
Career Transitions in the J-League: Theories and Practices of Career Support for Professional Football Players

Kiyoshi Takahashi

Kobe University

Kozaburo Shigeno

Japan Professional Football League

This paper examines the issue of career transitions with reference to football players in the Japanese professional football league (J-League) as well as the support systems in the case of J-League Career Support Center (CSC). According to the career transition theory, many changes take place as a result of events and non-events in a variety of realms, including roles, interpersonal relations, daily life, and ways of thinking. To cope with these changes, an individual needs to evaluate usable resources in the framework of 4S system: situation, self, support, and strategy. The Career Support Center, established within the J-League in 2002 for providing official support for the second careers, has focused on services for finding employment and education opportunities to both active players and retiring players. For example, the center has held joint try-outs for players who are out of the club's roster to find new teams, and has provided consultation for career in non-football occupations and higher education. The problems faced by retiring players can be classified into two categories. First is the psychological problem that losing their status as a professional footballer feels to them as though losing their own identity. Second is the technical problem that not only are they unable to imagine their long life after retirement, but also that they lack preparation for planning retirement financially, educationally, and vocationally. No matter how much assistance may be given, nothing will happen if the player himself is unwilling to endeavor for new career. It is important to get the ball rolling by himself.

I. Introduction

“My feelings became ambivalent. The ‘passion for football’ inside me had changed and, to be honest, I began to think about retiring. It was nothing to do with my age, strength, or body. It was a problem of my feelings. I had always lived my life striving to go higher and move further, but I suddenly felt that I had lost sight of my future....It was an unexpected mental state, even for me. Even though it was my beloved football, I couldn’t get fired up....I felt that I had a responsibility as a professional player. If I continued to play as a professional while having these feelings, it would be disrespectful towards the fans and supporters....I even told my family about my feelings.” (Atsushi Yanagisawa, in *Theory of Breakthrough* [Nakamura and others 2010, 78])

This is the inside story confessed by the footballer Atsushi Yanagisawa (former

member of the Japanese national team) in his decision to transfer from Kashima Antlers to Kyoto Sanga F.C., having experienced successive problems, such as the devastating miss shot in the match of 2006 World Cup, Germany and an injury during the 2007 season.

As is the case of Yanagisawa, everyone experiences major changes and turning points in their working life. The bigger the changes, the harder it is to adapt to them. Behind the glamorous scenes of professional football, the players listed in the professional league must retire from their playing careers at a very young age and find their next ways of living soon. It is for sure that unanticipated, terrible difficulties are waiting for them who experience a major transition from a professional sportsman to another career at an early stage in their life. This paper aims to think about the problem of career transitions with reference to the cases of football players in the Japanese league (J-League). It also learns about the effective career support systems, looking at the case of the J-League Career Support Center (CSC) which has been providing official support for the career related problems to players in Japan.

II. Theory of Career Transition

The theory of career transition (Schlossberg 1981; Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman 1995) provides many insights not only for academics researching career problems and practitioners providing support and counseling, but also for professional football players facing their turning point of life. Knowledge of career transition theories may be helpful at the very moment when they end athletic career and start new vocational career.

Individuals may feel anxious and upset at the point of career transitions (or milestones of their living), and sometimes may engage in baffling behavior that no one think as sensible. In order to understand such unfathomable things, it is important, first of all, to understand the phenomenon of transition in light of the theory. The cases of career transition differ significantly depending on the individual concerned. Particular circumstances and backgrounds in every person's case make it unique as to say that there is no identical phenomenon in career passage. Nevertheless, transitions can be broadly classified into two types (Schlossberg 2000).

The first category is the transitions that arise from encountering "events." This category can be further classified into "expected transitions" and "unexpected transitions" (Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman 1995; Guichard and Lenz 2005). "Expected transitions" refers to the major changes resulting from events that usually occur in a person's life (i.e., life events), for example, getting jobs, getting married, becoming a parent, acquiring property, the death of parents, and retirement. On the other hand, "unexpected transitions" refers to the changes of life as a result of unexpected (and, in many cases, unpleasant and unwanted) events, such as serious illness, accidents, corporate restructuring, job transfers overseas, and unwanted promotions.

The second category is "non-events," which indicate the life changes coming from

the fact that what one has been hoping for has not occurred after all. Non-events involve the influence of incidents that did not occur. Failing to get a permanent job, being unable to get married and remaining single, being denied to get promoted, losing the opportunity to acquire property, and not having enough wherewithal for retirement are all example of the second type of transition. Though it is not a sudden change, it insidiously impacts on the individual's life like a body blow.

