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Review

EL PROCESO DE TRANSICIÓN A LA ÉLITE EN DEPORTES COLECTIVOS: FÚTBOL Y BALONCESTO. UNA REVISIÓN SISTEMÁTICA

THE TRANSITION PROCESS TO ELITE IN TEAM SPORTS: SOCCER AND BASKETBALL. A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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RESUMEN

El objetivo del presente artículo es realizar una revisión bibliográfica sobre el proceso de transición deportiva de junior a élite en jugadores de fútbol y baloncesto. Se realizó una búsqueda sistemática siguiendo las indicaciones de la metodología PRISMA. Se usaron las palabras clave “career transition”, “junior-to-senior”, “football OR soccer” o “basketball”, “elite sport”. Como base de datos se usaron SportDiscus, PubMed, y Web of Science. Inicialmente se obtuvieron 670 resultados de los cuales se consideraron relevantes 24 artículos después de aplicar los criterios de exclusión e inclusión. Se han identificado unas barreras deportivas, sociales y culturales, académicas laborales, financieras y psicológicas que dificultan la TJS unos factores de rendimiento, sociales y psicológicos que facilitan la transición JTS y estrategias de enfrentamiento que es aconsejable que los clubes de fútbol y baloncesto puedan controlar para mejorar el proceso de formación del deportista y se obtenga una tasa de éxito mayor, así como que los deportistas puedan alcanzar un mayor rendimiento deportivo.

Palabras clave: junior-to-senior, transiciones, rendimiento.

ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to carry out a bibliographic review on the sports transition process from junior to elite in soccer and basketball players. A systematic research was carried out following the indications of the PRISMA methodology. The keywords "career transition", "junior-to-senior", "football OR soccer" or "basketball", "elite sport" were used. SportDiscus, PubMed, and Web of Science were used as databases. Initially, 670 results were obtained, of which 24 articles were considered relevant after applying the exclusion and inclusion criteria. Sports, social and cultural, work-related academic, financial and psychological barriers have been identified that hinder JTS, performance, social and psychological factors that facilitate the JTS transition and coping strategies that it is advisable for soccer and basketball clubs to control to improve the athlete's training process and obtain a higher success rate, as well as that athletes can achieve greater sports performance.

Keywords: junior-to-senior, transitions, performance.



INTRODUCTION

The process of developing successful athletes has always been non-linear, multifactorial, dynamic, random and with different possible solutions (Baker & Wattie, 2018; Collins, McNamara & Cruickshank, 2018; Till & Baker, 2020). As an example of the difficulty of this process, it is enough to analyse the success rate of different talent development programs. Barreriros et al., (2012), in his research on the development of international athletes in different sports from the moment of their competitive debut, observed that only a third of international athletes in the junior stage transitioned to senior athletes.

Research considers the transition from junior to senior (TJS) as the most difficult within the athlete's career (Stambulova, 2009; Vanden Auweele, De Martelaer, Rzewnicki, De Knop & Wylleman, 2004). TJS usually occurs when athletes move from lower categories (under 18 years) to senior. Bennie & O'Connor (2006) described that this transition occurred between the ages of 18 and 24. However, it is necessary to clarify that this will depend on the sport, since there are particular cases where the peak of performance occurs in adolescence, such as gymnastics (Law, Côté & Ericsson, 2007). TJS can be made more challenging by the fact that the transition can last several years, with athletes in a period of uncertainty and challenge (Stambulova, 2009). Facing this process successfully would allow the athlete to have a greater opportunity to have a long and successful development in sport. On the contrary, failure to cope with a transition could lead to negative consequences (Stambulova et al., 2009).

At the same time, during this transition, athletes will also be involved in other vital processes, such as the passage from adolescence to adulthood or the passage from secondary education to university, which can increase the demands of a cognitive, social, psychological and physical experience from the athlete (Pummell, Harwood & Lavalley, 2008; Wylleman, Alferman & Lavalley, 2004). Each of these transitions can be demanding in their own right, but when the demands of TJS are combined with concurrent transitions, the demands can increase exponentially (Morris, 2013).

