, such as negotiating sport and academic demands, and balancing their social lives. There are benefits and risks of being DC athletes. Broadening one's identity and social network benefits the athlete. There is also a risk of overextending oneself and experiencing burnout (Stambulova *et al.*, 2021). It is highly improbable to fully invest in both sport and academics simultaneously. A shift between these domains, as well as the social domain is necessary to allow for optimal balance in the athlete's life (Stambulova *et al.*, 2021).

Lewin (as cited by Watt and Moore, 2001) stated that both the student-athlete and the university environment must be considered when looking at the behaviour of the individual. The student-athlete's university experience is shaped according to these two factors (Watt & Moore, 2001). There has been speculation that playing sports at university could motivate the athlete to continue their efforts towards graduation (Watt & Moore, 2001). The level at which the student-

athlete performs may dictate the traditional university experience. In the USA, universities are classified according to NCAA Division levels. Division 1 student-athletes have a higher demand of athletics participation and, therefore, experience less of the university experience than the athletes in the lower divisions. At the lower levels, sport is seen more as a university experience, and the student-athletes compete more for the love of the sport than to perform on a national level or to gain external rewards. The student-athlete's goals can, therefore, influence their university experience. Student-athletes with the ambition to reach the international level will experience less of the university experience, than those whose goal it is to compete for the university.

There are both benefits and negative consequences to athletic participation. The benefits include the ability of sport to link people and organisations, creating long-lasting friendships and business partnerships. University sport has displayed good health and well-being in athletes and there is a link between competing in sport and the development of high levels of self-esteem, leadership, teamwork skills, motivation, managing emotions, and discipline (Watt & Moore, 2001; Gayles & Baker, 2015). The way in which an athlete wins and loses is linked to psychosocial development areas such as the management of their emotions. This requires skill development and builds character (Gayles & Baker, 2015). Gayles and Baker (2015) noted that the energy, time, and effort taken to remember plays and techniques for matches are similar to the work put in to study and prepare for exams. The negatives of sport participation include the notion of winning at all costs, especially if these views are emphasised by coaches, fellow students and student-athletes surrounding the athlete. Aggressiveness may also be approved by individuals that surround the student-athlete. This aggressive behaviour can “contribute to tolerance and promotion of sexual aggression, homophobia, steroid use, trash talk, and unhealthy body image” (Watt & Moore, 2001: 12).

Some circumstances can be regarded as both beneficial and negative. These include defining oneself as an athlete rather than as a student, having rigid schedules and being isolated from other students. Firstly, many student-athletes see themselves as athletes rather than as students. The risk of having a strong athletic identity could mean focusing on their athletic commitments and neglecting the responsibilities and activities required to be a successful student (Watt &

Moore, 2001). Identity foreclosure, role conflict or role engulfment happens to a student-athlete when their athletic identity takes over and the student identity is set aside, or when the demands of one role cause difficulty to meet the demands of the other (Watt & Moore, 2001; Comeaux *et al.*, 2011; Gayles & Baker, 2015). If this takes place, the development of student identity is hindered (Comeaux *et al.*, 2011). The formation of an ego identity depends on how successful the student-athlete is in their sport. The better they perform on the field, the more praise they receive from family, fellow students, and the media. When support and encouragement stem only from performance and athletic competency the student-athlete's entire sense of self-worth relies on their sporting achievements, contributing to a rather fragile identity (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001). There are benefits when student-athletes view themselves as athletes; they develop a positive identity, have a strong character, including characteristics of dominance, responsibility, sociability, and self-acceptance. Some student-athletes report feelings of role conflict as early as their second semester in their first year at university, due to sport requirements that inhibited them to engage academically on campus (Comeaux *et al.*, 2011). The NCAA has a rule that limits student-athletes to 20 hours supervised practice per week during the season and a limit of eight hours per week during the off-season (Comeaux *et al.*, 2011). No such rules are in place in SA.

Secondly, student-athletes have rigid schedules with high demands. Their schedules include attending morning lectures, attending athletics-related activities in the afternoon, and in the evening studying and doing assignments. Student-athletes do not have the luxury of setting up their own schedules, whereas general students have more flexibility in their scheduling. They can manage their own academic and social lives, for example by choosing the courses they will study, the times in the day to study, when to eat, or when to socialise. The responsibility of setting one's own schedule helps the student prepare for adult life or life after university. Student-athletes have less responsibility in this regard, which can be detrimental to the development of the skills they need for adulthood (Watt & Moore, 2001). The rigid schedule of student-athletes affects their development of mature relationships with fellow students. These time constraints cause limited interaction with fellow students and do not encourage the establishment and maintenance of these relationships (Drums *et al.*, 2014).

Thirdly, it has been noticed that student-athletes isolate themselves from other students and spend most of their time with other student-athletes. This can be positive, as they are around like-minded individuals who understand the struggles of balancing both their sport and their academics and who can provide support required. They also tend to have similar schedules. Gayles and Baker (2015) noted that participation in university sport can aid student-athletes in bonding with peers, specifically their teammates, which helps reduce feelings of stress and isolation, and helps with social adjustment to university life. High levels of diversity can be found in sport teams, and student-athletes could engage with people different to themselves and build relationships, as well as practice effective communication skills (Gayles & Baker, 2015). Howard-Hamilton and Sina (2001) reiterated that there is great exposure, and that student-athletes could interact with diverse racial, ethnic backgrounds or cultural groups. However, being isolated from general students may aid in the encouragement of student-athletes to disregard the responsibilities associated with being students (Watt & Moore, 2001). The development of relationships with non-athlete peers may be extra difficult as little time is available for extracurricular activities or socializing. Adding to this difficulty is the conversations held by non-athletes, which may not be part of the athlete's frame of reference causing a block in communication (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001). Referring to the NCAA, they have set a further rule in which they have a restriction on the number of student-athletes who may live in the same university residence (Comeaux *et al.*, 2011).

If the multiple demands placed on the student-athletes are not dealt with effectively they may lead to further challenges in performance in the academic domain, on the individual's mental health and in development in the psychosocial domain (Brown *et al.*, 2015). Social isolation is one psychosocial barrier. Time commitments of the athletic domain may leave little time for student-athletes to build relationships with individuals outside of their sports, leading to the possibility of relationships lacking depth and stability (Brown *et al.*, 2015).

Nthangeni *et al.* (2020) mentioned some of the facilitators to university sport participation, including finding enjoyment and having fun whilst participating, the ability to complete their degree quicker than anticipated, making their families proud, maximizing available opportunities for educational and personal development, making friends, socialising, receiving

incentives and awards. They also identified barriers associated with participating in university sport. These included the conflict with training or competing and their academic schedule (inability to attend class due to sporting commitments), limited time and energy for academic activities (class activities, assignments, studying for tests, work integrated learning and internships) leading to extra pressure being put on the student-athletes (Nthangeni *et al.*, 2020). Thomas *et al.* (2019) identified time restrictions, sport activities being limited, and workload being too high as barriers to participating in sport. They further reported that students experienced intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural barriers. The intrapersonal barriers included the stress and the self-perception of skill, the interpersonal barriers included not having friends, and the influence from fellow peers, and the structural barriers included assignments, academic timetables, and overcrowding of facilities (Thomas *et al.*, 2019).

Maulini *et al.* (2020) highlighted the importance of internal and external transitional coping mechanisms to positively overcome these challenges. These processes include the athlete's previous experience in the matter, their motivation, the social and financial support available to said athlete (Maulini *et al.*, 2020). Barriers that hinder the athlete's ability to cope with the transition, included lacking specific skills, interpersonal conflicts, and the struggle of attempting to balance sport and their academic pursuits. Stambulova *et al.* (2009) highlighted the need for increasing the awareness of athletes regarding the challenges faced throughout the transition phases through preventive interventions. There is also a need for the development of effective coping resources to deal effectively with the challenges faced to allow for success in critical moments. These interventions include counselling by career guidance experts (Maulini *et al.*, 2020).

2.7 Stellenbosch University

2.7.1 Academic Support

Stellenbosch University offers free academic counselling and support to their students. The Centre for Student Counselling and Development offers individual and group sessions, work sessions focused on personal development and career counselling. The work sessions offered by the unit assist students with time and stress management, as well as test and exam preparation and development of more effective study techniques. The unit offers individual counselling

sessions and career counselling, conducted by a registered counsellor or a psychologist, if deemed necessary. There are additional online resources available to the students, which include a wellness booklet, reading tips, and online study tips, among others. The unit also noted that online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic could be overwhelming, and that students may struggle with no peer interaction. The unit developed academic support videos to assist students while they worked online and from home (Stellenbosch University: Academic counselling, 2022).

2.7.2 Psychotherapeutic and Support Services

The university also offers free and confidential counselling sessions to students. The Psychotherapeutic and Support Services unit “offers professional support and counselling to students who are experiencing personal, professional or academic challenges, emotional or mental trauma or mental health challenges.” These sessions are conducted by qualified psychologists, counsellors, and social workers. These sessions can be individual or group sessions and cover various topics including, but not limited to “anxiety, tension, home or university trauma and loss, low self-esteem to alcohol and substance abuse.” Included in the services offered by this unit is assistance for students who need welfare, food assistance and emergency relief. Additional online resources have been made available to students, including information to identify possible signs of excessive distress and guidance on how to approach a student who the individual is concerned about and a series on mental health awareness (Stellenbosch University: Psychotherapeutic and Support Services, 2022).

2.7.3 Maties Sport

Maties Sport implements an Integrated Medicine and Science (IMAS) for High Performance Sport Model. It prepares high performance (HP) teams and individual athletes for optimal performance for their various sport competitions through an integrated and evidence-based approach. It is noteworthy that not all sports at Stellenbosch University are categorised as an HP sporting code. There are currently eight sport codes within the HP programme, namely, athletics, aquatics (swimming and water polo), basketball, cricket (men), football, hockey, netball, rugby 15's and sevens rugby (women). Within the Maties athletics club, not all the athletes that join the club are automatically part of the HP programme, athletes are selected by

criteria set by the club. The IMAS model consists of four domains, namely integrated medicine and science, recruitment and retention of talented student-athletes, performance enhancement, and empowerment/ PACER programme (Maties Sport, 2022). PACER is the acronym for Persistence, Authenticity, Commitment, Empathy and Resilience (Maties Sport 2016; 2022).

The IMAS programme gives student-athletes selected for the HP programme access to all areas within sport medicine. These services include medical screening, sport physicians, sports nutrition, sport psychology, physiotherapy, biokinetics, recovery massages and ice baths. Student-athletes who are part of a Maties team have access to the sport injury clinic, offered by the Campus Health Service (Maties Sport, 2016; 2022). The performance enhancement domain provides teams and individuals on HP sport bursaries with the following support: periodised training plans, sport technology support, strength, and physical conditioning (both in the gym and on the sports field), performance psychology and innovations in HP training. Student-athletes have access to the Maties gymnasium. HP teams and bursary holder athletes can train under the supervision of qualified strength and conditioning coaches, as well as have access to the recovery facilities (Maties Sport, 2016; 2022). The Empowerment domain provides activities, which enable student-athletes, coaches, managers, and trainers with the necessary skills to take responsibility for improving their own performance. These activities include short courses and workshops (including a drug-free sports programme), mental skills training sessions with a qualified psychologist, the PACER programme and access to other university resources. Maties Sport is committed to implementing and sustaining a drug-free sports programme (Maties Sport 2016; 2022).

The PACER Holistic Student-athlete and Coach Development and Support programme offers student-athletes in the HP programme with the necessary empowerment through self-development to help ensure their success in all domains of their lives, specifically their academic work, sport, and personal life. The focus for head and assistant coaches in this programme is training and development opportunities. Whereas for student-athletes, it focuses on academic support, leadership development and lends support to leadership groups/captains of the sport teams (Maties Sport 2016; 2022).

The PACER programme focuses on student-athlete academic success. Academic success is viewed in two ways, firstly as N (the number of years it takes to get specified degree) plus one year, and secondly in terms of the number of student-athletes continuing with post-graduate programmes. Each sport club identifies a squad of HP athletes. It is then the responsibility of the HP manager, who has access to the athletes' academic records, to monitor their academic progress with the outcome being progression to graduation. The athlete is red flagged if they pass 30% or less of the academic credits, and/or they fail a year module (as this sets their graduation back a year). The coach/manager must put an intervention in place to support the athlete. The coach/manager needs to speak to the athlete and determine what support is needed and advise the athlete on where to get access to academic tutors and counsellors. Student-athletes on bursaries must perform on the sports field and pass their modules. They do not have to pass cum laude, but within N + 1 years, i.e., one year longer than the typical duration for the specific degree programme.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In chapter two, we discussed the different definition of transitions, the transitions experienced in this phase of moving from high school into university, as well as the specific transitional theories which provided the lens through which the study questions were framed. We outlined the requirements of track and field and the performance demands placed on student-athletes. The demands of secondary and higher education were stated, followed by a more in-depth look at student-athletes and the requirements they face. We finished off the chapter by looking specifically at Stellenbosch University and the support services they offer to student-athletes from an academic, psychological, and sporting perspective. This chapter will look specifically at the methodology that was followed in conducting this study.

3.2 Researcher's Positioning

The primary researcher completed the Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) undergraduate programme in Sport Science, followed by the B.Sc. Honours programme in Biokinetics at Stellenbosch University, whilst simultaneously competing as an elite track and field athlete in the 200m and 400m. The primary researcher experienced the transition of relocating from Kwa-Zulu Natal to the Western Cape, which included a change in training facilities (e.g., from grass fields to a tartan track), a new coach and living conditions. During her years as a student-athlete, she won multiple national Championships, represented SA internationally at the World Student Games, World Senior Championships, and became an Olympian during 2016. The primary researcher worked part-time as an athletics manager at a leading high school in Stellenbosch whilst completing her research. She was, therefore, aware of her own positionality in the study as she had her own experiences of the transition from Grade 12 to first year university and because she was familiar with the HP programme of Maties athletics. The primary researcher used bracketing to distance her own views and allow the analysis to reflect the views of the participants. At the same time, the primary researcher was involved in the co-construction of the information, therefore, it is never possible to fully bracket, and subsequently she acknowledged some biases.

3.3 Study Design

The study was exploratory in nature and utilized a qualitative design. The rationale behind utilizing this design was to allow the participants to elaborate on their lived experiences, to gain insight of how they constructed their worlds and to describe the emotions they felt during their transition (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Specifically, a descriptive phenomenology qualitative research design was used to analyse the information elicited from the participants.

Phenomenology focuses on participants' lived experiences in their everyday lives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Patton (as cited by Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 26) explained that it is based on the notion that “there is an essence or essences to shared experience”, the researcher brackets, makes an analysis, and compares the participants experience in a phenomenon to identify these essences. The descriptive method entails listening to the participant describing their own lived experiences without making any interpretations. This approach is used when there is limited knowledge on the topic at hand, and when the aim is to have a clear understanding of the most essential meaning of the phenomenon of interest from the views of the participants who are negotiating the experience (Penner & McClement, 2008). In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with first year track and field student-athletes.

A constructivist epistemological perspective was utilised, the purpose of this perspective is to allow for the participants to describe their experiences, and for the researcher to understand, describe and interpret this information. The ontology of the research allowed for multiple realities for a single event and was context-bound. The reality is holistic, multifaceted and for ever changing (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

3.4 Duration of Study

The study lasted approximately four years, starting in January 2019 and the thesis was submitted for examination on 1 December 2022. This period included the development of the research protocol, ethical application, information session, semi-structured interviews, analysis, and write-up of the final thesis. The interviews commenced on 13 April 2020 and the last interview was conducted on 23 April 2020. A second round of check-ins with the participants were conducted between 21 May and 10 July 2020. The primary researcher initially planned to

complete the study in three years, for her to pursue her athletic endeavours. However, the Covid-19 pandemic, taking up a position as athletics manager at a high school for girls, and her continued participation in elite athletics meant that the study took four years to complete.

3.5 Ethical Aspects

The study was approved on 25 February 2020 by the Stellenbosch University Research Ethics Committee for Social, Behavioural and Education Research (REC: SBE, Project number: 13110; approval number: 2522020 (Appendix F)). The study was conducted according to the ethical guidelines and principles of the International Declaration of Helsinki, the South African Guidelines for Good Clinical Practice (2006), the Medical Research Council Ethical Guidelines for Research (2002), and the Department of Health Ethics in Health Research: Principles, Processes and Studies (2015).

3.6 COVID-19 Pandemic

Stellenbosch University placed an embargo on all in-person research during the national lockdown (level 5), thereby necessitating online interviews.

3.7 Participants

Participants included eight student-athletes (three men/ five women), respectively participating in track, field, and combined events, who made the transition from high school (grade 12 in 2019) directly into the first year at Stellenbosch University the following year (2020). This allowed for accurate retrospective accounts of their high school experiences as well as concurrent feedback of their experiences during the first few months of their first year at university. For this study, student-athletes were defined as individuals who are enrolled for tertiary academic programmes and who participate in organized competitive sport (Comeaux *et al.*, 2011). The mean age of the participants was 18.88 ± 0.60 years and ranged from 18 to 20 years. The overall academic results the participants achieved at the end of Grade 12 ranged from 56% to 85%, with a mean overall academic Grade 12 result of $72.45 \pm 9.59\%$. The academic courses the participants were registered for at the university varied across multiple faculties and included the Bachelor of Law, Education, Commerce and Theology degrees. The participants'

highest achievements in their athletics careers at the time of the interview ranged from competing at a national level, which included competing at SA Schools and ASA Youth and Junior Championships, to competing at an international level, which included competing at African and World Youth and Junior Championships. The participants' self-ratings on the athlete-student scale, and hours per week spent on various academic, sport and social activities can be found in Table 3.1. All participants were members of the Maties Athletics club. Having variation in the participant sample allows for a greater range of application of the findings by the readers of the research and therefore enhances the transferability of the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Table 3.1: Participant self-ratings on the athlete-student scale, and hours per week spent on various academic, sport, and social activities.

Participant	Self-rating on the athlete-student scale	Hours per week spent on			
		Attending class	Academic work outside of class	Sport-related activities*	Social activities
1	4	29	5-8	12	5-6
2	4	20	3-4	12	1
3	4	24	10	12	5
4	6 or 7	20	6	6	5
5	3	26	5	13.5	8
6	4	28	2	20	10-15
7	4	22	4	8	10
8	7.5	39	26.5	7	4-5

* Sport-related activities include training, gym, psychology sessions, recovery sessions etc.

Participants were recruited from Stellenbosch University through the Maties Athletics Club and Maties Sport HP Unit, based on the study's inclusion criteria. Recruitment was done by

approaching the Maties Athletics HP Manager. The following requirements had to be met for inclusion in the study:

- The participants had to be receiving coaching and competing in university competitions (e.g., Varsity Athletics competitions, USSA Championships, Boland/South African Junior Championships, or Boland/ South African Senior Championships),
- They should have reached provincial level or higher at high school (e.g., Boland (or another provincial team), South African Team), and
- They should have met the criteria of being a Bona-fide first year student according to the criteria stated in the USSA Constitution and be registered for a degree programme at Stellenbosch University.

3.8 Procedures

Participant recruitment commenced by approaching the Maties Athletics HP manager to identify potential participants. Thereafter, the researcher contacted the potential participants via email (Appendix A), followed up by WhatsApp messages. The email consisted of an information sheet with details about the proposed study, as well as providing them with a copy of the informed consent forms (Appendix B). An information session was set up, during which the aim, objectives and purpose of the study was explained to the potential participants. They were given the opportunity to ask questions or raise concerns. They were then asked to complete and sign an informed consent form.

Eight of the 13 contacted athletes agreed to participate. Although this is a relatively small number, there was saturation of the elicited information and the emerging themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The participants were contacted to schedule the interviews at a convenient time. All participants were interviewed individually. The interviews were conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic national lockdown level 5 (during which in-person interviews were not permitted), and were thus conducted over a video call, using the Zoom and Microsoft Teams platforms. Semi-structured interviews were used to elicit in-depth, context-rich information about the student-athletes' transitional experiences. A semi-structured format ensured that the participant could freely express their own experiences and enabled the researcher to lead each

interview based on the information elicited from the participants throughout the interview. With the participant's permission, the interviews were recorded to allow for accurate transcription and analysis. The interviews lasted between 55 and 108 minutes each.

Each participant was treated with dignity and respect, and the primary researcher did her best to enable good interviews despite technological challenges that occurred during the online interviewing. All information gathered was kept confidential, and every attempt was made to ensure anonymity when reporting the findings. It is important to note that participants were free to withdraw at any time during the research and that participation in the study was voluntary. Participants were informed that if any acute reaction to the research arose, access to a sport psychologist would be provided. The participant could attend up to three sessions paid for by the researchers. The sessions were valid from the date of recruitment to four weeks after the interview session. None of the participants required this service.

The information gathered during the interviews were stored on a password protected computer and backed up on the researcher's external hard drive. No names of the participants were used in the publication of this work. Participants were randomly assigned numbers. This was to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of each participant. Efforts were made to protect the identity of participants.

3.9 Interview Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were used to elicit information pertaining to their experiences during their transition from grade 12 to first year university, and to various barriers and facilitators experienced by Stellenbosch University first year student track and field athletes. All interviews were conducted by the primary researcher. Before the interviews commenced, to ensure the trustworthiness of the interview script three procedures took place. Firstly, the funnel principle allowed for the interview transcript to move from broad, open-ended questions (ice breakers and questions to gather general information) to more specific questions (gathering information specific to the various domains and Covid-19 pandemic). This principle was used to allow the participant to become comfortable with sharing their experiences, and to avoid influencing the

participants in their responses, and therefore decreasing bias and potentially missing important and unanticipated information (Rosala & Kate, 2022).

Secondly, the interview script was given to a third party (the study leader) to verify, the interview script was sculpted and adapted were necessary. Thirdly, the primary researcher performed a mock interview with a senior student-athlete who had undergone the transition a few years before. This allowed the interviewer to become familiar with the interview script, as well as to practice her interviewing skills. The senior student-athlete provided feedback and the interview script was further refined. At the beginning of each interview, the participants were asked whether they wanted to go through the informed consent again, and whether they wanted to discuss any questions they may have had. The participants were reminded that they did not have to answer any questions they felt uncomfortable with and that the study was voluntary, meaning they could withdraw at any time. The researcher made sure that the participants were happy with the interview being recorded before starting the recording, and all the participants agreed thereto.

Demographic information (such as age, the item, level of competition and sex of the participant) was gathered. The researcher and study leader developed a 10-point athlete, student-athlete, student identification scale which was like that of Marx *et al.* (2008) (who used a 5-point scale, 1 = mainly an athlete; 5 = mainly a student). The participants were shown the 10-point scale and asked to indicate a number, which they felt best described them (1 = being an athlete, 5 = being a student-athlete, and 10 = being a student). For this study, student-athletes were defined as individuals who are enrolled for tertiary academic programmes and who participate in organized competitive sport (Comeaux *et al.*, 2011). This 10-point scale was used to elicit information on how the participants perceived themselves. A rating below five would indicate the participants perceived themselves more an athlete than a student, whereas a rating above five would indicate that a participant perceived themselves as more student than athlete. The scale was used as a subjective rating system, once a rating was given the participants were asked to explain this self-identification. The explanation given by the participant will enhance our understanding of why the athlete may see themselves in this light and if in fact student-athlete identification is task-dependent.

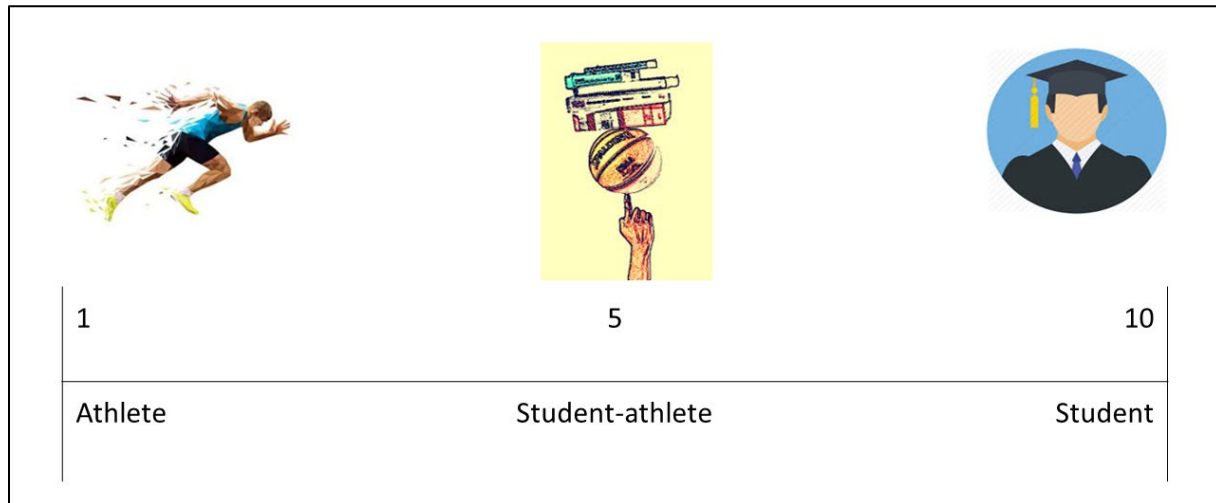


Figure 3.1: The 10-point athlete, student-athlete, student identification scale

An icebreaker question followed, “Tell me a bit more about yourself”. The interview questions followed a holistic approach, the questions asked covered general information; academic, athletic, social, psychological, financial, and legal aspects; barriers and facilitators to the transition; and a reflection of the year up to the interview session. Questions about the Covid-19 pandemic and its effects on the participants were asked as it was applicable to their experiences during their first year of studies. It should be noted that the interviews were scheduled to be conducted by the time students returned from their first term break, however, the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in all Stellenbosch University undergraduate students returning home, and not returning to Stellenbosch for the remainder of 2020.

Wylleman and Lavallee’s (2004) DPTFA, and Wylleman’s (2019) Holistic Athletic Career Model were used to develop the interview guide. This ensured that the questions captured holistic information, including information about the student-athlete's ability to cope, and about external and internal resources they utilized during this transitional period. The use of multiple models may strengthen the validity of the research design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The questions guided the participants to speak about their transition covering multiple domains of their lives (i.e., athletic, psychological, psychosocial, academic/vocational, financial, and legal). The interview guide ensured that the required information was obtained from each participant. The guide was flexible and allowed the interview to flow naturally. The order of the questions

could change to allow for further elaboration on the obtained information that may not necessarily have been captured through any of the existing questions.

The following are examples of the questions asked under each sub-heading in the interview guide (See Appendix C for the full interview script):

General Information:

- How did you make the decision to go to university?
- Could you please describe your typical weekday?

Academic, Athletic, Social and Psychological transitions:

- How is the academic workload?
- How have you balanced your athletics, academic and social activities?

Barriers and Facilitators:

- What inhibited you from or aided you in achieving your goals?

Reflection:

- What were your goals for 2020?
- Are you satisfied with your progress to attain your goals?

Covid-19 Pandemic:

- How has the Covid-19 pandemic and the recent move to online teaching and learning affected your first year at university?

Various probes and prompts were used to supplement the interview questions. These were used to get the participants to elaborate on the information elicited. This ensured that more in-depth information was obtained. The interviews lasted between 55 and 108 minutes each.

3.10 Data Analysis

The first step included the collection and management of data. All interviews were recorded, to allow for accurate verbatim transcriptions of the recordings. The interviews were transcribed by the researcher. The recordings were listened to multiple times to ensure accurate transcription (corrections were made to the transcripts if required) and to ensure familiarity with the elicited information. Thereafter the transcripts were read numerous times to allow familiarization.

The second step was line-by-line manual coding (Gibbs, 2007) and making margin notes while reading through the transcriptions (Creswell, 2013). The researcher used data-driven coding, meaning the retrieval of the codes out of what was happening in the transcripts and as far as possible not through interpreting the data based on existing theories. Initial coding took place, this consisted of identifying action words and code content. Code content included single words, a couple of words and sentences. A master code list was developed thereafter (Gibbs, 2007). The descriptive phenomenology method entailed listening to the participant description of their lived experiences without making any interpretations. The researcher analysed the participants' descriptions and broke them down into meaningful statements (a word, sentence or phrase that contained one idea), gathering the statements which were essential to the phenomenon construction of the study (Penner & McClement, 2008). Multiple source triangulation was used to enhance validity and consistency. The information elicited from the participants were compared and cross-checked, to highlight differing experiences during the transition (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In the third step, the data were analysed to identify themes and patterns with reference to the phenomenon, the codes were further developed and refined (Gibbs, 2010). A thematic framework approach was used to group the qualitative data into categories of codes, subthemes, and themes. With this approach, the recordings obtained during the interviews were linked by common themes, which allowed the researcher to group the information into categories and, therefore, “establish a framework of thematic ideas about it” (Gibbs, 2007:39). The researcher went through the transcripts to identify new information, as well as repetition of themes that had already emerged. Not all the participants had the same experiences, barriers, and facilitators during the transition. Patton (as cited by Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) noted the need to look for information that supports alternative explanations. Sections that stood out from the transcripts were highlighted and the in-vivo quotes were used to support the findings in this thesis. The use of thick, rich descriptions of the setting, participants, and the findings was used to enhance the transferability of the research. The researcher presented evidence in the form of in-vivo quotes from the interview transcripts to substantiate the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To ensure trustworthiness of the data analysis, a transcript (without identifying factors) of one of the participants was chosen at random and given to a third party (the study leader) to code. A

comparison was made between the researcher and study leader's coding. This ensured that the category names were accurate in describing the data. Where necessary the researcher recoded. This is a type of analysts' triangulation which consists of two or more researchers analysing the data independently from one another and then comparing their findings, enhancing the validity and consistency of the research conducted (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The final step included the visual representation of the findings using tables and figures (Creswell, 2013). The draft visual representations of the findings were given to the study leader to review. The researcher and the study leader met and had a feedback discussion. After the discussion, changes were made, and the visual representation of the findings was finalised. The findings of this study were communicated back to all participants to allow for member checking before the finalisation of the study. This allowed the participants to confirm that their experiences were accurately captured in the interpretation of the data. None of the participants gave any feedback to the researcher. The final thesis will be sent to all participants and Maties Sport following the successful completion of the examination process.

Chapter Four: Findings

Before bursting out of the starting block with the findings, let's reiterate the aim of the study. The aim was to explore the experiences of Stellenbosch University student track and field athletes during their transition from Grade 12 to first year university.