In the case of professional football players, changes from events, such as retirement and being out of roster, happen sometimes expectedly and sometimes unexpectedly. Non-events such as no appearance in regular season games, being ill-compatible with the manager, and not being selected for the national team are more stressful for those who have sacrificed everything for the unrealized goals and those who have been recognized as football elites.

III. Three Facts of Career Transitions

Broadly speaking, three facts have been derived in transition theory (Guichard and Lenz 2005). Firstly, everyone experiences some kind of transition in their career that alters considerably the roles taken by individuals, their relationships with others, their everyday activities, and their ways of thinking. Transition may overturn life and lifestyle up to the point that he/she needs to start new life from the beginning. Major changes arise in a variety of realms, including (i) roles, (ii) relationships, (iii) routines, and (iv) assumptions (Schlossberg 2000). The bigger those changes, the greater the impact on the persons and those around them, and the longer the time required for them to get over and move forward.

The second fact is that the duration and reaction to the transition differ according to the period (timing) of changes. When initially facing a transition, people are drained by the new roles that they need to take on in the future, e.g., an unemployed person, father or mother, retiree, and widow or widower. Eventually, individuals break free of their previous roles and are able to accept the new roles. They go back and forth between those two roles in the process of adapting to the new situation. It takes commensurate amount of time until they can say farewell to the past, separate themselves from the past roles and relationships with others, and give up the familiar way of looking at things (assumptions) and everyday activities (routines). While some people overcome the transition instantaneously, most people take a number of years till they get over the physical and psychological difficulties caused by the career changes. All they can do is just wait until time heals the metaphorical wounds.

Bridges (1980) has modeled the transition process on the basis of three steps: (i) end → (ii) neutral zone → (iii) beginning. The most distinctive concept in his theory is the notion of neutral zone: a psychological state of uncertainty being neither one thing nor the other, that lies between the ending phase in which one regrets what has ended already and the beginning phase that one moves on, perceives the change in a positive manner, and be-

gins something new. The neutral zone shows the ambivalent situation in which one is swayed by emotions at both extremes: “I want to continue as I am” and “I want to change.”

The hiatus between the end and the beginning is the period of hesitation. The individual cannot go back even if he/she looks back over the past with regret, or does not know which direction to go. The person stops, hesitates, and frequently experiences a feeling of futility. Tanaka-Oulevey (2005) points out that things do not go well to the ex-elite athletes at the transition to the next career, since athletes cannot deal with properly the strong sense of loss that they aren't players any longer. This often occurs in those who strongly identify themselves as athletic contestants. She lists the following five as the typical responses demonstrated by athletes when they retire:

- (i) Emptiness by the loss of value gained from competition: feelings of desolation about the past that they can no longer experience the cheers of spectators, the thrill and excitement of victory, and the sense of unity with team-mates.
- (ii) The loss of identity: the faltering of their own *raison d'être* and identity following the end of player status.
- (iii) Anger about their retirement: (sometimes misdirected or unfocused) feelings of anger that arise at the unexpected, forced retirement in such cases as injury and being out of player's list.
- (iv) Anxiety about the future: a strong sense of uncertainty about the future that arises from the fact that they had been dedicated to competition and had neglected preparations outside their sporting career.
- (v) Despondency about the vanishing of special status: Mental stresses brought about by losing their special status as “player xxx” and starting a new career as a rookie.

Everybody experiences negative emotions in the “neutral zone,” consciously or unconsciously. Properly getting rid of negative emotions in this phase becomes the first step toward making a fresh start. With the flourishing of positive psychology today, the field of career transition is still dominated by negative psychology.

Thirdly, though transitions may appear to be the same outwardly, different people have different ways of coping with them. Even a single person copes well with one transition and does poorly in the next transition. Effective ways of coping vary according to the individual, the timing, and the circumstances.

On the premise that a career is stable, the career stage theory (Super 1957; Hall 1976; Levinson 1978) has postulated that there is a certain pattern in career that is common to all people. However, this conventional approach is not always applicable to the phenomena of transition. The situation is so unique and highly specific to the individual that it is hardly successful to put together a universal, general picture of transition unless one excludes the detailed aspects and increases the level of abstraction quite considerably. No pattern sometimes means no preparation. Therefore, it is not so easy to make plans for transition as to

purchase insurance in advance.

