

1 Japanese female professional soccer players' views on second career development

2 Abstract

3 The purpose of this study was to analyze professional, Japanese, female soccer
4 athletes' views on second career development and perceived support from the Women's
5 Empowerment (WE) League, Japan. This study was underpinned by occupational
6 socialization theory and utilized a qualitative, collective case study design through
7 demographic questionnaires, in-depth face to face semi-structured interviews and
8 reflexive thematic analysis. Participants were six current professional soccer players of
9 one professional team of the WE League. Three themes were generated from the data:
10 (a) *avoiding washout effects in second career opportunities*, (b) *the importance of dual*
11 *career pathway opportunities*, and (c) *professional development and second career*
12 *training*. These findings reflected how participants' first career as a professional athlete
13 became ingrained within their identity and shaped future desires and preparations for
14 second careers. They also reflect the difficulty participants experienced balancing a
15 professional athletic career with part time office work for financial stability as well as
16 planning for a second career linked to soccer. Players expressed a need for second
17 career preparation to be facilitated by their clubs and the WE league, and we provide
18 implications and recommendations to support this work.

19 **Key Words:** Soccer, Women, Second Career Development, Professional Athletes, Japan

20 **Words:** 187

Introduction

25
26 In general, professional athletes have much shorter careers than non-professional
27 athletes due to the physical and psychological demands of elite level performance sport
28 (Stambulova et al., 2020). When the time comes to terminate their professional sporting
29 career, athletes enter a transitional period of retirement (Yao et al., 2020), often at a
30 much younger age relative to the general working population (e.g., retirement age in
31 Japan is the early 60s, professional athletes tend to be mid to late 30s). Despite this age
32 difference, athletic retirement has been analogously compared to work retirement (e.g.,
33 Brewer et al., 1993; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993) and the associated psychological
34 adjustments this transition requires. But rather than transitioning to a life without work,
35 most athletes must transition to another career. Reasons for career transition can be
36 divided into two criteria, transition predictability and life domain. Transition
37 predictability is the most common reason for athletic retirement and career transition
38 (Stambulova et al., 2020) encompassing personal choice, performance decline, lack of
39 motivation, falling social status within an athletic domain, and decreased physical
40 capabilities (Taylor et al., 2005). On the other hand, retirement and transition may be
41 forced and beyond the athlete's control, such as career ending injuries and deselection
42 (Taylor et al., 2005; Reifsteck et al., 2013). Life domain is a far less common reason for
43 retirement and associated with retiring to focus on other spheres and interests within life
44 such as families or other careers. Regardless of which mechanism triggers retirement,
45 the vast majority of professional athletes (excluding perhaps the most successful male
46 soccer and tennis players as examples) must pursue a second career to support
47 themselves and such transitions can cause mental exhaustion, and professional stress
48 that reduce quality of life (Nowak et al., 2021).

49 Such an experience can cause grief and the triggering of poor mental health.
50 Indeed, Stambulova et al (2009) concluded that 15-20% of retired athletes experienced
51 psychological distress upon career transitions that necessitated professional intervention
52 and psychological support. This may be attributed to general anxiety accompanying
53 dramatic changes in employment status and job role, self-identity, self-confidence, a
54 shift in social status (e.g., from having experience and being respected in one job, to
55 being inexperienced and having to earn respect in another), and forms of intra-and
56 interorganizational mobility (Yao et al., 2020). Further, McKnight (2007) stated that the
57 significant dedication and value players assigned to a prolonged sporting career resulted
58 in a struggle to develop interests in other domains or professions. As such, when they
59 were forced to retire, players had few non-sport related interests to define themselves
60 which ultimately led to a restricted vision of themselves as a person and their position in
61 society. In soccer, attempts to prepare athletes for retirement have been undertaken by
62 professional leagues and player unions; these have primarily focused on training for
63 second career recruitment and socialization through development programs for athletes
64 based on past studies (e.g., Lawson, 1983; Templin & Schempp, 1989; Curtner-Smith &
65 Sofa, 2004). Further, such a focus on career transition has dominantly focused only on
66 elite male athletes.

67 Over the last decade much has changed in the sporting world, especially with
68 regards to increases in participation, media presence, and level of elitism in female
69 soccer. For example, women's soccer has enjoyed their biggest TV audiences. The 2019
70 FIFA Women's World Cup in France generated record viewership with 993 million
71 people watching via television and a further 482 million accessing via digital platforms
72 (Lee et al., 2020). There is also a positive trend of professional women's soccer leagues

73 being started such as England (the Women's Super League) in 2017/18 and Japan (the
74 Women's Empowerment League) in 2021/22. Despite this growth in the women's game,
75 there are still substantial inequalities compared to the men's game (Harrison et al.,
76 2020). For example, at the highest level of English soccer, female players earned an
77 average of £27,000 (\$40,000) per annum while their male equivalents received an
78 average salary of £2.64 million (\$3.5 million; Harrison et al., 2020). Conversely, most
79 professional female soccer players in the world require dual careers (additional
80 employment: work and/or education) to make a living income as well as manage the
81 lifestyle of a professional athlete. Further, despite a desire to stay within soccer, the post
82 retirement career pathway for women is much less certain despite acquiring the same
83 level of skill and knowledge about soccer as male players (McCormack & Walseth,
84 2013).