4.1 Context of the Research

It is important to explain the context in which the research was conducted. The primary researcher initially scheduled the interviews from 6 April to 15 May 2020, approximately three months into the 2020 academic year, which commenced on 3 February. The participants would have transitioned from grade 12 to first year university, and experienced changes in the various domains. In the athletics domain, the participants would have moved into the mastery phase of their sport. The timeline would have allowed the start of training, some with a new coach and training group, and a few competitions would have taken place: league meetings, varsity athletics competitions, provincial championships, and the South African championships. In the academic domain, the participants would have started with higher education while pursuing their athletics career. Classes, tutorials, and practical classes would have started, with assignments and their first mid semester tests. In the psychological domain, participants were going through the transition from adolescence into young adulthood. Participants would likely have been challenged with having to budget, taking control of their own lives, and some may have had to relocate to a new town and to live away from home for the first time. In the psychosocial domain, participants' main source of support and advice seeking may start to shift, the participants may have become less reliant on their parents and look more towards their fellow teammates, students, and coaches. Participants would have had the opportunity to meet new people, new teammates, may have moved in with a roommate, went through orientation week and social activities in residences or their Private Student Organization's (to be explained later). There would likely have been a financial and legal transition; changes in support from family to financial support from the university, sport governing body, the government, and the participants' individual sponsors.

The interviews were scheduled to be conducted before the start of the mid-year examinations (typically middle of May), so that it would not interfere with their exam preparations. The Covid-19 pandemic broke out just before these interviews were scheduled. It caused unforeseen disruptions on a global scale and led to drastic changes to the student-athletes' academic and sporting year. Stellenbosch University went into early recess on 16 March (four days earlier than the usual autumn break). Soon thereafter the country went into a hard lockdown. Undergraduate students did not return to Stellenbosch for the remainder of the year and resorted to Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning, including all assessments. All sporting activities and events were cancelled, and only professional sport restarted later in the year.

Figure 4.1 provides a timeline of what the 2020 first semester would typically have looked like, compared to how it played out in the 2020 academic year. Being a first-year student-athlete during a global pandemic was a unique experience that would have influenced the participants' responses to the interview questions.

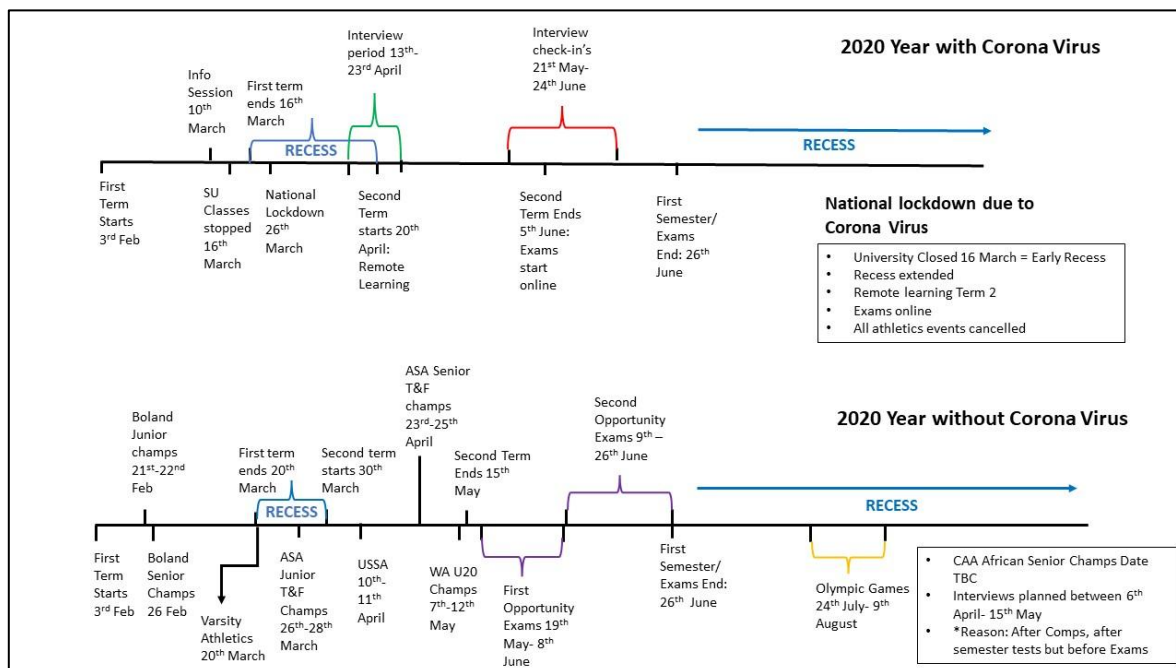


Figure 4.1. A student-athlete's 2020 first semester (due to the Covid-19 pandemic) compared to the planned 2020 first semester.

4.2 Qualitative Findings

Figures 4.2 - 4.7 provide visual representations of the emerging themes, subthemes, and categories of codes for each domain. The facilitators, transitional experiences, and barriers experienced within each specific domain are summarised. One can note that the headings (the domain, facilitators, transitional experiences, and barriers) were deductive from both the models, namely, Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) DPTFA, and Wylleman's (2019) Holistic Athletic Career Model. However, the emerging themes, subthemes, and categories of codes for each domain were inductive from the data.

4.2.1 Facilitators, Transitional Experiences, and Barriers in the Academic Domain

Tables 4.1 and 4.2, show the factors that played a role in deciding to attend university and in choosing which university to attend. Participants could indicate multiple factors. Please note that all information in the table was inductive from the data as emerging themes.

Table 4.1 Factors considered by the participants in deciding to attend university.

Factor	Number of Participants
Career aptitude test	4
Always knew they wanted to attend university	4
Consultation with family members	2
Against taking a gap year	2
Not an option to not attend university	2
Outside expectation to attend university	1
Back-up plan: future financial stability	3
Steppingstone to achieve future career aspirations	1
Advice from 'successful' fellow student-athletes	1

Table 4.2 The factors considered in the decision-making process of choosing which university to attend.

Factor	Number of participants
Proximity of university to their home	6
Ability to stay in the Western Cape	2
Staying with school coach	5
Institutional reputation	5
'Comfort/ comfortable'	4
Legacy- previous family attendance	2
Interest from athletics club management- Recruitment	2
Professionalism	1
Ability to make an impact at the university	1
Teammates	1

Not getting into their preferred course, choosing a 'safe' career with a good salary, being passionate about course choice, using the course chosen to better the communities they lived in, choosing a course that allowed more time spent on athletics activities and family influence were mentioned as factors that influenced their decision on which course to study. Four of the participants did not get in for their original first choice, three of these participants were happy with how it turned out. Participant six described it as follows:

... actually, it was my fourth choice... I got accepted for B.Sc. Dietetics, but it is on Tygerberg (The Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences is based 30 km from Stellenbosch), so I decided not to do that, because I don't want to pedal in and out of Stellenbosch the whole time... but it was kind of a good thing that it happened like that, because I do want to go in a more business-related field when I, when I do actually have to go and start working... so, it was kind of a blessing in disguise. [Participant 6]

Participant 3 chose their course based on family influences; they also took the aptitude test that suggested two courses. They reasoned that their course was the easier option out of the two and insinuated this would be better for their athletics.

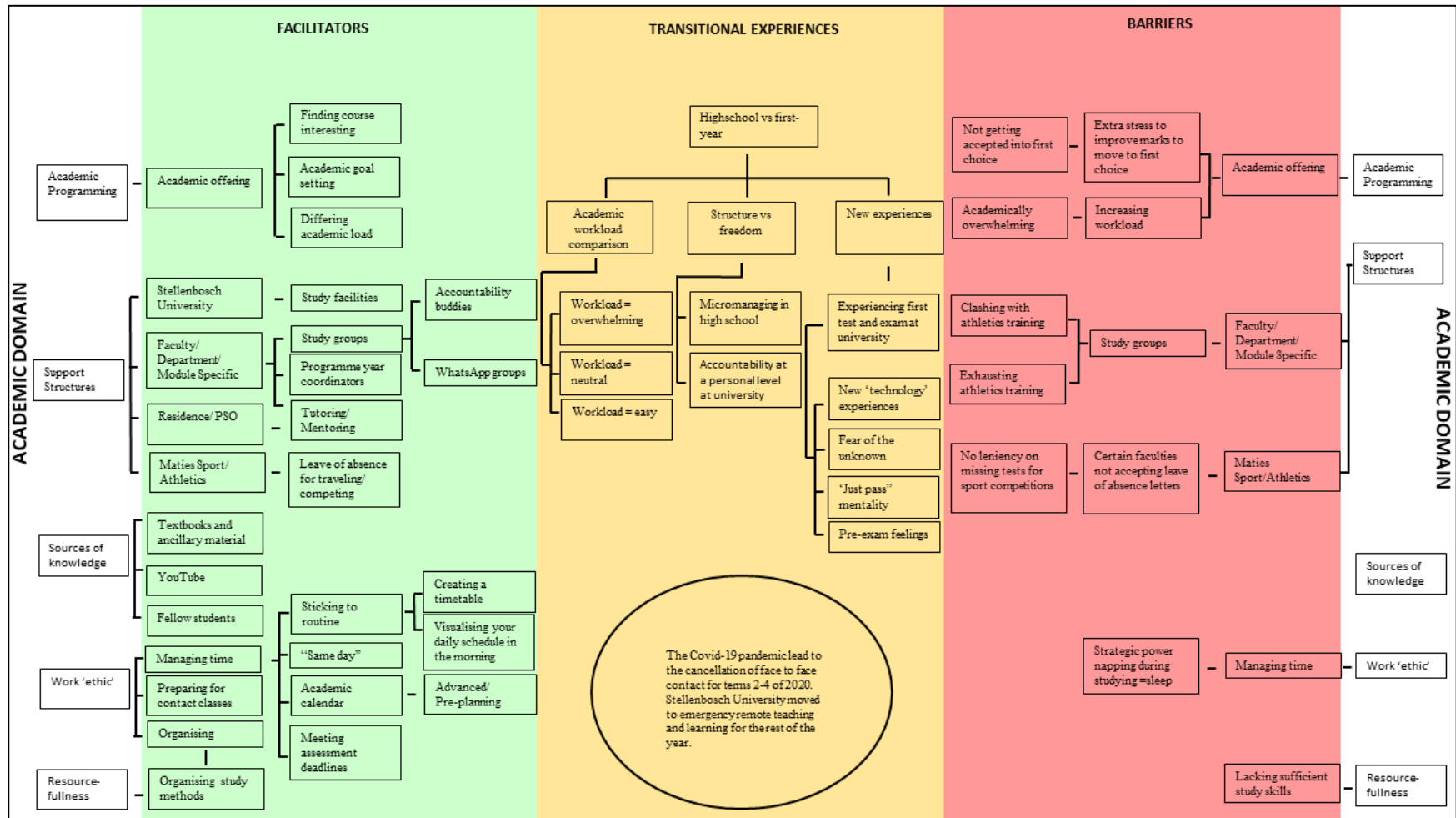


Figure 4.2. Facilitators, transitional experiences, and barriers in the academic domain

... so basically, my oldest brother did it and I tested very good for the course too, it was that or engineering... I said rather leave the engineering, because I know how many like what time the students take to learn and everything with the engineering, and so I rather decided with the how can I say, easier course... [Participant 3]

Student-athletes may find the academic domain as challenging and stressful. Figure 4.2 indicate various transitions, facilitators, and barriers thereto that had to be navigated.

4.2.1.1 Academic Programme

A big drawcard to the University is if they offer the student's preferred course. Participants compared their academic interests based on the subjects they took during high school.

... at school you had all these subjects that you didn't care about, like maths and science... So now you are actually doing what you want to do and that I think is pretty helpful as well cause you actually interested in the work you're doing. [Participant 6]

Setting academic goals was a facilitator for many of the participants. Their desire to increase their knowledge and have multiple degrees behind their names were mentioned. However, this facilitator turned into a barrier when top academic performance was needed for selection into the course the participant initially wanted to pursue.

The participants' perception of the academic workload varied. Their description of the academic workload ranged from easy to neutral to overwhelming. They used words such as "manageable", "not more or less", "fine", "basically the same", "I feel like I am back at school", and "chilled" when describing the academic workload. Participant seven spoke about taking an easier course that allowed more flexibility to focus on athletics.

The course I'm taking it's something I understand and enjoy, so it comes naturally... it's chilled for me... I can spend a lot of time on my athletics... [Participant 7]

The increase in the workload, the complexity of the topics covered, and the unfamiliarity (or new) work being covered were responsible for some students feeling academically overwhelmed. With regards to the increase in workload, participants spoke about not having enough time to keep up to date with all the work coming in, partially understanding concepts, and the work for a specific module at university in a single term being almost double the work one did in high school. Multiple assignments from different modules with the same due date was mentioned as overwhelming. The complexity of the work meant that students needed more time to grasp the topics, often this time was limited due to tests and homework that needed to be done in other modules.

... every week we write a test of the previous weeks work so that was difficult... sometimes you don't understand all the concepts, but you understand a part of the work of the previous work or weeks work and then you have to go write a test and they ask you difficult questions and you don't understand them, because you don't have the time to do the necessary examples... In the week it feels like you can't do anything properly, you just rush through everything to finish everything... I literally study the whole time, there's not time for anything else in term... [Participant 8]

It is important to note the emotional turmoil that may be experienced when being overwhelmed academically, more so for those who had never struggled academically before. The transition to university can bring about these new challenges and fears of not passing. It could be said that some chose to make the experience harder for themselves in the pursuit of becoming more independent. They had the option of getting a university tutor, but they wanted to become more independent and took on this challenge themselves.

Trying to find the balance between all the domains of university can be exhausting. Making time to train and then coming home to study at night can be challenging. One participant who was academically overwhelmed and possibly burnt out, complained about being constantly tired, unable to focus on class, on their assignments and on studying. Finding techniques to take one's mind off the academic requirements was necessary. This participant considered

themselves academically challenged, and this may have influenced their experience so far in university as they already came in with a preconceived idea that they are ‘bad’ at academics.

... sleep has been stealing a lot of time as well... I try to study, even when I have like free time... when I have free time, I open up my books and try to study, but I’m struggling because I feel so tired and I feel so tired and sometimes I try to watch a movie, try to watch a movie, calm my nerves down because the workload can just be overwhelming just thinking about it.

[Participant 1]

The participants often compared their academic workload in high school to the student-athlete’s academic workload that they now experienced. For several participants, the workload was a lot more now compared to what they experienced in high school. The work was brand new, it was mentioned that in high school the work often builds up with each academic year, so the course work was familiar where now everything was new and unfamiliar. The participants spoke about the course work being more detailed and concentrated than that of the work covered in high school. They mentioned that in high school the work was often repeated and elaborated on whereas in university lectures this was not the case. The amount of work covered in one term on a specific topic was almost double now to that of high school.

... we would do maybe three to seven topics in high school in a term and now we doing like 20, so it’s really crazy, it’s a lot more... [Participant 6]

The participants went on to compare the structure of high school to the freedom of university. The freedom of choice was frequently mentioned. The decision to attend class is up to oneself and one participant went as far as saying “*they are not going to notice if you are not there*”. The flexibility of one’s lifestyle in university was noted and further demonstrated that one can work out their own schedule, allowing more time to focus on their sport. This increase in freedom also came with an increased responsibility over one’s life. This responsibility was welcomed by many of the participants. This participant specifically enjoyed the new role of taking control of their life; being both responsible and accountable for their life.

... it's very nice to how can I say, decide for myself what I can do rather than let a bell or something control your life. [Participant 3]

To the contrary, high school was a more controlled environment. One participant described high school as feeling trapped and monotonous. It was mentioned that the freedom of university could also be a trap that students may fall into as the lecturers do not care whether students do their work or not. The student will eventually not end up with a degree if they do not submit their assignments and they will still have to pay the university fees.

It's a big trap for a lot of people because in high school the teachers would be on your case and yoh your project's overdue and you must get work done, where's your homework and all that kind of stuff, but university is more like here's the work, do it if you want to, if you don't want to you don't get your degree so, you're still paying the fees... [Participant 1]

University life came with many firsts for the participants. For many, working on laptops was a new experience. In school they wrote on paper and studied from printed textbooks, technology was mainly for those who took Computer Applications Technology as a subject. This introduction to technology at university also came with each student receiving a student email that required them to remember a password. A semester test written on a laptop in a room full of people, was also a new experience.

... it was interesting because I'm not used to 300 plus children going to a hall and then going to write so ya, it's pretty interesting to experience that and everything was on a laptop. I've never experienced something like that in school... [Participant 3]

Continuing with first experiences, an important first worth noting is the first test and exam experience at university. The first test and exam experience can be overwhelming. The fear of the unknown comes with many uncertainties to navigate. These include uncertainties around how question papers will be structured and how the questions will be asked, the difficulty of the questions and finding the right assessment venue.

I didn't really know what to expect out of the tests that we wrote and the assessments, I didn't really know the level of difficulty it included. [Participant 4]

What was frequently used as a coping mechanism during these uncertainties was a 'just pass' mentality. For some participants setting goals to scrape through allowed them to succeed initially until they completely understood the topic being covered, whereas others were just happy to get the bare minimum without the need to improve their marks. A reason mentioned for this mentality was the juggle between academics and athletics commitments, with participant 1 stating that "...with athletics it makes it extremely hard, super hard."

The participants were asked how they felt about the upcoming exams. The mid-year exams would be the first university exam experience for them. It was important to note that due to the national lockdown these exams were written online, which caused increased stress levels for some participants. The participants in general had mixed emotions about the upcoming exams. These included fear of not covering all the study work set out for the exam, fear of failure (for some this was a new experience), uncertainty of the examination format, as well as the achievement outcome. Others felt they were well prepared for what was coming, they understood all the concepts set out in the first semester.

I was nervous, because I didn't think that I would be able to go through the masses of work... and you don't know how the questions of the question paper are going to be asked... it was the first time in my life that I felt that I might not pass an exam. [Participant 5]

Participant 1 insinuated that they were just going with the flow and would accept whatever the outcome may be. They would not be too hard on themselves and would rather learn from the experience as this experience was initially not planned for.

... so, whatever happens, happens... This year is going to be a huge learning curve for me... I'm not going to be bummed about it... because everything is quite new for me, and I didn't plan to go to university so when I got in it was like, yoh, this is what I'm actually getting myself into. [Participant 1]

The additional comfort and distractions of being at home due to the national lockdown and staying focused and studying for exams was a difficult experience for many. Additionally, trying to navigate through the uncertain times was daunting. The participants thoughts about the upcoming exam period were that it was going to be tough. It was mentioned that they would need to stay ‘*head strong*’. Participant two was struggling with the idea of an examination period while being confined to their home. With exams being written remotely, they were struggling to adjust to the reality that exams would soon commence.

I think it’s going to be hard to stay focused because I am at home and I feel more comfortable at home, not doing any work... I think this exam is going to be a bit tough. [Participant 2]

However, the idea of the exams being online was comforting for some participants. They were “*glad*” the exams were online as they could focus on themselves and the test without the nervous energy of anxious students around them.

I followed up with the participants after the examination period. Many participants noted a positive exam experience. The exam timetable was the main contributor for this positivity, as it allowed for sufficient study time between the different modules. Participant 3, however, reiterated the fear of experiencing their first university exam. Online tests rely on students to be honest and to not use their notes. This was brought up in the quote below.

I’m still like I don’t know what to expect if I have to actually write an exam in an exam hall, because you have your notes and stuff with you... but the tests and assignments online it was, it was actually nice, they asked hard but also you had to know your work. [Participant 3]

4.2.1.2 Support Structures

Support at university is available through many platforms. Firstly, Stellenbosch University provided facilities on campus for students to work and study in, such as the computer laboratories, the library and various designated study rooms. Students could use the computers, have access to the internet for research. Assistive technology was made available by the university to individuals who required it, such as for students who were visually

impaired. The university also offers a shuttle system to the various faculties, which are located off campus. Students could take the shuttle to and from class. This benefitted both those who do not have their own mode of transport and those that have their own transport as it saved money on petrol and, subsequently, had a financial benefit.

There's a shuttle that takes us every morning. So that's the most, that's convenient for me, just take pressure off, you save petrol, and you don't have to worry about anything.

[Participant 7]

Secondly, support was provided to students that was specific to certain faculties, departments, or modules. Participants spoke about attending study groups with their peers. Participant eight spoke about the comfort of knowing you weren't alone:

...sometimes the one does his own work, and you do your own work, it's just there to motivate each other and just feel like you not alone but um most of the time it's a study group and we do the same subject for the next day. [Participant 8]

This is a benefit as well as a struggle as the participants would need to leave early to get to training or will struggle to focus on evening sessions due to a long day of class and training.

... sometimes I'd have to leave really early because of my athletics... Yoh it's a struggle you get there you're in that environment and you're sitting there and 30 minutes in you're already feeling so tired cause you come from training... [Participant 1]

Having 'accountability buddies' was mentioned, friends checking in with one another, made sure everyone had the correct dates for assessments and that nobody missed anything important. Some faculties started an academic WhatsApp group, on these groups the students could ask questions if they did not understand the work or if they missed something during the lecture. These groups were run by the students and information from the lecturers were communicated to the students by the student representatives. Further help was offered to students specific to certain faculties, departments, or modules. This included help with

referencing, reading techniques, how to present their assignments, giving extra marks as incentives for using the resources and scheduled meditation sessions.

There're so many help structures. If you need help with anything you can go to that department they can direct you there, if you need help with how to reference you can go... they give us extra marks and stuff to send teachers your stuff if you actually make use of the resources... They help you with how you read, how you present your assignments, and we do lab online as well. [Participant 7]

Help from Tutors and demi-lecturers were provided by the departments. In addition, some of the residences had academic mentors for each faculty, students could go to this mentor for help. These mentors could offer advice, or they could direct them to fellow students in the residence who were studying the same course.

...our mentor in charge of [name of degree] in my res did help a lot... I think there is three that we could go and talk to about specifically our faculty, or they would organize someone that studies the same thing as you do, and you can go talk with them. [Participant 6]

Maties Sport gave support to student-athletes traveling away to a competition in the form of a leave of absence letter. Maties Athletics will apply for the leave of absence to the University and the permission will be given in a letter to the student-athletes to provide to their respective faculties/departments/lecturers. In a pandemic-free year, the participants would have had more exposure with speaking to lecturers about the possibilities of missing tests, classes, and assessments due to athletics competitions, this includes traveling to said competitions, as well as competition days. A few of the participants still had the opportunity to speak to lecturers or faculty members. Many academic personnel were supportive and made alternative arrangements for student-athletes missing assignments. A 'sick' test was given to those who were unable to write the first test. However, not all departments allowed for a 'sick' test. In these departments students had to write two out of three tests, namely Assessment one (A1), Assessment 2 (A2) and Assessment 3 (A3). The work built up and was not written off as the students moved through the tests, with test three including all the work.

... you have A1, A2 and A3, and if you miss A1 you have to write A2 and A3 but you, your marks is more for the A3 than the A1 ... I even asked if I can write the test online or something and then he just said no it's not going to work, you going to miss it and then you going to write the A3... [Participant 3]

4.2.1.3 Sources of Knowledge

Participants spoke about the utilization of textbooks, ancillary material, YouTube, and fellow students as sources of knowledge in their pursuit of a degree.

I watch a lot of videos on YouTube for [Name of subject] ... usually use the texts books, because we get notes... I watch videos, but mostly you get knowledge from the people around you and they don't necessarily know everything, but they know a small part... [Participant 8]

4.2.1.4 Work 'Ethic'

Time management was essential to success in the academic domain. Participants spoke about sticking to a routine to eliminate distractions. Creating timetables, sitting in the morning, and visualizing all the tasks one needed to complete that day were mentioned as ways that aided in sticking to a routine. Decreasing the time spent on procrastinating by finishing work on the same day the participants received it, as well as revising work done in class on the same day were mentioned by the participants as good time management techniques.

... Time management overall is one of the big things that I've learnt, having to manage everything that is going on especially when it still was so busy and just making sure that you have everything done beforehand and not have to do everything in the last minute... [Participant 6]

Participants spoke about the use of strategic power naps to assist their studying. This participant was exhausted from training and was advised by a peer to take a powernap before starting their study session. However, it was a struggle to wake up from the nap.

I don't know how to take naps, literally people are [Participant's name] take a 30-minute nap, so I'm like cool set my alarm for 30 minutes, I don't hear the alarm, five hours later, or waking up the next day... [Participant 1]

The use of the academic calendar was mentioned. The calendar stated the dates of all assessments and the due date for assignments. This assisted participants with meeting all assessment deadlines.

...we have a whole year's calendar, so you know when you have this or when you have that. [Participant 7]

Printing the lecture notes and reading through the chapter ahead of class lead to participants being well-prepared for lectures. Making sure their notes were organised and filed after class was also beneficial when the time came to study and complete assignments.

I started organizing my work, because in the beginning I was just making notes and then there was papers and files and everything... [Participant 6]

4.2.1.5 Resourcefulness

Proper organization was essential when it came to successful study methods. Finding a routine and being organized enhanced the participants' academic success.

... once you just get a routine or you get organized you can actually visualize what you have to do and what you haven't done yet... [Participant 6]

The participants mentioned that they lacked sufficient study skills required at university. It was mentioned that in high school, participants were spoon-fed information, they were taught how to pass and not how to apply the work they were taught. A second participant mentioned that in school they went more in-depth during lessons and covered almost word for word what was said in a textbook, however, at university, the lecturers 'scrape over' all the work and the students must go through the work in depth on their own.

...I think in matric, they almost, they spoon feed you and also just how they treated the work, in school they taught us a pattern how we should do stuff, how we should do [Name of subject], this is the steps and with this course it's not the same, you have to improvise the whole time, so that made my academics a lot harder because I didn't see my work in that light previously. [Participant 8]

Mention was made of picking up habits in high school before attending university. Habits such as studying ahead of time and not at the last moment or pulling all-nighters, making a study schedule to cover all the learning work, getting into a habit of revising all the work covered in class on the same day were mentioned. Participant two mentioned the difficulty of picking up the habit now in university, as they had to juggle many things.

... I think that would have been easier than now... now it's difficult to bring it in when you have your athletics and other activities you are trying to do as well. [Participant 2]

4.2.2 Facilitators, Transitional Experiences, and Barriers in the Athletic Domain

Changes in the athletic domain include changing a coach, joining a new group, changes in the track environment (new facilities and equipment), and moving from a school to a club setup. With pressures from the social and academic domain, student-athletes may temporarily stop their sport in their first year of university. This decision seems to stem from the unknown about this new experience. They would like to settle in and figure out what is required from them or possibly just take a break from the competitive environment.

I initially didn't want to compete this year because I was going from matric to um first year, I was like maybe I just want a break just to see where everything goes and that was my mindset for quite a long time... [Participant 4]

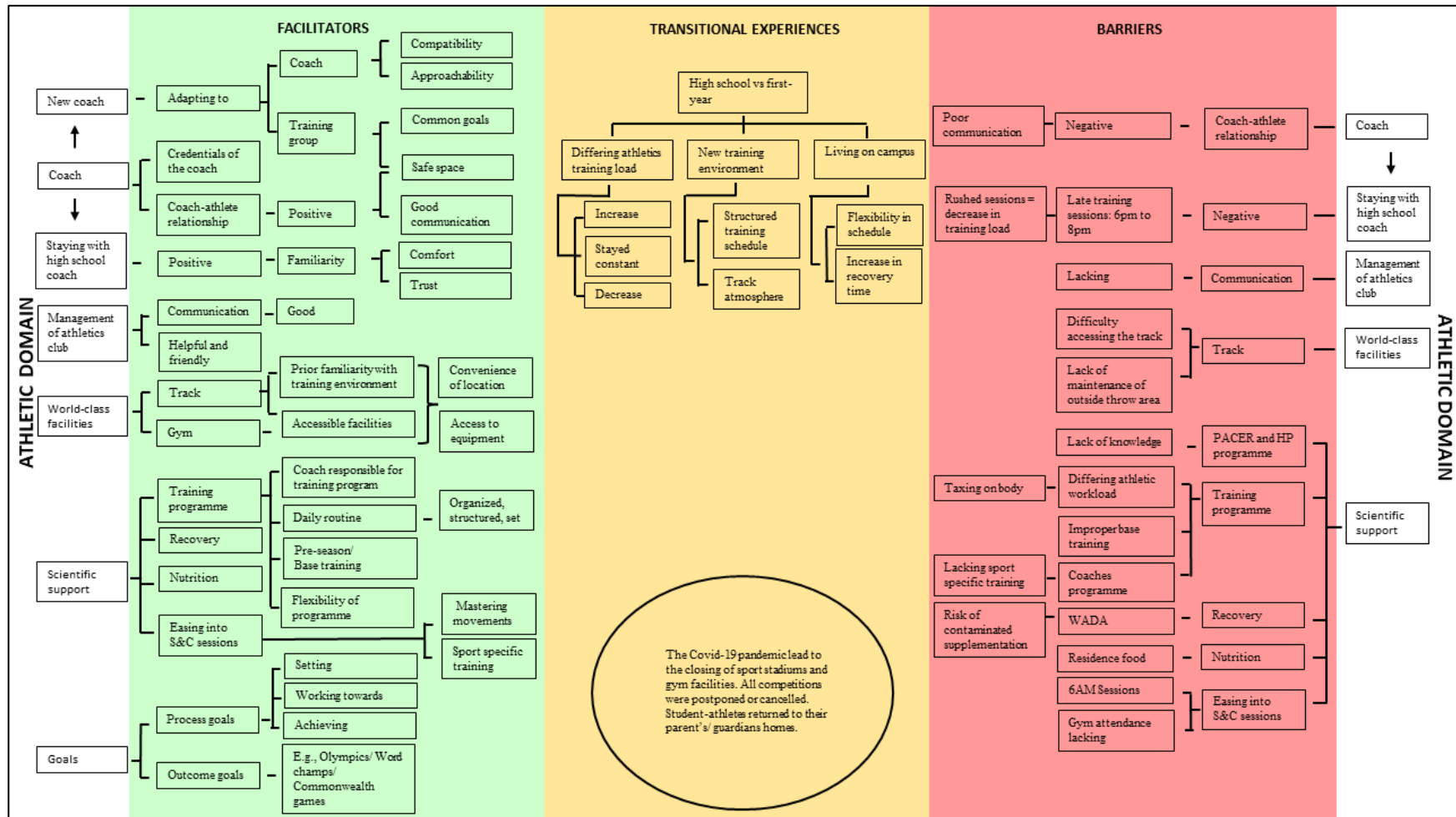


Figure 4.3. Facilitators, transitional experiences, and barriers in the athletic domain

As mentioned in chapter 3, the participants were asked to rank themselves on a 10-point athlete, student-athlete, athlete identification scale and to explain the perceived identity. It is worth noting that many of the participants prioritize athletics in the first semester as it is the athletics season and there will be plenty of competitions to attend, as the year progresses their ‘identities’ may change as their priorities shift.

