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# **Transition Experiences of Football Players from Amateur to Professional Leagues**

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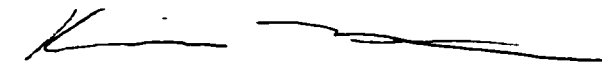
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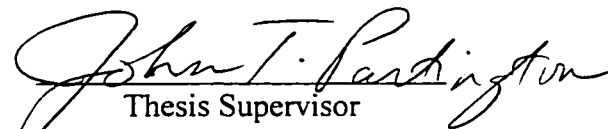
**"THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF FOOTBALL  
PLAYERS FROM AMATEUR TO PROFESSIONAL LEAGUES"**

submitted by **Debbie Stewart, B.A.**

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts

  
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## **Abstract**

This study examined how 21 football players prepared for and experienced the transition from the college level to professional status. Data were in the form of transcripts from audio-taped self-interviews which were structured around the following questions: How is the transition experienced?; What facilitates the transition; and what problems are encountered? Qualitative cross-case and case analysis of interview texts were undertaken toward describing the transition, determining differences between players who completed the transition successfully and those who had failed or were still struggling, and ultimately, generating useful practical guidelines to athletes in transition. Results revealed that important elements in successful transition included the following: openness, and willingness to seek advice from the social network within football; emphasis on the mental aspects of performance in both practices and games, especially keeping focused on the task at hand; and, degree of readiness for the transition and for playing professional football. Those findings were confirmed with post-hoc quantitative analyses. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

*"Getting to the NFL is like climbing Mt. Everest, there's a distinct pleasure in just the knowledge that you're one of the few who ever made it."*

--Tim Green, 1996, p. 2

As people move through life, they continually experience life-altering transitional changes. These changes can range from normal life transitions associated with childhood, adolescence and adulthood (e.g., puberty and marriage), to more unexpected transitions such as job loss or the death of a loved one. Often, these changes and transitions lead to new behaviours, new opportunities for growth and development, new perceptions about the world and about oneself, and new acquaintances and friends (Schlossberg, 1981). Athletes must not only cope with these "normal" life transitions, they must also contend with the transitions inherent in sport. For instance, athletes are faced with transitions emanating from events such as injury, losing a championship title, or being traded to a new team.

Although the literature is replete with studies examining the effects of developmental transitions and other life transitions, little attention has been paid to transitions within sport. Furthermore, when researchers have examined transitions in sport, they have focused predominately on the transitions leading to disengagement from sport, such as injury and retirement. However, another influential athletic transition, that from amateur to professional status within a sport, has been neglected. This transition is characterized by a loss of the intrinsic motivational context of amateur sporting status with the acceptance of monetary payment for one's athletic performance.

The depth and scope of the review which follows represents a compromise between the university requirements for evidence of serious scholarship in the development of the problem on the one hand, and on the other, the requirements of the

qualitative research design proposed for use in this study. Specifically, Patton (1990) has cautioned that a thorough and exhaustive review and analysis of the literature should not take place until after the interview stage of data collection. This is because such a review may bias the researcher's thinking and reduce openness to interviewee reports, and sensitivity to emerging potential new understandings.

### Transitions

The term transition suggests both a change and a period during which the change is taking place (Louis, 1980a). Transition depicts any change of status experienced by an individual which inevitably interrupts the continuity of events or experiences. These changes typically alter the individual's perception of him- or herself, and of the world, often requiring new sets of behaviours and responses (Schlossberg, 1981). The outcome may be positive or negative, and may result in growth or in deterioration (Moos & Tsu, 1976; Schlossberg, 1981). Moreover, transitions can be drastic (i.e., school to work) or gradual (e.g., new duties and responsibilities added to an old job). The one constant element of every transition experience is change (Allen & van de Vliert, 1984). However, different kinds of transitions can be distinguished. According to role theorists (e.g., Allen & van de Vliert, 1984; Nicholson, 1987), different transitions will have different effects on people depending on the degree of continuity between the roles a person experiences prior to and following a transition.