85 Thus far, research and training on how to support and prepare professional
86 sports persons, in particular female athletes, transition to a second career is lacking,
87 perhaps due to the historically gendered bias towards male athletes compared to female
88 (Bekker et al., 2018). There is also a dearth of research regarding professional female
89 athletes compared to male in general which may be attributed to both a much shorter
90 legacy of professionalism within female sport (Lovse et al., 2020), but also patriarchal
91 systems and norms that situate male sport as superior to female sport (Norman &
92 Simpson, 2022). This is still evident through the inequitable wage gap that exists
93 between male and female athletes in many sports (Agha & Berri, 2021). Female athletes
94 tend to be paid much less than men and are thus afforded a much shorter gap between
95 retirement and finding a second career to financially support themselves. Indeed, the
96 potentially poor wages female soccer players receive throughout their career compared

97 to men may necessitate the need for a dual career pathway to ensure survival, working
98 another job at the same time as a professional career.

99 Professional female athletes' transition to second careers is still
100 underrepresented in sport and kinesiology literature, and this limits practitioners' ability
101 to adopt and apply second career support and preparation when working with these
102 athletes (Emmonds et al., 2019). Within the wider context of female employment in
103 Japan (the focus of this paper), female soccer players' career trajectory post retirement
104 is even more important as, according to Assmann (2014), 60 to 70% of women in
105 general have non-regular employment (part time) and low salaries (as little as 2 million
106 yen (\$18,000)) resulting in many social and psychological disadvantages. As
107 professional athletes may be at a further disadvantage to gain regular employment with
108 a liveable wage having spent the first part of their working life playing sport, an
109 exploration of how female, Japanese, professional soccer players may be supported to
110 establish a second career path is essential.

111 *Japan's Women's Empowerment Professional Football League*

112 Historically, there was no professional soccer for women in Japan. A semi-
113 professional women's league, the Nadeshiko League, has been in existence for over 30
114 years and currently consists of 32 teams over 3 divisions. While a few Nadeshiko
115 players were paid, the majority were amateurs. In June 2021, the Japan Football
116 Association (JFA) announced the first fully professional women's football league in
117 Japan would have its inaugural season in 2021-2022, with the league starting on
118 September 18th after the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic games. The Japan Women's
119 Empowerment Professional Football League (called the WE league) was founded with
120 missions to (1) contribute towards building a sustainable society through promoting

121 female social participation, and (2) enhance diversity and choice in sport (The WE
122 League, 2021). By example, one of the WE league policies is that each team must
123 consist of at least 15 professional players that are signed to professional contracts, and
124 five of these 15 players must make at least \$50,000 annually. Furthermore, one team
125 executive member must be a woman and hold a measure of power and influence within
126 the club (The Washington Post, 2020). Though not full equality, these stipulations are a
127 start and highlight a progressive shift regarding professionalism within female soccer in
128 Japan. This also brings the opportunity to explore retirement transitions to sustainable
129 second careers among a newly professional athletic group and lay a foundation of
130 knowledge regarding how professional clubs can best support athletes when they reach
131 retirement. It important to consider, however, how players' desires and aspirations for a
132 second career are shaped by their first. For that, we can use occupational socialization
133 theory.

134 ***Occupational socialization theory***

135 Occupational socialization is a complex, longitudinal process in which an
136 individual acquires the necessary skills and knowledge base to perform the tasks
137 required of their profession (Brown, 2012). Occupational socialization theory is not
138 linear but has been described as a time-orientated continuum that includes acculturation,
139 professional socialization, and organizational socialization (Richards et al., 2014).
140 Acculturation refers to learning through initial interactions with more experienced,
141 important others within the career context (e.g., coaches, senior players) that shape
142 initial impressions, perspectives, behaviors, and beliefs (Lawson, 1983). Professional
143 socialization occurs when individuals are ready to commit to a certain career choice and
144 they work towards achieving and developing necessary skills and knowledge to do their

145 job role well (e.g., qualifications, workshops; Lawson, 1986). Occupational
146 socialization focuses on the ongoing socialization one experiences as one's career
147 develops and advances (Woods & Lynn, 2001).

148 Utilizing this theoretical framework within the context of sport allows researchers
149 to explore the acculturation, professional socialization, and organizational socialization
150 of a professional sport team, and explore influential factors that contribute to an
151 athlete's behaviors and decisions (such as choosing to retire; Richards et al., 2014). By
152 exploring the occupational socialization of professional female soccer players, we can
153 better understand their social situation and perceived norms and values in a 'workplace'
154 (in this case a professional soccer team) that may be disrupted when they are required to
155 transition to a second career. Further, by understanding how athletes see their
156 professional world, we can use occupational socialization theory to facilitate athletes'
157 transition from their first career to their second in a positive manner. That is, if a
158 professional female soccer club can integrate professional and organizational
159 socialization practice whereby athletes are encouraged to adopt a retirement decision
160 based on 'life domain' or choice (noted above), this may facilitate a fluid and positive
161 pathway transition. Indeed, Reitzes and Mutran (2006), stated there are two mechanisms
162 by which organizations can positively influence athletes' career transitions and lead to a
163 less traumatic retirement experience. First, professional athletes who have planned for
164 their retirement were better prepared for their second careers, and more likely to make
165 an empowering decision to retire (Drawer & Fuller, 2002). Second, career planning may
166 reduce some of the anxiety and uncertainty associated with employment changes that
167 may cause professional athletes to 'hang on' to their first career such that the decision to
168 retire may be taken away from them and made instead by a coach or board.

169 With these respective examples, athletic career termination may serve as an
170 opportunity for social rebirth (if planned and the decision is underpinned by
171 empowering factors of life domain) rather than a form of social death (if forced and the
172 decision is underpinned by social identity or relations being taken away). Therefore,
173 utilizing an occupational socialization approach allowed us to investigate the
174 acculturation, professional, and organizational socialization of female Japanese
175 professional athletes and explore factors that influence their decisions and behaviors
176 regarding transitioning to a second career (Richards et al., 2014).