I think my head is more focused, of course it is the athletics season so I can't say how it's going to be deeper in the year when the athletics season is done... [Participant 3]

Six of the participants ranked themselves as more athlete than student, five of them scoring themselves as a four and one of them as a three. The various reasons noted for this are putting more effort into athletics in the first half of the year, being happy with just passing the academic course and wanting to make athletics a career, the main source of income.

Umm, well at this stage, I haven't put a lot of work into my academics... It was racing season and I knew that if I wanted to reach my goals, I would have to focus on my athletics a lot more for this first term. So I really tried to put a lot more attention into my athletics than into my academics. [Participant 5]

Two of the participants ranked themselves as more student and student-athlete than athlete. One ranking themselves as a six/seven and the other as a seven and a half. Participant four's reasoning was that athletics was not their main goal in life.

... athletics isn't my main goal in life one day, I don't want to be an Olympic athlete so that's why I wouldn't necessarily put athletics over my studying... [Participant 4]

Participant eight had a hard time balancing their academic work and athletic training:

Well usually, in high school, it was in the first term, I always prioritized sport over academics... in the beginning of the year it's SA's and that's the most important time of the season. Then the rest of the year I would prioritize academics and I just think now, because

the course is much more difficult... I have to prioritize academics more... to actually succeed in both academics and athletics. So, it almost feels like I don't have a choice but to prioritize and have the balance I have now, but I would still like to be more balanced towards athletics.
[Participant 8]

4.2.2.1 Coach

The participants spoke about being drawn to a coach because of their coaching credentials. This also kept participants from leaving their high school coaches as they felt they could not find a better coach than the coach they already had. The coach-athlete relationship is an important factor mentioned by the participants. This relationship can be positive, a positive relationship was described by the participants as one with good, open communication and one which provided a safe space for the athletes.

...I could actually easily go and talk to him with any problem that I had, not just like sports related... [Participant 6]

On the other hand, a negative relationship has poor communication, the participants felt they were unable to communicate to their coach how they were feeling, that their coach was unable to see their point of view and that there was poor conflict resolution.

... I walk away, I leave the situation because he doesn't, he only sees one way man.
[Participant 7]

4.2.2.1.1 New Coach

Two of the eight participants had to negotiate a change in coach when entering university. Both participants spoke about this change as positive. Participant six made comparisons between their high school coach and their new coach. They described their new coach as more compatible, as they were younger than their previous coach and so more relatable and approachable. Participant one was setting up their own training programmes in high school, they enjoyed having a coach and just focusing on being an athlete. They shared their concerns about injury management and the need for a coach to guide them through the process.

... with athletics what I'm loving about it is that I'm not setting up my own programmes anymore... [Participant 1]

When moving to a new coach, one must also adapt to a new training group. The participants spoke about their training groups positively. They mentioned how the training groups had common goals, there was a fun, positive, yet focused environment, and the athletes became more than training partners, they became friends. Participant six mentioned that they were able to speak to their training partners about other topic than athletics and that the training group tried to get together over weekends to spend time together.

4.2.2.1.2 Staying with High School Coach

Staying with one's high school coach was shown by the participants to have both positive and negative consequences. The positives mentioned are the familiarity, familiarity of the training programmes, the coaches' cues, and the physical expectancies required of the athlete. The participants knew what was expected of them, and they felt they were better prepared. Staying with the same coach decreased the amount of "change" the student-athletes had to navigate. This familiarity brought a sense of comfort, mutual understanding, loyalty, and trust for the participants towards their coaches. Participant three spoke about the six-year bond they have with their coach.

... I feel it's a lot easier because we already have a very, like six years bond and I trust him and I know the process that [Name of coach] is going through and [Name of coach] knows how my body can handle stuff um so ya, we understand each other very good... [Participant 3]

The coach's knowledge about the university and the athletics clubs' systems was also perceived to be beneficial to the participants. Participant four mentioned that it made the transition into university smoother and easier. However, there were also negatives. By staying with the same high school coach, two participants relocated to the university town, they could only start training after six in the evening as this was the only time their coach could get to them. Their coach had to first finish coaching and then drive into Stellenbosch

and often was unable to make sessions as there was traffic, which meant they often trained alone. With the participants needing to attend classes, there unfortunately was no other available time to train. The participants mention that due to the time restriction (the track closing at seven pm) and the lighting, their sessions were often cut short and were rushed. One of the participants felt there was a decrease in their overall athletic workload due to this obstacle.

...we have to work on training earlier because we went over seven o'clock and then the track closes at seven obviously. [Participant 7]

Participant two mentioned the possibility of changing coaches to one who lived in the university town; however, they felt it would be hard to trust another coach and tough to build a new coach-athlete relationship.

...if this is going to bring down my performance and, then I'm going to have to make a change in coaches, a coach that is based in Stellenbosch, to make it easier for myself... [Participant 2]

Participant two went on to mention that staying with the same high school coach has not made the transition easier for them.

...I don't think that [Name of coach] is making it easier because of the late training, so that's even more draining for me... I don't think [Name of coach] is really considering my academic life, ya. [Participant 2]

4.2.2.2 Management of Athletics Club

Two aspects stood out regarding the management of the club. The first aspect was that most of the participants found the management to be friendly, supportive, and helpful. The second aspect referred to by the participants was the communication of the club to the athletes. Some participants noted this to be good, whereas others felt it was lacking. Some participants found

the management quick to respond and helpful with problem solving, responding to emails, organized and in constant communication with them.

... they do a lot of effort, and they always get back to you when you ask questions on email... so they are really friendly, and they really supportive... [Participant 8]

However, others described the communication as non-existent and in need of improvement. Participants mentioned the late notice of information regarding their bursaries, the last-minute changing of meetings (the student-athletes mention that they schedule their academics, training and social life around attending these sessions and they struggle to fit in these sessions when they are changed at last moment) and the management being too busy to focus on the athletes' individual needs as reasons for this.

... it feels there's not any communication basically at all coming to our athletes about how the stuff is... make sure of your exact times and stuff, than saying you have different times and stuff because with res and academics and stuff, you plan your programme to put everything in place and then with the times been scheduled around that it messes up your programme. [Participant 3]

4.2.2.3 World-class Facilities

The athletics track and the gym facilities were spoken of in high regard by the participants. Participants used words such as '*top-class*', '*cherry on the cake*' and '*professional*' to describe the athletics track facilities. It was mentioned that the athletics track facilities and equipment are easily accessible. Three participants mentioned that the equipment made available to them at university is unlike what they have used before, they have access to all the equipment they may need for their events, participants mentioned having access to hurdles, starting blocks and even cones which they previously did not have access to. They mentioned how this was beneficial to their training.

... most of the equipment's there that I'm using now never using before, so it has been a huge transition like my training... [Participant 1]

Prior familiarity with the track was mentioned as a facilitator by some of the participants, who had the privilege of training at the track and facilities prior to starting their university experience. They mentioned how the track became a place of comfort as they knew where everything was, making it easier for them to get to know people and fit in.

... because I know a lot of people come from Stellenbosch, so they know where what is, it was still a big adjustment for me because I didn't know exactly where everything was but at least I was comfortable going to the track because I knew where things were there and that's very helpful... [Participant 6]

There were, however, two negative aspects regarding the athletics track facilities. Firstly, the gates did not always work, either due to them being broken or due to the student cards not working. Participants mentioned this as an inconvenience as they struggled to find an entrance and subsequently were late for training or leading to athletes being denied access unless management was present at the track. The second aspect mentioned was the maintenance of the outside throws area. Participants mentioned the need for the cages to be fixed and the need for the upkeep of the zone markings and measurement markings.

The gym facilities were described as '*amazing*' and '*have everything an athlete needs.*'. They went on to specifically mention that there were ice baths, an indoor and outdoor swimming pool, an indoor athletics track, and all the gym equipment they have access to. Participant two mentioned that they had never been in an actual ice bath before. Participant six never had access to a '*real*' gym before attending university.

... we actually built our own gym in my matric year, cause we didn't have access to a real one, so ya a big adjustment. [Participant 6]

A big facilitator mentioned by the participants was the convenient location of the athletics track and gym facilities. In close proximity, is the tartan track, a grass track, the gym, ice baths, hot baths, swimming pools and saunas. There is also a Biokinetics Centre, a Physiotherapy centre, a sport massage therapist centre, and a sport physiology laboratory.

4.2.2.4 Scientific Support

4.2.2.4.1 PACER and High-Performance programmes

The PACER and HP programmes were referred to in chapter two. These programmes are there to aid the athlete in their university journey. However, it became evident during the interviews that the participants did not know much about them. Some participants mentioned that they may have heard of the programmes but forgot what was said, while others said they had never heard of them. It was noted, however, that there was a need for more transparency regarding the selection criteria of the athletes onto the HP programme. A need for a more memorable explanation of the PACER programme may be needed.

... I don't know anything about it, I don't even know what the HP squad is, what it does, who does it include, ya I literally don't even know so. [Participant 4]

4.2.2.4.2 Training Programme

The participants' training programmes were influenced by the coaches' abilities, the athlete's daily routines, the flexibility of both the academic and athletic programmes, the athletic workload, and the pre-season training the athlete underwent. The coaches training programmes was mentioned as both a facilitator and a barrier to the athletes' success. The credentials of the coach, as well trusting the coach and their programming, and giving over the responsibility of writing one's own programmes to a coach were named as facilitators. However, a barrier towards the coaches training programmes was the lack of event specific training, they felt that they did not do enough training in this aspect, and it, therefore, stood in the way of them attaining their goals for the year.

When one is lacking motivation, training becoming a habit or part of the daily routine can be seen as a facilitator. Looking at athletics as a hobby helped participants in achieving their goals, they set themselves for the year. Having set training times, better organization in terms of training days, times, and programming, as well as structured training programmes was mentioned as facilitators by the participants. Having flexible academic and athletic programmes was also noted as a facilitator. One participant noted that due to a flexible lifestyle, they were able to structure their day around their sport. They noted that the ability

to make one's own schedule, as well as being relaxed in their academic environment allowed them to focus all their energy on their training sessions. Another participant mentioned how they were able to schedule training sessions when they had a break in their class timetable, they were able to have a quick session and then head back to class in the afternoon again.

...I have a very flexible routine, so I can focus on my sport. When I'm at class I'm relaxed, I'm comfortable so when I get to training in the afternoon I can go all out, because my body is rested, I can basically become a beast on the track... [Participant 7]

A differing athletic training load was noted by the participants with the move to university. Participants mentioned that it was quite a big change in training load, with participant three referring to the change as '*a pretty big jump*' and participant five stating that '*it is quite taxing on my body*'. For some participants the change was in the specificity of the sessions, for others it was the number of sessions per week that increased significantly.

... I normally train two to three times a week in high school but now I do seven times a week... [Participant 3]

Having a proper pre-season/ base training was a facilitator for some of the participants. Using the time from November (when high school is coming to an end) to February (when the university semester starts) as a period to load training and focus on one's recovery was noted as beneficial. Whereas, not putting in the work in December and having improper base training was noted as a barrier for another.

4.2.2.4.3 Recovery

The participants all used some form of recovery method. They spoke about the following methods: sport massages, physiotherapy, stretching, foam rolling, ice baths or having a cold shower, recovery training sessions such as going for jogs, ensuring one does a proper warm up before training and a proper cool down after training, taking naps, going to bed early, eating a healthy meal or having a recovery drink, and lastly drinking lots of water.

I try and go for a weekly massage, I stretch at night, and then I just try and get a good meal in me. [Participant 5]

It is important to note that an athlete must be aware of what they put in their bodies. Athletes are monitored by the World Anti-doping Agency (WADA) and must, therefore, ensure that what they put in their bodies is not on the prohibited substance list. Participant three was aware of the risk of taking supplements to help with recovery.

... I know WADA is not a very nice thing, so I'm scared about taking any other supplements and stuff... they say the stuff is clean and it's been tested but who knows if that specific batch has been tested. [Participant 3]

The need to educate the athletes on what recovery methods were out there and what facilities were available to them at the university was identified.

There's nothing at all that has been given to me, or any advice or anything that tells me OK cool this is going to help you recover, apart from taking cold showers that's, that's all I've been told, stretches and basically that's it... I don't evens know how the ice baths things work, so I don't even know where I'm going to take an ice bath... [Participant 1]

4.2.2.4.4 Nutrition

The importance of having proper nutrition was noted by the participants as a potential aid to their performance. Cutting out on sugar and unnecessary treats was noted as not only a way to reduce one's financial budget but also to help lose weight. Eating meals at the residence was a barrier, as it was not deemed to be optimal for athletes.

... so not like the res's food is bad but there is a lot of carbs and I wouldn't say quality protein... The meals, I wouldn't say are optimal for an athlete. [Participant 5]

4.2.2.4.5 Easing into Strength and Conditioning sessions

There were two approaches of easing slowly into the Strength and Conditioning sessions. Both methods were used in the hope of decreasing the risk of injury for those who were introduced to these sessions for the first time. The first method was to master the basic movements before progressing further. The second method was to keep another participant out of the gym until the base training or winter season started. The participant did sport specific body weight exercises, medicine ball work, and elastic band exercises at the athletic track facilities to first increase their strength.

Not having a gym foundation was noted as a limitation by two participants. The inflexibility of the academic programme was mentioned as a reason one participant could not get to the gym. Another participant mentioned the importance of gym, however, gym is at six o'clock in the morning and they felt they were unable to have a gym session, attend and fully focus on class and then have a track session in the afternoon. Other participants experienced the same concerns. They mentioned how it decreased the amount of sleep and caused them to struggle to focus on the last few hours of class for the day.

...I'm thinking to myself if I'm gonna gym in the morning right, and shower and go to class, how tired am I going to be at the end of the day? Plus, track training... I can't start off my day with training and think that I'm gonna, I'm gonna focus and have maximum focus in class... [Participant 1]

4.2.2.5 Goals

The participants spoke about process goals and outcome goals. Process goals involved setting the goals, working towards attaining them, and achieving stated goals. Achieving target times/distances set by the coach at training, achieving personal best times/distances in training, seeing progress in specific exercises, and feeling good at training, and doing well at smaller competitions ahead of the target competitions are examples of the process goals set by the participants. Outcome goals set by the participants included making the Varsity athletics team, the USSA team, going to ASA Junior and Senior Championships, and making South African teams. Several participants spoke about their aspirations to compete on the

highest level in the sport, to be selected for the Olympic/ Paralympic games, the World Senior Championships/ World Para-Championships, and the Commonwealth Games.

...that's the goal that I definitely want to go to an Olympic Games. [Participant 7]

Being passionate about athletics was shown by the participants as an aid in achieving their goals. Participant one talks about how after a tough day it was easy to want to miss a session, but once at the track they enjoyed themselves so much that they couldn't believe they had previously planned to miss the session.

... One day you wanna, you wanna bunk training but when you get there you like ya I can't believe I was planning to miss this session and all that. I enjoy it at the end of the day, that's what keeps me going man, it's the love for the sport... [Participant 1]

4.2.2.6 High School vs. First-year

The biggest changes mentioned by the participants when transitioning from high school to first year at university in the athletic domain included differing athletics training load, the new training environment and living in closer proximity to the training venues. Changes in the athletic training load varied among participants. Some experienced a workload increase; their training programmes became more specific, there was an increase in the number of training days in a week and the introduction of gym work. Others felt the workload stayed constant and their reasoning included staying with the same coach and, therefore, having already adapted to the training programmes. For some, the training load became easier than it was in high school. For participant seven this was due to having academic flexibility, allowing the participant to schedule their day around their sport. They felt it was easier to cope with the training load demands than during the final year of high school.

I actually found that because the flexibility of the course I currently take, managing my day around my sport was way easier, I would say, personally, it was better than matric. [Participant 7]

The new training environment included changed training schedule structures and a new track atmosphere to negotiate. Participants spoke about an increase in the structure of training sessions. There were set training times that allowed more predictability in the participants timetables. They knew that every day they had to train at a specific time and, therefore, could plan their schedules around this. Training sessions were also more structured and organized. Participant one, who previously trained themselves, was grateful to hand over the control of planning sessions to a coach and was enjoying the role of just being an athlete. The atmosphere at the athletics track was mentioned to be very positive, the participants mentioned that everyone was supportive, helpful, considerate, and friendly.

...everyone is like a family there, so everyone cheers each other on... [Participant 4]

Some athletes relocated to the university town and living on campus allowed them to be closer to the training venues. This was beneficial to them as they had greater access to training venues, they had an increase in recovery time as they were now able to spread out their training sessions for the day, they spent less time commuting from their homes into Stellenbosch, and they had more flexibility in their schedules.

... access to training was a lot better because I had to drive in for a gym session and to come to the track in Stellenbosch and oftentimes I would have my track session and then directly after that have my gym session... it was really hard on my body... [Participant 5]

Participant three mentioned how they were able to go to lectures, when they had a break between lectures, head back to their residence, get dressed for a training session, train and then head back to campus if it was necessary afterwards.

...I am at Res...so it's very easy to go to class quickly and then go back to res and then change clothes and then go to my training. [Participant 3]

4.2.3 Facilitators, Transitional Experiences, and Barriers in the Psychosocial Domain

The social component of one's life is often sacrificed to keep up to date with other aspects of life that may be seen as more important. An average weekday consists of participants going to class, training, and fitting in some social activities. What stood out between the participants' schedules is how they arranged their times, the class schedule was considered first, athletics activities were scheduled around class, and social activities were fitted in last, if the participants had any free time.

Two participants made a comparison to high school when speaking about their average weekday. Participant three mentioned the biggest change in their week was the increase in training sessions per week in first year university compared to what they did in high school. Whereas for participant eight the opposite occurred, they spoke about how they had more time for athletic activities in high school. They mention the reason for this change was that their academics was requiring more from them in university. They were unfortunately struggling to keep up with their athletic requirements.

...here my academics requires a lot more from me, so this year I would stand up at seven, quarter past seven...then I am just going to the faculty, because all my classes start at eight... After five, when I finish with class I go to the hostel, then I get dressed and then I go to training, because I usually train at five or quarter past five... and then I go back to the hostel and I actually just prepare for the next day's test, because we write a test every day of the week, every week for (course). So ya, I didn't gym at all this year, that actually was a big problem. [Participant 8]

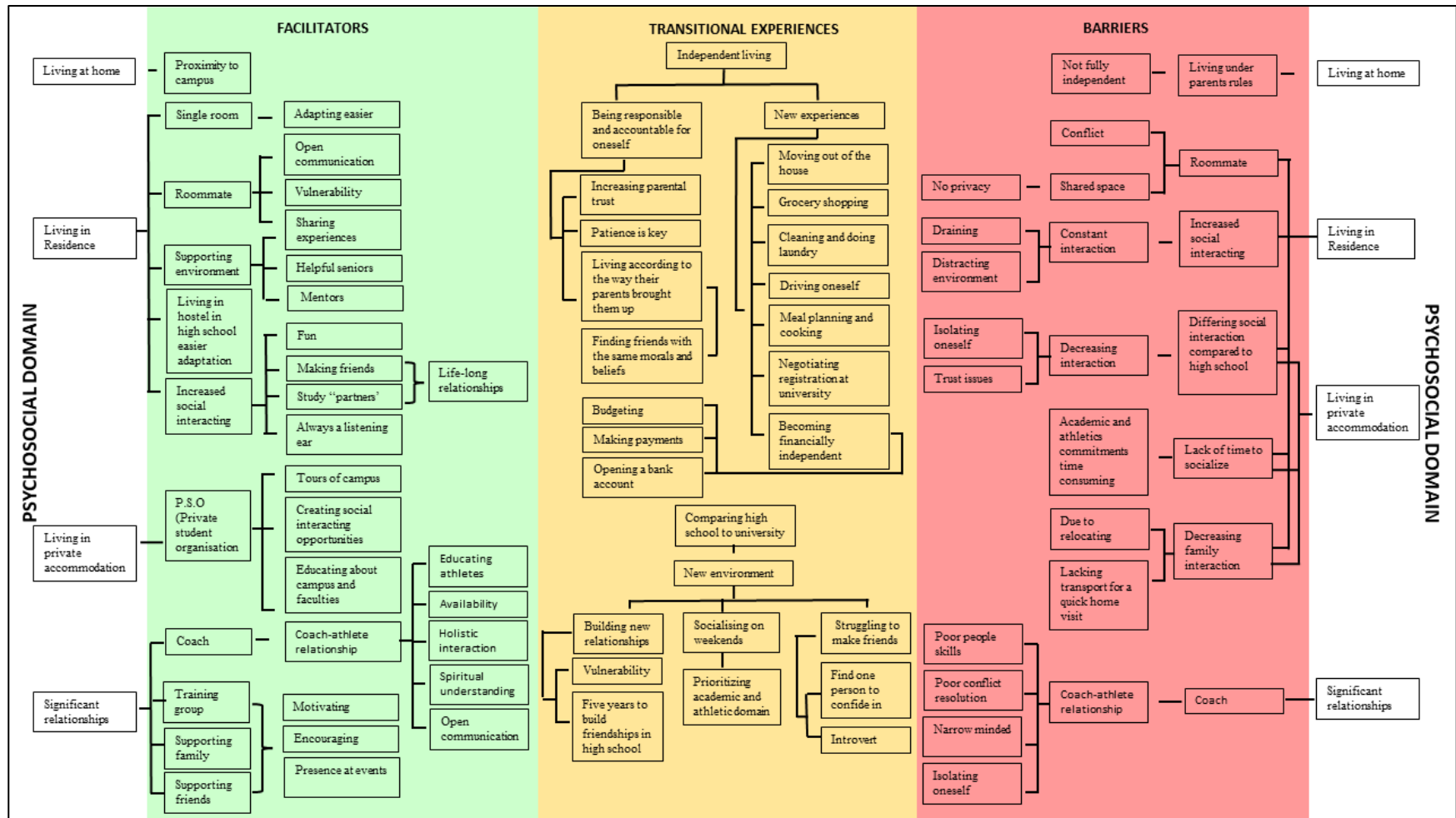


Figure 4.4. Facilitators, transitional experiences, and barriers in the psychosocial domain

Balancing the academic, athletic, and social domains were a struggle for many of the participants. Prioritizing their free time and managing their time more effectively was mentioned by the participants as ways they could move to more of a balance between the three domains. Participants prioritized academics and athletics over their social life. Social activities were sacrificed to keep up with daily athletic and academic schedules.

... So, my academics and athletics life is still the same, but my social life I just need to juggle depending on what work I need to do... [Participant 4]

What became apparent was that the participants felt the need to sacrifice in one aspect to succeed in another. Most participants chose to sacrifice their social activities to succeed in their academics and athletics. Whereas for some participants they chose to make sacrifices in two domains to succeed in one domain. Participant eight sacrificed their athletic and social activities in the pursuit to of academic success.

...it was hard to cope with the academics, well it is hard to cope with the academics and the sport... It feels like I have to sacrifice athletics to actually do good in academics...I would like more social time, but I don't think it's possible at this stage... I think that's something that can be left out now, so to make room for the things that are important for me now, and that's the sports and the academics. [Participant 8]

Participant five chose to make further sacrifices in addition to sacrificing their social activities, they sacrificed their academics to succeed in their athletics.

I knew that if I wanted to reach my goals, I would have to focus on my athletics a lot more for this first term. So, I really tried to put a lot more attention into my athletics than into my academics. [Participant 5]

4.2.3.1 Living at Home

The proximity of the participants' houses to campus was a big pull towards attending a university. Whether the participants decided to live on campus or live at home, being close

to family and being able to go home on weekends (or whenever they felt they needed to) were facilitators mentioned by the participants.

...I wanted to stay at home with my family because I'm comfortable here... [Participant 7]

Participant eight mentioned how their parents would often pop in and bring them food in the week and do their shopping. How they didn't have their driving license yet so their parents would drive them around. Many participants spoke about being able to take their laundry home on the weekends for their mothers to do. This parental support available to the participants may hinder their ability to be fully independent.

... I can still go home on weekends, so I don't have to do my washing... [Participant 5]

Participant four decided to live at home and commuted to campus every day. They did not find this to be challenging as they had done this for the past five years at high school. They enjoyed the newly found freedom of having a mode of transport and being able to drive themselves in every day. However, there were some barriers with living under one's parents' roof. The participant mentioned that they still needed to follow the rules set by their parents, which limited their independence.

... I first obviously like ask my parents, is it fine with you, can I still do it? It's not like I have that full, full range of independence but I still just make sure it's fine with them if I go and do what I want to do. [Participant 4]

4.2.3.2 Living in a University Residence

Living in a residence came with advantages and disadvantages. Having a single room enhanced one's ability to adapt to residence life. Having a single room allowed them to have a break from the constant socializing in a residence. On the other hand, participants mentioned that having a roommate allowed for open communication, they were able to be vulnerable and share their experiences with one another. This time together allowed them to share what they were stressing about and in doing so bounced ideas off one another and

problem solved. Many participants learnt how to deal with conflicts that arose positively. However, not all participants adapted well to having a roommate. Participants mentioned the struggles they had with their roommates being inconsiderate. Participant two mentioned that they were having problems with their roommates but have shied away from approaching them to resolve the issues. The desire to have one's own space (own bathroom) and increased privacy was also mentioned.

... I mean I just want to be in my own space... I want to have my own bathroom also.
[Participant 7]

The residence was stated as being a supporting environment. Having students that are studying the same course, academic mentors and helpful senior students in the residence was mentioned as a facilitator by the participants.

... I made a load of friends and most of them are studying the same course as I am, so you can actually go and ask help or advice or something like that so that's really cool...
[Participant 6]

It was noted by participant three that living in a high school hostel made it easier to adapt to living in the university residence. They were used to the constant distractions in a residence. They were able to prioritize the time they needed to work academically versus the time they spent socializing with their roommates and friends in the residence.

The increased social interaction in residences was mentioned as both a facilitator and barrier by the participants. The positives were that living in residence was fun, and that taking part in residence activities lead to having new and different experiences, it enhanced the participants ability to make friends, it allowed them to have individuals to study with and there was always someone to listen.

... it is easier to make friends, there's always someone there that you can talk to or that can listen to you or something like that, so I think that's really helpful to be in res, especially in your first year. [Participant 6]

The negatives mentioned were that the constant interaction led to participants feeling drained and it was a distraction.

... in the hostel your social interaction is basically permanent... It's really draining as well. [Participant 5]

Living in a residence or living in private accommodation led to differing social interaction compared to high school. For some participants a decrease in social interaction was seen either due to the participant isolating themselves or due to the participant having trust issues.

... I think in high school I was more; I was more social than now in university... I think it's because in high school, in matric, I knew most of the people, so I knew who to trust and who not to trust... [Participant 2]

Less time available to socialize was also mentioned by the participants. The time consumed on the academic and athletic domains were noted as the cause of this. Participants spoke about the desire to join university clubs and societies, however, their sport commitments clashed with the times these clubs/ societies met.

... I don't have time to join any other social club and that's the issue, there's been a lot of social clubs and societies and all that kind of stuff... I literally don't have time for anything. [Participant 1]

A decrease in family interaction was noted with the relocation to campus, whether it was living in a residence or moving into a private accommodation. One's family living in another province or country, not having a mode of transport and the financial implications of getting

home were noted as reasons for this. Participant one mentioned how family interaction can be helpful in overwhelming times.

...when things get overwhelming you know, sometimes you just feel like you need your brother there or sister there to get your mind off things, ya family... [Participant 1]

4.2.3.3 Living in Private Accommodation

A private student organization (PSO) is an organizational structure that supports students living in private accommodation that attend the university. These students are divided into different PSO communities, which provide them with all the opportunities for successful social and academic integration on campus. Participant four spoke about the benefits of the PSO, they mention that they were given a tour of the campus to allow for familiarisation of the surroundings before the start of class, they created social interaction opportunities for their members with various other PSOs, as well as some residences, and they educated their members about the campus and their specific faculties.

...I found the PSO was really, really helpful with showing us where everything is, and interacting with all the other PSOs and some hostels, so I really found the PSO was so helpful and useful and I would encourage it for any people that are scared they don't make friends, or scared they don't find out about their faculty, because I even found out so much information about my faculty that I didn't know from them which was really nice for me. [Participant 4]

4.2.3.4 Significant Relationships

Significant relationships in the participants' lives were the relationships with their coaches, their training group, their family members, and their friends. All the participants reported good relationships with these individuals. Words such as “*really good*”, “*really supportive*”, and “*strong*”, were used to describe these relationships. The coach-athlete relationship is an essential relationship that enhances the success in an athlete's athletics career. However, this relationship can be a facilitator, or it can be a barrier. The participants mentioned the following aspects of the relationship as facilitators. Firstly, the coaches' abilities to educate

the participant not only in their training but also on the athletics clubs' systems. Secondly, the coach's availability in the sense of the coach giving their time and focus to the participant in their training session but also being available to help the participant through non-sport related problems that may arise. Thirdly, some of the participants mentioned that their coach insisted on picking them up for an early morning training session or dropping them off after a late evening session to ensure their safety. Fourthly, the coach having a holistic mindset, working towards the participant succeeding as an athlete but also considering their academics and personal life. Fifthly, having a spiritual understanding with the coach was also noted, having the same mindset led to a deeper connection. Lastly, having open and honest communication with their coach about what was going on in their life, about aspects that were distracting them from performing in training or in competitions and just being able to be vulnerable.

...it made me feel like I could go to [Name of coach] if I had problems and that does help, especially when you are far away from home. [Participant 6]

The aspects of the coach-athlete relationship that the participants mentioned as barriers were as follows; the coach having poor people skills in the way the coach interacted with the athlete when they disagreed and poor conflict resolution. Participant seven mentioned that when there was a disagreement between them and their coach, they would just walk away from the situation. They would also not revisit the issue at a later stage, they would just avoid it going forward; the coach being narrow minded, only seeing their own point of view or misinterpreting what the participant was trying to relate to them; and then isolating oneself, this was done by participants to avoid further conflict with one's coach.