Finally, talent development must be understood as a process with different levels of approach, in which culture penetrates all these levels (Stambulova &

Alfermann, 2009). Therefore, to fully understand sports transitions, athletes and their context-cultural situation must be taken into consideration, understanding that their psychological characteristics will also be affected by their culture (Ryba & Stambulova, 2013). Along these lines, Ryba et al., (2016, 2019) presented the concept of "cultural transition", understood as a quasi-normative transition expected in the careers of many elite athletes to achieve a fulfilled career, pointing out that the cultural impact should be valued as one more factor that can condition the TJS.

This cultural impact is most evident in professional sports, and specifically in the world of basketball and soccer. Therefore, the objective of this article is to carry out a systematic review on the sports transition process from youth to elite in soccer players and basketball players, since there is no review that brings together these two sports since they are among the most practiced worldwide.

METHODS

The present study is a systematic review of the transition process in soccer and basketball because there is a need to know how this event is within the career of the players of these sports.

The systematic review was organized according to the guidelines of the PRISMA methodology (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis).

1.1. Search strategy

To identify the articles that met the inclusion criteria, the electronic databases of SportDiscus, PubMed and Web of Science were searched, establishing the years of search from 2000 to 2020. The following were used as keywords: "career transition ", " junior-to-senior ", " football OR soccer ", " basketball ", " elite sport ". The search included all the publications, obtaining 670 results.

The search process (Figure 1) was carried out in the months of December 2019 and January 2020, and consisted of the following phases, according to the criteria for preparing PRISMA systematic reviews (Liberati et al. 2009): (1) Identification: the first author (AG) found 670 studies by searching the 3 databases consulted. (2) Filtering: the first author



(AG) eliminated duplicate files ($n = 216$) and excluded those that did not belong to original primary information sources. In addition, we proceeded to discard those studies whose subject matter was not considered relevant according to a reading based on their title, abstract and keywords. At the end of this phase, the authors admitted 123 articles for analysis. (3) Eligibility: the first author (AG), together with the collaboration of the remaining authors (AR, MS and AL) eliminated the full-text studies that did not present all the inclusion criteria from the selection process ($n = 99$); (4) Inclusion: the remaining studies ($n = 24$) were finally considered by all authors as suitable for inclusion in the systematic review.

1.2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

To carry out this review, original studies, published in peer-reviewed journals, whose objective was to examine the transition from junior to senior in soccer and basketball, were included. The established inclusion criteria stipulated that 1) only research studies published in journals indexed in the Journal Citation Review (JCR) would be included; as well as 2) only studies that addressed the transition in soccer and basketball and that were written in English or Spanish would be included. The exclusion criteria adopted establish that (1) those investigations that examined another type of transition from the sports career (retirement, specialization in sports, etc.) and from other sports would be excluded; (2) research belonging to secondary research sources would be excluded; and (3) research that were not original articles (systematic reviews, meta-analyses, letters to the editor, opinion articles, etc.) would be excluded. Previously published systematic reviews were only considered to find potentially valid studies.

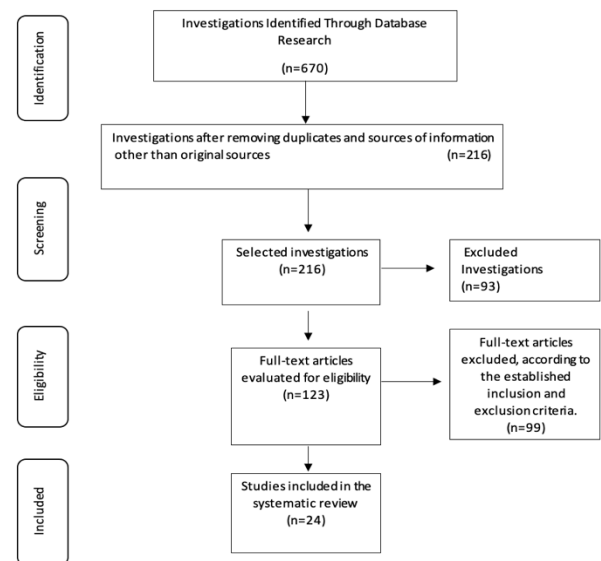


Figure 1. Distribution of the main variables.