### Career Transitions

One transition which has received a lot of attention lately is career transition. Career transition literature focuses on role transitions -- a role modification that is in some way linked to the organization (Sokol & Louis, 1982). A career transition is a period during which an individual is either changing role or changing orientation to a role already held (Louis, 1980a). Career transitions may be either voluntary (e.g., choose a new profession) or involuntary (e.g., mandatory retirement). Regardless, career transition refers to the change in a person's job or occupational roles -- including organizational

entry, geographic relocation, promotion, demotion, retirement -- and usually implies not only a change in the task content and task context (Brett, 1984) but also, a change in the person as well (Frese 1982; van der Velde & Feij, 1995). Specifically, career transitions habitually involve a reorientation of goals, attitudes, identity, behavioral routines, informal networks, etc. (Ashforth and Saks, 1995; van der Velde, Feij, & Taris, 1995). Thus, job transitions encompass a period of discontinuity and flux where individuals must make many cognitive (adjusting to new setting and demands), emotional (coping with a new social position) and behavioural (learning new tasks and routines) adjustments in order to achieve a new stability or synchronization.

Career transitions may be conceptualized either subjectively or objectively (Frese 1982; Louis, 1980a). When examining career transitions subjectively, the expectations of the individual in transition are considered in determining the beginning and end of a transition period. Subjective differences between old and new roles are personally rather than publicly noticed. Termed *contrasts*, these subjective differences are perceptions of the individual experiencing the transition (Louis, 1980a). An objective approach, on the other hand, delineates the transition period based solely on criteria related to work requirements. Thus, a transition period ends when all the work requirements are met by the individual or, conversely, when the individual has to leave an organization because he or she was unable to meet the work requirements. Objective differences between old and new roles (termed *changes*), are publicly noticeable and knowable (Louis, 1980a).

In addition to changes and contrasts, there are differences (termed *surprises*) that arise from discrepancies between an individual's expectations of their new work role and the subsequent real conditions in the new role (Louis, 1980a; 1980b). Surprises can have either a positive or a negative effect on the transition experience. In a study by Arnold (1985) the most commonly reported surprise told by graduates in the early months of employment was the general atmosphere at work. Conversely, the least commonly reported surprise was the nature of the work.

### Distinguishing Entry into Professional Sport from Other Career Transitions

While certain parallels between the transition from amateur to professional sport and other career transitions can be drawn, these are fundamentally different transition experiences.

First, career opportunities in professional sports are severely limited. In 1992, 1.1% of 4th year American college athletes made it to be a pro rookie (Coakley, 1994). This translates into 37 to 1 odds against college players making it to the pros. Odds against Canadian athletes becoming professional football players are more grim. Furthermore, for those athletes who do make it to the professional leagues, their career opportunities are short-term, averaging only four years. However, these figures obscure the fact that the number of people playing for one or two seasons is far greater than those who play for more than five years (Coakley, 1994). For these reasons, few professional athletes think of football as a career. For many non-athletes, however, their career is often a life-long pursuit.

Second, extreme sport activity and affiliation, as found among collegiate athletes, often interfere with educational achievement, contribute to role confusion and a deprived self-identity, and decrease the possibility of future occupational success outside of sport (Wooten, 1994; Coakley, 1994; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). Testimonial evidence of academic negligence among collegiate athletes is found in the recent past when athletic programs at major universities in the United States were put on probation for unethically keeping players eligible while bending school rules and ignoring athletes' progress as students (Kennedy & Dimick, 1987). Most negatively affected are male intercollegiate athletes in revenue producing sports, such as football (Kennedy & Dimick, 1987).

Further complicating matters, most of the technical skills and some of the mental skills and attitudes developed and refined through intense sport training are of limited value in the general job market (Coakley, 1994). Consequently, athletes striving to make it in the professional ranks are further burdened with the knowledge that failure not only ends their football career, but also severely limits their prospect of earning a decent income. In sum, athletics requires an almost total focus on sport participation which inhibits the development of important life skills necessary for career and personal planning (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990; Kennedy & Dimick, 1987). In contrast, the education and training for non-athletic careers typically leads to the acquisition of numerous skills valued in, and transferable to, other work fields.