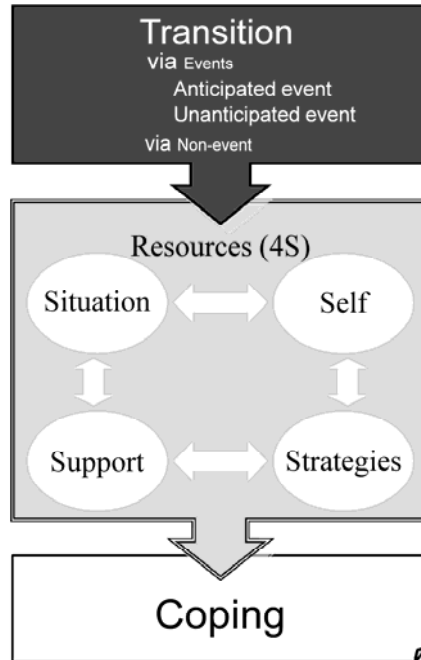
IV. The 4S System for Coping

To educate young people for coping with career transitions in advance, centers for providing career support are established in the J-League, as well as in universities and other educational institutions. Despite that those centers have provided career education seriously, in most cases, people get set for transitions after something has happened. Even if the staff at the J-League Career Support Center explain young players time and again that mental preparations for a second career are necessary, and even if professors teach the first-year students about the necessity of developing career and occupational image in four years' time, it has no impact on them because they are not yet facing the issue.

In order to handle with the career transition in a systematic fashion, even in an *ex post facto* action, what is needed is a system of coping. The coping system is a network of resources that can be utilized for coping in a specific circumstance. If one does not take the unique circumstances into consideration, the coping strategy can end up being irrelevant.

Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) stated that, in order to cope with the changes that occur as a result of transitions, it is helpful to use the framework of 4S System that can evaluate specific cases and identify resources for coping. The 4S System consists of the following four elements:

- (i) **Situation:** The individual faces the specific situation in a transition. The timing of the transition, causes, duration of impact, and past experiences in similar situations will differ depending on the person. It is fair to say that coping begins after the situational factors have been properly evaluated. Because the situational factors are sometimes thought as outside and beyond of one's reach, it is important to assess the degree to which the situation can be in control of oneself.
- (ii) **Self:** This represents the attributes of the individual who is coping with a transition. Environmental factors (situation) and personal factors (self) interact to give rise to the actual effect. So, it is necessary to undertake a proper evaluation in the individual side, too. The economic circumstances of the family, gender, age, and state of health, all significantly alter the way in which an individual copes with the transition. Moreover, from the perspective of counselors, an understanding of personality traits, e.g., optimism, tenacity, perseverance with anxiety, and personal values, impacts upon whether or not the individual copes well with the situation.
- (iii) **Support:** The individual can utilize diverse support from outside, e.g., family, friends, community, organizations, and third-party institutions. If there is no support available from those around the person, he/she may lapse into a state of helplessness, that makes coping even more difficult. According to the theory of social support, people around person can provide four types of assistance (House 1981):



Source: Compiled by the authors with reference to Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995).

Figure 1. The 4S Model of Career Transitions

- (a) emotional support, which involves keeping ears open to their complaints, consoling them, listening to what they say, and providing emotional assistance; (b) appraisal support, that provides criteria for judging whether or not the individual's behavior will be permitted by society, and whether it is right or wrong; (c) instrumental support, that includes substantial actions such as lending money when necessary, assisting with chores, and doing things on behalf of the individual; and (d) informational support, that provides helpful information, such as where and what kind of opportunities can be available. Because one person or one institution cannot provide all of these supports, it is important to make use of different people or institutions for different purposes.
- (iv) Strategy: This represents the approach or way of thinking adopted to coping. In general, one can alleviate stress from transition, if he/she can control the situation by re-evaluating it and utilizing various actions strategically. Because there is no one best way or no panacea for coping, it is important to have a good balance of diverse strategies. Like traditional Chinese medicine, the only way for dealing with the problem is to find the medicine that suits one's own body.

Figure 1 shows the 4S model that exhibits the flow from facing the transition, through

evaluating the resources, to coping with the problem.

Thus far, the article has focused on the theoretical side of career tradition. Let us leave the theory here and move on to the case of J-League's support for career transition. The next section will take a look at the history of professional football in Japan, followed by the description of activities undertaken by the Career Support Center in the J-League and the state of players who receive support. We would then like to provide hints regarding the actions taken by players in transition and support provided by those around them.

