

Analysis of Career Support Programs for Olympic Athletes in Japan with Fifteen Conceptual Categories

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Abstract—The Japan Sports Agency has made efforts to unify several career support programs for Olympic athletes prior to the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. One of the programs, the Japan Olympic Committee Career Academy (JCA) was established in 2008 for Olympic athletes at their retirement. Research focusing on the service content of sport career support programs can help athletes experience a more positive transition. This study was designed to investigate the service content of the JCA program in relation to athletes' career transition needs, including any differences of the reasons for retirement between Summer/Winter and Male/Female Olympic athletes, and to suggest the directions of how to unify the career support programs in Japan after hosting the Olympic Games using sport career transition models. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and analyzed the JCA director who started and managed the program since its inception, and a total of 15 conceptual categories were generated by the analysis. Four conceptual categories were in the result of "JCA situation", 4 conceptual categories were in the result of "Athletes using JCA", and 7 conceptual categories were in the result of "JCA current difficulties". Through the analysis it was revealed that: the JCA had occupational supports for both current and retired Olympic athletes; other supports such as psychological support were unclear due to the lack of psychological professionals in JCA and the difficulties collaborating with other sports organizations; and there are differences in tendencies of visiting JCA, financial situations, and career choices depending on Summer/Winter and Male/Female athletes.

Keywords—Career support programs, causes of career termination, Olympic athlete, Olympic committee.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE Japan Sports Agency launched a Sports Career Support Consortium in January 2017, three years before the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games in order to unify all Japanese sports organizations (e.g. Japanese Olympic Committee and Japan Sport Council) who individually had developed career support programs for top athletes including Olympic athletes. The overall aim was to design a career support program with consistency and continuity for present, retiring, and retired top athletes [1].

At present, the Japan Olympic Committee (JOC) career support program, called "JOC Career Academy" is for present, retiring and retired Olympic athletes, and the Japan Sport Council (JSC) career support program, called "JSC Dual Career Education Program" is available for present and retiring athletes.

When designing a career support program for Olympic athletes at their retirement, it is important to consider athletes' needs. The JOC started developing a career program for

Olympic athletes in 2002, and then launched the JCA to coincide with the launch of the National Training Center in 2008. Hong & Coffee [2] recently conducted a survey about the contents of each career program across 19 countries, including Japan, and found that: the JOC is responsible to deliver the JCA program; JCA runs its own program different from the International Olympic Committee Athletes Career Program; JCA offers tailored support services depending on athletes' needs; and JCA does not have specific practitioners who have knowledge of athletic career transition for the program. The JCA offers its own program with tailored support services despite the absence of specific practitioners. Details of what kind of specific practitioners are absent and what kind of tailored support services are available at JCA are not clear.

Since the Olympic Games constitute one of the major career transitions for athletes, it is important to have the knowledge of athletic career transitions to tailor programs for supporting athletes at their retirement [3]. In order to better understand the retirement of top athletes, including Olympic athletes, several career transition conceptual models have been developed. One of the most cited models in sports is the Conceptual Model of Adaptation to Career Transition proposed by Lavallee et al. [4]. Oulevey et al. [5] conducted a quantitative research using the model and found the differences with regard to the causes of career termination between Summer/Winter and Male/Female Japanese Olympians. It was found that: a) Female Summer Olympians (FSOs) tended to retire for psychological reasons—namely, either they had satisfied their objectives or they no longer enjoyed participating in their sport; b) Female Winter Olympians (FWOs) retired because they lacked the money needed to continue; and c) Male Summer & Winter Olympians (MSOs & MWOs) retired because of searching for paid employment. It was also found that FWOs required approximately twice the amount of money to continue their sports compared to the other three categories.

Regarding the retirement of top athletes, it is important to consider the athlete from a holistic perspective. For this reason, the athletic career model of Wylleman [6] has been also used to design career programs. According to this model, the necessary support at retirement includes Athletic, Psychological, Psychosocial, Academic, Vocational, Financial, and Legal aspects of the athlete's development. The most widely researched part of the model is the psychological aspect, as athletes have various psychological problems depending on the causes of career termination [7].