Third, the exclusive development of highly specific goals required to achieve success in professional sports leads to social deficiencies (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990; Kennedy & Dimick, 1987). Since the transition from amateur to professional sport is very intense and short-lived, athletes must dedicate their entire lives to their goal of becoming a professional football player. As a result, athletes in the transition to professional sport become isolated from family and friends and, therefore have few support systems available to act as buffers against the stress and anxiety of transition. For example, rookie football players entering training camp find themselves in a new city, isolated from family, friends, and other habitual supports. Moreover, the support systems provided by the team are often superficial or unreliable. In fact, many athletes talk of the "cut-throat", "everyone-for-himself", attitude of professional sports (Parker, 1994). In sum, the transition experience of rookie professional athletes takes place in a concentrated environment characterized by intense training with little free time, and

where all the people and activities surrounding the individual represent football (Brislin, 1981). Non-athletic careers, in contrast, tend to be life-long pursuits, involving many progressive steps and many transition experiences. Consequently, these individuals are able to maintain other aspects of their lives and, as such, are more buffered against the stress of the career transition.

Fourth, professional sports hold the promise of money, recognition and fame. In professional football, athletes become high-priced entertainers earning an average salary of 496 000 American dollars per season in the NFL (Coakley, 1994). In contrast other young people usually start their professional careers at the thirty- to fifty-thousand dollar range. Consequently, many young men, despite the slim odds of success, are lured into sport by the fame and fortune not found in other career paths.

Finally, football, with its paternalistic authority structure, inhibits the growth of young athletes (Gair & Baker, 1983). In general, coaches in professional football leagues react to pressures to win by creating an environment that controls all aspects of the athlete's life (Wooten, 1994). Gair and Baker (1983) report on how players are encouraged to view their coaches as a "father figure" and, consequently, are reduced to absolute obedience both on and, often-times, off the field. When an athlete fails to satisfy his coach, feelings of insecurity and worthlessness may result (Gair & Baker, 1983). In many cases, the paternalistic nature of professional football causes many athletes to experience a difficult transition, especially if they do not feel that they are pleasing their coach (Wooten, 1994). This extreme form of paternalistic and totalitarian practice, in which employees are given so little say in work policies, is rarely (if ever) seen in other work environments.

In sum, while there are a few similarities between career transitions, in general, and transition into professional football, the vastly different adaptational context inherent in the professional sport transition can lead to differences in the basic processes individuals undertake in their adjustment. However, it should be noted that, given the similarities between professional sport careers and other professional entertainment careers (e.g., performing arts and music), it seems likely that many commonalties exist between the experiences of individuals attempting to develop a career in sport and entertainment. It appears that many athletes are particularly vulnerable to transitional stress because the narrowed focus required by sport participation inhibits the development of significant life skills and the exploration of alternative possibilities for adult life (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). Common sense suggests that this is likely also the case in other entertainment fields.

#### The Meaning of Being a Professional Football Player to Young North American Males

The problem of amateur to professional football transition invites psychological examination, not only because the football transition differs in significant ways from other transitions, as discovered above, but also because the game of football itself is such a large part of the sport culture in North America.

From July to January you can hardly avoid the barrage of professional football: It enters our homes, whether gladly received or not, by television, radio, and on the computer via the Internet. Games, Canadian or American, are broadcast nightly from Thursday through to the acclaimed Monday Night Football; televised and print news feature daily articles on the game and its personalities, ranging from play-by-play analyses of the last game, to stories of the defiled Dallas Cowboys. If you want to -- and

are able to -- evade football through these media, there are still the innumerable and ever-present commercials and advertisements endorsed by football celebrities and superstars; examples range from Deion Sanders selling Pepsi and pizza, to Dan Marino and his family asking support for the children's charities they represent, to Dallas Cowboy's quarterback Troy Aikman's many appearances on weekly sitcoms such as "Coach".

At least three important social values are realized during the football season: entertainment, athletic prowess, and community identity (Stebbins, 1987). First, football is entertainment; its players are celebrities and heroes. How many of us have not at least heard of Deion Sanders, Joe Montana, Bret Favre, Troy Aikman, and the CFL's Doug Flutie? There is a preoccupation with professional football and its heroes. Billions of dollars are spent around the world, especially in North America, on the game of football.