177 The purpose of this study was to analyze professional, Japanese, female soccer
178 athletes' views on second career development and perceived support from one
179 professional team of the WE League. The central questions were: (a) What were
180 professional athletes' aspirations for second career development? (b) How were players
181 desires for a second career influenced by their first? and (c) How did players perceive
182 professional teams and the WE League should better support players' retirement
183 transition?

184 **Method**

185 ***Research design and origins***

186 We adopted a case study design to explore this group as we sought to holistically
187 study players' perceptions and experiences of retirements within the confines of their
188 current career as a soccer player and realistic future development (Hodge & Sharp,
189 2016). In this way, we could embrace multiple perspectives from players as well as the
190 complexity, and uniqueness of the phenomena under investigation (second career
191 development) within the cultural norms, policies, institutions and systems they are
192 experienced within the WE League in Japan (Simons, 2014). Underpinning this design

193 were assumptions of ontological relativism and epistemological constructionism
194 whereby we held that reality for each person (and the researchers) was unique and
195 relative to their own social standing, background, perception and history, and that
196 knowledge was crafted through interactions between other people, social institutes, and
197 wider social norms.

198 The lead author is currently a dual career athlete, balancing professional soccer with
199 her role as an assistant professor of health and sport sciences at a public university in
200 Japan. She could, therefore, approach the research from an insider's perspective
201 exhibiting empathy, understanding, and validation of participants' experiences. There
202 are advantages when a researcher is also a member of the group under study as this
203 helps with accessing and recruiting participants, building trust, more in-depth
204 understanding of the phenomena under investigation and providing interpretations that
205 may not be possible without lived experience (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). There, is
206 however, care to be taken and a critical self-reflection required to ensure ethics,
207 criticality of thought, and avoidance of taking for granted that one person's experience
208 is the same as another. There is also a danger of the researcher being susceptible to
209 confirmation bias and unconsciously shaping questions and coproduction of data with
210 participants inequitably (McSweeney, 2021). To ensure the first author did not overly
211 influence research findings, she continuously reflected upon and challenged her
212 preexisting assumptions and experiences to appreciate how these may influence the data
213 collection process, and drew upon her co-authors challenges and critiques of data
214 regarding interpretations of data.

215 *Sampling and participants*

216 A convenience and criterion-based sampling strategy was used, which meant cases

217 were sampled meeting a predetermined criterion of importance (Patton, 2015). The
218 inclusion criteria for this study were Japanese, female, professional soccer players that
219 expressed interest in discussing their own second career and career transition.
220 Specifically, we identified and selected all players (n=9) who were considering second
221 career plans and belonged to the lead author's affiliated team of the WE league.
222 Although the lead researcher attempted to interview these nine players, three refused to
223 participate due to not being comfortable with their current medical and life conditions.
224 Six participants were selected for this study. Pseudonyms of the six participants and
225 their demographic backgrounds are indicated in Table 1. All participants (MH, KA, SB,
226 NR, SR, SM) were Japanese, female, professional soccer players who belonged to one
227 of the professional teams of the WE league. The lead researcher received approval to
228 conduct this study from the University's institutional review board and secured signed
229 consent forms from all six participants.

230 ******PLEASE INSERT TABLE 1 HERE******

231 ***Demographic questionnaire***

232 A demographic questionnaire was used to collect background information from
233 participants. The data included information about age, soccer experiences, injury
234 history, professional contract conditions, and past experiences of second career training.
235 These details are provided in Table 1.

236 ***Online face-to-face interviews***

237 Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants. Interviewing is a
238 powerful way to gain insight into professional and social phenomena experienced by
239 individuals in sport contexts (Seidman, 2006), such as second career training and
240 transitions. The questions were constructed according to conceptions of occupational

241 socialization theory by exploring participants career trajectories (from acculturation to
242 organizational socialization), and informed by previous research in this area (e.g., Sato
243 & Haegele, 2017; Sato et al., 2022). Interviews were conducted online using the
244 Microsoft Teams communication and collaboration platform, in line with safe, best
245 practice during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviews lasted between 60 and 90
246 minutes each (average length = 75 minutes). Interview questions included a) When
247 thinking about joining the WE league, what were your thoughts in relation to retirement
248 and second career opportunities? What kind of knowledge and skills (that you learned
249 from soccer) do you think are important for seeking a second career? Why? c) How
250 important are professional retirees (former athletes) from your professional league in
251 progressing your career and future employment opportunities? and d) When you
252 became an elite athlete, how well were you prepared for second career opportunities?
253 All interviews were recorded via Microsoft Team software and an audio recorder.

254 ***Translation process***

255 To prepare the data collected in Japanese for analysis and reporting in English, a
256 cross-cultural translation technique developed by Banville et al (2000) was applied. The
257 technique involved a group of researchers proficient in both languages working
258 individually and collaboratively to ensure that meaning is retained through the
259 translation process. In this case, the process began with three Japanese-English bilingual
260 researchers individually translating the interview transcripts and the supplementary
261 artifacts. After this, they formed a committee with an established researcher to critically
262 compare and discuss their translations to ensure that the meanings of the original items
263 were preserved, making edits as recommended. Finally, all members were sent a copy of
264 the completed translation for final comments and critiques.