It would be valuable for career support programs to offer services depending on the different causes of sport career termination and their multiple aspects of development;

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however, no research to date has examined the service content of sport career support programs in relation to athletes' career transition needs. Oulevey et al. [5] pointed out that it is necessary to investigate whether JCA is tailored to athletes' causes of career termination. Toyoda [8] also suggested that investigating and verifying the effects of the existing career support program that has been established in Japan would lead to even more useful career support. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to investigate the service content of the JCA program in relation to athletes' career transition needs, including any differences in the reasons for retirement between Summer/Winter and Male/Female Olympic athletes. Based on the research findings, recommendations will be made on how to unify the career support in Japan after hosting the Olympic Games using sports career transition models.

II. METHOD

To investigate the service content of the JCA program in relation to athletes' career transition needs, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the JCA director who started and managed the program since its inception. The research focused on the following questions: What service contents are included in JCA program; Are there difference between Summer/Winter and Male/Female Olympic athletes using the JCA program; and Are there any challenges in the JCA program in tailoring the program to the needs of athletes.

A. Informed Consent

The research purpose was explained and consent was obtained to record data with the IC recorder. To respect human rights and ensure security, a sufficient ethical consideration was given, such as guaranteeing the right of the subject to choose to stop participating in the research at any point. In this research, since the subject has only one job role in Japan, the individual may be identified. The subject signed a letter of consent to participate in the research based on the understanding of the research purpose.

B. Research Period and Method

The interview of the JCA director was conducted with one to one interview method in June 2016 for an approximately 90 minutes. An interview guide was prepared, and a semi-structured interview method was adopted.

The interview schedule included the following: The background and the current situation of JCA; any issues when the JCA was launched; successful and unsuccessful program contents; Differences of using JCA depending on causes of career terminations; differences of using JCA depending on Summer/Winter and Male/Female Olympic athletes; and, any thoughts for future directions about JCA.

C. Analysis

All data obtained from the interviews were transcribed into type text. The text data was analyzed by the following four steps with reference to Sato's qualitative analysis method [9].

Creating Document Segments

From the text data, three themes were extracted as semantic

units: JCA past and current situations; athletes using JCA; and JCA current challenges. These document segments are the source of the analysis.

Open Coding

Each document segment collected in each theme was labeled depending on the kind of semantic content included and summarized.

Focused Coding

Focusing on the similarity and difference of labels, each label with similar contents was coded. Each code was labeled with more semantic units than in open coding, and sub categories were generated.

Conceptual Categorization

The sub-categories generated by the focused coding were collected and integrated to conceptual categorization into higher-level abstract categories.

D. Credibility and Certainty

Based on the methodology of qualitative research [10], the analysis procedure from the viewpoint of credibility (reality of the data) and certainty (whether the data or procedures can be relied on) was verified [11].

Interviewing the subject, who was involved in the establishment of the JCA and management of it as program director, enabled detailed descriptions and ensured credibility. In addition, co-researchers confirmed the analysis process from a consistent perspective, and when other interpretations occurred, a discussion was made until consensus was reached, thereby ensuring certainty.

The first author of the research was the principal analyst, who is a sports psychology expert with over 15 years of research and practice focusing on athletic careers. In addition, since the co-researchers had expertise in sport psychology and qualitative research methods, the analysis was possible with a view from a specialized field along with the research theme.

By conducting semi-structured interviews using an interview guide, it was possible to focus on the research theme while providing flexibility. In addition, the researchers asked questions in a non-instructive manner, so as not to prompt or direct the subject's remarks, and analyzed the subject's own words as transcribed.

In the qualitative data analysis conducted in this research, the entire context of the original document was repeated many times rather than in one direction of data reduction, and the analysis was conducted with emphasis on bidirectional flow.

III. RESULTS

Conceptual categories were generated for each of the three themes: 1) JCA past and current situations; 2) Athletes using JCA; and 3) JCA current challenges.