V. The History of Professional Football in Japan

The Japan Soccer League (JSL), the predecessor of the J-League, was born in 1965. Many teams were established in that period for the purpose of raising the morale of company employees, and continued their sport activities as corporate organizations, rather than as sport clubs or community institutions. As the competitiveness between teams increased thereafter, an impetus for the professionalization bore down on the society of Japanese football. The fact that professional footballers were permitted to participate in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics spurred on the tide of professionalization as well.

The history of professional football in Japan is generally thought to have begun with the birth of J-League in May 1993. This isn't correct, however. The movement towards the professional players had actually begun in 1985, eight years earlier than the beginning of the J-League.

Nineteen eighty five was the year when Yasuhiko Okudera, who played as a professional footballer in West Germany for nine years and had decided to return to his former team of Furukawa Electric (currently known as JEF United Chiba), and Kazushi Kimura, who had been a driving force in domestic footballing circles as a player on the Japanese national team and the Nissan Motors team (currently known as Yokohama F. Marinos), had their registration as "special licensed players (LP)" approved by the Japan Football Association. This means that both players could play football full-time and receive an income from it. The following year, when they registered as professional players for the 1986-87 season of the Japan Soccer League (JSL), marked the beginning of professional footballers in Japan.

The occupation of professional football player in Japan began in 1985 with only two qualifiers. When curtain rose on the J-League in 1993, the number of people with this occupation was in excess of 300, and by 2008 that figure had risen to more than 1,000. As the number of teams increases, the number of professional players increases. Since the establishment of the Career Support Center, more than 100 players each year have been cancelled their registration with the league and have lost their status as professional footballers. However, when the J-League was first founded, there was no third-party institution that supports players who have been compelled to search for a new occupation.

In 1996, three years after the J-League got underway, the J-League Pro-Footballers

Association (JPA at the time; currently known as the Japan Pro-Footballers Association, or JPFA) was established as a self-governing organization for players. The JPA, which was an organization for players, deployed its activities according to three principles, namely (i) aiming to develop and promote football culture; (ii) conducting activities that contribute to the society; and (iii) striving to improve the environment surrounding professional footballers. Taking the nature of players' association into account, "improving the environment surrounding professional footballers" is an important principle in the sense of supporting player's career after retirement. From the time of its founding, the JPA actively disseminated information about careers after retirement, reporting specific cases of retired England players in its newsletter.

In the JPA's survey in 1999, the percentage of players who responded to the question "Are you anxious about the life after retirement?" approached 90%, highlighting the anxieties of footballers with regard to their life after retirement and second careers. Professionalization meant the disappearance of traditional career path like becoming an employee of the parent company after retiring from playing career and dedicating oneself to the company's business. Now, professional players were compelled to acquire the new career paths and employment opportunities after retirement. At that time, efforts in this direction were left up to the individual totally.

The biggest issue was securing a new occupation to replace football. Unfortunately, there was no expert who can handle with this problem in the football society. The J-League considered the establishment of the Career Support Center within the league in order to acquire personnel with the expert knowledge and skills and to provide career support to football players.

A second career is an issue relating to the career prospects in the player's side. In other countries, it is the responsibility of players' associations to take initiative in implementing support activities. However, in the case of the J-League, due to the fact that only nine years had passed since its foundation, the J-League, which controls the league and clubs, took actions on behalf of the players' association.

In April 2002, the Career Support Center (CSC) was established as a department in the Japan Professional Football League (J-League). The CSC began its activities with the budget that was derived from 4% levy of the transfer fees accrued when players moved to other clubs (at that time).

VI. The Role of the Career Support Center in the J-League

What is the role of the Career Support Center? To put it in simple terms, it is "the bridge linking the player and society." Most professional players began football at a young age. Spending a tremendous amount of time and effort on their training and surviving intense competition, only a very small number are able to obtain the occupation of a professional footballer. Because they had dedicated too much to taking the position of profession-

als, in almost all cases, they lack preparation for their long life after retirement.

The major difference in player's mind before and after the inception of the professional league relates to the idea that a footballer is a profession or not. Most of the players in the days of the Japan Soccer League and the opening of the J-League never conceived that a professional league would emerge in Japan and that they could earn their living as a footballer. To be a Pro might be the story in overseas. Within Japan, it was unrealistic to see that football could be an occupation.

