# **Sans Partner Case Study**

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SPP 6522: Sport & Performance Psychology Interventions

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**Chapter 11: Transition Out of College Sport**

Shawndra Banks is a student-athlete nearing graduation without a post-graduation plan. As a small forward on The U’s women’s basketball team, she has dreams of playing abroad in Europe and traveling. As a communication and marketing major Shawndra has no specific goals but does well with public speaking, presenting, and demonstrating how things work (Coumbe-Lilley, 2019). When her supportive parents inquire about her plans after graduation, she reveals she does not have a plan and instead was hoping her dreams of playing basketball professionally would just happen for her. Shawndra was discouraged after meeting with a career counselor on campus as she felt the counselor did not know her or her situation and she did not believe that filling out a bunch of assessments was a meaningful or quick enough process for her situation. The meeting produced acute stress that caused an aggressive outburst towards her teammates in practice so coach Becky insisted Shawndra meet with the sport psychologist. Meeting with Javier gave her an idea of where to start planning her transition out of college, but her lack of direction is a concern. Shawndra needs support to explore her strengths/skills and how they apply to a career whether that be in basketball or elsewhere. This case involves collegiate student-athlete transitions, career planning, and identity exploration.

**Client Intake/Needs Analysis**

I will take a holistic approach to Shawndra’s case to cover multiple domains of her life as they pertain to her situation. No matter how much my position as a sport psychology consultant pertains to her athletic role, we can’t deny that non-athlete and non-student stressors affect all other domains. In order to gain her trust I will start with a “how are you feeling right now?” to open the conversation. A construalist approach will be used as I let her guide me to where her needs are. I can assume a lot about her role as a graduating college-athlete and there is a lot of literature around the subject, however the specifics of her experience and how she perceives it will provide me with unique factors to consider.

How I operate will be explained: I want to have a conversation about her current situation and what plan of action she is considering. What she tells me will allow me to sketch a profile of someone who either wants and has the capability to play professional basketball or someone who is perhaps averse to retirement or it may develop into something else entirely. Shawndra’s lack of action regarding her issue indicates she might not know what she needs and from whom. Since she already feels that formal assessments are a waste of time, I will gather initial information via semi-structured interview in a comfortable setting of her choosing (Coumbe-Lilley, 2019). I will use the Sport-Clinical Intake Protocol to reference the details of her presenting problem, how she perceives her presenting concern, existing social supports, and what she has already done to help her presenting problem (Taylor & Schneider, 1992). The Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) will be issued to her during the session to measure how much of Shawndra’s self-identity is derived from her athletic role as athletic identity is inversely proportional with life satisfaction during athletic transitions (Payne & Driska, 2020).

Shawndra’s goal of playing professionally may or may not be realistic. I am not a basketball coach therefore I cannot judge her ability through observation, but I can look to stakeholders if I have permission. Is her inaction towards her goal of playing in Europe due to lack of opportunities, lack of confidence, or lack of competence? Figuring out what opportunities are possible would be helpful in guiding Shawndra through an athletic and career transition that may not involve sports afterall. At this stage in the consulting process I should have an understanding of Shawndra’s issue, what she has done to help herself thus far, how she feels about it, and what steps she is willing to take to move forward in the transition.

**Case Formulation**

Shawndra’s primary issue is that she does not have a career plan with graduation looming in the next few months, which is producing stress. This is not a unique experience as all student-athletes have multiple pressures in that they must attend to their studies to meet a required grade-point average as well as their sport to play well and win for their team (Williams & Krane, 2013). Graduation and the inevitable athlete transition can cause changes in moods, confusion, loneliness, isolation, body image issues, grief, depression, anxiety, and even suicide ideation due to the shift from such a structured environment as college athletic programs into the real world (Smith & Hardin, 2020). Athletes who lack proper planning and support during this transition can experience a crisis and require professional assistance (Williams & Krane, 2013). Shawndra’s isolated outburst in practice is evidence that her composure is cracking, and she may be on the brink of crisis (Coumbe-Lilley, 2019).

Many athletes who play sports in college do not go on to play professionally despite the common dream of “going pro”. In fact, only 2% of NCAA student-athletes go on to play professionally, leaving 98% to make a career elsewhere (Stowkowski et al., 2019). For Shawndra, this statistic proves the likelihood that she will not play professionally and that she must explore her skills and match them to a possible career path. Even if she does play professionally, she wants to have options to fall back on so a non-sport transition should be considered inevitable. She acknowledges her dream of playing professionally in Europe consists of hope, rather than a plan and as her dad says, “hope is not a strategy” (Coumbe-Lilley, 2019). In order to facilitate a healthy transition from college, to graduation, to a career, I will use the four S’s of Schlossberg’s transition theory as a guide. This framework helps clients manage transitions by assessing four factors: situation, self, support, and strategies (Williams & Krane, 2013). Shawndra’s perception of the transition will play just as much a role as her resources in the success of her transition. Since we have five months until her graduation, we are able to get ahead of the process and help Shawndra plan for the future while also managing her current stressors leading up to graduation itself. This will allow her room to finish off her last semester successfully with passing grades and attention to the championship games.