Result 1: JCA Past and Current Situations (Fig. 1)

As a result of summarizing the document segments related to the "JCA past and current situations", 26 labels were obtained. Then coding for each label with similar content resulted in four

conceptual categories by focusing on the similarity and difference of labels. In the process of coding 26 labels, one

label did not belong to more than one category, and was eventually coded into any one of the conceptual categories.

Conceptual category	Sub category	Labels from Open coding	
Starting JCA	Why started	Japanese companies can't support athletes financially	
	How to start	Holding seminars to athletes about what career is Survey to National Federations about athletic career program Trying to start projects collaborating other organizations Starting occupational support at their retirement Copying the program design from Professional soccer association career project	
Situation of JCA	Difficulty at the start	Contacting Retiring athletes Publishing a flyer explaining what it is	
		No professional individuals in athletic retirement among the program Irregular speeches from retired athletes Seminar about communication skills Seminar about 100 times yearly	
	Seminar	Counseling by non-professionals Lack of knowledge of counseling Unorganized counseling system Collecting retiring athletes	
		Marketing	Trying to do survey for science based career assistance
Asu-Navi (Occupational support)	Collaboration with JOC, NFs,	Establishing a project to support both athletes and coaches Group meetings with College professors and NFs for problem solving Establishing a project because of the shortage of the budget from JOC Trying to establish a project to settle a career advisor system within NFs Difficulties of communications with JOC career staffs	
		Occupational support	Occupational support collaboration with Japan association of corporate executives Occupational support especially to winter sports athletes
		Staff for Asu-Navi	Non-professional staffs for starting the support Continuation the Asu-Navi Contract renewal
			Sponsoring companies' employees coming to become Asu-Navi staffs
			Occupational support for retired athletes
Asu-Navi Next			

Fig. 1 JCA Past and Current Situations

A. Starting JCA

This category was created to describe the beginning of career support (JCA) at JOC. One label was given regarding the increasing number of companies withdrawing from In addition, since only one label was obtained about what was difficult from the beginning, it was classified as "difficulty at the start". "Starting JCA" was composed of these 9 sub-categories.

B. Situation of JCA

This category was created to describe the current situation of JCA. The sub-category "Seminar" was obtained from the three labels on seminar content. The sub-category

"Counseling" was obtained from the three labels on the methods and quality of consultations conducted. The sub-category, "Marketing" was obtained from the two labels on conducting research and gathering people. The sub-category "Collaboration with JOC and NFs" was derived from the five labels on coordinating with other organizations to determine JCA action plans. "Situation of JCA" consisted of these four subcategories.

C. Asu-Navi (Occupational Support)

This category was created to explain Asu-Navi's activities as an occupational support. The sub-category "Occupational

Support" consisted of two labels. What kind of corporate association helped the support and what kind of athletes used the support were in the category. The sub-category "Staff for Asu-Navi" was derived from the label on how to obtain the human resources needed to maintain the support. "Asu-Navi" consisted of these two subcategories.

D. Asu-Navi Next

This category was created to describe Asu-Navi Next's activities. As only one label was obtained for the support of retired athletes, it was independently classified as the conceptual category of "Asu-Navi Next".

Result 2: Athletes Using JCA (Fig. 2)

A total of 29 labels were obtained in this category. Focusing on the similarity and difference of labels, four conceptual categories were obtained.

A. Tendencies of Visiting Reasons

This category was created as one that describes who came and asked for what. The subcategories of "Summer athletes", "Winter athletes", "Male athletes" and "Female athletes" are obtained.