Consequently, the basic attitude of players at that time was that football was a route for an employment in a company. Even if they were recruited as a footballer at a company, keeping a job opportunity in that company was one of the major concerns when making a career choice.

In the year when the J-League celebrated its ninth birthday, the CSC was founded in order to provide support in finding jobs and educational opportunities to players who are about to face a career transition. Placing "career support for players" at the forefront, the CSC started such activities as providing job information, financial support for acquiring foreign language and PC skills, and internship opportunities during the off-season. The center focused on tangible support that helped professional footballers get an employment outside the football league.

There was no organization prior to the CSC that players could call for assistance. Even if they had career problems and retirement plans to be discussed, they were unable to obtain an objective, expert advice for possibilities of employment outside of football. Therefore, the establishment of the CSC was a major leap for the career transitions among professional footballers. Thereafter, taking the J-League initiative as a point of reference, similar organizations were established in rapid succession in other sports, such as the Nippon Professional Baseball Organization (NPB) Second Career Support Program in 2007 and the Japan Olympic Committee (JOC) Career Academy in 2008. These are the evidences of the J-League's foresight and advancement in terms of career support.

VII. Activities for the Athletic Career Support

The CSC provided support in finding employment and educational opportunities for both currently active players and retired (and retiring) players. When it initially commenced its services, many players believed that "it still is not relevant to me at present." They had the image that "the CSC is an organization for helping retired players acquire a second career." The expression "employment support" tended to be perceived as the support for acquiring a new occupation after retirement. The staffs of CSC realized these facts, thus approached active players with the message "how we can prolong your career as a professional footballer."

The concerns of lineup players are focused on the success as a professional footballer. In the middle of the season, the CSC staffs explained "how difficult to be a J-League play-

er,” based on the figures calculated from the number of registered professionals out of total number of players in Japan, trying to re-evaluate the value of J-League players. Moreover, the staffs interviewed “what the term ‘professional’ means to you” to top athletes in other sports and compiled an educational movie with the title “Living as a Professional.” This movie tried to improve the professionalism of J-League players by the real voices of athletes in other sports. It communicated that players should concentrate on the current role as professional footballers from the cycle of Plan-Do-Check-Act, rather than make general preparation for unanticipated retirement during the playing season. In fact, the movie exerted a major impact on players as well as staffs of J-League clubs. The messages from professional athletes were accepted favorably, and the movies were made several times.

On the other hand, to players who were informed to be out of players list, the center maintained its original position of supporting them by providing sincere career guidance. More specifically, the CSC staffs built relationships with players in places like clubhouses and training fields throughout the season. Based on such personal relationships, the staffs made direct contact to players when notice of no further contracts was disclosed for the following year. The staffs worked hard to gain understanding of player’s current situation and of desired career paths for the future. If appropriate, they tried to have a meeting in person to provide face-to-face counseling to the player.

From its establishment in 2002, the CSC worked cooperatively with the players association to hold the “joint J-League try-outs” as a tangible aid for those who wish to play in other team and to keep the football career in the league. Until that point, those players often contacted to other clubs for trials on personal bases after receiving a notice of contract termination. It was common that the dates for trails overlapped in two or three clubs. Moreover, taking a try-out at another club was viewed as a new job-hunting activity during the contracted year, and was counted as the unofficial activity for the affiliated club. It placed a great burden on players financially and psychologically.

Since 2002, the joint try-outs have been positioned as official J-League events, so if a player were injured in try-outs, the club had to deal with the case on the contracted agreement. The coordinated try-outs have made job-searching opportunities efficient in the professional footballer market and certainly beneficial both for clubs and for players. Gradually, the try-outs have been recognized as an opportunity for gathering transition players in one place and meeting with scouts and contract managers of most J-League clubs, spreading the idea that “if you want to keep playing, go to the try-outs first.”

In the beginning, however, many players possessed negative impressions on the joint try-outs. Numerous media rushed in the event to report the cases of famous players failed to renew their contracts as a symbolic metaphor of corporate restructuring prevailing in Japan. Many hesitated to participate in the event even they knew that it opened new employment opportunities to them.

Players who received no-contract notification have minimum time to recover from that shock but prepare for the try-outs quickly. Naturally, they are not in the mood for

thinking about the next career. If they fail to attract interests from other clubs at the try-outs and find no other way but retirement, it is the timing that CSC staffs finally approach them for personal interviews.