***Situation***

In evaluating Shawndra’s situation collaboratively, we can frame it as a positive experience of new beginnings rather than an ending. Graduation is an anticipated event as college eventually ends and every athlete will eventually age out of NCAA eligibility. Knowing this, Shawndra has many choices in regards to her future which is exciting and allows time for planning. Schlossberg’s transition theory posits that transitions are opportunities for positive personal growth (Smith & Hardin, 2020). Other aspects I want to know about her situation are:

* How much control does she feel she has over the situation?
* Does her previous experience of transitioning from high school to college aid in this transition? How?
* What is the duration of the transition and how much uncertainty surrounds this aspect?
* What other stressors are currently weighing on her?

***Self***

Just as the career counselor needs personal information about Shawndra, so too does she. Knowing oneself helps in transitions by assessing existing coping mechanisms and transferable life skills Danish et al., 1993). Results of the AIMS will help determine how much of Shawndra’s identity is tied up in her role as an athlete, which will determine how much of her role is free to explore non-sport avenues. Educating her about athletic identity can facilitate her in this rediscovery period she gets to embark on as a college graduate and young professional. Finding identity outside of her athletic role is essential to establishing herself as something other than her student-athlete role, which she is forced to leave due to graduation. I also want to know the level of her personal competence as it pertains to her maturity, self-reliance as well as her ability to plan for her life and seek out help from others (Danish et al., 1993).

Other aspects I want to know about her are:

* What do you value besides sport?
* How do you react under stress? Physically, emotionally, cognitively, behaviorally.
* Demographic information like socioeconomic status, age, race, ethnicity.

***Support***

Social support makes athlete transitions easier to handle and is essential when moving away from sport (Payne & Driska, 2020; Smith & Hardin, 2020). Shawndra has supportive parents who care about her success, happiness, and well-being (Coumbe-Lilley, 2019). She has a coach that she has worked with her entire career whom she sees as a mentor. She gets along well with her teammates and has one particular teammate from Serbia that has an agent for playing in Europe after she graduates. What Shawndra lacks is the initiative and ability to utilize her resources in ways that will help her transition out of college sport. This could be because of the stigma against asking for help, time constraints, lack of encouragement to expand network, lack of social skills, avoidance of the situation, or more. Since she is not without support, it will be important to assist Shawndra in taking advantage of the resources she has including myself, her coach, her parents, and her career counselor. Other aspects I want to know about her social supports are:

* Do you know anyone who has played or is currently playing in Europe that you can ask regarding the process?
* What resources do your parents, coach, and university already offer that can aid you in deciding what you want to do and planning for it?
* Have you networked to explore what the experiences are in your desired pathways? Why or why not?

***Strategies***

A strategy is the detailed plan to reach a goal. Shawndra has an inevitable and anticipated event that she has not planned for despite having a dream. Whether the goal becomes entering a career as a professional basketball player, pursuing a career in sports, or pursuing a career outside of sports, actionable steps must be made to achieve that goal (Danish et al., 1993). We have identified resources and now we must mobilize them. Many skills learned in sport are transferable to life and one’s career but the process of transferring skills is not automatic (Pierce et al., 2018). Positive coach-athlete relationships combined with opportunities to apply life skills outside of sport can facilitate the transference of skills. A list of transferable skills from Danish et al. (1993) will be used to collaboratively assess which meaningful skills can remain in Shawndra’s arsenal.

At this point in the consulting process I have an understanding that Shawndra may not have a solid goal with which to build a plan. The transition, however, is inevitable so I can facilitate her in figuring out what she wants to do, what skills and strengths she has already that will aid in her transition, and goal setting ways to fulfill her decided career goal. I will do this through educating about proper goal setting with SMART goals and process/performance/ outcome goals, administering a strength finding assessment, and building a relationship that she feels comfortable within to share intimate details. There is a possibility that letting her focus on finishing her senior year strong and not interfering would be beneficial. I could simply mitigate her stress using stress management tools so that she may continue in her current goals. There is a lot that I can do that all depends on the information I receive. As much as I can infer, she is acting out what she truly wants and feels rather than simply being in the dark about her opportunities. Sometimes letting the time pass and doing nothing is beneficial and under-utilized (Keegan, 2016).

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