Conceptual category	Sub category	Labels from Open coding
Tendencies of visiting reasons	Summer athletes	Not many visitors since they come to National Training Center for training camps Not many since it's difficult for them to get sponsors for occupational support
	Winter athletes	Visiting for getting financial support Coming to get support since they come to National Training Center in the off season
	Male athletes	They don't come until they really have problems They come to get sponsors with female athletes
	Female athletes	Want to talk about performance and daily problems Want to talk about relating to sponsors Career planning after retirement
Financial situation of athletes	Summer athletes	Team sports have companies' support Individual sports are difficult to get sponsoring
	Winter athletes	Sports disciplines which don't have sponsoring go to Asu-Navi Getting sponsors to continue sports When company stops sponsoring problems occur Financial problems influence reasons to retire
Characteristics of visiting athletes		Willing to use the support Having a career plan Needing information and networking
Career choices after retirement	Un-flexible choices	Gaps between the athletes' desires and intentions of their clubs Some don't want to continue staying in their clubs to work as a second career Cultural tendencies not able to say what kind of careers athletes want to pursue
	Summer athletes career choices	Ball sports disciplines tend to become coaches in their clubs Depending on sports discipline, no possibility to choose coaching career Tendencies to believe it is the best to stay in their clubs to work
	Winter athletes career choices	Depending on sports discipline, no possibility to choose coaching career Tendencies to choose to start business by their own
	Male athletes career choices	Strong bond with their sports disciplines
	Female athletes career choices	More and more free choices Not strong bond with their sports so that diverse choices of career

Fig. 2 Athletes Using JCA

B. Financial Situation of Athletes

This category was created to describe the characteristics of the financial situation differences of summer and winter sports. The subcategory of "Summer athletes" and "Winter athletes" are collected by the three labels each. "Financial situation of athletes" consisted of two sub-categories.

C. Characteristics of Visiting Athletes

This category was generated to describe the characteristics of the athletes who come to the support voluntarily. The three labels relating to the fact that athletes who come by themselves are prepared in advance have been consolidated. Since there were no other sub-categories, they were independently classified into the conceptual category of "Characteristics of visiting athletes".

D. Career Choices after Retirement

This category was created to describe the career choices by athletes. The sub-category "Un-flexible Choices" was obtained from the three labels on the gaps between athletes' desires and their clubs' intentions. The labels on the tendencies of career choices by athletes depending on Summer/Winter and Male/Female differences were obtained as subcategories. "Career choices after retirement" consisted of five subcategories.

Result 3: JCA Current Challenges (Fig. 3)

By focusing on the meaning and content of each, 23 labels

were obtained in this category. Focusing on the similarity and difference of labels, seven conceptual categories were obtained.

A. Operational Difficulties in JOC

This category was created to explain difficulties within the organization, JOC.

B. Difficulties in JCA

This category was created to explain the difficulties in operating JCA. The sub-category "No Systematic support" was obtained by collecting the three labels related to counseling and seminar service contents. The sub-category "Lack of specialized personnel" was also derived from two labels on lack of professionals. JCA was not clear to decide their services for whom and from what period of time. Because of the ambiguity, the three labels were obtained in the subcategory of "Needs extract from athletes". These three sub-categories were coded at a higher level of abstraction and were called "Difficulties in JCA".

C. Difficulties in Asu-Navi

This category was created to describe the difficulties of corporate collaboration that are essentials for running Asu-Navi. The sub-category "Changes in the number of participating companies" was obtained from the two labels on securing Asu-Navi participants from both athletes and companies. The two labels for companies using Asu-Navi resulted in a

subcategory, “Asu-Navi benefit of sponsoring companies”. Only one label was obtained regarding the fact that the staff are from sponsoring companies to reduce labor costs. It was

independently classified into the sub-category “Staff from sponsoring companies”. “Difficulties in Asu-Navi” consisted of these three sub-categories.

Conceptual category	Sub category	Labels from Open coding
Operational difficulties in JOC		Limitations of JOC executives' understanding of careers Issues related to cooperation with Japan Sports Council (JSC) Issues related to the JOC Athlete Committee's activity policy
Difficulties in JCA	No Systematic support	Seminar system that cannot be systematized Asu-Navi is working but other service contents (counselling and seminar) are not organized Systematic seminar and counselling contents contributing development of Asu-Navi
	Lack of specialized personnel	No professionals to design and run the JCA counselling system Free staffs from JOC sponsoring companies
	Needs extract from athletes	Athletes need to know what JCA is Retired athletes are not coming to National Training Centre No data of retired athletes
Difficulties in Asu-Navi	Changes in the number of participating companies	Faced with the reality of difficult employment on the corporate side Increasing participation of Asu-Navi since Tokyo 2020 was decided
	Asu-Navi benefit of sponsoring companies	Good status to become a staff in JCA
Difficulties in NF	Secure free human resources	Providing facts related to national projects to companies No need of money but no professionals in athlete career Not promoting well how important JCA is
Lack of using past evidences	Difficulties working with sport psychology staff in JISS Difficulties copying other elite program systems	Gap between sport psychologists and JCA staffs Not able to set the career professionals in each NFs
Difficulties in Management		Management for Asu-Navi system Management for JCA
Ideal career support		Assignment of career professionals within NFs Human educational program for athletes to transfer their acquired skills from sports to society