RESULTS

3.1 Quantitative results of the bibliographic review.

Considering the sample used by the included investigations, 58.33% ($n = 14$) are made up of athletes, 17% ($n = 4$) are made up of technical staff and the remaining 25% ($n = 6$) are made up of both athletes and technical staff. Furthermore, in this 25% ($n = 6$), 3 studies included the parents. Regarding gender, 50% ($n = 12$) of the studies included were male and only 4.16% ($n = 1$) belong to the female gender. The remaining data is made up of 41.6% ($n = 10$) that includes both genders, and 4.16% ($n = 1$) that are not specified. Of the investigations included in this review, 95.83% ($n = 23$) are developed in the European continent and 4.16% ($n = 1$) of the included investigations are developed in the America regions. Regarding the competitive level of the sample that was used, and according to Swann et al. (2015), 62.5% ($n = 15$) of them demonstrate a “World Class” level, 20.83% ($n = 5$) of the included investigations use a “Semi elite” sample and, finally, 16.6% include both competitive levels. Considering the methodology used by the included investigations, 100% ($n = 24$) used a qualitative methodology, with the interview being the main research technique used with 83.33% ($n = 20$).

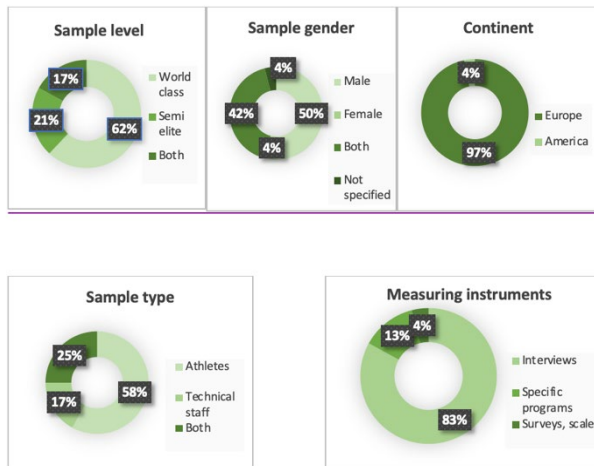


Figure 2. Distribution of the main variables

3.2. Factors that condition TJS in soccer and basketball

Considering the different factors that condition the transition to elite in soccer and basketball, a total of 19 have stood out (Table 1). These have been divided into three categories; psychological, that represents 52.63% (10 of 19 factors) of the factors found; performance factors with 21.05% (4 out of 19 factors); and, finally, social factors with 26.31% (5 out of 19 factors) of all the factors identified.

In the category of psychological factors, intrinsic motivation stands out with 20.83% ($n = 5$) of the included investigations, adaptability with 20.83% ($n = 5$) and awareness with 33.33% ($n = 8$) of the researchers analysed. In addition, other factors arise such as extrinsic motivation, confidence, athletic identity, good attitude, attention, team orientation and mental strength/resilience.

In the category of performance factors, technical competence stands out with 8.33% ($n = 2$) and performance evaluation with 8.33% ($n = 2$) of the included investigations. Other factors noted are early success in the transition phase and performance progression.

In the category of social factors, organizational support stands out, appearing in 33.33% ($n = 8$) of the included investigations, support from the coach/technical staff with 25% ($n = 6$) and family support with 25% ($n = 6$). In addition, as in the

previous categories, other factors appear such as teammates and support from colleagues.

Table 1. Factors that condition TJS in soccer and basketball

Authors	Factors		
	Psychological	Performance	Social
Franck et al. (2020).	x	x	x
Morris et al. (2015).	x		x
Morris et al. (2016).	x	x	x
Morris et al. (2017).	x		x
Mills et al. (2012).	x	x	x
Chamorro et al. (2016).	x		
Lorenzo et al. (2009).	x		x
Finn & McKenna (2010).	x		
Larsen et al. (2013).	x		x
Larsen et al. (2014).	x		x
Røynesdal et al. (2018).			x
Horrocks et al. (2016).			x

3.3. Barriers found in TJS in soccer and basketball

Taking into account the different barriers found, 13 types of barriers are identified. These are made up of five categories: sports, psychological, social and cultural, academic/work and financial (Table 2).