Second, professional football is the ultimate display of athletic prowess, brutish strength, mental toughness, and male bonding. According to an eight year veteran of the game turned author, Tim Green (1996), professional football players are the final vestiges of the Arthurian knights or the medieval gladiators: "It is the primal connection with physical battle confined only by the rules of sport, testing athletes on every level -- speed, intelligence, quickness, strength, endurance, grace and mental toughness -- that makes football so popular" (p. xiii). In football men take pride in, and demonstrate, their physical deftness and skill. Furthermore, there is a visible 'maleness' in the spectatorship of professional football (Stearns, 1990). Fathers and sons bond and develop shared interests around tossing the football in the backyard and watching professional football games. According to Horrocks (1995), men have used football as "a consolidation of

masculine solidarity against women"(p. 19) -- a clear validation of the male identity (Stearns, 1990). We only need to picture the stereotypical American Thanksgiving where the men are in the basement watching the football games, and the women are in the kitchen preparing the meal, to understand their statements. But, in support of his view, Stearns (1990) notes that the growth of professional football in the 1920's corresponded with the 'feminization' of certain branches of work. In addition, he associates the increasing popularity of the antics of professional football players in the 1980's, such as dancing over defeated players after a tackle and generally adopting an "in-your-face" attitude, as coinciding with the deluge of feminism which forced men to learn to be less boastful and ostentatious. Thus, professional football, as well as being a display of athletic prowess, strength, and speed, served as a symbolic outlet for the 'masculinity' that was suppressed in everyday life.

Finally, professional football is a valuable contributor to a community's identity and solidarity. Sport can bring together a community of diverse people with different backgrounds. A football team and franchise can put a city "on the map". Winning teams are especially valuable in this pursuit. And, participating in the CFL Grey Cup championship or the NFL Superbowl are "the ultimate realizations of this value" (Stebbins, 1987, p. 33).

As demonstrated, football has many meanings to the non-playing viewing audience, but what does professional football mean to its players and hopefuls? Green (1996), from his own experiences, discusses four factors which he believes constitutes the dream of playing in the NFL. All four of these factors also apply to the CFL to some extent. Obviously there's the money. An NFL contract can be compared to winning the

lottery: The average player in this league will earn two and a half million American dollars in his career (Green, 1996). Salaries in the Canadian Football League are notably less, but with a minimum starting salary of over 25 000 dollars for a five month work period, money is still a factor.

Second, the fame and prestige of being a professional football player feeds the dream and desire of aspiring professional players. Endorsements and signing autographs; adoring fans and media attention turn an 'average guy' into a celebrity.

Third, there's the thrill of playing your sport in front of large, energetic crowds. In discussing the thrill of football, Green (1996) compares an adrenaline rush to "a cold bowl of soup compared to the charge you feel playing in an NFL game" (p. 2). Crowds in the NFL can go over 60 000 and, in strong football cities, game day is phenomenal. Wearing the football jerseys of their favorite players and team, many with their faces and bodies painted in team colors, football spectators are loud, vocal, and not afraid to express either satisfaction or displeasure with a team's performance.

Finally, Green (1996) talks about the satisfaction of reaching the professional ranks in football. Hard work, determination, raw talent, and luck all play a role in making it to the 'pros'. However, this satisfaction is often elusive and short-lived. The following colorful quote from Green demonstrates how the violent and vicious nature of the game is an obstacle that faces every aspiring professional football player, who must live with the constant threat of career-ending injury:

"[I]t's like a game of chess. Even the lowest pawn, in the right position, can take out the king and end the game. If you're the fastest kid in the state of Texas destined to be the next Jerry Rice, you may never get there because some gap-

toothed duck-footed linebacker from Odessa laid you out in the fourth quarter of a 67-0 game and ended your career before it ever really got started" (p.2).

Thus, there is satisfaction in being one of the few men who were able to overcome the many obstacles and make it to the professional ranks. Obstacles for Canadian athletes aspiring to the professional ranks in football are even greater. The Canadian football system, from little leagues up through to high school, is underdeveloped and manned by volunteers who may not know enough about the game to properly nurture and develop their athletes. Thus, these players are at a distinct disadvantage in that their training has been inadequate and grossly inferior to the football training received by American boys. Thus, personal satisfaction resulting from hard work, dedication, determination, and exceptional ability may play an even larger role in the lives of Canadian professional football players.