265 ***Data analysis***

266 To analyze data, we adopted a deductive, latent reflexive thematic analysis informed
267 by Braun and Clarke (2021) and Braun et al (2016) method. Here we loosely and
268 iteratively followed a 6-stage guide that incorporated immersion, open coding, theme
269 building, development, naming and report writing. Themes were crafted with
270 consideration of occupational socialization theory and analyzed without a further layer
271 of interpretation beyond participant testimonies or the underpinning theory.

272 ***Trustworthiness***

273 Trustworthiness was established through member reflections and peer-debriefing.
274 Member reflections were used to ensure findings resonated with participants' lived
275 experiences (Patton, 2015). The researcher sent electronic files of the interview
276 transcripts and crafted themes to respective participants. We used member reflections
277 rather than 'checking' in line with our ontological assumptions that there are different,
278 subjective realities unique to each person. As such, there is no one interpretation of an
279 experience. What is important is that results and interpretations resonate and represent
280 participants – even if that were not the interpretation they may have made. Indeed,
281 member reflections and sharing different interpretations can be an enlightening and
282 empowering exercise as participants may learn a different way of viewing the world.
283 Peer-debriefing is a process of exposing oneself to a knowledgeable peer in a way
284 paralleling an analytic session; with the purpose of exploring aspects of inquiry that
285 might remain only implicit in the inquirer's mind (Patton, 2015). For this study, two
286 professional colleagues who had expertise in qualitative research agreed to serve as
287 peer-debriefers. These individuals reviewed the established themes and agreed with the
288 findings of the researchers, as they deemed the interpretations of the data to be

289 meaningful, evidence-based and representative.

290 **Results**

291 We will present the ‘what’ of participants’ perceptions of second career opportunities
292 in the results section and expand upon the ‘whys’ and ‘hows’ of these perceptions
293 through occupational socialization theory in the discussion section. Three major
294 recurrent themes were crafted from the data analyses; (a) *avoiding washout effect in*
295 *second career opportunities*, (b) *importance of dual career path opportunities*, (c)
296 *professional development and second career training*.

297 ***Theme I: Avoiding washout effect in second career opportunities***

298 This theme captures the range of desired second careers expressed by female,
299 professional, Japanese soccer players and the various anxieties associated with these
300 respective paths. First, some players were interested only in receiving training that
301 would lead them to continuing a career in soccer (i.e., coach, referee, sport scientist,
302 etc.) and were disinterested in professional training unrelated to this domain (e.g.,
303 business, therapy, education). Participants explained that they were afraid the skills and
304 specialized knowledge they had developed through soccer such as skills to perform the
305 sport itself, self-discipline, social control, teamwork, mutual respect, and fair play
306 within a soccer context (Simons, 2014) would be wasted or of no use within a second
307 career. For example one participant, Ms. MH, explained her second career plans after
308 retiring from professional soccer league:

309 I want to be a soccer coach after retiring professional league. I am anxious and afraid that
310 when things may not go well in the future and I do not have any plan B. In order to prepare
311 my second career, I have a certified soccer coaching license of official class B (issued by
312 Japan football association) at this moment. I needed to complete intensive training spending
313 a few days, this means that I needed to skip some practices and got permission from my
314 head coach. I feel that I would only be able to select future professions that I may be able to
315 use and apply my specialized knowledge and skills of soccer for my second career
316 opportunities.

317

318 It is apparent that Ms. MH takes her future second career seriously and embraces
319 opportunities to expand her coaching qualifications in soccer. The JFA organizes and
320 runs various training courses and issues coaching licensure that Ms. MH committed to
321 maintaining and advancing. She sacrificed time in her first career to prepare for her
322 second (e.g., missing practice), completed various renewal process and paid annual fees.
323 Arguably, her motivation was driven by fear that this was her only option and that
324 ‘things may not go well in the future’. We termed this phenomenon the “*washout effect*”
325 as participants feared they may be perceived as a ‘washout’ having achieved significant
326 success as a professional athlete but may not experience the same degree of success in a
327 second career. They were afraid, anxious, and nervous moving away from soccer; and
328 were therefore hesitant to explore ventures in other life domains about which they
329 perceived they had no experience, skills, or knowledge.

330 Expanding this further, the power and social status of professional sport as a first
331 career may have influenced players’ desire to have a second career associated in some
332 way with soccer. For example, Ms. NR held a master’s degree in Kinesiology and
333 aspired to apply for a doctoral program. The area she specifically wished to study,
334 however, was biomechanics in *soccer* performance with the hope of a second career as a
335 higher education faculty member of soccer coaching in Kinesiology:

336 I would like to have my second career of professorship in higher education. I have seen my
337 teammate who recently became a faculty member in Kinesiology. I like to focus on research
338 study of biomechanics and soccer. I do not want to have unfamiliar or unrelated field of
339 soccer. I believe that my current profession as being a professional member and national
340 team member become successful until this moment, so I hope my second career would have
341 some success, so I cannot abandon soccer in my life.