Out of these categories, the category of social and cultural barriers stands out, since both changes in social relationships and inadequate social support, as



well as the lack of strategies from the clubs, sports and country culture are the ones that happen to appear the most, with 37.5% (n = 24) of the investigations included.

Regarding the sports barriers, it stands out above all the changes in the training/competition conditions with the appearance in 33.33% (n = 24) of the investigations. Different sports interests, organizations and structures of different leagues are other types of sports barriers.

In psychological barriers, the competition that athletes have in this period (with 20.83%, n = 24) and the external pressure that athletes receive with another 20.83% (n = 24) of the included investigations are present.

Finally, in terms of academic/work barriers, studies (with 12.5%, n = 3), the change in priorities caused by the rise to elite and incompatibility with other personal and social spheres stand out. The lack of financial support appears as the only financial barrier with a percentage of 4.16 (n = 1).

Table 2. Barriers that appear in the TJS

Authors	Barriers				
	Sports related	Psychological	Social and cultural	Academic /work	Financial
Chamorro et al. (2016).	x	x	x	x	
Franck et al. (2020).	x	x	x	x	x
Lorenzo et al. (2009).	x	x	x		
Finn & McKenna. (2010).	x	x	x		x
Morris et al. (2015).			x		
Morris et al. (2016).	x	x			

Morris et al. (2017).	x	x		x
Van Yperen. (2009).	x			
Mills et al. (2012).	x	x	x	
Larsen et al. (2013).				
Barreiros et al. (2013).	x	x		
Aalberg et al. (2016).				x
Røynesdal et al. (2018).				x
Tekavc et al. (2015).		x		
Debois, et al. (2015)				x
Gledhill et al. (2015).				x
Mortensen et al. (2013).				x

3.4. Coping strategies found in TJS in soccer and basketball

Considering the coping strategies indicated as possible solutions to overcome the barriers, 11 types of strategies emerge, divided into five categories: psychological, sports, social and cultural, academic/work and financial (Table 3). Among all these types of strategies, various specific programs stand out, with a percentage of 25% (n = 6) of the investigations included. Seizing opportunities, preparing for the next level of competition, having technical support and mentoring are other sports strategies highlighted by the research included in this review.

Regarding psychological strategies, mental strategies stand out with the appearance of 20.83% (n = 5) of



the analysed investigations. Having a balance in life and good emotional support are other types of psychological strategies cited. Other categories of strategies are social and cultural, where social support has major importance with 20.83% (n = 5). Finally, both in the categories of academic/work strategies, with the appearance of 4.16% (n = 1), and financial with the appearance of 12.5% (n = 3), the specific programs and having financial support stand out.

Table 3. Barriers that appear in the TJS

Authors	Strategies				
	Sports	Psychological	Social/cultural	Academic/work	Financial
Chamorro et al. (2016).		x			
Franck et al. (2020).	x	x			x
Lorenzo et al. (2009).		x			
Finn & McKenna. (2010).		x			
Morris et al. (2015).	x			x	
Morris et al. (2016).	x	x	x		
Morris et al. (2017).	x	x			x
Van Yperen. (2009).		x	x		
Mills et al. (2012).		x			
Larsen et al. (2013).	x				
Larsen et al. (2014).					

Gledhill et al. (2015).		x			
Aalberg et al. (2016).	x				
Røynesdal et al. (2018).		x			
Storm et al. (2014).	x		x		
Gulbin et al. (2013).		x			
Horrocks et al. (2016).		x			
Mortensen et al. (2013).	x			x	

DISCUSSION

The objective of this article is to carry out a bibliographic review on the process of sports transition from junior to elite in soccer players and basketball players.

The results of the bibliographic review have shown that for the transition to elite in soccer and basketball, a series of psychological, sporting and social factors must be taken into account, which can help athletes achieve sporting success.

At a psychological level, motivation (intrinsic, extrinsic) is cited (Franck, et al., 2020; Morris et al., 2017). These results support the study by Pummell et al., (2008), where they propose that having high motivation is associated with being successful in TJS, which means that athletes who are motivated to spend more time competing and training, and who prioritize their sport over their educational commitments, have a greater chance of success. On the other hand, analysing the work of Taylor & Collins (2019), where unsuccessful cases are studied, it seems that the lack of motivation on the part of footballers can lead to unsuccessful transitions. The adaptability to different contexts (Finn & McKenna, 2010; Lorenzo et al., 2009), the confidence that athletes have in their qualities and the self-esteem to be successful in this stage (Mills et al., 2012; Morris et al., 2017), are traits considered necessary to be able to successfully face this challenge. Other research has identified that high levels of self-



confidence and a good ability to adapt to changing situations are important factors when making the transition (Jones et al., 2014).