From the above it is clear that the problem of transitions from amateur to professional football is a psychologically significant problem that is relevant in our sport culture. Millions of youth and young men aspire to become professional football players. Thus, the football transition is a very human and social problem which needs to be examined in order to "learn about the person, his moral struggles, his successes and failures in securing his destiny in a world too often at variance with his hopes and ideals" (Burgess, as cited by Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 78).

### Approaches to Studying Transitions

Traditional approaches to transitions have suggested that all people face a similar sequence of experiences. As such, many "phase" and "stage" models have been borrowed from sociology and psychology to describe the experience of transitions

(Parker, 1994). Most notably, are the thanatological theories, such as Kubler-Ross' (1969) five stage model of grieving and bereavement: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and, finally, acceptance. In fact, her model of bereavement is so widely accepted that the markers of an individual's progress through many transitions have frequently been characterized by Kubler-Ross' five stage model.

Recently, several shortcomings associated with these models have been identified. First, it is becoming recognized that although changes in life often involve losses which require adaptation, these changes may also involve new opportunities and challenges (Swain, 1991). Since transitions can involve gains rather than (or in addition to) losses, it is appropriate to employ a more neutral attitude towards change as a transition. Given the wide range of variables that mediate adaptation to transitions, it is difficult to find simple generalizations that apply to all people. Thus, since transitions are very complicated processes and individuals vary considerably in their experiences of transitions, researchers such as Schlossberg (1981) have begun to emphasize a multidimensional perspective on transitions.

According to Schlossberg (1981), "a transition can be said to occur if an event or nonevent [an event which, although anticipated, did not happen] results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus, requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships" (p. 5). Thus, Schlossberg's definition of transition is expansive in that it includes obvious passages such as marriage but also, more subtle changes such as the nonoccurrence of an anticipated event. In addition, unlike most models of adaptation to change (e.g., Hopson & Adams, 1971), Schlossberg considers the context in which the transition took place, the individual's perceptions of the transition,

and how it changes over time. The emphasis is not so much on the transition or change itself, but on the individual's perception of change. For example, for some athletes being traded to a new team is a relatively minor, typical happening, but for others, being traded represents a significant movement.

### Adaptation to Transition

Adaptation to career transition is an intricate process involving a tremendous number of variables each having different salience depending on the individual, the organization and the particular environment (Schlossberg, 1981). Because adaptation is such a complicated process, it is a term frequently used without careful explanation of its meaning (Ashford & Taylor, 1990). Recently, however, several researchers have attempted to provide more productive definitions of adaptation to transition. For example, Ashford and Taylor (1990), define adaptation as "the process by which individuals learn, negotiate, enact, and maintain the behaviors appropriate to a given organizational environment" (pp. 4). Here, 'appropriate' assumes some degree of fit between expected behaviours demanded by the organization and actual behaviours of the individual. Thus, adaptation is an interactive process of understanding and negotiating the demands of the environment and then responding in an appropriate manner (Ashford & Taylor, 1990). Schlossberg (1981) also promotes the dynamic view to measuring adaptation. She defines adaptation as a movement from total preoccupation with the transition to integrating the transition into everyday life. Thus, in the beginning the athlete is totally conscious of being a rookie in the NFL. In later stages of adaptation, however, the athlete is simply aware of being a professional football player as only one aspect of his life. This process depends on the actual and perceived balance between the

individual's resources and deficits, as well as the degree of similarity and differences in the pre- and post-transition environments, especially with regard to one's support system. Schlossberg identified three primary factors which affect the outcome of the transition process, namely: 1) the type, context, and impact of the transition, 2) the personal and psychological characteristics of the individual, and 3) the environmental characteristics before and after the transition.

Adaptation is a dynamic and gradual process wherein these three sets of factors interact and influence adaptation or failure to adapt. However, not all factors are equally important in adapting to a particular transition. There have been suggestions in the literature that sport transitions may be highly related to the particular context in which the transition is occurring (Parker, 1994; Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985). Thus, career transitions are likely sport-specific and it may not be very meaningful to compare the transition experiences of a retiring Olympic wrestler to those of an aspiring professional NFL player.