... I feel like [Name of coach] will understand me the wrong way or [Name of coach] will have something to say... I think it's going to make it awkward... [Participant 2]

... I walk away, I leave the situation because he doesn't, he only sees one-way man... He eventually comes around, he just has to, he first has to get upset a bit, but I let him be... we just evade it hey, we move on, we don't really, we don't talk about it again. [Participant 7]

The relationships with the participants' training groups, families and friends were mentioned to be supportive. These individuals had a motivating and encouraging influence on the participants, they also had a positive presence at athletic events. The support of these significant individuals towards the participants' athletics careers made it easier for them to work towards achieving their goals.

...they (family) really motivated me and encouraged me and cheered me on to do the things that I want to do and achieve, and they always were there to help me... [Participant 4]

4.2.3.5 Independent Living

As a person grows up there is an increase in responsibilities, one needs to learn to become independent and look after oneself. Participants spoke about being responsible and accountable for oneself. Participants six mentioned that during this transition there were many new experiences they needed to navigate, occasions where they had to rely on their own ability to figure it out and because they successfully navigated these experiences, they felt there was an increase in parental trust towards them and a shift to their parents viewing them as more of an adult.

I just think that my parents maybe trust me a little bit more cause they can see that I can figure stuff out on my own or I was able to do all these things on my own, so I think my parents really do think that I am more of an adult now then a child. [Participant 6]

Participants spoke about the need to be patient with oneself when navigating through these new experiences. The need to be patient to finish the task at hand was also mentioned, the example given by participant six was that you are unable to control how fast the people work at the bank, so instead of getting frustrated the experiences taught them to be calm and control what they could control.

... because I had to do all of these things so quickly on my own and there's no way you can rush people at the bank, so I sat there for three hours, so I couldn't help it, so I definitely, I definitely learnt to be patient... [Participant 6]

They needed to stay grounded in the principals their parents brought them up in, as well as the need to find friends at university who shared the same morals and belief systems. Participant one spoke about living according to the way their parents raised them and to not get lost in the excitement of the newly found freedom.

... I had to stay grounded and disciplined as well, I was like yoh your mom raised you up well, so don't go disgrace them, watch yourself and that, parents are always on my mind, you know, you gotta make them proud, don't lose yourself cause like the environment...

[Participant 1]

As mentioned above, there were many new responsibilities and experiences that came along with the transitioning of moving to university. There were many new experiences. Moving out of the house was a big step. For one participant, they had been living in a hostel at school and so could easily adjust to living away from home. They mentioned that their roommate was having a more stressful time adapting to living in the residence and out of the house for the first time.

... my roommate has never been in res so (roommate) is stressing a lot, when am I gonna do this, when am I gonna do this and I help (roommate) a bit of just calming (roommate) down, and saying you have your time just put it out... [Participant 3]

The above was reiterated by participant one, just leaving the house and being without one's family was already a huge adjustment.

...already staying by Stellenbosch by myself was quite tough man [Participant 1]

Grocery shopping, cleaning, and doing laundry, having one's own mode of transport, driving oneself, meal planning and cooking, making one's own appointments, time management, negotiating university registration and becoming financially independent were all new experiences mentioned by the participants.

Um, it's a lot of work for me because I have to make my own food, I have to wash my own dishes, I have to make sure my room is tidy every day, my cupboards... [Participant 2]

Some participants booked food at the university residence but sometimes classes did not allow one to get back to the residence in time for lunch. Participant two booked meals on occasion, but on most days, they prepared their own meals. This participant planned what they were going to eat the previous night to save time on their meal preparations the next day. They ensured their cooking was done before training, so they could eat as soon as they returned from training.

Some days I book a meal, but most of the days I will make myself because some days I'll take my lunch to class because there is a certain time that I want to eat... [Participant 2]

Booking meals at the residence worked out cheaper than buying food at a restaurant or takeout. Students often forgot to go onto the system and book meals for the week.

I'm too lazy to book, I should actually book, you can save a lot of money. [Participant 7]

In a residence, students were fortunate to have cleaners who come and do the basic cleaning in their rooms, this includes vacuuming/ sweeping and washing the floors. Students can put their bins outside their room doors to be emptied for them. Most residences have laundry facilities; some even provide a person who will do the students' laundry for them at an extra cost. Students are then only responsible to clean any dishes they may have in their rooms. This saves time that can be used on other responsibilities.

... it's a lot easier and better because you don't have to worry about ok, I have to wipe out my room or something, you know it's already done, your room is clean, washed floors and everything. [Participant 3]

Becoming financially independent involved participants learning to budget for themselves, for some it was the first time they ever had to budget. Participant one felt they finally

understood why their parents told them to not waste their food and to be mindful on consuming the food they bought.

...now you understand what it means when parents go on about finishing your food and actually being careful about consuming things, what you buy and not buying unnecessary things man, buying the things that you need, that's one thing I learnt like bad, you need to try to use your money wisely... [Participant 1]

Participants also mentioned the new experiences of opening their own bank accounts.

...one of the big things is my mom and dad came to drop me off in Stellenbosch and they left pretty early so I had to do my own registration and paying for university fees and opening a bank account and all those kind of things, I never did that at home, my parents did that for me... [Participant 6]

4.2.3.6 Comparing High School to University

Moving into a new environment can be daunting for some and exciting for others. There are chances for a person to start over, to make new friends and to grow independently. This transition can lead to changes in one's social life. Participant four welcomed this change.

I'm in the environment of meeting new people so I love seeing them and making effort to see them... [Participant 4]

Building new relationships can be challenging, the participants mentioned how a person needs to put themselves out there and can feel quite vulnerable. Another difficulty mentioned was trusting new individuals, some participants may take longer to let their guard down. In high school learners have five years to build friendships, participant two felt they were more social in high school compared to university. Trust was the main reason for this.

I think it's because in high school, in matric, I knew most of the people, so I knew who to trust and who not to trust, but now when I just started university, I don't know who to trust and who not to trust... [Participant 2]

Participant two struggled to make friends at university and would wait for the weekend to socialize with people they knew. They felt they could be more themselves as they were closer to those individuals. However, the sport psychologist had suggested they needed to socialize more and suggested they found at least one person at university that they could confide in.

... in one of (sport psychologist's) meetings they also said you need to try to socialize more... try to get one friend that I can make plans with during the week, speak about, tell them how my week has been... [Participant 2]

Being an introvert can be challenging when meeting new people and building new relationships. Participant seven preferred to be alone, they had a small group of friends and didn't go out often. They referred to the people they had met in their course as "class buddies" and not as friends. They were part of a smaller faculty, the number of students in their year was around 30 people; everybody knew one another, and the lecturers knew them by name.

A common occurrence among the participants was social activities being a weekend occurrence and lacking during the weekdays, the academic and athletic activities were prioritized during the week. However, it is important to note that social activities were also sacrificed by the participants on the weekend to training and competition commitments.

... on the weekends I did most of the social work actually, because I know it wasn't going to mix in with any of my academics or my athletics, because I still was trying to find a balance between it all... [Participant 6]

4.2.4 Facilitators, transitional experiences, and barriers in the psychological domain

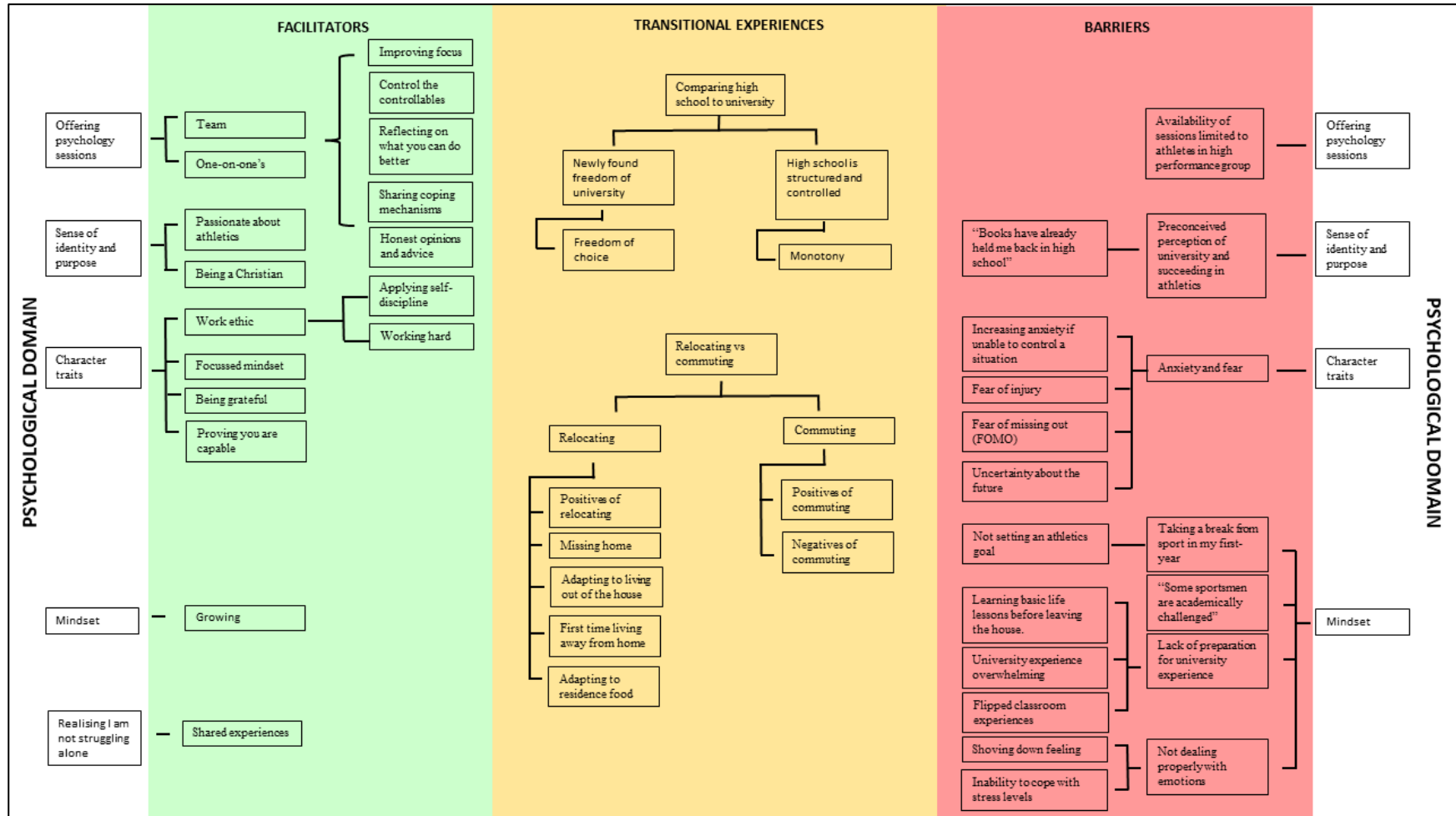


Figure 4.5. Facilitators, transitional experiences, and barriers in the psychological domain

4.2.4.1 Offering Psychology Sessions

The only barrier in this case was that the sessions were not offered to all student-athletes in the athletic club, they were limited to those in the HP squad. Participants in the HP squad spoke about the offering of both team and one-on-one sessions with the sport psychologist. The benefits mentioned by them on attending these sessions included the following, improvement in focus both on the sports field, in the classrooms and in everyday life, it helped bring more clarity to them, it helped them focus on what they could control and what they could not, and to shift their focus to the controllables.

... I think one of the times (sport psychologist) said something that you are not always, you can't always control everything around you... I've tried to focus on the things I can do, so I can't control everything that's around me and I shouldn't be stressing out about something that I can't, can't change and I think that's one of the things that I really did keep with me.
[Participant 6]

The sessions helped them reflect on what others around them were doing and what coping mechanisms they were using, this in turn gave them ideas of what they could do better or provided potential coping mechanisms that they could implement in their lives, the sessions also allowed for a safe space where all the student-athletes could give their honest opinions and receive helpful advice from fellow student-athletes and the sport psychologist.

... I think hearing about how the other athlete's cope and their methods of coping helps me think of ways how I can cope... [Participant 3]

4.2.4.2 Sense of Identity and Purpose

Being passionate about one's sport was a facilitator for some of the participants. When times got tough, the love of the sport kept participant one going.

...that's what keeps me going man, it's the love for the sport... [Participant 1]

Having a sense of purpose and a belief in a higher power was also mentioned by the participants. Living your life to glorify God and not for your own personal gain gave the participants an increased sense of purpose.

... in anything that I do I just want to glorify God in it, so if it ain't glorifying God then it's not worth doing. [Participant 1]

Having the preconceived idea that if one attended university there would be a lack of athletic success was noted as a barrier for participant one. They felt that by attending university, they would not succeed on a high level in their athletics. They felt many athletes who attended university either dropped out of their sport or did not meet their full potential.

... my biggest problem coming to university was the thought of yoh I really want to make athletics my career... Most athletes they go to university, don't really get that far with athletics, they end up dropping it, or they don't excel as they supposed to... I want to be one of the best, if not the best in the world man and I feel books has already held me back in high schools so what's it going to do in university... [Participant 1]

4.2.4.3 Character Traits

Character traits mentioned by the participants that facilitated success include a great work ethic, having a focussed mindset, being grateful, and proving to oneself that you are capable. Great work ethic included having self-discipline and working hard. Putting in extra time to understand the academic work, ensuring that you do all your recovery sessions and not bunking class were mentioned by the participant as tasks that needed self-discipline.

... I started doing my jog sessions as well... so Wednesdays are basically our recovery day... and I sometimes did not do my, go and do my jog session... I decided to do that more often... [Participant 5]

Working hard and staying grateful for the opportunities one received was mentioned as a facilitator by participant seven. They mention that just because you put in all the work, and one deserves what they were working towards doesn't mean that you will always receive it.

... I learnt even if you deserve something it doesn't mean you going to get it, so just keep working towards it and be grateful for everything... [Participant 7]

Having a focused mindset included knowing exactly what one wanted and what one needed to do to achieve it. Participant seven mentioned that they were the only thing standing in their way of achieving their goals.

...I was really focused, and I knew what to do... I was the only thing, the person that would have been in the way. [Participant 7]

Proving to oneself that they can achieve one's goals was mentioned by the participants as a facilitator. Participant eight spoke about the positive impact getting into a 'harder' academic course had and that what motivated them the most was to be able to still compete at the ASA Junior Championships while simultaneously studying their chosen course.

... just that satisfaction of I can do this, I'm clever and just proving myself basically...and obviously to go to SA's and still prove to myself, well I can still do this, even if I am studying (course), that was the main motivation. [Participant 8]

Character traits mentioned by the participants as barriers to success were anxiety and fear. Having increasing anxiety of being unable to control a situation, the fear of injury, the fear of missing out, and uncertainty about the future were mentioned. The inability to control anxiety levels when situations become uncontrollable was noted by participant six.

...I know I do things in steps, so I can't start mixing things. Then I get really frustrated and I get all, ya my heart rate shoots really high, and I can't handle with that... [Participant 6]

Learning that one cannot be a part of everything is something participant six found out. They decided to attend a friend's birthday party and had to stay up all night to finish an assignment. They felt that this fear of missing out can stand in one's way of achieving one's goals.

...I want to be part of everything and then I get really upset when I can't be part of something, or I would go out one night really late still cause it was one of my friend's birthdays and then I came back to res and I started to doing my project till six in the morning... [Participant 6]

Not being certain about what the future holds was described as a demotivator by participant eight. As they did not get into their first choice and were unsure if their second choice is what they wanted to do, they started to question their reasoning about spending all this time on academics in the pursuit of success in their course and in a sense sacrificing their athletic dream, something which they had been so sure about for the last seven years.

... it was difficult in the beginning of the year because it felt, well I'm spending all my time on academics or something that I'm not even sure about and I'm leaving athletics... that was a really difficult thought because why would you spend your time on something you not sure about rather than something you did for seven years... [Participant 8]

4.2.4.4 Mindset

Having an open mind to grow was another facilitator. Participants felt they had grown in areas they had previously lacked in. The following were found to be barriers. Firstly, having the previous mindset of taking a break from sport in the participants first year at university and then later changing their mind once the season had started, held participant four back from succeeding. The importance of knowledge of events available to the student-athletes, as well as setting goals were noted.

... my mindset in the beginning of the year wasn't to participate in any big athletics meetings... Once my coach mentioned it to me then my mindset only changed, so I think it was like there wasn't something really in my way, it was just my mind wasn't set on being

determined every single day to reach my goal because there wasn't really a goal in the beginning... [Participant 4]

Secondly, having the mindset of “*Some sportsmen are academically challenged*” inhibited participant one from meeting their full academic potential. They mentioned that they were lazy, but their potential to gain a bachelors pass in matric shows they have academic potential. It is important to note that this participant did not effectively prepare for assessments in school, doing work at the last minute and staying up all night the night before assessments.

... Some sports people are not good at academics, and I was one of those, not really that good but I was extremely lazy but even through that, but even through that I still managed to, to excel you know and get a bachelors... [Participant 1]

Thirdly, some participants spoke of the lack of preparation for the university. Participants now needed to wash their own dishes, clean their rooms, make their own food, learn how to use a washing machine, banking, learning to use their computer/laptop, and participant seven mentioned that before moving to the residence they had never even made their own bed.

... I could have just taken a little bit more responsibility or just asked around the house simple things, how do I use the washing machine, or what do I do when I go to the bank or something... I think little life lessons that you could still ask your parents while you still at home... especially figuring out your computer beforehand... small stuff that you shouldn't be stressing about when you go to res... [Participant 6]

Not all participants struggled with taking on these new roles, for some home life prepared them for living away from home. Washing their own clothes and cleaning their room was not much of a hassle for them.

I was always like ah with chores and stuff like that, cleaning, washing the car, and fixing things... say twice in the week I'd make food or something or once in a week... [Participant 1]

Fourthly, the university experience was overwhelming for a few of the participants. Participant one referred to the transition as being “*too bad*”. They were struggling with the clashes between the athletic training load and academic workload. They mentioned the importance of time management, however, they felt that they had never been in this situation and therefore could not effectively manage their time in these situations.

... you gotta sort out your time management but I've never done this before, so I don't know how much time I'm gonna spend on this... [Participant 1]

Fifthly, struggling with something one was once excelling in was referred to as a barrier by participant five. They had never previously struggled with their academics, however since they started the transition into university, their experiences flipped.

... Now it's kind of flipped over where I am starting to struggle with my academics... struggling academically is not something that I am used to... that's something that started this year with the transition... [Participant 5]

Lastly, not dealing properly with emotions, shoving down feelings and the inability to cope with the stress levels were mentioned. Participant five dealt with the fear of failing an exam by suppressing their emotions and not working through the fear. They also spoke about the inability to deal with their stress levels when it came to race time, they were overwhelmed by all the domains overlapping. This was a barrier in achieving their athletic goal.

I think my stress levels were just too high... When it was time to race, I was just tired and stressed out... [Participant 5]

4.2.4.5 Realising I am Not Struggling Alone

Participants mentioned that having shared experiences with other students and student-athletes allowed them to feel that they were not the only one's struggling. They felt unified in the knowledge that they were struggling together with others.

... it was really terrifying for me at first, but you get the hang of it quite quickly, especially if you know you are not the only one that's struggling. [Participant 6]

4.2.4.6 Comparing High School to University

The newly found freedom of university was compared to the structured and controlled environment of high school. At high school, participants were given a class schedule, the bell rang to tell them when it was break/ class time, there was very little freedom to make one's own decisions. The participant described high school as feeling trapped and monotonous.

... in high school you literally you had to sign in, sign out, even if you just go even on the school grounds you have to sign out of the res... you felt like you were trapped in a place... [Participant 3]

However, a benefit of this structured and controlled environment is that living in a hostel in high school helped prepare some of the participants for living in a university residence. Participant three commented on how high school was much more structured, but this helped them to have better structure in university and schedule their time wisely.

... school was so structured, res in school was so structured... it helped me a bit being more structured in res in university, because if you not structured then you literally won't get the balance of your three components of athletics, social and academics... [Participant 3]

University was described as free, if you want to go to class you can, if you would like to skip class you can, it is all up to your own decisions at the end of the day. Participants were able to set out their routine for the week. The freedom of choice was often discussed by the participants. It was often mentioned that in university “*you can do what you want to*”, “*it's my choice*”, and “*it's all about how, how dedicated you are*”. This freedom was welcomed by the participants, they enjoyed the new roles of taking control over one's life. They noticed that they needed to be responsible and accountable for their own lives.

I know that I am responsible for myself, cause especially when you still at school you feel like, “no, mom is going to do it for me, no, it’s ok my dad will go fetch it later.” I feel university has definitely helped me to take responsibility for myself cause I know I have to do this cause when I grow up, I’m not going to live in my parents’ house for the rest of my life...

[Participant 6]

4.2.4.7 Relocating vs. Commuting

Relocating to Stellenbosch can be a daunting, yet exciting experience. Various positive comments were made about relocating to the university town, e.g., close proximity of residence to lecture halls, being able to go back to one’s residence room between classes or fitting in a quick training session between classes. Participants also mentioned being able to have the freedom to do what they wanted when they wanted, and the desire to become more independent as benefits of relocating.

... so, it’s very easy to go to class quickly and then go back to res and then change clothes and then go to my training... [Participant 3]

For participant six, it was their first time living out of the house and the university they selected was in another country. They mentioned that the busyness of their schedule at university kept their mind off missing home.

Um, in the beginning it was a little rough but then I adjusted pretty quickly, and the thing is I am so busy during the day with classes and training, you don’t get to miss home actually, you just so tired you fall into bed and sleep... [Participant 6]

The participants had to adapt to living out of the house. They had more responsibility and had to do tasks that they may not have previously done at home, such as cleaning, doing laundry, cooking, making their own appointments, banking and even making the bed. Some had to adapt to having a roommate and sharing spaces such as bathrooms with other individuals. A few participants mentioned they had to get used to a decrease in family support, missing simple moments like siblings walking into their room to chat.

Living away from home meant getting used to someone else's cooking. Some participants cooked for themselves, but most participants booked meals at the residence. Participant five spoke about their struggle with getting used to the food served at the residences.

I'm still, I wouldn't say struggling to get used to the food, but the meals, I wouldn't say are optimal for an athlete. [Participant 5]

Participant four decided to not reside in Stellenbosch and to commute into and out of town every day. They had been doing this for the last five years (it is approximately a 30-minute drive) and felt it did not take away from their university experience nor was it taxing on their body. They also mentioned various benefits to living at home, such as being comfortable, being used to the food, as well as not having to cook for oneself.

...I'm kind of used to it so it's not much of an effort as other people would think it is. [Participant 4]

However, participant five's big push to relocate was due to commuting in and out of the university town every day. They previously had to drive into Stellenbosch every day for their training sessions (approximately 45–60-minute commute), this often led to training sessions and gym/biokinetics appointments being scheduled one after the other, which was taxing on the participant's body. They also felt that they could have been doing something more productive with the time they spent commuting.

I would have my track session and then directly after that have my gym session or bio or something like that, umm so ya it was, it was really hard on my body, and it took a lot of time traveling between [Name of town] and Stellenbosch... [Participant 5]

4.2.5 Facilitators, transitional experiences, and barriers in the financial and legal domains

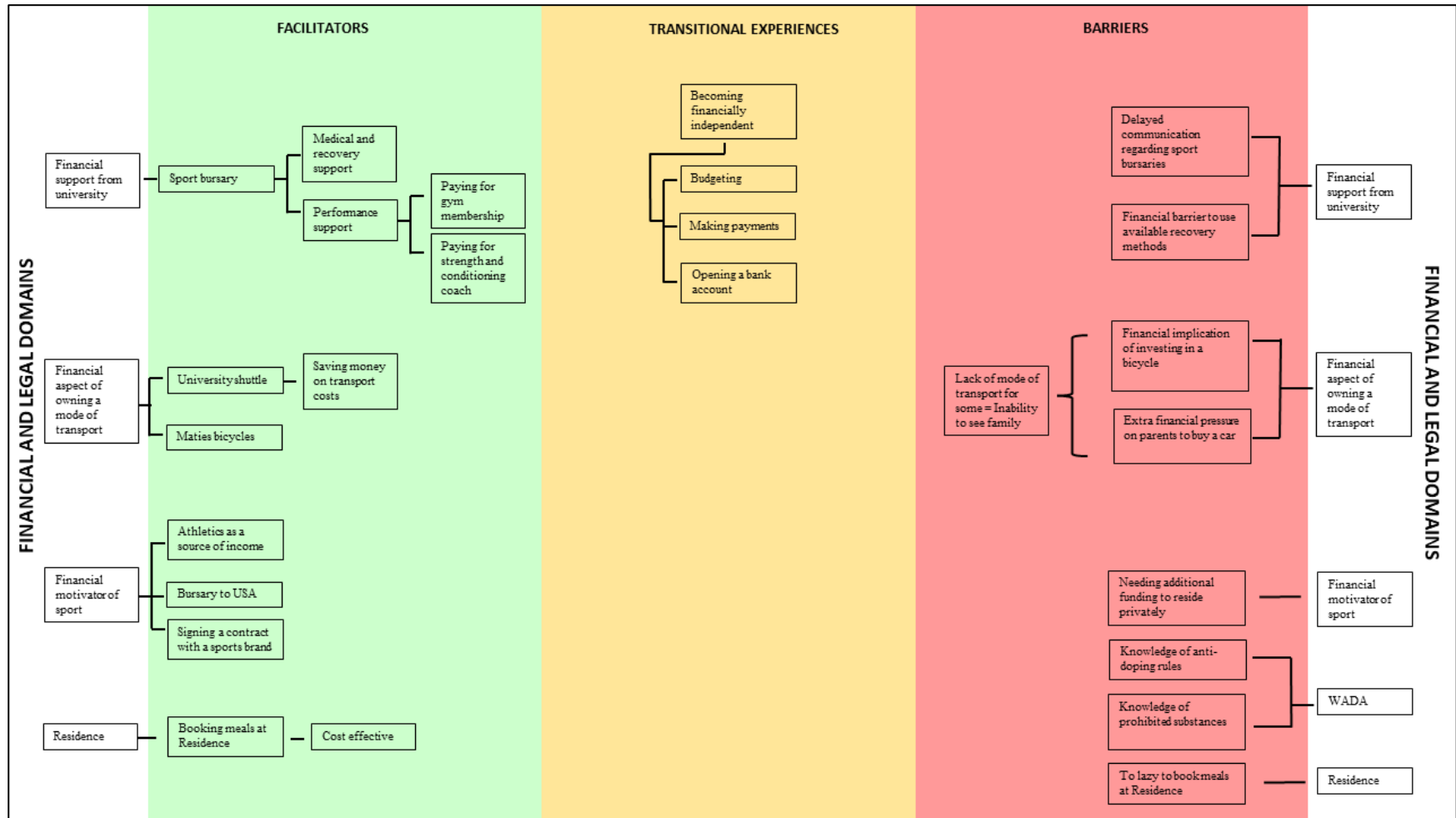


Figure 4.6. Facilitators, transitional experiences, and barriers in the financial and legal domains

4.2.5.1 Financial Support from University

Many of the participants spoke about receiving sport bursaries from the university. The participants signed a contract with the university. The contract stated the requirements of both the club and the student-athlete. The sport bursary was used to cover expenses on the student account, as well as medical and recovery support, and performance support. Participants mentioned the sport bursary or the HP programme covering costs for physiotherapy, chiropractor sessions, and recovery methods such as ice baths. The performance support mentioned by the participants was gym membership fees and paying for the participants strength and conditioning coach.

... you use your bursary to pay for physio and stuff like that... My gym membership is being paid by maties... and they pay for my strength and conditioning coach... [Participant 5]

One barrier was the delayed communication regarding sport bursaries. Participants mentioned that feedback was meant to be given by a specific date, but they had at that point heard nothing. Participant two mentioned they had not heard when the money would reflect in their account. There was also mention that the announcement of the HP squad was late, and this caused a delay in the bursary process.

... (HP athletics manager) hasn't let me know about anything about the bursary yet, and also the HP came out so late also. So, there was a whole delay... (HP athletics manager) hasn't mentioned anything further or when it's going to be into my account. [Participant 2]

A financial barrier to use the available recovery methods was mentioned by participant one. There was also a lack of knowledge of how the HP setup worked, as well as the recovery methods they had on offer to them.

... I don't evens know how the ice baths things work, so I don't even know where I'm going to take an ice bath, ice is expensive... [Participant 1]

4.2.5.2 Financial Aspects of Owning a Mode of Transport

The university provided shuttles to the various Stellenbosch University campuses. Participant seven mentioned how it was not only convenient and took off the pressure of getting to campus, but it also helped save money on petrol costs.

... there's a shuttle that takes us every morning... So that's the most, that's convenient for me, just take pressure off, you save petrol, and you don't have to worry about anything.

[Participant 7]

There were financial implications of buying a bicycle. Participant one spoke about how they would like to buy a bicycle but unfortunately, they are too expensive. The suggestion to use a Maties bicycle was mentioned. Students at Stellenbosch University can enter into a rental agreement with the university. They rent a bicycle and if needed a bicycle lock for the year. At the end of the agreement, they give the bicycle back and receive their deposit back. This facilitator became a barrier as participant one was worried about their reputation of being seen on a Maties bicycle. They thought it was bad for one's image to be seen on one.

I can't get a Maties bike man because ah the reputation is on the line, like come on.

[Participant 1]

Participant six decided to turn down their first-choice study course as this meant the student had to drive in and out of Stellenbosch to the medical campus at Tygerberg. They did not want to put extra financial pressure on their parents to buy them a car.

... my dad, parents had to get me a car and that would be extra financial pressure on them already... [Participant 6]

4.2.5.3 Financial Motivator of Sport

The desire to make athletics one's career was a motivator for participant one. They were passionate about their sport and wanted to make it their source of income.

... I want to make athletics my career, you know where my source of income, something I actually enjoy and something I actually am keen to do... [Participant 1]

The possibility of receiving a bursary to attend university in the USA was a motivator for participant six. They focused mainly on their sport for the first two months of their year in the hope that it would increase their chances.

I was offered a bursary in America to maybe go and do sport there but nothing was confirmed yet, but the thought about going there was so big and that's why I did really focus on my sport a lot these first two months cause I know that was what was gonna maybe get me to America... [Participant 6]

The dream of signing a contract with a sports brand was another motivator. Participant seven spoke about their ambition to have their athletic breakthrough, to sign a contract and to travel the world.