Fig. 3 JCA Current Challenges

D. Difficulties in NF

This category was created to explain National Federations' understanding of career support. Since only one label was obtained regarding the NF's lack of understanding of ongoing career support, it was independently considered the conceptual category “Difficulties in NF”.

E. Lack of Using Past Evidences

This category was created to explain not being able to utilize the overseas career support successful case at the beginning of JCA. From the label on the gap between the overseas organizations with a counseling system by psychological experts and the current situation of JCA, two subcategories were obtained as “Difficulties working with sport psychology staff in JISS (Japan Institute of Sports Sciences)” and “Difficulties copying other elite program systems”. From these, the code “Lack of using past evidence” was used.

F. Difficulties in Management

This category was created to describe the difficulties in managing JCA as a director. The sub-category “Difficulties in management” was obtained by collecting the two labels related to the Asu-Navi as a director and the management duties in JCA. Since there was no other sub-category, it was independently classified as a conceptual category of “Difficulties in management”.

G. Ideal Career Support

This category was created to describe optimal career support based on the subject's experience as a director. The two labels on the assignment of career professionals within NFs and the purpose of career support have been consolidated into a conceptual category called “Ideal career support”.

IV. DISCUSSION

The results of the analysis of “JCA past and current situations” revealed how sport career programs in Japan have developed. In particular, since the 1990s, as a number of companies withdrew from sports support due to the recession, the availability of Asu-Navi and Asu-Navi Next for athletes' employment has important implications as occupational and financial supports. “Athletes using JCA” also generated conceptual categories of occupational and financial issues, similar to the results of “JCA past and current situations”. This suggests the importance of occupational and financial support.

Results also showed there were differences between the Summer/Winter and Male/Female athletes regarding the tendencies to visit and access JCA services, financial situations, and their career choices after retirement. It is necessary to provide multifaceted support, not only depending on the causes of career termination, but also for the situations each Olympic athlete has.