In sum, adaptation to transition is an incredibly complex process with many personal, organizational and societal variables interacting to influence the outcome. Thus, simple explanations about the reasons for an individual's success or failure in adapting to change and transition tend to be inappropriate, incomplete, and distorted. In considering the individual's experience in adapting to change and transition we must consider the fit between an individual's skills and the demands of the new job, as well as the individual's ability to make sense of these demands, to negotiate organizational demands, and to cope with the stress of change and uncertainty (Ashford & Taylor, 1989). Furthermore, in order to accomplish these tasks and to meet the new

environmental demands, the individual adopts a plan or a set of strategies. Some strategies are adaptive and facilitate transition (e.g., forming "mentor" relationships with experienced players) while others are maladaptive and even destructive (e.g., withdrawal or avoidance).

## CHAPTER 2

### Qualitative Research Tradition: From Controversy to Understanding

*"Scientists firmly believe that as long as they are not conscious of any bias or political agenda, they are neutral and objective, when in fact they are only unconscious."*

-- Namenwirth, 1986. p.29

I have chosen to include a fairly extensive chapter on qualitative research and certain pertinent issues associated with this tradition because qualitative research is an alternative to mainstream psychological research. Consequently, qualitative research is often neglected, and even shunned, by researchers in psychology. While gaining prominence in other disciplines (e.g., anthropology, education, sociology), qualitative research is still an aside to psychological research based in the positivist tradition. In fact, my own undergraduate and graduate training in psychology exemplify this statement. Although extensively educated in scientific methods and the statistical analysis of quantitative data, I had barely been introduced to the qualitative research tradition prior to commencing my thesis. I believe that my training reflects psychology's long-standing ambition to be considered a 'hard' science. However, psychology would benefit from setting aside its biases and -- following the lead of the rest of the research community [e.g., physics is becoming critical of, and moving beyond, the Newtonian scientific paradigm (Smith, 1996)] -- adopt a more open stance to alternative approaches: "Until we, as a research community, are more familiar with the traditions our colleagues have adopted, we cannot fully comprehend the meanings they would make of their

inquiries, nor can we judge their work in a way that is consonant with their starting premises and interests" (Lincoln, 1989, p. 238).

The qualitative paradigm and its methods were best suited to my research questions. Thus, I seek to familiarize the reader with an important contextual element of my thesis: namely, the qualitative research tradition in which I am working.

### Qualitative Research Defined

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994b), "qualitative research is a field in its own right" (p. 1) which cuts across many topics and disciplines. As such, "a complex, interconnected family of terms, concepts, and assumptions surround the term *qualitative research*" (p.1). Thus, qualitative research is difficult to define clearly since it has no theory, no paradigm, and no distinct set of methods of its own. Denzin and Lincoln (1994b) attribute this complex and sometimes contradictory family to its association with very diverse -- and often-times, opposing -- traditions, such as positivism, post-structuralism, and the interpretivist and cultural studies. Thus, qualitative research is embedded in a complex (and still evolving) history. Qualitative research can be conducted in a multitude of different ways. For example, in an attempt to display the range of qualitative research approaches, Wolcott (1992) devised a tree diagram that listed more than 20 different ways of collecting qualitative data, and Tesh's (1990) computer-generated synopsis organizes 27 types of qualitative research. However, a general definition can be devised: Qualitative research is "an approach to the study of the social world that seeks to describe and analyze the attitude and behavior of humans and their groups from the point of view of those being studied" (Bryman, 1988, p. 46).

While qualitative research embraces multiple methods, many commonalities among the traditions can be discerned. Each tradition believes that inquiry must occur in a natural setting rather than a contrived one (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994b; Marshall, 1995; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Thus, qualitative researchers seek to contextualize experiences (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994a), and to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994b). Qualitative methodologists endeavor to understand a phenomenon as a whole and typically seek to adopt a position of deep attentiveness and empathic understanding or "verstehen", wherein there are no theories to prove and no expected results to support. (Bryman, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990). Moreover, being committed to presenting the perspective of those being studied is a fundamental characteristic of qualitative research (Bryman, 1988). In their attempt to explain the way the participants come to understand and manage their situations, qualitative researchers, for the most part, use words and rich descriptions (Bryman, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994). In order to accomplish this, qualitative researchers can: Chose from a variety of empirical techniques, including interview, observation, interaction, case study, and personal experience; utilize a wide range of data analysis procedures, such as content, discourse, archival, and statistical analyses; and even draw upon a variety of approaches, including phenomenology, hermeneutics, ethnography, and deconstructivism (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994b; Fetterman, 1988).