... I want to achieve some, I want to have my breakthrough, I wanna, I wanna sign a contract, I wanna, I wanna travel the world... [Participant 7]

A financial barrier mentioned was the need for additional funding to allow the participant to reside privately. They needed an additional bursary to cover the costs.

... I stay at um [Residence's name], but um I'm looking to go private... I first have to get an addition bursary man which I am waiting on. [Participant 7]

4.2.5.4 World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA)

Under the legal domain, the importance of knowing anti-doping rules by the student-athletes was mentioned. General knowledge of the list of prohibited substances is required by the student-athletes. Participant three mentioned the risk of taking supplementations, as they may be contaminated with substances on the prohibited list.

... I didn't want to take supplements and stuff because I know WADA is not a very nice thing, so I'm scared about taking any other supplements and stuffs... [Participant 3]

4.2.5.5 Residence

Booking meals at the university residences was mentioned by the participants as cost effective. They mentioned the ability to save money by eating at the residence. However, they still did not use this opportunity as they were lazy.

... I usually go out to get food, I never eat at res, cause I don't know I'm, I'm missing, I'm too lazy to book man, I should actually book, you can save a lot of money. [Participant 7]

4.2.5.6 Becoming Financially Independent

Becoming financially independent involved participants learning to budget for themselves, making payments for university fees and opening their own bank accounts.

... I had to do my own registration and paying for university fees and opening a bank account and all those kinds of things, I never did that at home, my parents did that for me... [Participant 6]

4.2.6 The Covid-19 Pandemic as the Second Transition

4.2.6.1 Feelings Towards Covid-19

Participants varied in their emotional response to the Covid-19 pandemic and mentioned both positive and negative experiences. With the country moving into level five lockdown, all individuals had to remain at their homes unless they were essential workers, went to buy groceries or go to the doctor. A positive aspect mentioned by the participants was that this lockdown period allowed more time; time to prepare for athletic events both physically and mentally (as the major competitions were postponed by a year), time to adapt to strength and conditioning training, time to catch up academically, and time to spend with their families. More time meant that the stress levels of the participants decreased.

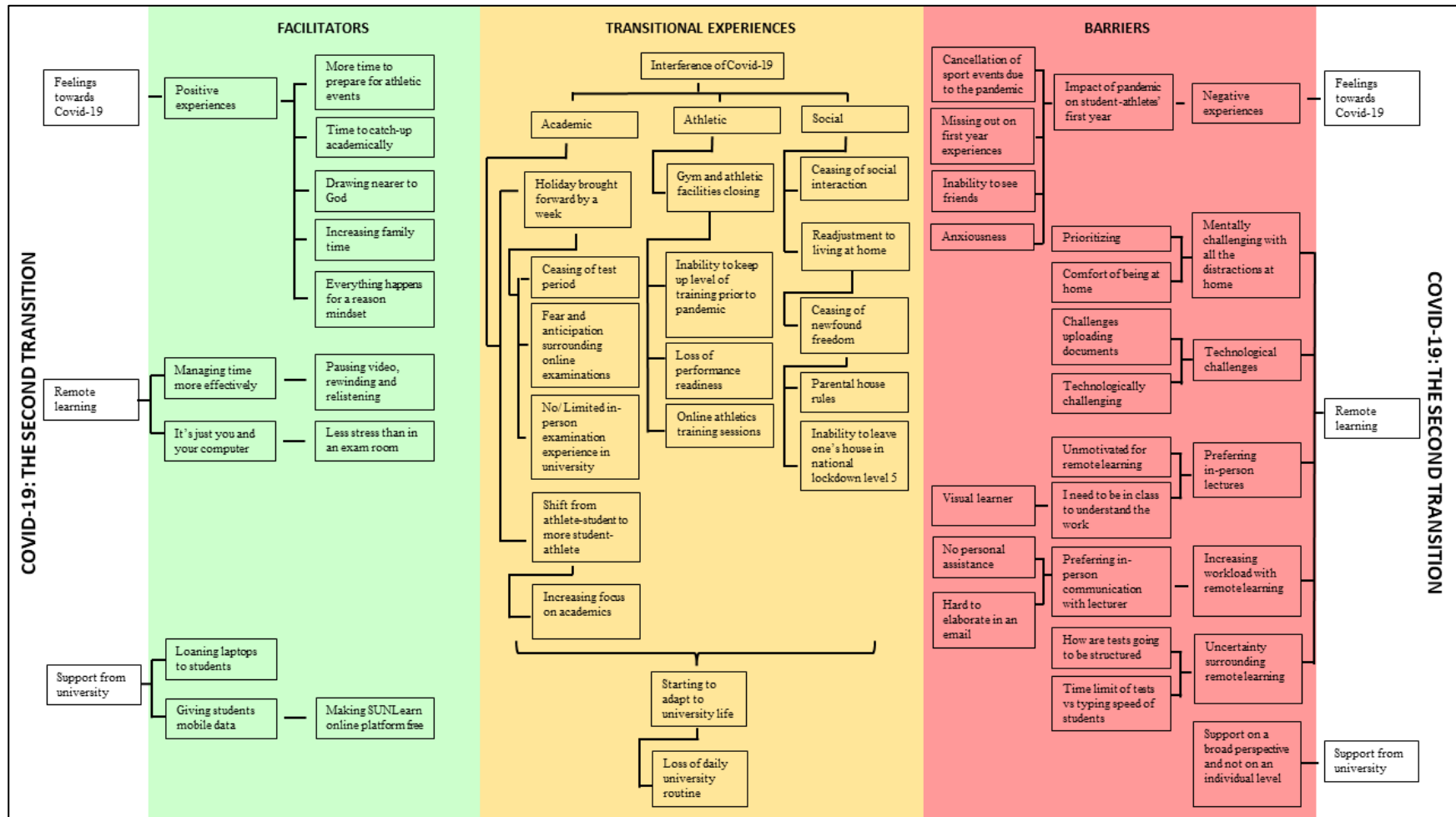


Figure 4.7. The Covid-19 pandemic as the second transition

... I basically had time to go through all of my work so I could catch up and ya, it just took a lot of stress off me... [Participant 5]

Participant one spoke about how relocating back home due to the Covid-19 pandemic allowed them to return to their home for the first time since they started at university.

... this lockdown actually helped me get home... if it wasn't for lockdown I would be staying in Stellenbosch. [Participant 1]

Two mindsets were mentioned by the participants as facilitators during this time. The first was the mindset that everything happens for a reason. They reasoned that once the pandemic was over, they would be able to experience everything they had missed. The second was a growth mindset. The participants looked for opportunities to improve themselves during this time. Participant one searched for ways to strengthen their mind and faith. Participant seven used the opportunity to improve their online skills.

I'm going to have it again in the future so it's fine, I can work on my online skills now... [Participant 7]

When speaking about the Covid-19 pandemic, participants used phrases such as “*we all stuck at home*”, “*it stopped it*”, “*wrecking ball*”, “*irritating*”, “*I am missing out*”, and “*set everyone off track*” to explain how they felt. The negative aspects mentioned by the participants on the impact the pandemic had on student-athletes first year was firstly the cancellation of sport events. Level five lockdown started the week before ASA Junior Championship was scheduled to take place. Participants also mentioned the difficulties that came with the inability to access training facilities. They felt limited in what training they were able to do.

...so basically the week before SA Juniors we had the thing of where the president said OK no more of than a hundred people in the same place, so then I thought to myself “wow, I was so prepared for this and now it's just away”... [Participant 3]

Secondly, they spoke about missing out on the experiences of a first-year student. Participants spoke about missing out on going to lectures, meeting new people, going to dances, going out on the town, and simply sitting and having coffee with friends. The participants spoke about the loss of freedom that occurred with relocating back home. They mentioned that it was an adjustment to live at home under their parents' rules again and to not have the freedom of choosing what they wanted to do when they wanted to do it.

... I think it just makes it a little bit more difficult cause second year is gonna be much harder than our first year and first year is that year when you can actually experience the student life that you, that we all wanted to experience, and now that's a little messed up cause we can't... [Participant 6]

Thirdly, they were unable to see friends. By moving back home and out of the residence, not having all your friends around you was mentioned as an adjustment. Participants spoke about how they were missing their friends. They spoke about the decrease in social interaction.

Fourthly, they spoke about the excitement of the transition being replaced with anxiousness. Participants mentioned the concerns they felt towards the uncertainties surrounding their academic future and their athletics performance. The inability to see a specialist to get more information regarding their injury was noted by participant one as a worry. The participants mentioned they had finally gotten into a routine at university, they had finally started adapting, and now they would have to start the experience from scratch again when they returned. The uncertainties surrounding remote learning were also mentioned.

...it's just that the experience is not that exciting as it was any more, umm it's more a worry kind of experience instead of a not a good kind, an anxious experience you know and it's more concern about my education and know my athletics performance as well because now it's taking longer for me to get to the solution for my leg... [Participant 1]

4.2.6.2 Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning

Two facilitators were mentioned by the participants regarding remote learning. Firstly, the participants felt they were able to manage their time more effectively. Instead of sitting through a lecture, not understanding the work, and then having to go and research it after the lecture, participants were able to pause the lecture video with online learning, go to YouTube or their textbooks, grasp the concept, and then continue with the recording. Participants also spoke about the ability to pause and rewind the lecture video if they missed something that was said or to allow them to fully grasp the work being covered.

When I sit in class and I don't understand the [Name of subject] that the person is explaining to me, I'm basically sitting there for an hour and wasting my time, where I can quickly, ok do I understand what she's saying, no I don't, ok let's YouTube it... [Participant 8]

The second facilitator mentioned was specific to the examinations being online. Participant six felt less stressed as they could focus solely on themselves without witnessing everyone else around them stressing. They felt being at home alone was less stressful than being in a room full of stressed students.

... I think it does make it a little easier that it is online cause you don't see all of the people around you that are stressing as well so it's just you and your computer and your work... [Participant 6]

However, there were numerous barriers mentioned regarding remote learning. Participants mentioned how the experience was mentally challenging as there were many distractions at home. These included the comfort of being in one's home, the distraction of one's family members, the lack of motivation to do work and having responsibilities at home. Participant one spoke about the importance of prioritizing what needed to be done at a certain time, when to focus on academics and when to focus on one's responsibilities at home.

... it's mentally challenging with all the distractions I'm surrounded by on a daily basis as I'm always in my comfort zone. [Participant 7]

The technological challenges were another barrier. Many participants considered themselves technologically challenged. They mentioned that they had not taken Computer Applications Technology at school and so did not feel comfortable working on a laptop/computer. The challenges around scanning and uploading documents onto the system, finding the correct documents on their devices, and having an exam time limit was mentioned as a stressor.

So, the assignments, some of it's tricky because you have to scan the documents and I did an exam last week and I couldn't find the document and it was 3 minutes left, so that was just so stressful... [Participant 8]

Participants preferred in-person lectures. Going to class and sitting in lectures with fellow students was noted as a motivator for some participants. They felt unmotivated by the idea of working at home. There was mention of setting reminders on one's phone to remember to go online and check what work needed to be done. They felt that as they were at home, no one would be checking up on them and so they had to put effort in to stay on top of their work. Some participants mentioned that they needed to be in class to understand the work. They felt they could not go through the large amount of work on their own.

... I need to be in class to understand the work, I can't go through those masses of work on my own... [Participant five]

Participant six described themselves as a visual learner. They needed to see their lecturer talk and explain the work as this aided them in understanding the work. They felt that working alone, would take longer to get through the course work.

... I'm also a very visual person, so visually seeing my lecturer talk or explain something does help me a lot and now I actually have to do that on my own. I think now it's just going to take a little bit more time to get through the same amount of work. [Participant 6]

The participants mentioned the increase in academic workload with remote learning. Participant four mentioned that they were surprised that the workload was more with remote

learning than what it was with in person lectures. Participant one reiterated this, mentioning that there was a lot of work coming in at once from various subjects and they just tried to keep up. Preferring in person communication with lecturers was mentioned by participant one, getting personal assistance was a challenge and it was said that there was an inability to fully elaborate in an email.

... you not in the environment where you can physically communicate with people and get personal assistance in that sense and emails doesn't really elaborate and explain the whole thing properly... [Participant 1]

The uncertainty surrounding remote learning was the last barrier noted by the participants. They mentioned the anxiousness of the unknown of how the online lectures were going to work and how the tests were going to be structured. Participant three mentioned the worry of the time limits of the tests against the typing speed of the students.

... I don't know how they going to let you do [Name of subject] on computers... you have to show your equations and stuff, and I don't know how they are gonna tests us on that on the computer, cause I know some people they can't type fast... [Participant 3]

4.2.6.3 Support From The University

Participants mentioned that in this time of relocating and the national lockdown, the university loaned laptops to students and they gave students free mobile data to assist with the access to online resources during remote learning. The university ensured that they made SUNLearn (the platform the university uses for learning, teaching, and uploading assessments) free.

... they made computers available on loan to students, or they asked the different mobile networks to make SUNLearn free... [Participant 6]

Participant one noted that the support from the university was on a broad perspective and not on an individual level. They mentioned that the university focused on support in a specific area and that it may not be where they as an individual needed help.

... on a broad perspective basically not really as an individual kind of support base, so it's more we are going to help out everybody in this area, so you come now with your problem and make it a whole thing, so not really focus on you as an individual... [Participant 1]

4.2.6.4 Interference of Covid-19 Pandemic

The interference of Covid-19 on the academic domain was mentioned by the participants. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and a national lockdown, university holiday started sooner than scheduled, and there was a ceasing of the in-person semester test period. For some participants this did not interfere with their academic programme as they were able to complete all their tests before the lockdown, others had only written one test at that stage.

Umm no I only had one... I just started studying and then the university shut down, because I was gonna write the Thursday. [Participant 5]

Once university started again, remote learning took place. Tests and examinations commenced online. The participants spoke anxiously about the uncertainties of the online assessments. Due to the lockdown, participant three had never written an in-person test/ exam at university, this had brought about fear and anticipation of the experience.

I've never had a written university test before so it's, I'm scared for the first test too. [Participant 3]

A shift in roles was experienced by a few of the participants. A shift from a more athlete-student to more student-athlete due to the pandemic was noted. Due to the competitions being cancelled and the inability to leave one's house, the participants had more time to focus on their academics.

Things have changed, ya, so I think especially now with the next month or two we all supposed to stay home and start studying, I think the student-athlete thing is going to be more student-athlete than athlete-student cause I can't train, I'm not at the track, I can't do anything really, so I think the studies are going to be a little bit more on the, a little bit more important right now. [Participant 6]

In the athletic domain, access to training facilities was impossible for the first part of the lockdown. Student-athletes went from having access to a track, equipment, a gym, and recovery facilities, to having access to nothing. Home workouts and running around in your property became popular during this time. The participants spoke about making the best out of the situation with what they had at home.

... I do what I can at home but it's still not full on training like we did back in university cause ya we can't. [Participant 6]

Participants mentioned that they were concerned about the loss of performance readiness due to their inability to fully train during the lockdown.

... with the athletics you don't know if you are going to be ready like you were before the whole lockdown, if you still going to be ready after the lockdown... [Participant 2]

Coaches became creative during this time, as they were unable to physically coach their athletes. Participant two's coach turned to online training sessions. The coach would check their posture, give explanations and feedback. The participant noted that the sessions were very different to what they would have done on the track.

We have Zoom meetings every day with my coach and the group so, but it's not hectic sessions that we would have at the track, so that's different. [Participant 2]

Participant seven felt that due to this occurrence they had not yet had the true experience of being an athlete at the university and in the HP squad.

I haven't really gotten to truly experience what it means to be a Maties high performance athlete. [Participant 7]

In the psychosocial and psychological domains, the participants were now back in their parents' home and had to readjust to living at home, they again had to follow their parents' house rules. Social interaction with friends in residents or on campus ceased. In level five of the national lockdown, people were not allowed to leave their house unless they were essential workers. The newfound freedom experienced by participants was taken away from them. Participants mentioned the frustration of missing out on all the experiences they were having before the lockdown started.

I am missing my freedom, I was used to doing what I want when I want. So ya, having set out rules and not having, having friends all around you... [Participant 5]

Participants spoke about having set daily routines. Participants two and three were concerned about having to build up the “*habit*” of their routine again after the prolonged interval away from campus.

I think because I started adapting perfectly and then the corona virus hit and now what am I gonna do, I think breaking that routine that you were building... [Participant 3]

4.2.7 Mechanisms of Support Available to Student-athletes

The mechanisms of support available to Stellenbosch University student-athletes was multifaceted and have been discussed throughout the findings within their various domains. Figure 4.8 highlights the previously discussed support mechanisms.

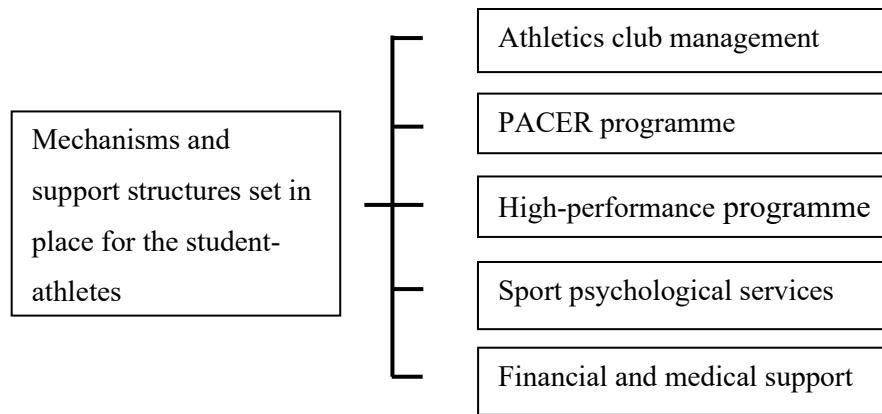


Figure 4.8. The mechanisms of support available to Stellenbosch University student-athletes

This chapter described the information elicited during the individual interviews and check-ins with the participants. This information was analysed and presented according to seven overarching themes, namely, facilitators, transitional experiences, and barriers in the academic, athletic, psychosocial, psychological, financial, and legal domains, the Covid-19 pandemic as the second transition, and mechanisms of support available to student-athletes. Each of these overarching themes consisted of numerous subthemes, and categories of codes.

The next chapter provides a discussion of the findings. Linking it to the available literature on the research topic.

Chapter Five: Discussion of Findings

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to explore and gain a better understanding of the experiences of Stellenbosch University student track and field athletes during their transition from Grade 12 to first year university. A descriptive phenomenology qualitative research design was used to guide the analyses. Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) DPTFA, as well as Wylleman's (2019) Holistic Athletics Career Model became the lens through which the research questions were framed, and the findings and discussions were presented. Firstly, this chapter described the research process and procedures. This was followed by a summary of the findings and a discussion that included reference to relevant literature.

5.2 Description of the Research Process

To answer the research questions, eight individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with first year Stellenbosch University student track and field athletes. During the interviews, the questions guided the participants to discuss their transition covering multiple domains of their lives. They were also asked to rate themselves on a 10-point athlete, student-athlete, student identification scale. A descriptive phenomenology qualitative research design was used to guide the analysis. A thematic framework approach was used to group the qualitative data into categories of codes, subthemes, and themes (Gibbs, 2010). It is important to reiterate that the headings (the domain, facilitators, transitional experiences, and barriers) were deducted from the above-named models. However, the emerging themes, subthemes, and categories of codes for each domain were inducted from the data.

5.3 Discussion of the Findings

5.3.1 Facilitators, Transitional Experiences, and Barriers in the Academic Domain

5.3.1.1 Academic Programme

One of the first facilitators noted in this study was the participants' desire to attain academic goals. They were motivated by a desire to increase their knowledge and to graduate. In contrast, the 'just pass' mentality was mentioned by several participants as their mindset for

the academic domain in their first year at university. Having low expectations may lead to less disappointment and pressure on them. Cosh and Tully (2014a) noted that their participant's academic goals were 'just doing enough to pass.' They did not mind if the mark was good or not, they just did not want to fail the subject. The participants noted the desire to do well academically but felt this was not possible due to external constraints. Sport was prioritized over their studies, by giving more time and effort to their sporting endeavours (Cosh & Tully, 2014a).

The participants in Woodruff and Schallert's (2008) study were motivated by having to 'pass to play.' Academic performance was a means to participate in university sport. This is the same as the 'just pass' mentality, and for many participants sport was their priority. The academic motivation of a student-athlete may determine their academic success. MacNamara and Collins (2010) noted that although the pursuit to achieve one's athletics goals was prioritised by many participants, there was also a motivation to do well academically. Being aware of the available career opportunities and having the desire to learn and being open to embrace challenges were mentioned as facilitators (Brown *et al.*, 2015). Aquilina (2013) noted the time dedicated to academic pursuits depended on the individual's priorities. Some dedicated a lot of time and effort to achieve good marks and academic qualifications, others put in just enough time and effort to pass.

The participants' perception of the academic workload differed during the transition from high school to first year university. Some participants found the experience as easier and not much of a change, whilst others were struggling with the load and felt overwhelmed. The participants who found the experience overwhelming attributed it to the increase in the amount of work being covered, the complexity of the topics covered, the unfamiliarity of the course work, insufficient time to fully grasp all the work, clashes of the due dates for assignments, the fear that they may not pass, the inability to attend study group sessions due to clashes with training, and the inability to study and concentrate after tough training sessions. Student-athletes spend a lot of time on sport related activities. Their university coaches expect them to spend more time on their chosen sport. Coupled with academic

requirements and other domains in one's life, could lead to mental fatigue and becoming physically exhausted (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).

Woodruff and Schallert (2008) reiterated this finding. Their participants felt that high school studies were easy and non-time consuming, however, they struggled in their university courses. It took more time and effort to pass their subjects. Time limitations due to training and gym schedules, attending lectures etc., affected the effort they could put into their studies. Time and scheduling were mentioned as facilitators of success (Woodruff & Schallert, 2008).

Tekavc *et al.* (2015) highlighted that combining sport and academics was manageable in high school. The perceived challenges during this time were the lack of flexibility of one's school, competition, and training schedule. The athletes needed to use their free time productively. At university, the combination of sport and academics was a constraint. The reason for this was the increased load both in training and in the classrooms, and the lack of support from the university. This meant that student-athletes choose their academic courses based on the ones that would allow them greater academic flexibility, thus aiding their ability to manage their responsibilities, training, and study schedules. Brown *et al.* (2015) acknowledged the difficulties experienced by student-athletes in their attempt to meet all their course requirements. The sacrifice of attending training, as well as the clash between academic deadlines with training requirements were some of the barriers (Brown *et al.*, 2015). Thomas *et al.* (2019) and Montagni *et al.* (2020) identified a lack of time and high academic workload as barriers to participation in sport. Montagni *et al.* (2020) proposed more time for sport participation and for less academic workload as possible solutions to these barriers.

When students are actively involved on campus, it facilitates growth in both learning and personal development. Student-athletes need to be more engaged during lectures (interacting with lecturers and peers on in-class assignments) and outside of lectures (class preparations, interacting with lecturers outside of class, interacting with classmates on group assignments) (Comeaux *et al.*, 2011). Fatigue was the result of high time commitments associated with their DC pursuits. Physical fatigue (due to demanding training schedule, negative impact of fatigue on one's ability to train) and mental fatigue (i.e., the inability to fully concentrate

during lectures after strenuous training sessions, in their studies in general, and in finishing assessments) were noted as academic and athletic barriers (Cosh & Tully, 2014b).

The current participants spoke about the flexibility of their academic course allowing them more time to focus on their athletic ambitions compared to the structure and rigidity of high school. MacNamara and Collins (2010) likewise found that their participants acknowledged they had the ability to be more committed to their sport as the teaching and class attendance requirements allowed more flexibility. They elaborated on this by comparing it to the pressure they experienced in their school days when combining academic work with their participation in sport (MacNamara & Collins, 2010). Certain faculties allowed the participants to extend their degree programmes. It allowed them to take fewer modules in their first year which reduced their academic pressure, and this enabled them to focus more on achieving their athletic goals. Brown *et al.* (2015) identified the flexibility of one's course, the ability to extend one's degree programmes, being able to split one's final year over two years and receiving progress reports as facilitators.

Watt and Moore (2011) used words such as demanding and inflexible to describe the schedules of student-athletes. This included attending lectures in the morning, training in the afternoon, and attending to academic assignments in the evening. Cosh and Tully (2014b) highlighted clashes between one's training schedule and the academic timetable as stressors. These clashes meant that student-athletes were forced to prioritize either their sport or academics. The concern of missing important learning opportunities when they were unable to attend class had negative effects on their grades (Cosh & Tully, 2014b).

In high school, learners were closely monitored. There was a set structure, and the day ran according to the school bell. The participants spoke about the freedom of choice at university. They mentioned the choice to attend class and submit assignments. They noted that no one would notice if they did not attend lectures, and that in the end it was all up to them. They also mentioned that if they did not hand in assignments in high school the teacher would follow up and ensure that they submit it. At university, they would just fail and had to pay the study fees regardless. This was noted as a 'trap' that one could easily fall into. The

freedom of university brought about an increase in responsibility and accountability over one's life. Making their own decisions and taking that control over one's life was a role the participants were enjoying with this transition. MacNamara and Collins (2010) likewise found that there was less supervision at university compared to high school and an increase in independence at university. They noted that the academic workload independence initially brought about some challenges that had to be negotiated, especially at the beginning of the transition (MacNamara & Collins, 2010). The increased freedom at university, compared to the more structured environment of high school, meant that student-athletes needed more personal investment in their academic career development (MacNamara & Collins, 2010). Aquilina (2013) mentioned the increased freedom associated with attending university, noting that students had to be actively involved in their academic coursework to be successful.

There were many firsts for the participants when they started at university. A big change was noted in the use of technology. They had to get used to working on computers, which was overwhelming for some who felt incompetent. Taking Computer Applications Technology at school was a facilitator since these individuals felt less overwhelmed and had one less change to navigate. The first test and exam experience at university was noted as overwhelming. This was due to the multiple unknowns of the experience. Being unfamiliar with the way questions will be asked, how papers were structured and the difficulty level, ensuring they arrive at the correct assessment venue, contributed to this anxious experience. Students in their first year at university need to negotiate the new academic environment by learning new study habits (Parker *et al.*, 2004). On top of this experience and adjustment, the participants had to deal with a pandemic. The pandemic led to further adjustments and multiple unknowns as all assessments and lectures moved to an online platform.

5.3.1.2 Support Structure

The support from the university was a facilitator. Students had access to the library, computer labs and study rooms. Many students did not have computers/laptops, printers, scanners, internet access, and so on, at home. These facilities allowed them to have a space to work on their assessments. One participant mentioned that they had spoken to the Dean of their faculty

in advance about the possibility of missing lectures and assessments due to attending major championships and received support. Brown *et al.* (2015) spoke about the benefits of meeting with academic staff prior to a problem arising. The support from the coach, academic staff, parents and partners, and sport management on the student-athletes' academic endeavours is essential (Brown *et al.*, 2015). Academic personnel who recognised the importance of the student-athletes' athletics pursuits were another facilitator. Lecturers were seen to promote a DC by allowing flexibility for the student-athlete's class and examination schedule (Tekavc *et al.*, 2015). Access to tutors, demi-lecturers, the availability of lecturers, study partners/groups, class WhatsApp groups, and academic mentors at the residences were identified as facilitators. However, the exhaustion from training and clashes of different domains may have prevented some of the participants from using these support structures optimally.

Nthangeni *et al.* (2020) identified poor academic support (needed by student-athletes who had to catch up on work they missed due to sport participation) and the pressure placed on student-athletes by their parents/guardians to perform athletically and academically as major challenges. They mentioned the need for the provision of academic tutors and extra classes to student-athletes to aid them in achieving academic success (Nthangeni *et al.*, 2020). Pummell *et al.* (2008) suggested that receiving mentoring (advice and support) from senior students may be beneficial for student-athletes whilst negotiating the transition to university, especially for those who find this experience stressful. Comeaux *et al.* (2011) found that making friends with fellow athletes who put value on their academic pursuits, as well as student-athletes actively developing their own academic talent, facilitated their belief in their studies.

The participants mentioned traveling for sport and missing lectures and assessments. Although the participants in this study did not have much experience with dealing with traveling for sport due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the cancellation of competitions, some of them still mentioned this as an anxious future event. The level of stress on the student-athlete depended on their study programme and certain faculties were more accommodating than others. Nthangeni *et al.* (2020) mentioned the conflict between training or competitions and the academic schedule as the most important barrier experienced by student-athletes.

They mention that this is likely due to the academic requirement to attend lectures that compete with their need to attend training sessions every day and traveling on occasion to other provinces to compete. Similar to the observation by Nthangeni *et al.* (2020), some lecturers denied the participants permission to participate in competitions. Cosh and Tully (2014b) observed that permission to travel for competition was often provided by academic personnel. However, on their return, there was often a lack of support to catch up on the academic work they missed. Academic staff who view the student as a person, have a better understanding of their needs. This allows them to utilize the necessary support provided by the university, subsequently leading to better academic performance and overall retention (Drum *et al.*, 2014). Comeaux *et al.* (2011) noted the importance of head coaches and academic personnel building relationships. These stakeholders should collaborate and design programmes which aid in maximizing the opportunities to interact with academic personnel and fellow students as this may enhance the student-athlete's learning experience.

5.3.1.3 Work 'Ethic' and Resourcefulness

Time management skills, scheduling and proper organization allowed the student-athletes to effectively cope with the multiple demands across all domains during their transition from grade 12 to first year university. Creating and sticking to a timetable, eliminating time wasted by procrastinating and by doing assessments immediately, utilising all the available resources and doing class revisions on the same day as the class were mentioned as efforts to save time. MacNamara and Collins (2010) mentioned the need for development, self-management and refinement of one's own behaviour, preplanning, and prioritizing. Being proactive, dedicated, and having a strong work ethic was necessary in the pursuit of academic success (Brown *et al.*, 2015). The use of power naps was identified as an effective coping technique to manage the academic and athletic demands. Without efficient time management and organizational skills, a student-athlete may burn out by trying to juggle all domains.