342

343 Similar to Ms. MH, Ms. NR explained that the success she experienced as a
344 professional athlete was something she wanted to build from in order to have a similarly

345 successful second career (thereby avoiding the ‘washout effect’). In her specific
346 situation, Ms. NR aspired to combine her qualifications in biomechanics and her lived
347 knowledge of performance soccer to foster new research skills and techniques that may
348 enable her to explore her desired topic deeply with specialized insight. Therefore, she
349 believed that pursuing a doctoral degree may help increase her professional credibility
350 and improve the quality of her second career, but still desired that second career to be
351 within the realm of soccer. Of note, Ms. MH and Ms. NR were only two out of five
352 athletes who signed fully professional contracts that are not subject to a salary cap.
353 Therefore, they felt that they were no longer treated as amateur athletes and were
354 motivated to maintain high levels of performance: For example, Ms. MH said that

355 Two differences between Amateur and professional athletes are that I am motivated to
356 improve my performance rather than health. When I was amateur athlete, I wanted to play
357 longer as much as I can, but now I am motivated to improve my performance. This is the
358 reason that I want to deal with soccer after my retirement.
359

360 Some participants who did not have fully professional contracts expressed a desire to
361 expand a focus on health to a second career, and though not specifically within soccer,
362 still linked in some way to performance sport. For example, Ms. SB explained that she
363 was motivated to learn sport nutrition in relation to athletic performance:

364 When I close to age of 30, I felt that I was interested in studying about the relationships
365 between food intake and athletic performance. I am assessing time schedule when and how I
366 should take protein, calcium so on. I checked the place of production and nutrition facts. I
367 would like to have a second career of food master (consultant) if it is possible.
368

369 Though not specifically focusing on soccer, this again shows that some participants
370 desired a second career that was linked in some way to their first and were not interested
371 in exploring second career ventures in other work domains.

372 ***Theme II: The importance of dual career pathway opportunities***

373 As noted in the introduction, most female soccer players required a ‘dual career’

374 where they held another job and/or education pathway in addition to playing soccer.
375 This was encouraged by the teams of the WE League, and was something participants
376 placed importance on. Dual career arrangements were perceived to be important for
377 financial and career stability. That is, participants felt their professional contracts and
378 annual salaries were not financially adequate Four participants (Ms. SB, Ms. KA, Ms.
379 SM, & Ms. SR) maintained a dual career, and had differing perceptions of how work
380 outside the soccer field would fit within future second career plans. For Ms. SR and Ms.
381 KA, the office work they did to supplement their income was a temporary means to an
382 end, and desired a second career involved in soccer post retirement. Ms. SR, for
383 example, said:

384 Since I joined in this organization, I was encouraged to have dual career, so I worked as an
385 office worker in this team. I chose this way, because I was unable to afford myself without
386 dual career arrangement. Honestly, this career was not what I wanted, but I learned how to
387 do office management work. This was helpful. At the same time, my colleagues (office
388 work) always respect, support, and encourage my career as being a professional athlete. My
389 colleagues asked me I may stay after retiring from this team, but I do not think I would stay,
390 because I would like to have my second career opened.
391

392 Similarly, Ms. KA said:

393 I was not interested in my duties and responsibilities as being an office worker, but I devoted
394 myself for my professional soccer player. I worked from morning until 3:00 pm and began to
395 practice soccer after that. I loved soccer very much, so I watched the clocks and wanted to
396 practice soccer as soon as my office duties were over, that is my motivation. I cannot see
397 myself working with second career without soccer fields. I want to be a coach or analyst. I
398 appreciate my current work environment. Without dual career arrangements, I do not think I
399 would not be able to continue as being the professional athlete. I appreciate that this
400 organization prepared me to have the job of office work.
401

402 Ms. SR and Ms. KA were professional players, but whose contracts were subject to a
403 salary cap requiring additional work to supplement income. Though their salary was
404 capped, these players were instructed to train full-time and work in an office part-time.
405 This led to concerns that fulltime office work post retirement would be difficult to find:

406 I wanted to have an opportunity to have professional contract without a salary cap, but it was
407 unfortunate, but this means that I had to think my second career seriously. My concern is

408 that when I retire as being professional athlete, my job status will be a part time. I am
409 anxious that I will not be able to find full time job after the retirement (Ms. SR, interviews).

410
411 Though some players viewed dual careers as a temporary means to an end or a
412 potential disadvantage, other players described health (e.g., balanced lifestyle),
413 developmental (e.g., development of personal identity), and social benefits (e.g.,
414 expanded social network) from undertaking a dual career and perceived a different skill
415 set opened the possibility of pursuing a second career *outside* of a sporting context:

416 I believe that many professional athletes would like to continue and work with soccer for
417 their second careers, but I am willing to have more options opened, because I have been
418 more confident to work various fields in second career opportunities, because I had multiple
419 jobs in my career experiences. I worked as a gymnasium facility manager, a sales of life
420 insurances, a soccer coach of youth sport, and a clerk of health clubs. Honestly, I want to
421 learn something else. I am interested in working at apparel companies, so I hope I would be
422 able to apply my knowledge and skills to my second career (Ms. SM, interviews).

423
424 Though appreciative of the skills, friendships and support provided by dual careers
425 in offices, players were not analogous in their consideration of making office work
426 rather than continued involvement in sport the focus of their second career. This may,
427 perhaps be linked to different messages and contrasting working cultures (explored in
428 depth in the discussion) between office work and professional soccer.

429 ***Theme III: Professional development and second career training***

430 Participants stated their belief that the WE league or professional soccer teams
431 should help players facilitate second career transitions. The participants believed that
432 professional development should fit their existing schematic views of themselves and
433 desires for appropriate second career opportunities, otherwise they may reject career
434 advice from the WE League and professional soccer teams. As most participants desired
435 to continue within the realm of soccer, they suggested that licensed coach training
436 courses may help participants gain the required knowledge, communication skills, and
437 leadership styles to coach youth or professional athletes and build coaching excellence.

438 This would facilitate desired transition from playing career to a second career while
439 staying in their desired realm of soccer. Ms. NR explained:

440 I think it is important that WE league and professional teams should organize professional
441 development of second career for professional athletes. I recommend that one of
442 professional development opportunities should focus on soccer related coaching license
443 workshop. Japan Football Association offers various official classes of D, C, B, A, and S
444 coaches. This professional development opportunities may allow to understand coaching
445 skills. If it does not work, they may change their mind and find alternative career
446 opportunities as being referees. The WE League and teams should find various career
447 sources to introduce the career choices (Ms. NR, interviews).