The second form of support is the guidance for higher education. The main target of this educational support is the high school graduates who contracted straightaway. Apportionment for correspondence education in famous private universities has been secured for currently-active players and players facing retirement, thereby broadening opportunities for receiving post-high school education during playing seasons. In addition, the CSC has distributed information concerning universities that accept retired J-League players via a special admission quota. Those universities perceived it as an excellent opportunity to improve visibility to high school students, as well as the chance to strengthen college football teams. Some ex-players who have college degrees obtained coaching positions in academia.

The CSC provided other forms of support including alumni meetings where active players got together with retired football players and athletes in other sports to share their experiences. Financial supports for acquiring computer skills, business etiquette, and English communication, as well as internships (miniature work experience) during the off-season were the activities that worked out for expanding career skills.

VIII. Attitudes of J-League Players to the Career Support

When the CSC was initially founded, the heaviest time and efforts were allowed to let players understand the objectives and services of the CSC, to put them as the “leading actors” of the career transition, and to build trustful relationships with them. The staffs visited all of the clubs and gave explanations of the CSC’s objectives and activities in formal presentation and casual conversation between practice sessions in each club.

However, there were antagonistic feelings toward the CSC. Because the center was founded for “providing career support for players facing retirement,” active players right in the middle of the season felt as if showing interests in the services and listening to what the staff said were the foretoken of unpleasant fate of retirement. At that time, many players demonstrated a disagreeable attitude and gave off an impression implying that “It’s none of my business.” In fact, the CSC staffs heard opinions from players like: “It’s better to think about career just on the verge of retiring,” and “Why don’t you give support when we are actually facing retirement?”

On the other hand, even if they were superficially indifferent, the players who were harboring subconscious anxieties welcomed this chance and took initiatives on their side to seek for career guidance and consultations. When the CSC’s staff visited clubs and explained past activities and new plans, some players called for advice on that site, and some got in touch via e-mail later on. Until the birth of CSC, discussions regarding retirement and future plans were commonly put under restraint in a very limited range of relationships, e.g., mentors/teachers in former high school or college, parents, and close friends. Undoubtedly,

the fact that the CSC launched support for second career problems as the third party and disseminated information officially and honestly brought a refreshing surprise to the players.

It was known from the JPA survey that the majority of players felt anxious about the post-professional life. Is it better to think about retirement in advance from days of active players, or to focus on the fierce competition in front of them and wait to do so till the time comes? The CSC activities disclosed the unnoticed, yet serious challenge of designing post-retirement careers to the minds of professional players.

IX. Problems of Athletic Career Transitions

To most players, the fact that they were unable to renew their contract is too tough to accept it. The psychological damage of losing status is often so high as to hardly conceal its shock. Therefore, when providing career support, it is necessary for the CSC to communicate with players having an empathy that they are in a devastated mental condition as to refuse support from the third party.

The second author (Shigeno) was once affiliated to J-League clubs as a professional footballer, and twice had the experience of contract termination. In the first time, though he expected it in advance, he felt not small sense of oppression when he actually received the notification. The second time was completely unexpected, because he had appeared in half of regular season games and felt confident in his record. He almost lost his memory because the shock was too strong to handle consciously. The notification was informed in just a few seconds, but he couldn't restore clear memory of the scene. He was unable to get what the person in front of his very eyes was saying and, though superficially calm, found it difficult to understand the circumstance for a while. What is worse, he suddenly suffered from acute emphyema and stomach ache and lost weight around 15 pounds in a week.

In order to understand the player's mental state accurately, the career advisor needs to take the strategy of active listening, rather than traditional approach of giving advice. Because players are highly sensitive to the notice of discharge and retirement, no matter how much the CSC staff may publicise their help and assistance, players won't talk about the sensitive issues truthfully unless having trustful personal relationships with the advisor. The introduction to CSC's principles and services during the season is only a port of entry activity to open doors to players who need to find a new occupation, functioning as the resort in case of need.

The acceptance of CSC services was facilitated by the fact that former players who shared values of the football community took the role of expert career advisors. In supporting the players, the CSC provided only information relevant to their circumstances and waived to seek job opening till the player requested to do so. From the second author's own case of athletic retirement and the experience as the career advisor working with the fellow players, he is keenly aware that no matter how much people around the player push him to

go ahead, nothing will change unless the player himself is willing to change. The greatest support is to give the player a clue and impetus to get the ball rolling by himself. Restraining the good will to offer a helping hand and taking a position of stay is the best strategy for the true help. Paradoxically, for professional footballers who are always at the center of attention, true support does not mean to give but withhold a helping hand.