Some of the participants mentioned that they lacked sufficient study skills and that they were not adequately prepared for university. This was due to the spoon-fed method used at high schools and being taught how to pass but not necessarily how to apply the work, which was an important part of university studies. This may have contributed to academic dependency

and students struggling to adapt to the lecture environment as lecturers often ‘scrape over’ work, meaning they had to go through the work in greater depth on their own. Certain habits should be developed before arriving at university as a possible strategy to ease the transition. Comeaux and Harrison (2011) noted that students arrive at university with different traits and having different life experiences. This may have direct and indirect influences on their time at university. They noted that student success at university was associated with one’s family background, experiences and academic preparation, and the individual’s characteristics pre-university (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).

5.3.2 Facilitators, Transitional Experiences, and Barriers in the Athletic Domain

5.3.2.1 Athletic Disengagement

Disengaging from athletics in one’s first year seems to stem from two reasons; to take a break from the competitive environment and to allow for an adjustment period in the first year. Lubker and Etzel (2007) noted that individuals who disengaged from sport after high school (either due to lack of sporting opportunity or lack of desire) often experienced complications during their transitions. This was due to the combination of the impact of the transition and sport disengagement that diminished their self-concept, provoked emotional responses, and challenged their self-identity. Student-athletes undergo changes across multiple domains, with many of these domains interfering with one another. The choice to disengage tends to come from athletes who do not have goals to make a national team and are more focused on their vocational aspirations. Forced disengagement from athletics in one’s first year was also noted. In this case the academic load became unbearable, and they had no choice but to sacrifice their athletics to succeed in the academic domain. The participant that took a break from their sport, studied a course that is very difficult and time consuming. Missing training sessions because of one’s academic commitments was noted as a stressor. Other concerns included the inability to attend all training sessions leading to one being ineligible for selection and a decrease in one’s performance due to missing training (Cosh & Tully, 2014b).

5.3.2.2 Perception of Identity

Participants were asked to rate themselves on a 10-point athlete/ student-athlete/ student identification scale. The subjective rating scale was used to elicit information on how the participants perceived themselves. A rating below five indicated that the participants perceived themselves more as an athlete than a student, whereas a rating above five indicated that a participant perceived themselves as more student than athlete. Once the participants rated themselves, they were asked to explain this self-identification. The explanations for having a more athletic identity, included being happy with achieving the bare minimum academically, putting more effort in athletics to achieve their goals, making athletics a main source of income, whilst on the other end of the scale, it was noted that athletics was not their main goal in life, and that they needed to prioritize academics to succeed. Pummell *et al.* (2008) noted that their participants developed an athletic identity, demonstrated by the increased importance placed on their sport, as well as the prioritization of athletic development over their academic development.

Identifying strongly with athletic identity was damaging to one's academic motivation and performance, resulting in a decrease in focus and concentration compared to student-athletes who identified strongly with their academic pursuits (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2021). Athletic identity and athletics goals were positively associated, while academic goals were negatively associated with one's athletic identity. Academic identity and athletic goals were unrelated (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2021).

Pummell *et al.* (2008) noted the possibility that individuals with a strong athletic identity may experience greater perception of stress, as performance and identity are closely linked. Therefore, performing below par may have a greater impact on the self-esteem of these individuals than those who identify less with their athletic domain (Pummell *et al.*, 2008). Role interference (viewing one's roles separately and as interfering with each other) was negatively related with student-athlete's psychological well-being (Comeaux *et al.*, 2011).

It should also be noted that many participants felt their identity was seasonal. In the athletics season, their identity shifted to being an athlete-student as they prioritized training, travel,

and competitions. Once the season was done, there was a shift to more of a student identity, as they had to prepare for the examination period. Likewise, Yukhymenko-Lescroart (2014) stated that it is likely that student-athletes may have fluctuating identities during the academic year. In the competitive season, student-athletes have a stronger athletic identity, whereas during the mid-year and final exams there is a shift towards a stronger academic identity (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2014). When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, the participants acknowledged a shift to a stronger student identity. All sport events were cancelled, and the national lockdown meant that one could not train outside one's property. This increased the time available to focus on one's academics.

5.3.2.3 Coach

When selecting a coach, emphasis was placed on the credentials of the coach. Their knowledge, experience, results of their athletes, and their demeanour were considered. Rees *et al.* (2016) stated that the value of a coach lied in their ability to provide proficient coaching and training. The coach-athlete relationship depended on the ability of the coach to provide a safe space for the athlete and for honest and open communication. Brown *et al.* (2015) noted the need for increased communication between coaches or experienced student-athlete teammates when the first-year student-athletes came in, as this would help them to understand what was required of them. The student-athlete's ability to communicate effectively, act with integrity, and show emotional intelligence were important in establishing the coach-athlete relationship (Brown *et al.*, 2015).

The transition to university often brought about a change in coach and in how training sessions were conducted (MacNamara & Collins, 2010). Six of the eight student-athletes in the present study were fortunate to stay with their high school coaches. The other two had to negotiate this extra change during their transition. Both felt that the change in coach was positive, as the new coach was more compatible, they had shared moral values and the coach was younger than their previous coach and, therefore, more relatable. They were happy with a more structured training schedule with designated and consistent training times.

Brown *et al.* (2015) found varying responses to a change in coach, some were able to immediately build a relationship with their new coach while others initially struggled to build this coach-athlete relationship. A key feature for MacNamara and Collins (2010) during this transition was changing a coach. Five out of the six athletes that participated in their study moved to a new coach. Their reasons for changing coaches included opportunities to learn more with another coach and university coaches being on a higher level leading to a higher chance to fulfil one's potential (MacNamara & Collins, 2010). The athletes felt that being open to learn and listen to the individuals around them allowed them to adjust easier (MacNamara & Collins, 2010).

When moving to a new coach one must often adjust to a new training group as well. The participants spoke positively about this change, they enjoyed that the environment was focused, yet fun and positive, and that the training partners had common goals. The training partners grew into friends and had a supporting role for the student-athletes. MacNamara and Collins (2010) mentioned the following reasons why their participants moved to new training groups, to challenge one's comfort zone, to gain performance and learning opportunities, and having outgrown their current training group. Pummell *et al.* (2008) noted the importance of the support that came from training partners. This included encouragement, warming up as a team, having a network one could turn to for advice, and having more experienced and knowledgeable athletes to train with. The important impact of role-models and senior student-athletes on the first-year student-athletes was mentioned. The senior athletes supported the individuals in meeting their sporting expectation by leading by example, giving guidance, setting the desired performance standard, and inspiring the individuals to reach this standard (Brown *et al.*, 2015).

Staying with a high school coach was easier, more familiar, and the athletes knew what was expected of them. The coach's knowledge and expertise were a big pull to stay with the coach in question. The knowledge of the coach about the university system benefitted the student-athletes, as they felt this helped them adjust to what was being required of them. One participant who stayed with their high school coach, considered moving to a new coach for various reasons, and felt that the coach did not consider their academics and was, therefore,

making their adjustment to the transition more challenging. It is important for the coach to be invested in the academic pursuits of their athlete as well as their athletic goals.

Coaches can either facilitate or create a barrier to successfully combining the academic and athletic domains. Coaches were deemed to be a source of stress if they did not allow flexibility in the athletics schedule to enable the student-athlete to attend their academic commitments, by asking too much from a time perspective of the student-athlete and when they were unwilling to make exceptions for the student-athletes academic commitments. Coaches were seen as supportive when they enhanced the enjoyment of sport (through creating an enjoyable training environment) and by offering flexibility in training schedules that facilitated academic requirements (e.g., decreasing training load during the exam period, allowing late arrivals to training due to academic schedules, and by providing alternative training slots when there were clashes with academic schedules) (Cosh & Tully, 2014b).

As stated before, it is important for head coaches and academic personnel to build relationships, as this could in turn lead to coaches being invested in the academic pursuits of their athletes (Comeaux *et al.*, 2011). This investment can lead to an increased accountability in the student-athlete's academic progress (Comeaux *et al.*, 2011). Loyalty and having a personal relationship with their high school coach was put forward as reasons for staying with them. MacNamara and Collins (2010) found this to be the reason athletes chose to stay with their high school coaches; they felt that their coach was like a father figure to them and that it wouldn't be fair to leave the coach.

5.3.2.4 World-class Facilities

Having access to world-class facilities was mentioned as a facilitator. Many of the student-athletes had access to facilities and equipment they were not previously exposed to. If managed correctly, this will benefit their performances in the long run. The proximity of the athletics track, gym facilities, sport massage therapist, biokinetics centre, physiotherapy centre, various sport science and recovery facilities was a big facilitator mentioned by the participants. Student-athletes who chose to live on campus in the university residences found this to be even more convenient as these amenities were all within walking distance. The

convenience of living on campus includes the proximity to training venues, an increase in recovery time due to decreased travel time to training and medical appointments, and the flexibility to spread out one's training schedule throughout the hours of the day (being able to attend lectures, train during a break, and return to lectures again).

MacNamara and Collins (2010) found that the convenient set-up of the university aided quality training. Aquilina (2013) highlighted the following factors as contributors to student-athlete's ability to successfully manage a DC, the proximity of training facilities and lecture venues, flexibility in one's academic programme, which considered the student-athlete's sporting requirements, as well as the establishment of a support network (including academic and sport staff). World-class facilities also meant that student-athletes would be exposed to international athletes training on the facilities. Student-athletes could learn through observing these elite athletes and seeing what it took to be the best in the world (Brown *et al.*, 2015).

Familiarity with the athletics facilities and the university environment prior to coming to university aided the participants in this transition. This familiarity brought about a sense of comfort as the participants had prior knowledge of where everything was situated, potentially decreasing some of the anxiety and fear of this unknown experience. Making a list containing the pros and cons of the move to a new training group, visiting the university campus before, and prior engagement with coaches while in the final year of high school were found to facilitate the transition into university (MacNamara & Collins, 2010).

5.3.2.5 Scientific Support

The student-athlete's training programmes were influenced by many factors, such as the coaches' ability, expertise and experience, the flexibility of their daily academic and athletic programmes, the change in workload from high school to university, and their pre-season training. Successful athletic performance was determined by the following factors. An athlete's trust in their coach and coaching programme, and their commitment to the training programme. The current study revealed a few barriers to attaining one's athletic goals; being unable to raise concerns with one's coach due to being afraid of the consequences thereof or because the coach was not open to being challenged. Not having enough event specific

training was noted as a barrier, however, some of the athletes were concerned how their coaches would react if they questioned their training programme, as they did not want to upset them. This demonstrated the need for open communication and a well-developed athlete-coach relationship.

It is necessary to educate athletes on the importance of recovery and the various recovery methods available to them. To achieve peak performance, one must supplement one's training and competition demands with adequate time for recovery (Venter *et al.*, 2010). All the student-athletes in this study used some form of recovery. Venter (2014) reported that all athletes, regardless of sport, gender, and level of participation, used and valued the following recovery modalities; sleep, the replacement of fluids, and socializing with one's friends.

A lack of finances was a barrier to making full use of the available recovery methods. There are recovery methods that require minimal to no costs, and this is where education about various recovery modalities will be helpful. Venter *et al.* (2010) grouped the available recovery methods into four categories. The first category was labelled natural strategies; these included athletes participating in active recovery, focusing on their nutrition, and sleeping. These recovery modalities do not require any specific devices and are, therefore, available to all athletes. The second category was the physical and physiological strategies; these included receiving sport massages, having ice and warm water baths, and combinations thereof. The third category was the psychosociological strategies; these included the use of imagery, breathing techniques, socializing with significant others and the use of prayer. The fourth category, the complementary/alternative medicine strategies, included the use of reflexology, acupuncture, and herbal therapy.

As mentioned before, the university's world class facilities include various recovery services, such as physiotherapists, sport massage therapists, saunas, ice and hot baths, and swimming pools. The HP programme manager should discuss with the HP students what services are available to them. Some of the participants were not clear on this; however, they mentioned that the programme covered ice baths, physiotherapy, and chiropractor sessions. Wade *et al.*'s (2014) research, noted that strength and conditioning coaches felt that first-year student-

athletes lacked the mental toughness they needed to endure high-intensity training. They also identified a lack of knowledge about proper nutrition and principles of recovery.

One of the participants noted a lack of flexibility in the academic programme. Academic commitments took up most of this participant's time, allowing little time for training sessions, which made it almost impossible to get into the gym on top of this. Some participants mentioned that they went to the gym early in the morning before lectures began, however, the concern was the lack of sleep and being tired from the session. This may reduce their ability to focus during class, and leave them tired, whilst they still had training later in the afternoon. Student-athletes who attended early morning gym sessions recognised the struggle to concentrate towards the end of the day. Their inability to attend gym sessions resulted in a decrease in strength and performance, and an increased injury risk. Cosh and Tully (2014b) found this to be the case for their participants who were not able to attend all their sessions, from which they would likely have benefitted.

Easing into strength and conditioning sessions in one's first year was seen as a facilitator. Many student-athletes had limited gym experience. Some had never been introduced to a gym set up, whereas others had never used the equipment that was now available to them and did not have access to strength and conditioning coaches. A gradual introduction to gym work should decrease the risk of injuries. Wade *et al.* (2014) surveyed strength and conditioning coaches, who noted that first year student-athletes had little to no exposure to appropriate strength and conditioning training. These student-athletes lacked lower extremity strength, needed to increase their flexibility and to strengthen their core muscles, and needed to acquire proper Olympic lifting technique.

5.3.2.6 Goals

With the Covid-19 pandemic interfering with the athletic year schedule, it was not possible to focus on outcome goals as these goals consisted of performing at competitions or being selected for university or national teams that were either cancelled or postponed. Process goals involved setting goals, working towards, and attaining these goals. Process goals included achieving training targets set by coaches, achieving personal best performances

during training, progressions during training sessions, and positive results at smaller competitions. Achieving these process goals gave the student-athletes the necessary confidence for major competitions. They knew that if they were able to reach these process goals during training, they would be able to meet the outcome goals they set. The importance of setting goals, as well as monitoring, reviewing, and adjusting one's goal in response to varying factors in one's life was also noted (MacNamara & Collins, 2010).

Aspirations to compete for one's country at major competitions was noted as a facilitator. The Olympic dream kept several athletes motivated during difficult periods. Being passionate about one's sport was another facilitator. Yukhymenko-Lescroart (2021) noted that people participate in activities they are passionate about, because they view the activity as important and enjoyable. Additionally, these activities resonate with how one views oneself, and further embodies central features of the individual's identity (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2021).

5.3.2.7 High School vs. First-year

The changes in training load during this transition varied among the participants. For some the load increased, for others it stayed the same, whilst some even mentioned a decrease in training load. The reasons for an increase in training load was that the sessions became more specific and intense, the number of sessions per week increased and the addition of strength and conditioning sessions that was previously lacking. These increases taxed the participant's bodies. The transition to university also demanded a higher training standard, and a successful transition depended on the athlete's commitment, motivation, and willingness to make sacrifices (MacNamara & Collins, 2010). Student-athletes may struggle to meet the increased training demands of university sport, especially due to more training sessions per week (Brown *et al.*, 2015).

Participants who experienced a decrease in training load cited two reasons. The first reason was negative; because the training sessions were held later, the track sometimes closed, or coaches were not available. These sessions had to be cut short resulting in a lower training load. Changing from one's high school coach to a coach who lived in Stellenbosch would be beneficial. The second reason was positive; the flexibility of the academic programme

resulted in more time to focus on one's training and recovery, therefore, the athletes were better rested and subsequently perceived their training load to be lower.

5.3.3 Facilitators, Transitional Experiences, and Barriers in the Psychosocial Domain

5.3.3.1 Sacrificing to Succeed

There is constant tension between the academic, athletic, and social domains (Aquilina, 2013). Coping with the various demands and balancing these three components, required the student-athletes to prioritise time management. Their academic and athletic demands were prioritised over the social components. The participants typically restricted their social activities during the week, whilst they prioritised their academic and athletic activities. It is further important to note that social activities were often sacrificed over weekends when they had to train or compete. This was reiterated by Aquilina (2013) who observed that athletic and academic roles took precedence over socialising (the social component was sacrificed due to time restrictions), and that the social relationships often developed in the confinements of the athlete's athletic environment. Student-athletes also compromised on academic success, due to the amount of time they dedicate to their sporting pursuits (Aquilina, 2013).

Time constraints and the demands of competing restricted the student-athletes' social activities (Pummell *et al.*, 2008). The inability to be involved in campus activities due to sporting commitments was a challenge for student-athletes (McFarlane, 2014). Cosh and Tully (2014a) noted that their participants took a passive responsibility to their decision to prioritize sport over academics, stating that 'uncontrollable' external constraints were barriers to their academic pursuits. External factors such as sport being time consuming, and the pressure exerted by the coach on the athletes to attend training sessions were noted. Student-athletes often did not take ownership of their decision to put sport first, but rather insinuated that it was out of their control.

The need to sacrifice in one domain to succeed in another was a common theme among the participants. Some chose to sacrifice their social activities to focus on their athletic and academic pursuits. Others felt they needed to sacrifice in two domains to succeed in the

domain that was the most important to them. Individuals who perceived themselves as being more students than student-athletes, chose to sacrifice their athletic and social activities to succeed in their studies. This was the opposite for those who gave more importance to their athletic domain, these individuals sacrificed their academic and social activities. Cosh and Tully (2014a) noted that student-athletes made sacrifices in their academic domain by giving the bare minimum to pass their subjects so they could prioritise the athletic domain.

Aquilina (2013) stated that when prioritising tasks, there were multiple approaches. These included placing the same level of importance on tasks in all domains, prioritising one domain over the other domains whenever there was a chance, and to shift the priority according to the situation that arose whilst negotiating a DC. There was also a risk of losing sight of a balanced lifestyle when in pursuit of one's goals.

5.3.3.2 Living Arrangements

Students have multiple options of accommodation. There is the option to live at home (for those who live close enough to the university), to live in a university residence on campus, or private accommodation in the university town (e.g., in a flat or student digs). The benefits of living at home included, the familiarity of food, and being close to one's family. Barriers included having to follow the rules set out by their parents. The independence of living out of the house is hindered as one may need to ask permission to attend events, whereas those living out of the house can make their own decisions. Depending on the distance of one's house from Stellenbosch, one may need a car to commute in and out every day. This is an additional financial barrier; however, these individuals do not have to pay rent. The enjoyment of their newly found freedom of owning a mode of transport was noted, and the participants enjoyed being more mobile and independent.

The decision to live in the university town or to live at home comes with facilitators and barriers. The facilitators include being able to go home on weekends (or whenever one feels the need to) and being close to one's family. However, this may cause a barrier to the student's ability to start the process of becoming fully independent from their parents. The parental support noted were taking one's laundry home, parents doing one's grocery

shopping and cooking, and parents driving one around due to not having a license. Individuals whose family lived in another province or country, those that do not have a mode of transport, or who couldn't afford going home regularly, experienced a decrease in family interaction. For participants who were used to a supportive family, when life got overwhelming, their interaction with their family was a facilitator.

Parental support is essential for student-athletes, and ranges from emotional support, to encouragement, to financial support, and finally to practical support (Cosh & Tully, 2014b). Practical support included the provision of transport to and from training sessions, and access to domestic aid (e.g., meal preparation, cleaning, doing laundry). These forms of support were noted as facilitators as it allowed more time to focus on studying by decreasing time pressures to complete these tasks (Cosh & Tully, 2014b).

Living in a residence came with benefits and challenges. Depending on the specific residence, one may be placed in a single room or must share a room with a roommate. Participants who were placed in a single room felt that they could adapt to residence life easier as they were able to escape from the constant socializing. The benefits of having a roommate included learning to deal with conflict positively, having someone to be vulnerable with, share your experiences with, and to have someone to bounce ideas off and to receive advice from. The barriers of having a roommate include the desire for privacy and having an inconsiderate roommate. Having problems with one's roommate, had a negative impact on the transitioning process of students (Drum *et al.*, 2014). The supportive environment provided by a residence was another facilitator. Students were able to approach others studying the same course as them for assistance. They were also assigned to academic mentors. There was also mention of the senior students being helpful. Another facilitator to adapting to residence life was prior experience of living in a high school hostel. Such students were used to the constant distractions, were able to manage their time by knowing when to prioritize their academic work versus when to socialize with your roommate and friends.

The increased social interaction within residences were a facilitator to some and a barrier to others. The increase in social interaction was noted as fun, it brought about new and

unfamiliar experiences, and led to potentially lifelong friendships. It was draining for some individuals, especially those who were more introverted. It was also deemed to be a distraction. Those with little self-discipline may find it more challenging to pull themselves away from the fun and social activities and to prioritise their academics and athletics activities. There was also a difference in the social interaction when living in a residence or private accommodation compared to high school. Reasons for a decrease in social interaction were individuals who were isolating themselves, due to having trust issues and seeing themselves as more of a 'loner'. An increase in the time consumed by academic and athletic pursuits, left little to no time to join university clubs and societies. Pummel *et al.* (2008) noted the detrimental effects to one's sport performance resulting from social isolation.

Students who live in private accommodation can join a PSO. The students are divided into different PSO communities, which provide them with opportunities for successful social and academic integration on campus. The benefits of joining a PSO include a tour of the campus during the orientation programme to allow for familiarisation of the surroundings before the start of class, having social interaction opportunities with various other PSOs, as well as some residences, and they educated their members about the campus and their specific faculties.

5.3.3.3 Significant Relationships

Relationships with one's coach, their training group, family members, and friends were important. Rees *et al.* (2016) highlighted the importance of the athlete's family members during the developing years. Athletes of varying calibre indicated the important influence family members, coaches, training partners and other athletes, classmates, and other various support staff had on them (Rees *et al.*, 2016). Strong and supportive relationship with one's training group, family and friends was beneficial to the student-athletes whilst they underwent this transition. These individuals had a positive presence at athletic competitions, motivating, and encouraging the student-athletes. The support of these significant individuals made it easier for them to work towards their goals. Families and romantic partners influenced the success of an athlete's DC pursuits. When these individuals were supportive, take on more responsibilities at home, and understanding towards their pursuits it benefits

the DC athlete. These relationships were detrimental when these significant others were not understanding and required more energy and time from the athlete (Tekavc *et al.*, 2015).

Maulini *et al.* (2020) noted the importance of social support as a coping mechanism both at the beginning and end of one's athletic career. There was a need for student-athletes to develop strong social support systems whilst they were negotiating the transition into university (Pummell *et al.*, 2008). Significant others (family and peers) provided a vital coping resource, both in terms of motivating the athletes to participate in sport and during their transition to student life (Pummell *et al.*, 2008). Types of social support included encouraging the individuals, knowledge sharing, and having a group of friends one can approach for advice (MacNamara & Collins, 2010).

Student-athletes mentioned the following individuals who influenced their motivation; their family (support, desire to be like one's parents, being part of a sport family, parents placing more emphasis of their athletic domain), lecturers (receiving help, important to academic success), fellow peers, coaches (need for a connection, detrimental pressures placed on student-athletes), and their training partners (close relationships, detrimental pressures placed on student-athletes) (Woodruff & Schallert, 2008). Social support also assisted the student-athletes in adjusting to university and increased their commitment to their sport (MacNamara & Collins, 2010).

The coach-athlete relationship is essential and could enhance an athlete's sporting success. This relationship can either be a facilitator or a barrier. The coach could educate the participant both in terms of their athletics training and on the athletics clubs' systems. Pummell *et al.* (2008) noted the lack of support and communication from the organization as a source of distress stress. This stress could be decreased by coaches educating the athlete on the organizational systems at the start of the transition. Furthermore, the coach's availability in terms of giving their time and focus to the participant in their training sessions but also being available to help the participant through non-sport related problems that may arise was found to be a facilitator. Another facilitator was the added effort of picking up the student-athlete for an early morning training session or dropping them off after a late evening session

to ensure their safety. The athlete benefitted if the coach had a holistic mindset, worked towards the student-athlete's athletic success, but also considered their academics and personal life.

Coaches who took a holistic approach, showed greater awareness and concern for their athletes. Coaches need to be aware of the transitional challenges their student-athletes were experiencing. If they are more aware, they will be able to support the athlete through these adjustment periods and refer the student-athlete to get help if necessary (Drum *et al.*, 2014). Student-athletes mentioned that having a spiritual understanding and similar mindset with one's coach led to a deeper connection. Lastly, having open and honest communication with one's coach about what is going on in one's life, about aspects that are distracting one from performing in training or in competitions and being able to be vulnerable were noted as facilitating aspects of a coach-athlete relationship. Poor people skills, the coach being hard-headed and narrow-minded, and poor conflict resolution skills were noted as barriers to the coach-athlete relationship. Tekavc *et al.* (2015) spoke about the role of the coach as both facilitating and constraining. The coach can optimize the DC of a student-athlete by being supportive, motivating and understanding towards their athletic and academic pursuits. Another facilitator was if the coach acted professionally and educated the athlete. A constraint was when the coach didn't understand the athlete.

Rees *et al.* (2016) mentioned the importance of the coach being competent and an expert in their field, further mentioning that during the athlete's development years, the coach could enhance the athlete's psychological skills development and their mental toughness. The need for a strong and positive coach-athlete relationship was further emphasized. The value of support and effective feedback depended on the bond and common identity between the athletes' personality and the coaches' characteristics (Rees *et al.*, 2016). The coach played an active role in the increased responsibility the student-athletes took over their lives. They allowed the athletes more responsibility at competitions and to take leadership roles. Providing proactive support was noted as a potential barrier, which suggests one should wait for student-athletes to seek help. The perception of parental involvement was noted to inhibit

the student-athletes' move to take more responsibility over their lives, as parents took responsibility for their children's lives before they came to university (Brown *et al.*, 2015).

5.3.3.5 Independent Living

As a person grows up there is an increase in responsibilities and accountability for one's life. One must learn to become independent and look after oneself. The ability to successfully negotiate challenges and new experiences that arose not only increased one's confidence in their ability, but also increases parental trust towards these individuals and a shift to their parents viewing them as being more mature. The need to be patient, calm, and to control the controllables both with oneself and within the frustrations of the task at hand was noted as valuable lessons. It was easy to get swept away by the newly found freedom the transition afforded. There was a need to stay grounded in the principals their parents brought them up in, as well as to find friends at university with whom they shared the same morals and beliefs. Parental support through the investment of emotional, time, and financial resources was significant for student-athletes in their sport, however, the direct input parents gave before the move to university slowly diminished with the progression of the individuals during this transition. Parents had an indirect input and less control over the student-athletes' lives, leading to student-athletes becoming more independent (MacNamara & Collins, 2010).

As previously noted, there were many new responsibilities and experiences during the transition of moving to university. This transition was demanding; students experienced living away from home for the first time and begin the process of becoming independent from their parents (Drum *et al.*, 2014). The move out of the house and into a residence or private accommodation was a huge step for some. For others, the move wasn't as daunting as they had been living in a hostel at school and experienced having a roommate and therefore adapted easier to the move. For others, this was not the case and led to a more stressful time adapting to living out of the house for the first time. The adjustment to just living without one's family, without the added challenges, was already noted as a huge adjustment. The process of looking after oneself and becoming responsible for one's life included the drive to become independent, the willingness to take control of one's life, accepting opportunities which bring more responsibilities, and taking ownership (Brown *et al.*, 2015).

New experiences in this transition included grocery shopping, cleaning, and doing laundry, having one's own mode of transport, meal planning and cooking, making your own appointments, time management, negotiating university registration and becoming financially independent. Some of the participants noted that they were not adequately prepared for these responsibilities. One of the participants noted that this was the first time they ever had to make their own bed. Other tasks were a bit more complex, such as learning to cook, learning how to use a washing machine, banking, the university registration process, and learning to use a computer/laptop. Not all the student-athletes struggled with these new roles, some were well prepared for the transition to a more independent lifestyle.

Advanced preparation for the challenges a student-athlete may face during their transition was beneficial. It was further suggested that this would lead not only to the individuals coping with the transition but to them thriving in this new environment (MacNamara & Collins, 2010). The example highlighted in their study was the key stakeholders (including coaches, parents, significant others, and management) stepping back from a leading role and shifting into more of a supportive role. This allowed the student-athletes to develop and combine skills which allowed them to cope independently with the challenges they faced. The coach spoke about the need to aid the athletes in becoming more involved and accountable in their athletics career. This was achieved through enhancing goal planning and goal setting skills (MacNamara & Collins, 2010). Brown *et al.* (2015) found that the support obtained from the high school personnel and from parents, caused student-athletes to be unable to look after themselves, and limited their ability to take responsibility over their lives. They added that the overinvolvement of parents and high school personnel meant that student-athletes struggled to complete simple tasks such as making sandwiches or washing their clothes. The desire to learn and being open to new experiences was noted as a coping mechanism in the process of taking control over one's life (Brown *et al.*, 2015). Students who worried about being alone, who had highly controlling parents upon whom they depended, and who were denied the need for close relationships found the adjustment to university as more challenging (Drum *et al.*, 2014).

4.3.3.6 Comparing High School to University

Feelings of excitement and anxiety described the move into the new university environment. There were chances for a person to start over, to make new friends and to grow independently. This transition can bring social changes into one's life. Having a welcoming attitude to the social changes was found to be beneficial. Being an introvert can be challenging when meeting new people and building new relationships.

High school learners have five years to build friendships. Many, if not all, of the pupils one started their high school careers with was still there in their final year of high school. Regarding the individual's change in educational levels, friendship networks were often broken as the individuals dispersed to various educational institutions (Wylleman *et al.*, 2004). Building new relationships can be challenging; one must be open, vulnerable, and trusting to allow new friendships to grow. It can be a difficult process for some individuals to lower their walls and to trust new individuals. When starting at university it may take time for some individuals who may at first be less social at university compared to high school. However, it was noted that some of the individuals who struggled to make new friends at university, would wait to socialize over the weekend with their friends from high school.

5.3.4 Facilitators, Transitional Experiences, and Barriers in the Psychological Domain

5.3.4.1 Offering Psychology Sessions

Members of the HP squad had to attend sport psychological group sessions, whilst individual consultations were also available to them. These sessions were not offered to all student-athletes in the athletics club. Maulini *et al.* (2020) noted the need for expert career guidance and counselling for student-athletes. The counselling should help them create a lifestyle that allows the combination of a sport career with an educational/ vocational career. One-on-one counselling sessions should assist individuals with developing strategies to cope with self-identity, with the shifts of available support (emotional and social), enhance their coping skills, and assist in developing a sense of control (Wylleman *et al.*, 2004). The sessions should also prepare the student-athletes to deal effectively with crisis moments that may arise during the transition (Maulini *et al.*, 2020).