Other important psychological factors are having a sporting identity, a good attitude, team orientation, and mental strength/resilience (Franck et al., 2020; Larsen et al., 2014). According to coaches, those athletes who are socially competent and effective in building relationships are more likely to experience a more feasible TJS (Mills et al., 2012).

At a sport level, the factors that most determine the transition to elite are based on having or not having the specific skills of the sport (Mills et al., 2012; Franck et al., 2020). Taylor & Collins (2019) state that a lack of technical and tactical development is associated with an unsuccessful transition. Similarly, being successful in the phases leading up to this change could help athletes succeed in becoming elite (Bennie & O'Connor, 2006).

Finally, at a social level, the factors that most condition the transition to becoming elite are family (Morris et al., 2015; Lorenzo et al., 2009), colleagues (Morris et al. 2017; Franck et al., 2020), coach or technical staff support as well as the support of the organization (Franck et al., 2018; Røynesdal et al., 2018).

On the contrary, lacking such support is associated with a greater probability of not achieving sporting success (Taylor & Collins, 2019). Several studies (Bennie & O'Connor, 2006; Pummell et al., 2008; Vujic, 2004) point out the importance of these types of factors, since athletes who receive support and positive stimuli, without excessive pressure, are more prone to experience TJS successfully.

4.1. Barriers in the process of transition to elite in soccer and basketball

In relation to sport barriers, the changes experienced by the players in the conditions of both training and competition stand out (Finn & McKenna, 2010). Athletes have to face increased demands in competition and training, either due to increased intensity, speed or pace of play, an increase in the necessary concentration, or even a lower tolerance for error (Pummell et al. 2008; McNamara & Collins, 2010).

Other types of sports barriers are caused by factors unrelated to the athlete. They are the interests, generally of an economic nature, generated around the athlete by their representatives (Chamorro et al., 2016a; Morris et al., 2017 & Franck et al., 2020). This aspect, together with the organization and/or structuring of professional leagues (number of teams, number of matches, trips) (Chamorro et al., 2016a; Franck et al., 2018 & Morris et al., 2017), is another type of a barrier arising.

Observing the psychological barriers mentioned, the competition is the most relevant. The increase in the physical and cognitive demands of training and competition lead athletes to question their own worth (Alge, 2008). This increased demand causes a rise in pressure on the players (Finn & McKenna, 2010) directly related to the assessment of performance and results (Barreiros et al., 2013; Mills et al., 2012). This pressure that the players receive can be internal, since it originates from the athlete himself because they demand a high level from themselves; or external, because it is produced by the clubs, from the competition between the players for having more minutes on the field, or through family (Chamorro et al., 2016a; Finn & McKenna, 2010). The social repercussions that soccer and basketball have are other origins of these external pressures (Chamorro, Sánchez-Oliva & Pulido, 2019).

This type of psychological barrier also entails psychological consequences (Chamorro et al., 2016; Tekavc, et al., 2015), either in the form of stress, or in the form of negative feelings and thoughts. For example, a high level of tension, insecurity, concern about errors, frustration with undesirable results, somatic and cognitive anxiety (Debois, et al., 2015; Van Yperen, 2009).

From a social and cultural point of view, changes in the relationships of their peers, inadequate social support, (Finn & McKenna, 2010; Lorenzo et al., 2009) or withdrawal from the family may arise (Franck et al., 2018). This is related to the cultural transition that many athletes experience when becoming elite (Ryba et al., 2016). Aspects such as the change of country, continent, language, or whether the club is adequate or not depending on the characteristics of the players, are some of the aspects that athletes must assess when facing this transition (Ryba et al., 2016).