Broadly speaking, players anticipating retirement may face two types of problems. The first is the psychological problem that losing status as a professional footballer feels to them as if losing their own identity. Outwardly, it is a loss of major source of income that is indispensable to secure their living. Yet psychological loss is more serious than that.

The second author lost his position as a professional player just in three years. After the long years of efforts sacrificing almost everything in his life to the point, it was like a nightmare fell over him suddenly. He dropped in the maze of life for several years, worrying and wondering what to do in the future as the lay person with football skills only.

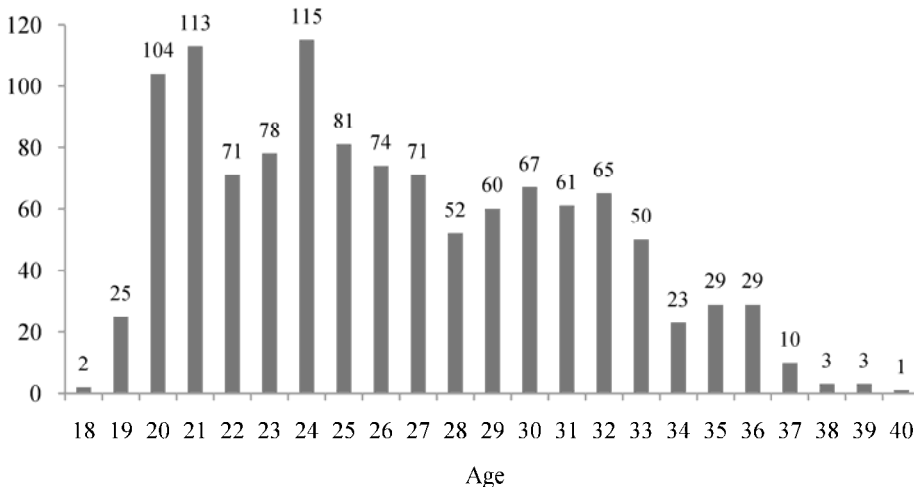
Majority of professional footballers are the football elites having no experience of substitutes at high school age. Once joined in a professional team, they may experience hardships that have never happened in their elite career, for example, failing to hold starter positions and being out of roster instantly. Recovering from those incidents requires an inconceivable level of pains.

Most of the footballers in the J-League have dreamt of becoming professionals since their childhood. It is regrettable that the “completion” of childhood dream sometimes hinders from moving forward in their subsequent career. An early death of realized dreams makes the footballer’s problem more complex.

Every year since the establishment of the CSC, the number of players who lose membership with the league at the end of the year has reached in excess of 100. The average age of terminated players is around 26 (see Figure 2). For a typical J-League player who signs a professional contract at the graduation of high school (age 18), their average lifespan as a professional footballer may be as short as eight years. To borrow the words of the footballer Kenta Kano (Yokohama F. Marinos), the life of footballer is something like:

“For players who turned to professional straightaway from the high school, it is often said that the third season is the year of showdown. In three years, you will be ready for the game. If you cannot take a starting line-up by that point, the team won’t put you in the system any longer. There will be no fourth year....” (Kenta Kano, in *Theory of Breakthrough* [Nakamura and others 2010, 233–34])

For most of the players whose contract comes to a dead-end, the number of appearances in regular season games may be zero or in single digit. Those who are in reserve regularly may predict a career crisis at the very early stage. In many cases, it is so stressful that total body and soul get out of condition.



Source: J-League Career Support Center.

Figure 2. Number of J-League Players Whose Registration Has Been Cancelled (2002–2009)

The second problem is more technical in nature. Not only are they unable to envisage their long life after retirement, but also that they lack preparation for planning retirement financially, educationally, and vocationally. Because players have spent almost all time to football since childhood and walked on the “route to football” without looking aside, they sometimes have no prior experience to work on the part-time basis or no clear image of earning a living. They attach less importance to education and occasionally perform poorly at school. Saving and investing money are out of their interests. Accordingly, it is a big challenge for them to develop a new vision for the long life after retirement and to acquire new skills that help them to obtain employment, such as computer skills, business etiquette, and English communication.