Lawless and Grobbelaar (2015) showed how successful and less successful student track athletes during the 2011 USSA Athletics Championships, could be differentiated as a function of their sport psychological skill levels. They reported that 73% of the sample of 143 athletes perceived psychological skills training (PST) programmes as “important” or “very important”. However, only 24% of the participants had previously consulted with sport psychologists, either individually or in team contexts. Furthermore, 12% of the athletes had a “great need” and another 32% had “a need” for structured PST programmes. Lawless (2013) reported the efficacy of a sport psychological skills training programme for first year student track and field athletes, through a quasi-experimental study. A seven-session intervention programme over seven weeks with daily homework activities and assignments yielded improvements in nine of the 11 sport psychological skills subscales among the 24 participants. In comparison, the control group ($n = 18$) improved in only four of the subscales.

Student-athletes in the Maties HP programme were offered team and one-on-one sessions with a sport psychologist. The attendees of these sessions noted an improvement in focus both on the sports field, in lectures, and life in general. It gave them the ability to recognise what they could control and what they could not, and to shift their focus toward the controllables. The group could reflect on the coping mechanisms they could implement, created a safe space where they could share their experiences and received advice from their fellow student-athletes and the sport psychologist. Maulini *et al.* (2020) noted other benefits of individual and group sessions in aiding the transition throughout one’s career. Individual sessions allowed one to analyse individual challenges and conflicts in one’s identity, whereas group sessions allowed for shared reflection on common challenges that arose.

The Five-Step Career Planning Strategy by Stambulova (2010) is an effective strategy to facilitate the student-athletes in their transitional experiences. This counselling system increased awareness for the athletes, regarding their past experiences, experiences they were currently undergoing, and for possible future experiences. Additionally, this system aimed to help the athletes face transitions in all domains in one’s life (Stambulova, 2010).

Bantjes *et al.* (2019) emphasized the elevated risk of suicidal behaviour among university students globally. They noted the importance of the promotion of student's mental health as integral in the prevention of suicide, which further highlights the need to provide campus-based suicide prevention programs in SA. There is also a need for university management and coaches to consider compulsory courses in mental health or for regular sessions between the student-athletes, team management, coaches, and qualified psychologists. These sessions should aim to remove the stigma attached to mental health problems, allow individuals to engage on relevant mental health topics, including warning signs and symptoms, and supply or point the student-athletes to available coping resources (Coggins & Raunig, 2018).

5.3.4.2 Sense of Identity and Purpose

Being passionate about one's sport was identified as a facilitator. When times get tough (e.g., academic work is piling up, and one must go train after a hard day in class), the love for the sport helps one to keep going on. Having a sense of purpose and a belief in a higher power was another facilitator. An increase in one's sense of purpose was mentioned by those who felt they were living their life to glorify God and not merely for their own personal gain.

Having the preconceived idea that if one attended university there would be a lack of athletic success was noted as a barrier. One of the participants noted that athletes who attend university either dropped out of their sport or they did not meet their full potential. This individual was struggling academically, and this preconceived mindset may have played a role in their lack of academic success, as well as them self-identifying as more of an athlete than a student-athlete. Negative student-athlete stereotypes (specifically regarding one's intellectual abilities) inhibited the quality of purposeful engagement in academic activities (Comeaux *et al.*, 2011). Tekavc *et al.* (2015) found that 10 of their 12 participants decided to go to university after completing high school. When making the decision to attend university the following aspects were considered. Firstly, seeing academic opportunities and studying as an investment for one's future career. Secondly, as a back-up plan in case one had to end one's athletic career prematurely or did not meet their sporting expectations. The individuals who decided to focus solely on their athletic career, gave the following reasons. Firstly, participating in athletics is time and energy consuming and difficult to combine with

academic pursuits. Secondly, the physical and mental energy that is required to achieve athletically was impeded by studies. Ramos *et al.* (2017) reported that DC athletes performed better in all domains of life, than those who solely focused on their athletic careers. They noted that the combination of both sport and academics was the best trajectory pathway an athlete could take. The reason for this was that these individuals were better prepared for life after sport and that they achieved peak performance within the same timeframe as athletes who chose to focus solely on their athletic career. Tekavc *et al.* (2015) found that four of the 10 participants in their study who decided to go to university dropped out. These individuals made the decision to focus solely on their athletic pursuits. The perception of one's athletics career not allowing sufficient time and energy to pursue an academic career was noted. Two of the participants suggested that a DC does not allow one to be successful in both the academic and athletic domains.

5.3.4.3 Character Traits, Mindset and Realising I am not the Only One Struggling

Various character traits can enhance or inhibit the chances of success. Facilitative character traits included great work ethic (self-discipline and working hard), having a focussed mindset (knowing exactly what one wanted and what one needed to do to achieve it), being grateful, and proving to oneself that you are capable. Being determined and self-disciplined, motivated to make the most of the opportunities that arose, one's work ethic, and realising that quality effort is better than quantity (knowing when to rest and focus on recovery), were traits associated with successful transitions (MacNamara & Collins, 2010). Collins *et al.* (2016) noted will power, being persistent, passionate, and able to defer immediate gratification as desirable traits. Brown *et al.* (2015) noted that having talent but lacking the desired work ethic was a barrier to successfully reaching one's goals.

Character traits that may inhibit the student-athletes' chances of success included uncertainty about the future, anxiety (caused by uncontrollable situations) and fear (e.g., fear of failure, injury, and of missing out). The degree to which one experienced stress during a transition was related to one's perceived sense of control over the transition (Pummell *et al.*, 2008). The fear of failure could lead to student-athletes not dealing properly with their emotions by suppressing unwanted feelings, which may exacerbate their inability to cope with their stress

levels. The perceived negative judgement when one fail, and feelings of extreme anxiousness and nervousness from pressure to succeed from coaches and training partners were noted (Woodruff & Schallert, 2008).

The right kind of stress in the correct dose, at the right time and with the correct response from the individual can be beneficial. Moderate levels of stress can enhance growth, however, too much stress can be overwhelming and too little stress may inhibit the potential for growth. This highlights the importance for athletes to prepare for challenges and their need to be supported throughout these experiences (Collins *et al.*, 2016). When one is uncertain about the future, one may question decisions that have been made. The need to sacrifice one's athletics to succeed academically came into question. The student-athlete questioned their decision to spend a large amount of time to succeed in their course and in a sense sacrificing their athletic dream, something which they had been so sure about for several years. Showing persistence to complete a task, or overcome a challenge, may lead to negative outcomes such as the continuous failure in a task, or being successful but inefficient. Both these outcomes may have been avoided by using alternative pathways to complete the tasks. An individual knowing when to persist and when to change their course of action, may not only be beneficial to the outcome of the task but also to their well-being (Collins *et al.*, 2016).

Being open to grow and develop areas that were lacking was a beneficial mindset. Having the ability, as well as the willingness to develop skills (through life experiences, those that may emerge from one's attitude, or through education), make a big difference to the success of the individual when faced with challenges (Collins *et al.*, 2016). Additionally, it helped to realize that one was not struggling alone. Sharing experiences with other students and student-athletes enabled them to realise that they were not the only one's struggling. They felt unified in the knowledge that others had similar challenges.

Having the mindset of taking a break from sport in one's first year at university and then changing one's mind once the season had already started was a barrier noted by one of the student-athletes. It was important to know which resources were available to them. The

“*some sportsmen are academically challenged*” mindset inhibited their ability to reach their full academic potential. There is an assumption, purely based on the identity of being an athlete, that athletes lack academic ability and motivation (Yopyk *et al.*, 2005). Students that achieved good marks in high school had higher levels of self-efficacy and this resulted in their successful academic performance at university. Being optimistic, having elevated levels of self-efficacy, and performing well in their studies aided in the adjustment of these students to university (Drum *et al.*, 2014). Having the preconceived idea that you are bad at academic work may have led to the student-athlete not acquiring the necessary study techniques. This may set them up for failure by preparing poorly for assessments at school, doing work at the last minute and staying up all night to study or meet deadlines. Aquilina (2013) mentioned that some sport personnel regarded the academic pursuit as a threat to the athletic development of their talented athletes.

5.3.4.4 Comparing High School to University

The newly found freedom of university was compared to the structured and controlled high school environment. High school learners were given a class schedule, the bell rang to tell them when it was break/ class time, and there was very little freedom to make one’s own decisions. Phrases used to describe the high school experience included “feeling trapped” and “monotonous”. A benefit of this structured environment is that living in a high school hostel prepared some of the students for living in a university residence. High school learners experienced a heightened sense of responsibility when deciding the next step of their life after high school. A sense of freedom was noted, when one was able to make one’s own decision about which university to attend and where they should live (Falls & Wilson, 2013).

University was described as free, a place where you could make your own decisions (the freedom of choice), and students were able to plan their own routine. The students welcomed this newly found freedom. It was important to take responsibility and accountability for one’s life. They became more aware of their growing independence and not relying on their parents to do everything for them.

5.3.4.5 Relocating vs. Commuting

Relocating to the university town can be a daunting, yet exciting experience. Many positive comments were made about relocating, these included the proximity of the residences to the lecture halls (enabling you to go back to one's room between classes or fitting in a quick training session between classes), having the freedom to do what they wanted when they wanted, and the desire to become more independent. Those whose parents lived in another country often felt homesick. Having a busy schedule kept their minds from missing home. Moving away from home brought about an increase in self-sufficiency and independence. Students living away from home and from their parents, need to take care of themselves and become more independent in their academic pursuits (Tekavc *et al.*, 2015).

When one relocates, one must adapt to living out of the house. This comes with an increased responsibility and possibly having to do tasks one may not have previously done before, such as cleaning, doing laundry, cooking, making their own appointments, banking and even making the bed. Some had to adapt to living with a roommate and sharing spaces such as bathrooms with others. Relocating comes with the possibility of a decrease in family support. Fussy eaters struggled to adapt to the meals offered in the residences. Choosing a university outside of their hometown, came with the added challenge of making new friends. Further, the need to adapt relationships with one's parents and existing friends to one that is more independent was noted (Parker *et al.*, 2004).

One may decide to rather commute in and out of town daily. There were different opinions regarding commuting, the negative feelings included sitting in a car every day and that it was taxing on one's body, the time spent commuting in and out could be used more productively, and due to limited time, one's training sessions were scheduled immediately after the other. On the positive side, the student-athletes mentioned that they had been commuting for the last five years, they felt it did not take away from their university experience nor was it taxing on them. They also mentioned various benefits to living at home, such as being comfortable, being used to the food prepared, as well as not having to cook for oneself.

5.3.5 Facilitators, Transitional Experiences, and Barriers in the Financial and Legal Domains

5.3.5.1 Financial Support from University

Attending university is costly and many student-athletes apply for bursaries (Coggins & Raunig, 2018). Some student-athletes were able to secure bursaries to cover the costs of their studies. The decision for student-athletes to attend university stem from the knowledge that a proportion of their expenses will be covered by a sport bursary. Student-athletes were discouraged by the thought of paying for a university education (Simon, 2021). Receiving a sports bursary meant they could cover the cost on their student accounts (e.g., academic fees, residence fees, food quota, athletics club membership fees), and could contribute towards performance support (gym membership fees and strength conditioning coach fees), and medical and recovery support (physiotherapy, chiropractor sessions, and various recovery methods). However, the delay on the announcement of sport bursaries was a barrier. Student-athletes were unable to budget for the year if they did not know in advance if they would be receiving a bursary and the extent thereof.

The provision of institutional support was significant. Aquilina (2013) mentioned the criteria used by Loughborough University to receive a sport scholarship, the first criteria required the athlete to be accepted into the university as a student first, the second criteria included the experience of the student-athlete in competing on an international level at either a junior or senior level. The advantages of receiving a scholarship included money towards university fees, living expenses, on-campus memberships, access to professional coaching, scientific support (sport science) and medical support, to the top training facilities, academic workload flexibility and access to a support network of university staff (Aquilina, 2013).

The financial burdens of attending university contribute to the dropout rate among students. The following risk factors increased the likelihood of student-athletes dropping out of university; one's financial circumstances and the overall cost of studying, being dependent on one's own/ family financial resources, the need to find employment while simultaneously studying and competing in one's sport (Bernardo *et al.*, 2016). Not all student-athletes received scholarships and Pummell *et al.* (2008) noted that most financial support still came

from one's parents. The time constraints, lack of flexibility, and the commitments of both the academic and sport domain result in very little free time for the student-athletes to find a job. If one was able to find part time work, the hours were not sufficient to earn a comfortable salary (Cosh & Tully, 2014b).

Cosh and Tully (2014b) highlighted the financial pressure experienced by student-athletes. This included living expenses (such as rent), the additional sporting expenses which included competition costs, traveling, buying sporting equipment, coaching fees, and club fees. Recovery methods were a further financial hurdle. Student-athletes may not be able to afford the medical (e.g., physiotherapy) and recovery support (e.g., ice baths, sport massages) out of their own pockets. There were benefits for those making the Maties Sport HP squad as they had access to several sessions within these support structures. However, the student-athletes did not have enough knowledge on what was available to them through this programme. It is easy to jump to conclusions and blame management for this lack of knowledge, however, this could also be the fault of the student-athlete who may have forgotten, neglected to take initiative and ask for information, or not attended the meetings where this was discussed.

5.3.5.2 Financial Aspects of Owning a Mode of Transport

Stellenbosch University has many campuses (some are located outside of Stellenbosch) that require students to travel to lectures and practical sessions. It was noted that there are already many expenses when attending university. The athletics track is situated on the main campus (in Stellenbosch), and for training purposes it was easier to live and attend lectures in Stellenbosch. This was a major consideration for one of the participants who turned down their first choice as they did not want to put extra financial pressure on their parents to buy them a car. There are, however, shuttle services provided to and from main campus and to departments on the edge of campus. This was a facilitator for those who owned a vehicle as they did not need to pay for fuel. It also aided those individuals who would need to pay for transport to get to their classes.

Stellenbosch is a bicycle friendly town. It is often easier to ride a bicycle as one does not need to negotiate time stuck in traffic and finding parking on campus. It also decreased the amount of time spent walking to class and being on their feet. This could enable a more energised training session after a long day of class and lower the risk of overuse injuries if one is not used to the sudden increase in walking. There were financial implications in acquiring a bicycle, as well as expenses to service the bicycle and keep it secure. The university offers students the option to hire a Maties bicycle, however, this seems to be a barrier as there is a negative stigma attached to riding one of these bicycles.

5.3.5.3 Financial Motivator of Sport

The financial aspect of sport can motivate an individual. There were three trains of thought when looking at one's future. There was talk of sport not being one's future and rather the desire to invest in one's career, the second was studying to have a backup in case of a sport ending injury, and the third was wanting to make athletics one's career. The individual who experienced the third train of thought wanted to make their sport their main source of income. This and their passion for the sport motivated them. Elite student-athletes are tempted to drop out of their studies to pursue a career as a professional athlete, since the money and desire of taking on such a career often outweighs the benefits of pursuing academic goals (Rivera, 2004). The desire to attain a professional sporting career (even if the possibility was slim), was associated with failure in the academic domain and dropping out of university (Gaston-Gayles, 2003).

The opportunity to receive a university bursary was another financial motivator of sport. Individuals put all their focus into their sport to ensure they would reach the performance standards to secure a sport bursary. The third financial motivator of sport was the desire to sign a contract with a sports brand. There are many advantages of signing a contract, if one's performances are of high standard, they could receive sporting gear and clothing, financial incentives, and assistance with travel costs. Aquilina (2013) highlighted that the unfortunate reality for many athletes is that they will not be able to make a living out of sport, as few are adequately rewarded financially. Additionally, few athletes can rely on the systems in place to assist them financially and with the psychological impact of retirement from sport, this

highlights the importance of studying while competing in one's sport or preparing for the post-athletic career whilst one is still competing (Aquilina, 2013).

5.3.5.4 World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA)

In the legal domain, the student-athletes need to negotiate WADA. The coordination of strategies for anti-doping and sport organisational policies around the world is done through WADA (Morente-Sanchez & Zabala, 2013; Wylleman *et al.*, 2016). It is the athlete's responsibility to know what substances they are allowed to consume and when. It is essential to know the anti-doping rules, and the rights and responsibilities of the athletes when encountering WADA. It is impossible to memorize all substances on the prohibited list, however, all athletes need to know where they can find this information. Sport physicians should stay up to date with changes to these rules and offer accurate advice to their athletes. Wylleman *et al.* (2016) found that the decisions by athletes to dope was complex, that doping was prevalent at all levels of development, and that it influenced all domains of life.

5.3.5.5 Becoming Financially Independent

Student-athletes transitioning to university are still financially dependent on their parents. There is, however, a transition to becoming more financially independent. First year students need to learn to function independently, this involved acquiring the ability to budget their time and money (Parker *et al.*, 2004). Parents giving students a budget is one step towards independence. Individuals need to learn to budget for themselves and to follow said budget. This meant cutting out luxury items for some and ensuring they do not waste what they bought. It was noted by some participants that whenever they ran out of money or needed something extra their parents would help them. Other participants were not in the same fortunate position. One participant had to open their own bank account and pay their own university fees. Previously, their parents performed these tasks for them. This participant wished that they had learnt how to perform basic life skills at home before leaving for university, as the experience would not have been so overwhelming. The financial benefits gained from a DC is higher employability for the individuals (Tekavc *et al.*, 2015).

5.3.6 The Covid-19 Pandemic as the Second Transition

5.3.6.1 Feelings Towards Covid-19

These participants experienced something rather unique. They had been first year students for about eight weeks when the Covid-19 pandemic broke out. This was a very uncertain time for everyone. The Covid-19 national lockdown, the postponement of competition and eventually all contact classes for the remainder of the 2020 academic year can be described as non-normative transitions. The likelihood of non-normative transitions turning into a crisis was high due to the inability to anticipate them (Zamora-Solé *et al.*, 2022). The 2020 first year cohort were just starting to find their feet and were enjoying the independent lifestyle of university. Making their own decisions and becoming responsible and independent were positive experiences of the transition to university. However, the Covid-19 pandemic created a second transition for these student-athletes; they had to return home, back to living under their parent's roof, and their parents' rules. They had to adjust to remote teaching and learning, online assessments, and examinations, and managing the responsibilities required from them in the house with the demands of remote learning.

They also had to cope with the disappointment of competitions being cancelled, as well as missing out on all the social opportunities (e.g., first year dances, residence dances, and simply having coffee dates with new friends). There was a possibility of these athletes suffering more during the lockdown period. Most athletes' daily routines consisted of taking part in outdoor activities, which was not possible as they were confined to their houses. The postponement of competitions and the Covid-19 pandemic caused many athletes to lose motivation, concentration, and the desire to continue preparing for the competition as they did before the onset of the lockdown period (Clemente-Suárez *et al.*, 2020).

Additionally, coaches, support personnel, and sport organizations had to reorganize their work on online platforms, adding further challenges they had to cope with (Stambulova *et al.*, 2020). The ability to cope and manage this non-normative transition was facilitated by four resources. Firstly, the athlete's ability to tolerate frustration and their ability to adapt to challenges (also known as the psychological resources of sport identity). Secondly, through environmental resources offered by the coach, family members, and the institution. Thirdly,

through the development of non-sport related aspects in one's life (such as studies and career development). Lastly, due to the perception of an athlete's lifestyle (exposure to extraordinary situations, and commonly facing restrictions) (Zamora-Solé *et al.*, 2022).

There were varied emotional responses to this phenomenon, both positive and negative experiences. The positive response to the pandemic was that it allowed the student-athletes more time. One participant started to doubt if they would achieve the goals they had set. The academic pressures combined with the new athletic demands was overwhelming. They were physically and mentally not prepared for competition, and they subsequently welcomed the postponement of events as it gave them more time to adapt to the new training stimuli, the strength and conditioning sessions, as well as to build a proper strength base. They also noted that this period gave them the time required to catch up on their academic work.

It also gave them more time with their families. Once the semester had started, not all student-athletes had the financial means to travel home to see their families. The pandemic gave them the opportunity to go home and spend time with their families. There was a decrease in stress because they perceived that they had more time. Schinke *et al.* (2020) noted that some athletes used this time to reflect on their identities, to distance themselves from the demands of their sport and to develop their identity and interests outside of sport. Through this they became aware that they were more than just their sporting achievements.

Zamora-Solé *et al.* (2022) highlighted the realization that their participants had. They mentioned that they had the opportunity to focus on other training aspects they did not previously have the time for, such as strength and flexibility training. The ability to work on one's weaknesses without time pressures was another benefit, this in turn would enhance their performance going forward. The athletes had more time to recover, both physically and mentally. It allowed them to take a step back, breathe and reflect on the past competitions and their emotional responses to the physical and psychological demands they encountered. It allowed them to recover from their injuries and niggles, and potentially to prolong their sporting careers (Oblinger-Peters & Krenn, 2020). Additionally, priorities started to shift to other aspects of life, including academic pursuits, career development, and family. Both

coaches and athletes changed their perception of the lockdown and postponement of events from being a threat to being an opportunity that allowed them to work together to set short-term goals (Zamora-Solé *et al.*, 2022).

Participants also spoke about two mindsets in this experience. The first was one of ‘everything happens for a reason’, which may have lowered their initial disappointment of the ‘loss’ they experienced. Some realised that as soon as the pandemic passed, they would once again have all the experiences they were missing out on. The second mindset was one of growth. They used this opportunity to find ways to enhance their online skills, strengthen themselves mentally, and to grow in their faith. Overcoming the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic may have prepared the athletes to cope better with future unexpected challenges that may arise in their sporting careers (Zamora-Solé *et al.*, 2022).

The negative experience centred around their ‘losses’. The loss of independence due to relocation back to their parents’ house, the loss of freedom of movement (during national lockdown level five one was unable to leave one’s house), the loss of newly established routines. There was also the loss of competition opportunities, the ability to access training facilities, the loss of in-person social interaction with friends, and the loss of the ‘normal’ first year experiences such as attending dances, meeting up with newly made friends, and attending lectures. The excitement of the transition was replaced with anxiety and concern around the uncertainties about their academic future and athletic performance.

Most of the participants experienced the national lockdown as an unpleasant experience. The separation from the one’s they loved, uncertainty and risks to one’s health, being bored and frustrated, suicidal tendencies, post-traumatic stress symptoms, feeling confused and angry, were some of the negative psychological effects of being in quarantine. Stress was caused by the duration of the quarantine, fears of being infected, feeling frustrated, boredom, not having enough supplies available, lack of information, loss of financial means, and the stigma of being infected (Brooks *et al.*, 2020). Disappointment, confusion, and feeling relieved were emotional responses related to the cancellation of sporting events. Athletes who needed more

time to recover from injuries were relieved. Some were demotivated to train because there was no goal they could work towards (Zamora-Solé *et al.*, 2022).

5.3.6.2 Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning

The ending of one phase in a student's education and the start of another, such as the transition from high school to university, was particularly challenging during the Covid-19 pandemic (Daniel, 2020). Barriers and facilitators were noted when teaching and learning moved to an online platform. The facilitators included more effective use of one's time, the ability to pause a lecture and read up on a term before continuing with the recording. This reduced the time one would use to look up terminology after an in-person lecture and having to sit through a whole lecture not understanding what the lecturer was saying. The time to walk between lecture halls was also cut out, meaning students could go directly to the next class. They were able to schedule all their lectures for the day one after the other, meaning that they could finish their academic day earlier if they chose to. The second facilitator was that the online examinations were less stressful than in-person exams. Participants were able to focus on themselves, and not on those around them who were stressed.

Various barriers to remote teaching and learning were mentioned. Lischer *et al.* (2021) noted the lack of experience academic personnel had for online teaching, and the lack of time to prepare for remote teaching. The uncertainty about this method, and how online lectures and assessments would be structured caused anxiety. There were also many distractors at home, such as being disrupted by siblings. Having to prioritise the academic demands with the responsibilities of one's home life was challenging. Knowing when to do one's course work and when to help around the house was mentioned. There was also the comfort of being at home, one often associates home with relaxing and unwinding and this may have added another challenge to be productive and focus on one's academic work. There were many distractions at home that impacted the study experience for the student (Lischer *et al.*, 2021). The disappointment of the pandemic caused a lack of motivation for many individuals. The size of one's house, and accessibility to computers and networks also played a role. Daniel (2020) noted that studying in one's home was not easy and that individuals with low motivation struggled a lot. They further highlighted that not all homes had the equipment and

internet connection needed for effective remote learning. This was reiterated by Lischer *et al.* (2021), who noted that not all students were able to find a suitable space in their home for productive learning.

Being technologically challenged was another barrier some students had to overcome. Students had to negotiate the use of laptops/ computers, scanning, and uploading documents, finding the correct documents on one's device, and having the pressure of a time limit to submit assessments on-time. During in-person exams, one would receive an exam paper and the script on which to write answers. They could bring a pen and a back-up, which covered most of the things that could go wrong during the exam. With online exams, there were extra obstacles; internet access, electricity (students had to navigate load shedding, as they could not use it as an excuse to miss assessments), knowing how to upload documents, ensuring they saved their work correctly and regularly. This was more anxious and stressful. Cao *et al.* (2020) highlighted the psychological effects students may have experienced from the pandemic. These included feelings of fear, anxiety and worrying. They further noted that the students' anxiety stemmed from the following: their residence, their parents' source of income, living with one's parents, and a family member becoming infected.

The participants also preferred in-person lectures. Some individuals were motivated through physically being on campus, sitting in the lecture halls, working on campus, and seeing one's friends. The thought of studying from home was demotivating for many of these individuals. They realised that no one would be checking up on them and that it was up to them to be dedicated to their work. Physically attending lectures and seeing/ hearing their lecturers speak helped them to understand their work. The fear of not getting through all the course work on one's own was mentioned. Another reason was being a visual learner, meaning they were able to understand concepts easier if they saw the lecturer. The move to online learning brought about an unexpected increase in academic workload. The preference of in-person communication with academic staff was mentioned. It was difficult to communicate via email and it was subsequently a struggle to utilise the available support.

5.3.6.3 Interference by the Covid-19 Pandemic

Looking at the Covid-19 pandemic holistically, there was interference noted within all the domains during the transition from grade 12 to first year at university. In the academic domain, the university holiday started a week earlier than scheduled, and the in-person semester test period stopped. Some of the student-athletes already completed all their tests before the lockdown started, whereas others had only started writing at that stage. The university moved to emergency remote teaching and learning, and later with online assessments. No undergraduate students (except for some final year medical and health science students) returned to campus for the remainder of the academic year. There was a fluctuation in the perceived self-identity of many participants from a more athlete-student to a more student-athlete identity. This was due to the competitions being cancelled and the inability to leave one's house and having more time to focus on their studies. In the academic/vocational domain, the postponement of sport brought about more time to focus on this domain, however, certain adjustments were needed to negotiate the interference of Covid-19, and this required more time and effort (Stambulova *et al.*, 2020).

In the athletic domain, access to training facilities was not possible during the initial phases of the lockdown. Student-athletes went from having access to a track, a gym, equipment, and recovery facilities, to having no access at all. One had to revert to home workouts and running around in your garden. The loss of performance readiness due to being unable to fully train during the lockdown was a concern noted by the student-athletes. There was the added disappointment of not experiencing being a Maties HP athlete. Being unable to receive treatment for one's injury was another cause for concern. They were anxious to have to wait longer to find out what was wrong and what the treatment process would entail. In-person rehabilitation sessions were not allowed during the lockdown level five.

Biokinetics is an occupation that is concerned with promoting a healthy lifestyle, maintaining an individual's physical abilities, and focusing on the individual's final phase of rehabilitation. The programmes prescribed by these professionals are based on scientific evidence (Biokinetics SA, 2022). The national lockdown meant that these athletes could not have in-person sessions with their Biokineticists (Kholvadia, 2022). The Health Professions

Council later gave permission for tele-medicine or online rehabilitation sessions. These online sessions did not benefit everyone.

Sport injuries are regarded as non-normative transitions that athletes must navigate. It is one of the most important and difficult transitions athletes may encounter. It is unpredictable and involuntary in nature and athletes require coping strategies to successfully negotiate the transition (Wylleman *et al.*, 2004). It is important that athletes are properly assessed when they are injured. Knowing what was wrong and receiving a treatment plan can provide some control among the uncertainty. In the athletic domain, there was an interference in the development of the athlete through the closing of sporting facilities, competitions being cancelled, and the inability to set up a schedule (Stambulova *et al.*, 2020).

In the psychosocial and psychological domains, the loss of freedom was noted due to moving back home. The frustrations of the readjustment to living at home and having to follow their parents' rules was mentioned. Social interaction with friends in residents or on campus ceased. During level 5 of the national lockdown, people were not allowed to leave their house unless they were classified as essential workers. The newfound freedom experienced by these first years was taken away from them. In the psychosocial domain, there were challenges of feeling isolated and being worried about one's loved ones. There was also a compromise in the athletic identities of the individuals (Stambulova *et al.*, 2020). A possible increase in social isolation and mental health problems was noted when students lived by themselves, had little direct contact with family and friends, social support was limited, and students did not have a strong social network (Lischer *et al.*, 2021).

This was a financially stressful time for all the individuals, as they were unable to work and some of their parents lost their jobs. The Covid-19 pandemic had overwhelming and long-lasting effects. In the financial and legal domains, some may have received less funding, they were unable to travel and compete internationally due to travel restrictions and felt uneasy and uncertain about doping control procedures (Stambulova *et al.*, 2020).

5.3.7 Mechanisms of Support Available to Student-athletes

The multifaceted mechanisms of support available to the Stellenbosch university student-athletes was discussed within their various domains in chapters four and five. The mechanisms and support structures in place for the student-athletes include the management of the athletics club, the PACER and HP programme, sport psychological services (team and individual sessions), financial, and medical support.

There are additional benefits for those selected as part of the HP squad. However, some of the student-athletes lacked knowledge on what was available to them through the HP programme. It is easy to jump to conclusions and blame management for this lack of knowledge, however, this can also be the fault of the student-athletes who may have forgotten what was said after the meetings, failed to take initiative and ask for information, or did not attend the meetings where this information was provided.

There is seemingly a need to make the student-athletes more aware of the support systems and structures that are in place. Few of the participants could recall what the PACER programme entailed. The HP programme should be explained clearly, including the criteria to make the HP squad, what one receives by being in this squad, and what is required from the student-athletes in return. There is also a need for more information regarding the equipment and the facilities (both training and recovery) available to them.