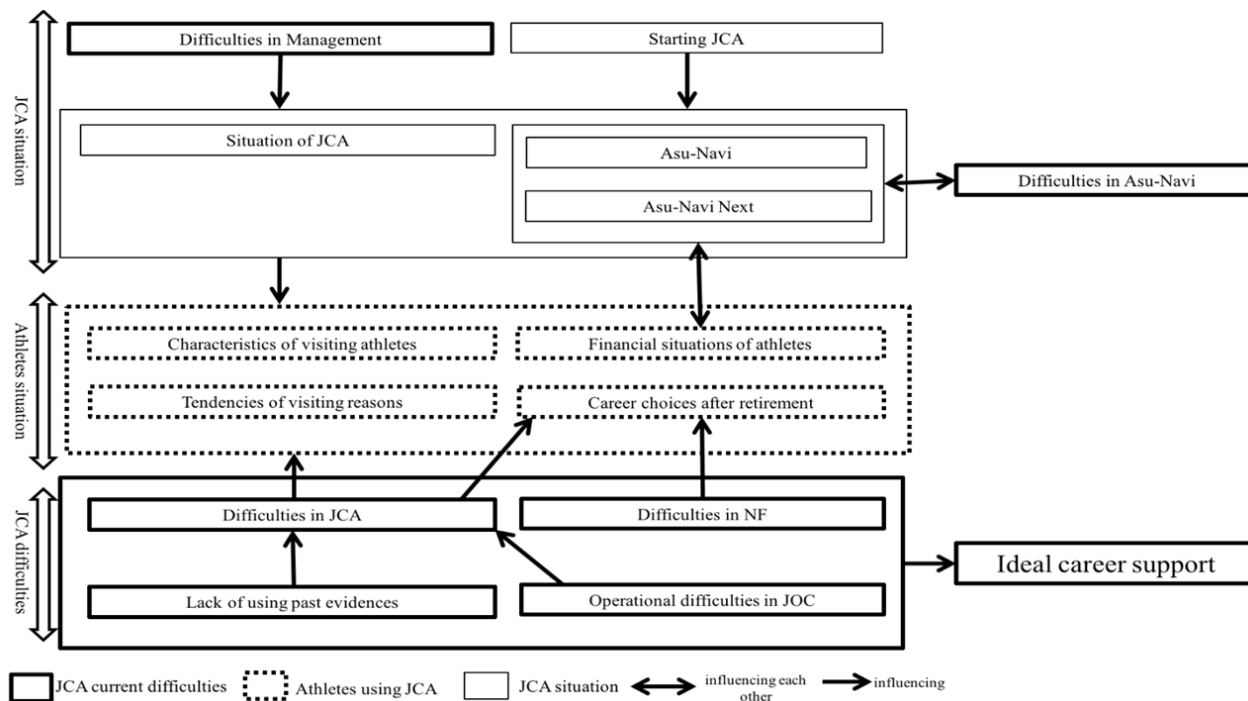


Fig. 4 JCA Situation, Difficulties, and Athletes' Situation

“JCA current challenges” revealed two issues, “Issues on JCA's shortage of human resources” and “Issues on JCA systematic support”. Although JCA started with a shortage of human resources, results suggested that securing adequate human resources was an issue. Wylleman [12] pointed out that support services should be provided in an interdisciplinary way, including psychologists, medical doctors, physiotherapists, strength and condition experts, nutritionists, academic and vocational support professionals, and financial experts based on the Holistic Athletic Career Model. Since at JCA there appears to be a shortage of staff competency to meet the needs of athletes, “Counseling by non-professionals” has been done. Therefore, research on appropriate human resources is an issue for the future. Similarly, it is questionable what kind of evaluation system has been used to secure human resources in the areas of occupational and financial support. Asu-Navi has been beneficial for both the JOC and the corporate sponsors. JOC was able to complete this project at lower cost as part of the human resources was provided by the corporate sponsors. The sponsors have been also proud of helping athletes as a national project. However, the ability and aptitude standards of the human resources necessary to carry out the support services have not been specifically defined, and in that sense, as described in the HAC model, research needs to be done to secure “experts” for the future.

Results showed that the service contents of seminars and counseling sessions were not systematized. In this situation, it will be difficult for athletes to know what kinds of support JCA provides. In fact, from the results of “Athletes using JCA”, it is clear that only athletes who already have a clear awareness of issues with their career, as well as those who want to get

sponsors and who have financial problems, are visiting. From these results, towards unifying the programs, it is necessary to consider career supports that meet the needs of athletes using various career transition models as a framework. In particular, various prior studies have required a career support tailored to differences in the reasons for retirement and psychological problems peculiar to retirement. In a unified program, it was suggested that Olympic athletes need to have opportunities to understand how to use their career support effectively.

In conclusion, the relationships between all 15 conceptual categories generated by the qualitative analysis method were organized focusing on three items related to career support: “JCA situation”, “difficulties”, and “athletes' situation” (Fig. 4). JCA started with the need of occupational support, so that Asu-Navi and Asu-Navi Next was started. The services of Asu-Navi and Asu-Navi Next were beneficial for both JOC and the corporate sponsors. Since part of the human resources was provided by the corporate sponsors, JOC was able to complete these projects at lower cost. On the other hand, JCA had difficulties with other sports organizations. Due to the lack of athletic career professionals in JCA, the support system was not systematized, and there was no multifaceted support as shown in the HCA model. It has become clear that this situation and current difficulties are affecting career support for athletes.

The results of this research show that while sport career programs in Japan (JCA) provide occupational and financial supports, the support for athletic, psychological, psychosocial, academic and legal aspects were not found. Further research needs to be done to know more specifically what kind of support is needed and what kind of human resources are needed for career support programs for Olympic athletes in Japan.

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