448
449 Another participant, Ms. SR explained the importance of discuss and sharing future
450 plans with teammates, even though such conversations may be frowned upon:

451 It was taboo to ask about second career with my teammates, because we need to focus our
452 performance. I am not sure that this is called as professional development, but we should
453 have a group conversation and other teammates' opinions about their future career or
454 educational plans. I think it is important to share with resources of college education and job
455 search (Ms. SR, interviews).

456
457 Another participant, Ms. KA went further suggesting that the WE league and
458 professional teams needed to focus on helping players earlier in their career as she
459 believed many professional athletes from overseas considered a second career while
460 they were immersed in playing professional sport. She also advocated for development
461 workshops exploring how to balance a second career and family:

462 I learned that many professional athletes in overseas are preparing their second careers
463 before they retire. They attend colleges and universities when professional season is over
464 and are preparing their second career development. Plus, many of them have families and
465 children and they consider and return as professional athletes again. I do not think I would
466 be able to return as professional athletes and have family, but I need to learn this type of life
467 and career options (Ms. KA, interviews).

468
469 Ms. KA further explained, "I have college education before joining in the professional
470 teams, but many professional athletes in the WE league joined in professional league
471 after graduating from their high schools. Therefore, I believe that it is important to offer
472 second career internship or workshop opportunities when they are in off season."

473 All participants hoped that the professional governing body would facilitate

474 meaningful professional development opportunities so that players could significantly
475 increase their knowledge and skills before their eventual transition to a second career.

476 **Discussion**

477 Participants generally desired and envisioned a second career linked to their first
478 as a professional soccer player. Though this perhaps looked different to each player
479 (e.g., coaching vs higher education vs nutrition in athletic performance), it is apparent
480 that the sociological influence of professional soccer culture got under participants' skin
481 and directed their desires for a continued career path within soccer. How and why this
482 occurred can be explored through an occupational socialization theory lens.

483 **Occupational Socialization of professional, Japanese, Female Soccer Players**

484 Occupational socialization is a longitudinal process involving acculturation,
485 professional socialization and organizational socialization in which, it is argued, an
486 individual can acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed at their chosen
487 profession (Brown, 2012; Richards et al., 2014). By exploring more deeply participants'
488 perceptions of second career options through these 3 tenets, we can better understand
489 why and how such opinions are formed.

490 First, acculturation refers to how participants' initial impressions, behaviors,
491 beliefs, and perspectives were influenced by their interactions with other players,
492 coaches etc., within the professional soccer club (Lawson, 1983). Focusing specifically
493 on retirement, participants were told such discussions were 'taboo' and focus should be
494 redirected to soccer performance. This is a problematic finding as female soccer players
495 being acculturated to focus on retirement or a second career only after their professional
496 career has come to an end can lead to disempowerment, anxiety and uncertainty
497 (Drawer & Fuller, 2002), significantly exacerbating an already difficult and potentially

498 traumatic life transition (Stambulova et al., 2020). Though literature states (male) soccer
499 structures afford time and training to prepare for second careers (e.g., Curtner-Smith &
500 Sofo, 2004), it appears that the culture in professional, Japanese, female soccer
501 pressures current players to focus only on their current career. Again, this has potentially
502 dire consequences as the inability to develop other interests, skills, or experiences
503 outside of professional sport can result in players struggling to develop themselves
504 beyond sport, and a resulting collapse of their self-concept and self-identity when
505 retirement does inevitably happen (McKnight, 2007). Without higher level
506 organizational support for second career discussion, and shifting the player culture from
507 focusing only on soccer performance to considering life after soccer, players may
508 remain acculturated and define themselves only in regards to being a successful,
509 competent athlete (Harrison et al., 2020). This increases the risk of long-term negative
510 consequences for players, as rather than being prepared or deciding to retire themselves,
511 they may be forced into retirement through nonautonomous factors such as contracts
512 being terminated or injury (Reifsteck et al., 2013) and experience a crisis of self.

513 Progressing to professional socialization regarding second careers, when
514 individuals were ready to commit to a career choice and work towards developing the
515 necessary skills and knowledge to do this job role well, there was noticeable overlap
516 between participants first and second career desires. All except one participant desired a
517 career progression into another realm of soccer involvement or athletic performance. At
518 this point, however, it is important to consider the 2 different paths of professional
519 soccer players in this study as these paths had significantly different ‘whys’ and ‘hows’
520 of participants’ professional socialization and, resultantly, significantly different
521 implications for the research.

522 Ms. NR and Ms. MH were the only participants that earned enough to make
523 soccer their one and only career. Being exposed only to one career and culture may have
524 influenced their decision to work towards a second career that was also within soccer.
525 This supports previous literature that stipulated a first career in professional sport
526 grounds and informs professional athletes' values and desires firmly within that sphere
527 (Bourke, 2003) and that second career options that maintain an identity as a professional
528 soccer player are considered (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Though still playing
529 professionally, both Ms. NR and Ms. MH were already planning and working towards
530 desired second careers (undertaking qualifications, targeting appropriate education
531 courses). Such preparation has been highlighted as a positive choice in previous
532 literature as this may result in less distress, identity crises, and a more empowered
533 retirement transition compared to other players that focus on second career after
534 retirement (Stambulova et al., 2020; Yao et al., 2020). That being said, professional
535 players that desire and work towards only a second career in performance soccer may be
536 at risk should they fail. This is very real possibility in female soccer players as, even
537 within professional women's soccer, men tend to dominate higher levels of
538 organization, coaching, and management (McCormack & Walseth, 2013). As noted, the
539 gendered nature of soccer may cause additional difficulties for ex-players to fill
540 leadership roles, but this may be even more difficult in Japan where the wider
541 population of females in work tend to be in part-time irregular work (Assmann, 2014).
542 The compounding of a male-dominated and gendered work-space within a country
543 where women struggle to find regular full time work may result in a failure to fulfill a
544 desired second career in soccer. This may result in distress, a crisis of self and identity,
545 anxiety and depression, in addition to potential financial difficulties as professional

546 soccer players need a second career to live (Sambulova et al., 2009).