Chapter Six: Conclusions, Limitations and Future Research

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 6, the concluding chapter, starts with the conclusions that were made for each of the research objectives. This was followed by the delineations, the delimitations and limitations of the study, and practical recommendations based on the study's findings, to support student track and field athletes undergoing this transition. Finally, suggestions for future research were stated.

Reviewing the literature for this study allowed the primary researcher to gain a better understanding of the transitions faced by the student-athletes, the demands placed on student-athletes in high school and university across the various domains, the barriers and facilitators cited through earlier studies, and the support structures available to student-athletes at Stellenbosch University. Various transitional theories have been put forward to aid our understanding of different types of transitions, including normative and non-normative transitions. The current study used Wylleman's (2019) Holistic Athletics Career Model as the lens through which the elicited information was analysed. Although the researcher personally experienced this transition at said university, it was necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the available literature on the topic.

Much of the existing research was conducted outside South Africa and, therefore, may not relate directly to what local student-athletes experience and are exposed to. The knowledge gained through the literature review gave direction to explore the broad range of experiences that South African student-athletes may encounter. This study focussed on a single South African university, namely Stellenbosch University, which restricts its generalisability to other tertiary settings in South Africa. It should be noted that the rationale for qualitative studies is never to generalise to other settings, but to gain a deeper and context-rich description of the lived experiences within this specific setting. More local studies are needed on the transitions of student-athletes from high school to university to gain a comprehensive understanding of experience at various higher education institutions (e.g., university, colleges) and across the various provinces in the country. Whilst the researcher had her own first-hand experience of this transition and read the available literature, she endeavoured to

describe the experiences of the participants that she interviewed, through bracketing her own experiences and biases. The unique context, i.e., the Covid-19 pandemic during the 2020 academic year, in which the study was conducted should also be considered.

6.2 Conclusions

The study aimed to explore the experiences of Stellenbosch University student track and field athletes during their transition from Grade 12 to first year university. The study set out to achieve four objectives. The following conclusions were made for each of these objectives.

6.2.1 Objective one

To explore the academic, athletic, psychological, psychosocial, financial, and legal experiences of Stellenbosch University student track and field athletes during their transition from Grade 12 to first year university.

The university environment is a novel one for first-year student-athletes. They encountered many different experiences for the first time. The move to becoming more independent was identified as a major theme. They had to negotiate various changes in their academic, athletic, psychological, psychosocial, financial, and legal domains. The Covid-19 pandemic certainly changed the ‘normal’ first-year experience which they would have expected during this transition. Looking at the transition from a holistic perspective is important. One cannot view the various domains as separate entities; one should consider the cross-domain transitional experiences and how their interaction influenced the life of the student-athlete.

6.2.2 Objective two

To explore the barriers and facilitators experienced by these individuals during this transition.

The barriers and facilitators, like the experiences within the various domains, depended on the student-athlete’s perception of the situation. Some perceived certain occurrences as hindering or difficult, whereas others brushed it off and felt little impact. Multiple barriers and facilitators were noted by the participants across all the domains. Pre-empting various

challenges that one may experience across all life domains when transitioning to university and actively preparing for these challenges may lead to a less stressful experience and subsequently to a more successful transition. Advanced preparation for the various challenges student-athletes may face during their transition to university may enable them to thrive within this new environment.

6.2.3 Objective three

To explore the notion of being a “student-athlete” versus being an “athlete-student”, in other words establishing ‘why’ these participants are at university.

Regarding the decision to attend university the following were mentioned as motivators; studying as a back-up plan for life after sport, as a steppingstone to achieve future career aspirations, due to external expectations placed on the individual, and the desire to have multiple degrees behind one’s name. An academic pursuit is a type of contingency plan if the athlete’s sporting career does not develop as expected. The motivation of the student-athletes’ towards their academic and athletics pursuits contributed to their perceived self-identity. Reasons for perceiving one’s identity as being more of an athlete than a student-athlete included being happy with achieving the bare minimum academically, putting more effort into athletics to achieve their goals, and hoping to make athletics their main source of income. The reasons for identifying as a student more than a student-athlete included, athletics not being the main goal in life, and the need to prioritize academics to succeed.

The student-athletes’ perceived identity fluctuated throughout the academic year. In the athletics season, their identity shifted to more athlete-student as they needed to prioritize training and spent more time travelling and competing. Once the athletics season was done, there was a shift to a more student identity, as they prepared for the exams. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, a shift to a stronger student identity was noted. Sports events were cancelled, they were unable to train outside their property and they had more time to focus on their studies. At the same time, there was an expectation that once the pandemic was over, they would be able to resume all the aspects related to being a student and a student-athlete.

6.2.4 Objective four

To explore the knowledge about and utilization of the available support structures and mechanisms set in place to effectively support these student-athletes.

To enhance the transition, it is important to link the demands of the transition with the resources available to the individuals. With this statement in mind, the participants in this study expressed limited knowledge on the support structures and resources available to them. Information regarding academic support, psychotherapeutic and other support services is readily available on the university website. Students may not yet be independent enough to do their own research without being prompted by academic personnel or sport managers. The participants generally did not know what was available to them through the PACER and HP programmes. It is easy to blame management for the lack of knowledge shown by these individuals, however, the unusual circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic and how it interfered with the typical academic and sporting year may have reduced the opportunities to inform the student-athletes thereof. Furthermore, the student-athletes may have forgotten what they were told, may not have taken the initiative to obtain this information, or may not have attended the meetings where the information was shared. If used optimally, the available support structures and systems would benefit their athletic performance as well as their growth and success in various life domains.

6.3 Delineations of the Study

This study was delineated to those who chose to participate, who competed in track and field, who were receiving coaching and competing in university competitions, who had reached provincial level or higher at high school. They also had to meet the criteria of being a Bona-fide first year student according to the criteria stated in the USSA Constitution, and to those registered for a degree programme at Stellenbosch University. Due to the inclusion criteria, this study was limited by the number of first year Stellenbosch University track and field athletes in 2020.

6.4 Delimitations of the Study

One of the eight student-athletes who was interviewed in this study was not a South African resident, but their perspective on the transition was insightful. Whilst the study provided valuable insight into the transitional experiences of student track and field athletes at Stellenbosch University, it should not be assumed that all the student-athletes (both in track and field and other sporting codes) in the Western Cape Province, or South Africa in general, not to mention international universities would undergo the same experiences. Individual differences among participants would result in different perceptions and unique experiences by the various participants.

6.5 Limitations

The primary researcher, although able to understand Afrikaans, has English as a home language. All interviews were conducted in English. All the participants were proficient in English; however, English may not have been their home language and these individuals may have misinterpreted the questions or may have struggled to communicate their views clearly.

The interviews took place during the Covid-19 pandemic when students were sent home, approximately seven weeks into their academic year. The national lock-down commenced shortly after, sport events were cancelled, the university reverted to remote teaching and learning for the rest of the year and most undergraduate students did not return to Stellenbosch for the remainder of the year. Due to the national lockdown, face to face interviews were not allowed. The interviews were conducted over an online platform. This came with technological challenges, such as interruptions to the internet connection, issues with the sound clarity, the use of mobile devices to conduct the interviews, and batteries dying mid interview. This contributed to a more impersonal interview process and lack of connection between the participants and researcher, and possibly a lack of trust in sharing vulnerable information. Another unforeseen limitation was the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the first-year student-athlete's typical transitional experience. The current findings may differ from that observed among other first year cohorts. This limitation was also unique in the sense that it was possible to explore a second transition (moving back

home). The current information could be valuable for student-athletes who for whatever reason experienced social isolation or disruptions in the typical transition to university life.

Little to no information was obtained regarding the legal domain of the student-athletes. Wylleman *et al.*'s (2013) Holistic Athletics Career Model originally described the transitions in the psychological, psychosocial, academic/vocational, and financial level. In 2019 it was expanded to include the legal domain. Unfortunately, Wylleman's (2019) model was unavailable at the time that the interview scripts were constructed and the legal domain was subsequently not fully explored.

6.6 Practical Recommendations

This study broadened our understanding of the cross-domain experiences of the student-athletes and the barriers and facilitators they experienced along the way. It provided unique insight into their perceived identities and their rationale for it. The study also revealed a general lack of knowledge about the mechanisms and support structures available to them. Although this study cannot describe all student-athlete experiences across various sporting codes and the multitude of universities/ colleges in South Africa and throughout the world, it can guide and improve existing, as well as future support programmes implemented under similar socio-economic circumstances. This study provided insight into the personal experiences, thoughts and feelings of student track and field athletes during a specific transition within a specific South African university setting.

Practitioners working in the high school and university environment can use the following recommendations to enhance the transitional experience. There is a need to create beneficial academic habits such as efficient study techniques, ability to create a study schedule and revising academic work after class. Learners should be taught to apply their academic work and not just to parrot learn to pass their subjects. High school teachers often spoon-fed the learners, which was detrimental to the students as they needed to adapt to a more independent learning environment at university. The academic buy-in of coaches to the student-athletes' academics pursuits were noted as beneficial, followed by the need for better communication between sport and academic personnel, as well as communication by sport and academic

personnel and the student-athletes themselves. Assistance in the development and refinement of time management skills and organisational skills is required. The available information on the various support structures to students and student-athletes should be shared more effectively, however, the information regarding academic support and counselling for these individuals is available on the university website, so the onus rests on them to look for it. More education is needed on the necessity of strength and conditioning for athletic development and performance, including the importance of proper recovery and the various recovery methods.

Regarding the support available to the student-athletes at Stellenbosch University, the PACER programme should be communicated better. The HP programme should also be explained clearly, including the criteria to make the HP squad, what one receives by being in this squad, and what is required of athletes in this squad. More information should be shared about the available equipment and facilities.

6.7 Recommendations for Further Research

The need to investigate the transition of student-athletes from high school to first year university/ college in a South African context still exists. Such studies should focus on track and field and be broadened to other sporting codes, as well as on the experiences at other universities/colleges across all provinces in SA. This will provide a better understanding of what student-athletes go through in individual and team sports, as well as in the well-funded and well-equipped versus the resource-poor universities/colleges. There is a need to conduct a longitudinal study that follows top performing youth athletes throughout high school, into university and throughout their university careers. Most such studies to date used retrospective designs, which suffer from recall bias. In-time tracking, and interviewing may yield unique insight into the various challenges, barriers, and facilitators experienced by youth athletes.

Student-athletes undergo transitions across multiple domains. These domains often clash with one another creating challenges for these individuals. We cannot focus solely on one domain while not acknowledging the influence of the other domains. The current study

encompassed the experiences across all domains and gathered insight on a broad range of experiences. It may, however, be beneficial to investigate a specific domain in more depth, whilst acknowledging the cross-domain challenges. This may elicit more information on the specific domain, which in turn may offer more solutions for a smooth transitional experience.

The current study was influenced through the Covid-19 pandemic. The researcher was able to elicit information regarding the impact of the pandemic on the student-athletes and their experiences. It may have been beneficial to get a more detailed response of how the Covid-19 pandemic influenced the transition of general first year students. It would also have been interesting to study individuals who were in their final year of high school when the pandemic occurred, and the challenges they encountered negotiating their final school year followed by their transition to university and towards the new normal in the year thereafter.

6.8 Reflection

The primary researcher hopes that these findings and recommendations can be used by future student-athletes to better prepare themselves for the psychological, psychosocial, athletic, financial, legal, and academic challenges they may encounter when entering university. She also hopes that this information will create awareness around the challenges the student-athletes undergo, thereby affording parents/guardians, school/ university administrators, coaches, and other support staff the chance to better assist these student-athletes during this transition. This may subsequently lead to a smoother transitional period, a more positive overall experience, and possibly a more successful year for this unique population.

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Appendix A: Recruitment email to participants

Appendices

Possible Participant for master's study on transition of track and field student athletes from grade 12 to first year university.

Palframan, J, Mej [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]>
Fri 2020/03/06 15:18

To: [REDACTED]

■ 1 attachments (107 KB)

Information + consent form.doc;

Good day [REDACTED],

My name is Justine Palframan. I am a master's Sports Science Student and a Maties track and field athlete, I am contacting you as a possible participant for my study. My study is on the Transition of track and field student athletes from grade 12 to First year university.

Why you?

You are receiving coaching and competing at university competitions (E.g., Varsity Athletics competitions, University Sport South African Championships, Boland/South African Junior Championships or Boland/ South African Senior Championships).

You have reached provincial level or higher at high school (E.g., Boland Team, South African Team).

You meet the criteria of being a Bona-fide first year student according to the Criteria stated in the USSA Constitution.

You are registered for a degree programme at Stellenbosch University.

You matriculated in 2019.

What will be required of you?

Meet with me for a one-on-one interview session, the interview will be 60 minutes long, and answer the questions as fully and truthfully as possible.

Please do note that you do not have to answer any question you are not comfortable with.

I would like to invite you to an information session where I will go through the procedures, and you can ask me any questions you may have. Attached you will find more information about my study, as well as the consent form. May you please read this so long in preparation for the session during which I will explain everything in further detail. During the information session you will be requested to provide informed consent if you wish to take part in the study. Please let me know if you will be attending the session.

Date: 10th February 2020, Tuesday

Appendix A: Recruitment email to participants

Time: 17:25

Venue: Maties Athletics Office

I look forward to hearing from you,

Kind regards,

Justine Palframan

<https://outlook.office.com/mail/sentitems/id/AAQkADE1YWUxYWQ0LTM3MDAtNDM5Ny1hNDRhLTU5NmI3NWUwODk3ZQAQAEkVyDI7T9It2Og...>

1/1

Appendix B: Informed consent form for student-athletes

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LEAFLET AND CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT:	
Exploring the transition of track and field athletes from Grade 12 to first year university	
DETAILS OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (PI):	
Ms Justine Palframan	Ethics reference number: 13110
Sport Science Department, Sport Science Building, Coetzenburg Rd, Stellenbosch, 7600	Cell phone number: [REDACTED]

We would like to invite you to take part in a research project. Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this project. Please ask the study staff or doctor any questions about any part of this project that you do not fully understand. It is very important that you are completely satisfied that you clearly understand what this research entails and how you could be involved. Also, your participation is **entirely voluntary**, and you are free to decline to participate. In other words, you may choose to take part, or you may choose not to take part. Nothing bad will come of it if you say no: it will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits or reduction in the level of care to which you are otherwise entitled to. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you do agree to take part initially.

This study has been approved by the **Health Research Ethics Committee at Stellenbosch University**. The study will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines and principles of the international Declaration of Helsinki, the South African Guidelines for Good Clinical Practice (2006), the Medical Research Council (MRC) Ethical Guidelines for Research (2002), and the Department of Health Ethics in Health Research: Principles, Processes and Studies (2015).

What is this research study all about?

The study will be conducted at the Sport Science Department at Stellenbosch University, a venue that is suitable for both investigator and participant will be arranged. We are hoping to recruit 12 participants overall. The aim of this study is to explore the experiences of Stellenbosch University student track and field athletes during their transition from Grade 12 to first year university. The reason I am interested in doing this study is to hopefully identify factors that will help assist a student athlete in this transition period, to make it a smoother and easier process which leads to a more successful first year experience all round (socially, athletically, and academically) for the student athletes. This could then lead to a more positive experience in this transition process and this could further lead to higher retention in sport, more success in their sport in their first year at university and higher retention in university in general.

The Procedure will be as followed:

- Participants will be interviewed. The interviews will follow a Semi-structured format; this allows for the participant to freely express themselves and the interviewer to lead the interview based on the information received. With the participant's permission, the interviews will be recorded to allow for accurate transcription and grouping of qualitative data into categories.
- The Interview session will be conducted after starting at Stellenbosch University. The session will consist of three parts. Firstly, the researcher will begin with explaining the purpose of the study, go through the informed consent, an explanation of what is expected of the participants will be given and demographic information (such as age, the event, level of competition and gender of the participant) will be obtained from participants. The participants will be given time to ask questions and it will be made clear that the participants may pull out of the study at any point if they so wish. Next, the participants will be asked about

Appendix B: Informed consent form for student-athletes

their achievements for the year. They will be asked about their academic, social, and athletic experiences. They will be given time to reflect on their performances in the year so far, as well as to identify possible barriers and facilitators they experienced.

Why do we invite you to participate?

You have been invited to participate because you meet the following inclusion criteria:

- Receiving coaching and competing at university competitions (For Example: Varsity Athletics competitions, University Sport South African Championships, Boland/South African Junior Championships and Boland/ South African Senior Championships).
- You have reached provincial level or higher at high school (For Example: Boland Team, South African Team).
- You fit the criteria of being a Bona-fide student according to the Criteria stated in the USSA Constitution.
- You are registered for a degree programme.

What will your responsibilities be?

You will be expected to answer the questions as truthfully and fully as possible and to be available to meet in person for the interview sessions. These interview sessions will last a maximum two hours.

Will you benefit from taking part in this research?

The information gathered from this study can be used by future student athletes to help better prepare them for the challenges faced when entering university from a social, athletic, and academic aspect. This information can also be used by parents, school/ university administrators, coaches, and other support personnel to better assist student athletes in this transition period. A smoother transition period will thus lead to a more positive experience for student athletes and possibly a more successful year for these individuals.

Are there any risks involved in your taking part in this research?

There are no risks involved in participating in this study. The individual can share as much as they would like to, they do not have to answer any questions that they are uncomfortable with answering. This study is completely voluntary, and participants can withdraw at any point if they so wish. All information is confidential and anonymous. If any acute reaction to the research arises, access to a sport psychologist will be provided. The participant will be able to attend 3 sessions, which will be paid for by the researchers. The sessions are valid from the date of recruitment to 4 weeks after the interview session.

If you do not agree to take part, what alternatives do you have?

As these are interview sessions and not an intervention or treatment. There are no alternatives. If you do not wish to participate, you do not have to.

Who will have access to your interview transcriptions?

We will ensure that each participant will be treated with dignity and respect and ensure that the interview environment is made as confidential and comfortable as possible. All information gathered will be kept confidential. With the permission of the participants, the interviews will be recorded to ensure accuracy of the information acquired. The information gathered during the interviews will be stored on a password protected computer and backed up on the researcher's external hard drive which only the researcher and supervisor will have access to. No names of the participants will be used in the publication of this work. Participants will be randomly assigned numbers. This is to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of each participant. Everything will be done to protect the identity of participants.

Will you be paid to take part in this study and are there any costs involved?

- You will not be paid to take part in this study and there are no costs involved. The benefits will be sharing experiences, verbalizing what you are struggling with, and awareness of what support structures are available to you.

Is there anything else that you should know or do?

- You can phone Justine Palframan at [REDACTED] if you have any further queries or encounter any problems.
- You can phone the Health Research Ethics Committee at 021 938 9677/9819 if there still is something that your researcher has not explained to you, or if you have a complaint.
- You will receive a copy of this information and consent form for you to keep safe.

Appendix B: Informed consent form for student-athletes

Declaration by participant

By signing below, I agree to take part in a research study entitled Exploring the transition from High School to First Year University for Maties Student track and field athletes. I declare that:

- I have read this information and consent form, or it was read to me, and it is written in a language in which I am fluent and with which I am comfortable.
- I have had a chance to ask questions and I am satisfied that all my questions have been answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is **voluntary**, and I have not been pressurized to take part.
- I may choose to leave the study at any time and nothing bad will come of it – I will not be penalized or prejudiced in any way.
- I may be asked to leave the study before it has finished, if the study doctor or researcher feels it is in my best interests, or if I do not follow the study plan that we have agreed on.

Signed at (*place*) on (*date*) 2019.

Signature of participant

Signature of witness

Signature of parent or guardian (Only for participants under 18 years old)

Declaration by investigator

I (*name*) declare that:

- I explained the information in this document in a simple and clear manner to
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took enough time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she completely understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above.
- I did/did not use an interpreter. (*If an interpreter is used then the interpreter must sign the declaration below.*)

Signed at (*place*) on (*date*) 2019.

Signature of investigator

Signature of witness

Appendix C: Semi-structured interview questions

Semi-structured Interview Questions

Demographic Information:

Name and Surname: _____

Date of birth: _____

Sex: _____

Item: _____

Highest Level of competition (2020): **Varsity Athletics/ USSA/ SA Juniors/ SA Seniors**

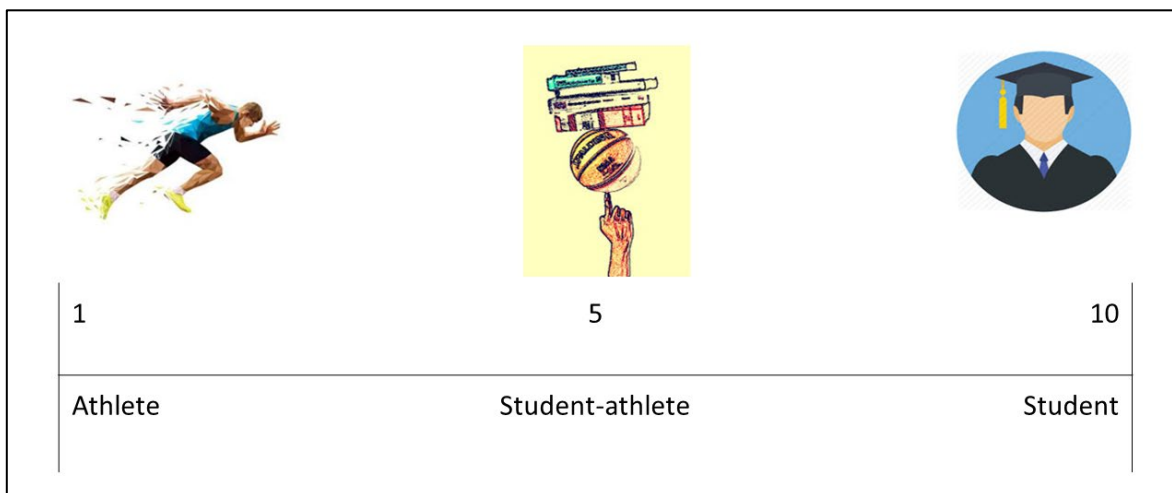
Highest Athletic achievement (Career): _____

Matric Academic average: _____

Academic Course Registered for: _____

High Performance Athlete: _____

Please look at the below scale and make a mark on the scale where you feel best describes yourself. 1 being Athlete, 5 student-athlete and 10 student.



Ice Breaker:

Tell me a bit more about yourself?

Questions:

General Information:

1. A) How did you come to the decision to go to university?
B) Did you seek advice from individuals on this decision? (If yes, who?)
2. Why did you choose Stellenbosch University?
3. Why did you choose the course you are studying?

Appendix C: Semi-structured interview questions

4. A) Could you please describe your average weekday before the lockdown started?
B) How many hours a week do you spend on academic work outside of class?
C) How many hours a week do you spend on your athletics? (Training, gym, psychology, etc.)
D) How many hours a week do you spend on social activities? (Visiting friends, going to the movies, hobbies)
5. What have been the highlights of your 2019 and your 2020 year so far?

Academic, Athletic, Social and Psychological:

1. Tell me about your transition from Grade 12 to First year?
2. A) How is the academic workload? Is there a noticeable change in the workload compared to what was expected of you in matric?
B) How did the first assessments and semester tests go?
C) How do you feel about the upcoming exams?
D) How are you managing the study load?
3. Did you have any experience speaking to your lecturers about missing tests or class for athletics competitions? (If yes, what was your experience?)
4. How is the athletic workload? (Both training and sports related activities) What do you do to help you recover? Is there a noticeable change in the workload compared to what was expected of you in matric?
5. A) How are your relationships with your support structures? (Parents, friends, coaches, administrators, etc.)
B) How is your social life? Do you make time to see friends?
C) Have you joined any social clubs? Or partake in resident/PSO activities?
6. Have you received any psychological sessions this year through your university? Individual or team sessions? How have these assisted you?
7. How have you balanced your athletics, academic and social activities?

Barriers and Facilitators:

1. What do you know about the PACER program?
2. Please may you comment on the medical support you receive? (Access to physiotherapists, sport doctors, etc.)
3. Please comment on the facilities you have access to. (Track, Gym, etc.)
4. Please comment on the management of the club. How have they assisted you?
5. A) Are you part of a high performance set up?
B) What do you receive from this program? What are you utilizing?

Appendix C: Semi-structured interview questions

- C) What is working and what is standing in your way?
6. A) Did you change coaches?
B) How is your relationship with your coach? Did they aid in making your transition smoother?
7. A) Did you move away from home? Where are you originally from?
B) If yes, how are you feeling? Is this your first-time living out of the house? Are you staying privately or in a university residence?
C) If no, has there been a change in your experience of being at home?
8. Can you please speak about what you have learnt for yourself this year? (Do you have to do your own washing? Cooking? Cleaning your apartment? Making your own appointments? How do you feel about the changes?)
9. What has been the major change during 2020?

Reflection:

1. What were your goals for 2020? Did you reach them? Are you satisfied with the process to attain your goals?
2. What aided you in achieving your goals? What inhibited you from achieving your goals?
3. Would you define yourself as a student-athlete? Or an athlete-student?
4. Looking into the future, where do you see yourself?
5. If you could go back in time to matric, what would you do differently to better prepare yourself for this year?

Corona Virus:

1. How do you think the Covid-19 pandemic has affected your first year in university?
2. Do you feel supported by the university at this time?
3. How is the communication from the university? Your lectures? From Maties Athletics/ Sport?

Appendix D: Notice of approval

**NOTICE OF APPROVAL**

REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (SBER) - Initial Application Form

25 February 2020

Project number: 13110

Project Title: Exploring the transition of track and field athletes from Grade 12 to first year university

Dear Miss Justine Palframan

Your REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (SBER) - Initial Application Form submitted on **02 December 2019** was reviewed and approved by the REC: Humanities.

Please note the following for your approved submission:

Ethics approval period:

Protocol approval date (Humanities)	Protocol expiration date (Humanities)
18 November 2019	17 November 2022

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Please take note of the General Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

If the researcher deviates in any way from the proposal approved by the REC: Humanities, the researcher must notify the REC of these changes.

Please use your **SU project number (13110)** on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your project.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

FOR CONTINUATION OF PROJECTS AFTER REC APPROVAL PERIOD

Please note that a progress report should be submitted to the Research Ethics Committee: Humanities before the approval period has expired if a continuation of ethics approval is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary)

Appendix D: Notice of approval

Included Documents:

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Default	CV HGrobbelaar-2019	06/11/2019	1
Data collection tool	Semi-structured interview questions	06/11/2019	1
Data collection tool	Focus group question	06/11/2019	1
Research Protocol/Proposal	Justine Palframan master's proposal final	06/11/2019	1
Proof of permission	13110 2019 Maties Sport Application for Research Approval Justine Palframan	19/11/2019	2
Informed Consent Form	13110 SU HUMANITIES Consent form Relevant stakeholders	19/11/2019	2
Informed Consent Form	13110 SU HUMANITIES Consent form Student-Athletes	19/11/2019	2
Default	13110 response letter	19/11/2019	1
Proof of permission	13110 Institutional Permission Standard Agreement 1626	02/12/2019	2
Default	13110 RESPONSE LETTER 2 2nd Nov 2019	02/12/2019	2

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at cgraham@sun.ac.za.

Sincerely,

Clarissa Graham

REC Coordinator: Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities)

National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number: REC-050411-032.

The Research Ethics Committee: Humanities complies with the SA National Health Act No.61 2003 as it pertains to health research. In addition, this committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research established by the Declaration of Helsinki (2013) and the Department of Health Guidelines for Ethical Research:

Principles Structures and Processes (2nd Ed.) 2015. Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.

Appendix D: Notice of approval

Investigator Responsibilities Protection of Human Research Participants

Some of the general responsibilities' investigators have when conducting research involving human participants are listed below:

1. Conducting the Research. You are responsible for making sure that the research is conducted according to the REC approved research protocol. You are also responsible for the actions of all your co-investigators and research staff involved with this research. You must also ensure that the research is conducted within the standards of your field of research.

2. Participant Enrolment. You may not recruit or enrol participants prior to the REC approval date or after the expiration date of REC approval. All recruitment materials for any form of media must be approved by the REC prior to their use.

3. Informed Consent. You are responsible for obtaining and documenting effective informed consent using **only** the REC-approved consent documents/process, and for ensuring that no human participants are involved in research prior to obtaining their informed consent. Please give all participants copies of the signed informed consent documents. Keep the originals in your secured research files for at least five (5) years.

4. Continuing Review. The REC must review and approve all REC-approved research proposals at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk but not less than once per year. There is **no grace period**. Prior to the date on which the REC approval of the research expires, **it is your responsibility to submit the progress report in a timely fashion to ensure a lapse in REC approval does not occur**. If REC approval of your research lapses, you must stop new participant enrolment, and contact the REC office immediately.

5. Amendments and Changes. If you wish to amend or change any aspect of your research (such as research design, interventions or procedures, participant population, informed consent document, instruments, surveys or recruiting material), you must submit the amendment to the REC for review using the current Amendment Form. You **may not initiate** any amendments or changes to your research without first obtaining written REC review and approval. The **only exception** is when it is necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants and the REC should be immediately informed of this necessity.

6. Adverse or Unanticipated Events. Any serious adverse events, participant complaints, and all unanticipated problems that involve risks to participants or others, as well as any research related injuries, occurring at this institution or at other performance sites must be reported to Malene Fouche within **five (5) days** of discovery of the incident. You must also report any instances of serious or continuing problems, or non-compliance with the RECs requirements for protecting human research participants. The only exception to this policy is that the death of a research participant must be reported in accordance with the Stellenbosch University Research Ethics Committee Standard Operating Procedures. All reportable events should be submitted to the REC using the Serious Adverse Event Report Form.

7. Research Record Keeping. You must keep the following research related records, at a minimum, in a secure location for a minimum of five years: the REC approved research proposal and all amendments; all informed consent documents; recruiting materials; continuing review reports; adverse or unanticipated events; and all correspondence from the REC

8. Provision of Counselling or emergency support. When a dedicated counsellor or psychologist provides support to a participant without prior REC review and approval, to the extent permitted by law, such activities will not be recognised as research, nor the data used in support of research. Such cases should be indicated in the progress report or final report.

9. Final reports. When you have completed (no further participant enrolment, interactions, or interventions) or stopped work on your research, you must submit a Final Report to the REC.

10. On-Site Evaluations, Inspections, or Audits. If you are notified that your research will be reviewed or audited by the sponsor or any other external agency or any internal group, you must inform the REC immediately of the impending audit/evaluation.