Another obstacle pointed out in literature, and which could be called structural barriers, are those that arise due to the lack of the club's strategies, because not all have professional means to address other aspects related to the players, apart from the sport (Aalberg et al., 2016; Røynesdal et al., 2018). The culture of the sport, its impact, and the importance of each sport in the country, can make the transition difficult for soccer and basketball players (Franck et al., 2018; Larsen et al., 2013).

The last category of barriers refers to academic/employment and financial. In this category, those that most affect this process are studies, referring to the different facilities or difficulties experienced by athletes to combine the academic and sports fields (Finn & McKenna, 2010; Caciija & Stambulova, 2007). These barriers can affect the well-being of the athlete, and the different institutions need to implement specific club programs (Larsen et al., 2014) to help them plan their sport with other activities (Morris et al., 2017). Regarding financial barriers, the lack of financial support from different institutions and clubs are highlighted (Finn & McKenna, 2010; Franck et al., 2020).

4.2. Coping strategies in the process of transition to elite in soccer and basketball.

It is clear that, part of the success of this process depends fundamentally on the different strategies used to overcome the barriers indicated above. These strategies are usually sports, psychological, social and cultural, academic/work and financial.

Regarding sports strategies, the fact of taking advantage of opportunities are clear (Morris et al., 2016; 2017; Mills et al., 2012), especially when players are allowed to enter first-team dynamics. This circumstance will also mean that they improve their preparation for the next level of competition (Franck et al., 2018; Gulbin et al., 2013; Morris et al., 2017), through the different training and competitions experienced in previous stages. The existence of specific technical support, provided by the technical staff, with the aim of improving the player's own technical deficiencies, or allowing the design of an individualized training program focused on developing the athlete, is also especially important (Aalberg et al., 2016; Larsen et al., 2014; Horrocks et al., 2016). It is possible to assume that, thanks to the

implementation of these strategies, the sporting barriers experienced by the players can be solved, if not totally at least partially.

From psychological strategies, literature highlights having a balance between the different facets of life (Franck et al., 2020; Storm et al., 2014). When working with a player in transition to elite, it is interesting to provide them with services that help them handle different challenges that involve not only being an athlete, but also being a student, child, and so on (Nesti, 2004). If the athlete is able to be successful in all aspects (personal, sporting, social, academic), they will have more options to achieve success in the transition. Studies with unsuccessful cases (Taylor et al., 2019) support this idea, since they defend that players who have had an imbalance in a field other than sports, has made it more difficult for athletes to achieve success. Other authors refer to this type of strategy, through the execution of carrying out other activities or occupations by the players, which help them to disconnect from the sports field and thus avoid possible negative consequences such as overtraining, anxiety or stress (Finn & McKenna, 2010; Morris et al., 2016).

Having emotional support (Morris et al., 2017; Mortensen et al. 2013; Van Yperen, 2009), provided both by the player's social network (family members) and by professionals within the sports field, such as psychologists (Henriksen, et al. 2014), stand out as strategies that can facilitate the transition. This emotional support is shown through a concern, affection or feeling of importance on the part of external factors, as defended by Caciija & Stambulova, (2007). Obtaining or developing a series of mental strategies (Finn & McKenna, 2010; Morris et al., 2016; Chamorro et al., 2016a) to face adverse situations also facilitate the transition to elite in these sports, such as having a resolution strategy from planned problems, being self-reliant, having self-control, accepting the positives and negatives that may occur during the season, blocking negative thoughts, or a positive reassessment (Drew et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2014). Other authors proposed other mental strategies such as developing internal resources with the help of different professionals in the sports field (Van Yperen, 2009; Henriksen et al., 2014), listening to music or having one's own emotions under control (Franck et al., 2020; Čačija,



2007). If the players have these strategies, it is more likely that they can overcome the barriers, due to an increase in confidence, self-esteem, and personal identity among other characteristics (Cacija & Stambulova, 2007).

Among the social and cultural strategies, mentoring or meetings with athletes, and social support to be able to face the whole process stand out. Unlike emotional support, in this case it is generic support, provided to the athlete by the different environments and acquaintances that surround them (Vujic, 2004).