547 The participants that required a dual career experienced different professional
548 socialization, perhaps due to their exposure and immersion within a working space very
549 different to professional soccer; the majority of these participants worked part-time in
550 an office. The balance of part time office work and full-time soccer training may have
551 professionally socialized some participants towards desiring a second career, not
552 necessarily within soccer, but within athletic performance. These individuals still
553 identified as a professional athlete and, arguably, viewed the skills they learned as a
554 soccer player as more important to carry forward than skills learnt in an office. This
555 may also be informed by the status colleagues and society gave to their professional
556 career (encouragement, support) that positioned a soccer career as more successful and
557 impressive than an office career. These participants may have also been acculturated
558 within office work and influenced by their colleagues treating them well and with
559 reverence because they were professional soccer players. The value placed on this identity
560 through relational interactions with others may have shaped the self-perception that a
561 second career within performance sport or athletic performance is desirable to maintain
562 social status and respect; thereby avoiding ‘wash out effects’ and a second career less
563 successful than their first. Exposure to other work domains does not necessitate a
564 change in career in professional athletes as they commonly maintain the values,
565 sensitivities, skills, and knowledge of their first professional career when in pursuit of
566 their second (Harrison et al., 2020). Akin to the soccer only participants, there is no
567 guarantee of working in sport as a second career (Santos, 2013), particularly given the
568 gendered employment world of soccer and Japan as a whole, so these participants too
569 may experience a difficult path when they retire.

570 One participant was professionally socialized to work outside of sport through
571 her experience of a dual career. Ms. SM was perhaps unique in that she had a depth of
572 experience in different careers beyond soccer and expressed a desire to learn and
573 develop beyond the sports sphere and was open to adopting a second career before she
574 ‘needed’ to retire. As noted by Stambulova et al., (2020), a decision to retire to pursue a
575 new career was deemed a much more positive, but rare, transition pathway undertaken
576 by professional players. Thus, encouraging players to pursue dual careers through their
577 playing tenure may facilitate opportunities for more fluid pathways and positive
578 transitions from first to second careers (Ritzer, 1998). We could argue with prolonged
579 and varied exposure to different careers, female soccer players may become more adept
580 at reshaping their self-concept beyond soccer and gain confidence that they are able to
581 ‘fit’ in different spheres. That is, with more experience in different working
582 environments, the more confidence a player may gain that they can succeed in different
583 careers and perhaps perceive more (successful) career path options beyond just soccer
584 or sport.

585 Finally, occupational socialization focuses on the ongoing socialization one
586 experiences as one’s career develops and advances. At this point, participants noted that
587 the courses and personal development they had undertaken towards their second career
588 were undertaken through their own initiative and expense. They expressed desires for
589 WE League and their own professional club to do more as an organization to not only
590 support second career development, but facilitate this through trainings, opportunities,
591 and education. Past research has highlighted the importance of organizations supporting
592 athlete’s transitions to second careers through development opportunities and
593 preparations (Day-Garner, 2017). Works have further discussed the importance of

594 integrating professional and socialized practice that emphasize life domain transitions
595 (Stambulova et al., 2020). Players further indicated that support for balancing a career
596 with other life domains was lacking as they expressed uncertainty regarding family life
597 and career. This highlights that preparation for a second career should start as soon as an
598 athlete participates in sport including academy level (e.g., age 16+), because it may be
599 too late when they wait until they reach the end of their soccer career. Therefore, more
600 career training may be done to emphasize the importance of life outside of sport for
601 positive transitions from first to second career. Moreover, concerns were raised
602 regarding the lack of timely interventions for players that are acculturated in
603 professional sport (i.e., those that transitioned from high school to the WE League).
604 Without socialized support for other life or work domains, concerns were raised
605 regarding the welfare of such players upon retirement.

606 **Recommendations**

607 Our study identified that the majority of players were desirous of having a
608 second career within the professional sports realm. This is not surprising as prior
609 socialization can strongly influence second career choice and adjustment, particularly in
610 professional sport (Nicholson, 1984). Indeed, participants noted, that opportunities to
611 work towards a second career in professional sport within the WE League was limited
612 to coaching qualifications where they had to sacrifice their own playing time and
613 training, or were reliant on players creating their own opportunities through previous
614 qualifications (e.g. University degrees). The primary recommendation from this study is
615 that the WE League and teams design and implement second career opportunities for
616 meeting professional athletes' needs and interests. More specifically, professional
617 development should use a systematic delivery of culturally influenced content with

618 sufficient duration and intensity to promote clear goals and objectives (Maurer, 2000).

619 The following additional recommendations are intended to enhance the quality of

620 second career opportunities and the athletes' learning experiences.

621 First, career decision making is a matter for each athlete, but athletes, teams, and

622 others should know that there are many factors that may facilitate or complicate the

623 process. In many soccer professions including referees, facility managers, medical,

624 business, there are specific entry requirements in soccer industry (Bourke, 2003).