X. In Order to Survive the Transition Happily

According to Ben-Shahar (2007), the happiness from goal achievement does not last long. The feeling of relieved and relaxed after crossing the finish line is a fleeting sense of freedom that there is no need to bear on hardship any longer, and people sometimes mistake it for bliss. Clear goals like “becoming a professional football player,” “taking a league title,” and “being selected in the national team,” compel self-sacrifice naturally. Activities of personal interest and fun may change into the subjects of patience and sacrifice. Many times, we can hear athletes say “I’ll hold everything out until I achieve my goal. All daily activi-

ties become a means of goal accomplishment.” However, the euphoria of having a status of Pro’s and the joy of victory are unexpectedly short-lived. Players are heavily involved in perpetual competition for winning the goals, then unable to enjoy their happiness after attaining goals at last.

To be in a state of happiness, it is necessary to alter the tragic sense of self-sacrifice for noble objectives and taste the joyful sense in beautiful daily life without feeling guilty. This does not mean abandoning oneself to pleasure, but rather living whilst enjoying one’s current activity and feeling linkage to the future. To put it another way, it involves striking a balance between instrumental benefits that lead to future goal attainment and teleological benefits that focus on enjoying happiness in the present.

In the period of major career transitions, or in “the neutral zone” (Bridges 1980), the feeling of emptiness resulting from goal disappearance exerts a highly detrimental effect on typical athletes who tend to engage in goal-oriented activities. Being in a state of “object loss” can delay coping with the transition.

Conducting a qualitative study of second career through interviews with J-League players, Takahashi (2010) suggested that during career transition phases, three skills are required in the sequential order: (i) conceptual skills (general design and vision for a career) → (ii) human skills (skills for interpersonal relationships and formation of personal networks) → (iii) technical skills (job-related knowledge and skills required to get employed). In the initial stages of a career transition when players are overwhelmed by the shock, the most urgent issue is to develop a concept or vision that can clarify the direction of their own career. The practices of CSC emphasized the conceptual skills as well.

More than anything else, it is essential for people in transition to have spontaneity and actions on own initiatives to survive independently. Daisuke Nasu, player of Jubilo Iwata and the captain of Japan’s team at the Athens Olympics, exhibits the positive attitude of J-League players who hang in there in all situations. His word echoes forcefully in the ears of people who are facing a career transition as well.

“It’s not only footballers who have good times and bad times, but everyone does. The important thing is, what you feel and what actions you take in bad times. It is a preparation for the next step. If you have energy to link your feelings of depression or frustration to the next step and to take action, you’ll be able to get something.” (Daisuke Nasu, in *Theory of Breakthrough* [Nakamura and others 2010, 153])

References

- Ben-Shahar, Tal. 2007. *Happier: Learn the secrets to daily joy and lasting fulfillment*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Bridges, William. 1980. *Transitions: Making sense of life’s changes*. Cambridge, MA: Per-

- seus Books.
- Guichard, Jean, and Janet Lenz. 2005. Career theory from an international perspective. *Career Development Quarterly* 54, no. 1:17–28.
- Hall, Douglas T. 1976. *Careers in organizations*. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman.
- House, James S. 1981. *Work stress and social support*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Levinson, Daniel J. 1978. *The seasons of a man's life*. New York: Knopf.
- Nakamura, Shunsuke, and others. 2010. *Topparon* [Theory of breakthrough]. Tokyo: KK Bestsellers .
- Takahashi, Kiyoshi. 2010. J-riga ga picchi wo saru to iukoto [When J-League players leave the pitch]. In *J rigu no kodo kagaku: Ridashippu to kyaria no tame no kyokun* [The behavioral science of the J-League: Lessons for leadership and careers], ed. Kiyoshi Takahashi, 175–99. Tokyo: Hakuto Shobo.
- Tanaka-Oulevey, Miyako. 2005. Kyaria toranjishon: Supotsu senshu no sekando kyaria kyoiku [Career transition in Sports]. *The Japanese Journal of Labour Studies* 47, no. 4:67–69.
- Schlossberg, Nancy K. 1981. A model for analyzing human adaptation to transition. *Counseling Psychologist* 9, no.2:2–18.
- . 2000. *Overwhelmed: Coping with life's ups and downs*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Schlossberg, Nancy K., Elinor B. Waters, and Jane Goodman. 1995. *Counseling adults in transitions: Linking practice with theory*. 2nd ed. New York: Springer.
- Super, Donald. E. 1957. *Psychology of careers*. New York: Harper & Row.