Receiving advice from athletes who have already made the transition (Røynesdal et al., 2018), creating new relationships with first-team players, and improving the relationship with the coaches are other relevant aspects that make up this social support. Along the same lines, another figure to highlight is that of the coaches in lower categories. On many occasions, it is this person who prepares the player and tries to anticipate for what may happen to them (Taylor et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2020), so these players continue to seek their opinions and advice.

Another type of strategy is financial, based fundamentally on having financial support that allows the athlete to continue investing their time and effort in trying to overcome this stage. This support can be shown in the field of these professional sports through contracts offered to players by clubs, or

secondary contracts such as advertising. This financial support, at the same time, also benefits the clubs with higher income and profits, due to its increase in sports performance (Kahn et al., 2000). The literature mentions that this aspect is important, since athletes who transition to elite and who have had this support have been more likely to be successful (Drew et al., 2019).

Regarding academic/work strategies, the possibility of implementing specific educational programs that help the athlete to be able to combine their sports career with their academic career is pointed out. Ooijen (2009) considers that one of the main concerns that athletes in full transition have is the balance between professional training in sports and education, and how the implementation of these programs can help them to continue both with sports practice as well as academic. The specific literature (Aquilina, 2013) points out that some benefits of combining sports and studies are having a balanced lifestyle, reduction of life stress, positive effects on the self-regulation of athletes, positive effects of socialization or a better career planning.

With the intention of combining and reflecting the results obtained from this review, figure 2 is presented. Considering the importance of the results, the different categories are shown, as well as the different types of each category, depending on the number of times they have appeared in this research.

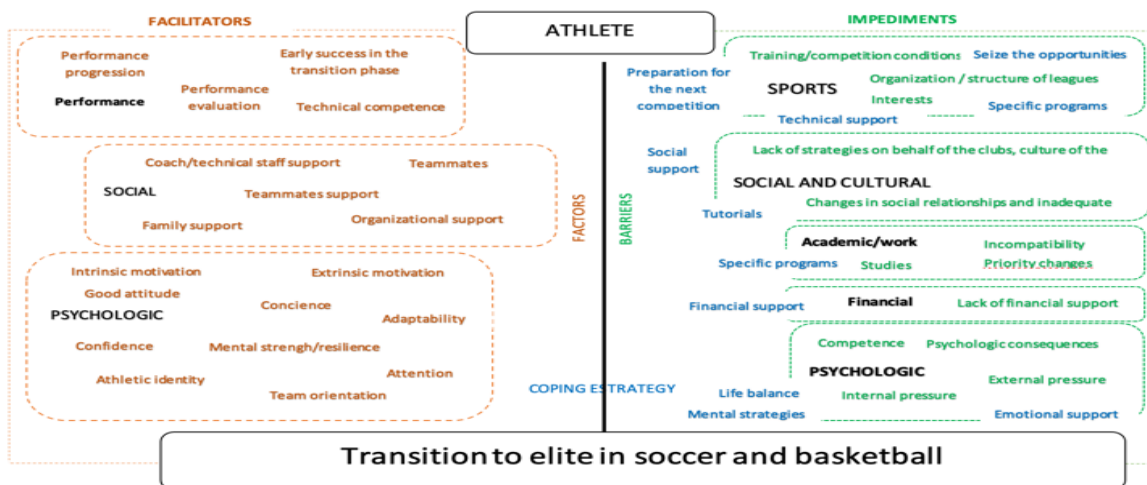


Figure 3. Transition to elite in soccer and basketball (Author's own creation).



CONCLUSIONS

The transition to elite in soccer and basketball is determined by a series of facilitating factors that can help athletes in this process, the facilitators being of a psychological nature (such as motivation, high levels of confidence, orientation towards the team and mental strength/ resilience) are the most decisive.

In the same way, possible barriers can occur during this process (of sports, academic/work, social, cultural and psychological nature). The main difficulties are usually of a psychological nature, highlighting the increased competition experienced and the pressure felt by the player, both internally and externally. For this reason, some strategies to overcome these difficulties suggest using other types of activities to improve people's vital balance or strategies aimed at increasing the emotional support felt by the athlete; it is also necessary to implement sport strategies.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

One of the most important limitations in this study has been that despite the great variety of articles that investigate the transition to the elite, the literature is not very abundant in these two sports, as well as the great variety of samples (types of sports, level of participants) existing.

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