625 Although many team managers may not be pleased with the amount of time

626 professional athletes are obligated to spend time studying or in their dual career

627 (O'Donoghue, 1999), all teams and the WE League should establish and provide second

628 career services including lifestyle support (how to balance soccer and education),

629 support for coaching certificate and licensure, and other training (i.e., nutritionist) for

630 the professional athletes.

631 Second, it is important to explore professional athletes' dual career experiences,

632 but the WE League and teams should consider educational development for them.

633 Capranica and Guidotti (2016) explained that engaging in higher education allows these

634 professional athletes to continue their personal and professional development outside of

635 soccer, so that the professional athletes may have a tenable path in post-retirement or

636 after sport at colleges and universities. Therefore, the WE League and teams should

637 provide flexibility in career paths and education that is an important component in

638 achieving sport-education balance (Brown et al., 2015).

639 Lastly, this study recommends that the WE League and teams may use

640 experiential learning approaches (e.g., internship or field experiences) for professional

641 athletes during the off season. The purpose of experiential learning is to prepare the

642 professional athlete to be a contributing part of society outside of soccer. The
643 professional athletes who did not study or prepare for their second careers do not learn
644 how to transfer learning from one situation to another or one discipline to another
645 (Inkster & Ross, 1998). Therefore, connecting and applying their second career
646 preparation to internship or field experiences may increase their opportunities for future
647 employment or entrepreneurship.

648 To facilitate these recommendations, a collective effort is required that involves
649 not only the WE league but coaches, managers, staff members, and medical persons
650 (Duffy et al., 2010). For example, coaches and managers do not only manage and help
651 athletes improve technical, tactical, physical and mental capabilities, but also develop
652 their personal, social, and lifestyle capabilities through educational and career pathways
653 (Johnston & Baker, 2020). To do so, Swanson and D'Achiardi (2005) suggested that
654 athletes' professional development should have three different constructs in second
655 career development including interests/needs, values, and abilities that lead athletes to
656 make an empowered second career decision (Savickas, 2002). Once the professional
657 athletes explore and learn the details of these three constructs, team coaches and
658 managers can encourage the professional athletes to explore vocational opportunities
659 and training through experiential learning opportunities such as internship or externship
660 during off season (Navarro & McCormick, 2017). In occupational socialization theory,
661 Keith and Moore (1995) suggested that when professional athletes develop professional
662 socialization while studying their second career development, mentoring and counseling
663 are key factors of their professional development. The amount of contact between
664 professional athletes and mentors (e.g., coaches, managers, and career counselors) allow
665 them to exchange guidance of particular behaviors and patterns that align with other

666 personal and important values (Navarro & McCormick, 2017). This study confirms that
667 it is important to provide professional development opportunities and empower
668 professional athletes during sporting careers. Thus, the professional athletes may be able
669 to facilitate a continued career path and avoid negative and crisis-transition scenarios
670 (Duffy et al., 2010).

671 *Study limitations*

672 This study has several limitations. First, the participants were purposefully
673 selected from one team from the WE League in Japan, such findings are therefore
674 culturally specific and may have limited applicability to other domains and countries.
675 From a qualitative perspective, however, the reader may consider transferability to the
676 contexts of the other teams elsewhere (Leininger, 1994) where female players are
677 required to hold dual careers. Second, the number of participants was small, and they
678 had rather diverse backgrounds and experiences. However, qualitative inquiries,
679 typically use small samples with the intent of uncovering, describing, and explaining the
680 the phenomena of interest (Patton, 2015). Our intention was to uncover common themes
681 reflective of the professional experiences about second career of Japanese women's
682 professional athletes matriculating at the WE league.

683

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Conclusions

685 Past research has highlighted the often traumatic transition of professional
686 athletes' sense of self and purpose when they are forced to retire (Stambulova et al.,
687 2020). In sport culture where there are gendered inequalities regarding financial and
688 further employment opportunities (Dunning, 2017), this is particularly important. By
689 exploring the experiences and perceptions of female, professional Japanese soccer

690 players regarding second career opportunities, we could identify (a) how being a
691 professional athlete shaped second career aspirations and perceptions of development,
692 (b) how players believed the WE League supported them, and (c) how players believed
693 professional teams and the WE League should better support players. This study helps
694 researchers explore workers' behaviors and decisions based on values of occupational
695 socialization (Richards et al., 2014).

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917 **Table 1 Characteristics and Work Context of Participants**

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Name*	Age	Gender	Experiences of playing soccer	Injury history	Second Career Training	Current status of career contract
MH	25	Female	2 years (Professional) 16 years (Amateur)	Hamstring damage	No	Professional soccer player
KA	27	Female	9 years (Professional) 10 years (Amateur)	Anterior cruciate ligament rupture	No	Professional soccer player & Office worker
SB	29	Female	11 years (Professional) 13 years (Amateur)	Bone fracture (elbow and foot)	No	Professional soccer player & Office worker
NR	27	Female	12 years (Professional) 10 years (Amateur)	Right Foot Sprain	No	Professional soccer player
SR	31	Female	11 years (Professional) 13 years (Amateur)	Recurrent dislocation of peroneal tendon	No	Professional soccer player & Office worker
SM	28	Female	9 years (professional) 10 years (amateur)	Meniscus tear	No	Professional soccer player & Office worker

919 *Pseudonym.

920 *Note. Ms.SB, Ms.SR, and Ms.SM had high school diplomas. Ms.MH and Ms.KA held
921 bachelor degrees. Ms.NR held a master of science degree in Kinesiology.

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