### History of Qualitative Research

In the past four decades we have witnessed a surge in interest in qualitative methods, especially in the social and human sciences. [Human science is a term used to refer to the sciences that explore the human experience, rather than the natural world

(Tesh, 1990)]. This interest stems largely from a growing dissatisfaction among these scientists with the more traditional scientific approach. While there has been increasing debate and discussion surrounding the merits of a scientific approach to human study and the benefits that would accrue from adopting and integrating a more qualitative philosophy and methodology, qualitative research itself is not a new tradition. Its history predates this modern escalation in interest in its potential. In fact, qualitative research in the social sciences is almost as old as the disciplines themselves (Tesh, 1990), and dates back to the early 20th century in the case of social anthropology (Richardson, 1996).

From the inception of the social sciences, there has been tension between scholars within each field (except anthropology) who wished to emulate the methods of the older natural sciences, and those who felt that consciousness in humans called for a different approach. The former group were known as the positivists because they adopted the philosophical stance of positivism "which refers to the 'positive' [observable] data of experience as the basis of all science" (Tesh, 1990, p. 9). In contrast, the latter group, known as the anti-positivists, were inspired by the German romantic movement which valued the conscious, emotional, and social life of humans. They promoted a humanistic social science (Tesh 1990).

Throughout most of the history of the social sciences, qualitative researchers have been the minority. Despite the dominance of positivism, however, qualitative research traditions have quietly persisted through the 20th century. Denzin and Lincoln (1994b) perspicuously describe the history of qualitative research in this century by dividing it into five phases or 'moments'. The first moment, called the traditional period, extends from 1900 until World War II. In this era, qualitative researchers -- strongly influenced

by positivist scientific thought -- wrote objective accounts of field experiments which sought to validly and reliably study foreign cultures (e.g., Malinowski's 1914 - 1915 ethnography of the people of New Guinea).

Denzin and Lincoln's second moment, the modernist phase (post World War II to 1970s), was characterized by attempts to formalize qualitative methods. Social realism, naturalism and 'slice-of-life' ethnographies were esteemed. In psychology, in the mid 1960s, Abraham Maslow was publishing works in humanistic psychology. He advocated a method for psychology that was more comprehensive, holistic, and personal than the traditional scientific methods (Tesh 1990). It is also at the end of this period, that Bryman (1988) claims qualitative methods in the other social sciences were brought into the open. He attributes rising interest in qualitative research to three factors: 1) The growing dissatisfaction with the dominant scientific approach and quantitative research. 2) the thesis of philosopher T. S. Kuhn on scientific revolutions and paradigm crises. According to Kuhn, certain views of knowledge, called 'paradigms', have major influence on the field of study at any one time until irregularities in the findings begin to occur. This causes a crisis since studies obtain results that do not fit the theory. Consequently, a search ensues for a new paradigm which will better explain the phenomena under study (Martens, 1987; Tesh 1990). And, finally, 3) the growth of phenomenology in the 1960s. Phenomenological philosophy emphasizes consciousness, and all the 'phenomena' (e.g., events, processes, objects, etc.) that we become aware of through consciousness (Giorgi, 1995). The growth of phenomenology created interest in participant observation and unstructured interviews as research methods (Bryman, 1988).

The third moment (1970 - 1986) described by Denzin and Lincoln (1994b) is labeled "Blurred genres". Qualitative researchers, in this period, had a wide range of paradigms, methods and strategies at their disposal (e.g., post-positivism, symbolic interactionism, constructivism, phenomenology, and ethnomethodology). This was the age of the blurred interpretive genres. Qualitative researchers in the social sciences were concerned with the author's presence in the interpretive text. Hermeneutics, the interpretation of texts to discover what the author meant (Van Langenhove, 1995), was borrowed from the humanities. At this time, there were no longer any rules concerning the subject matter of qualitative research, nor were there any firm standards of evaluation. While there was growth in the qualitative movement in the social sciences during this moment, human science research and qualitative methods -- with a few notable exceptions -- remained in the shadow of mainstream North American psychology. Psychological researcher Amedeo Giorgi, for instance, was advocating a systematic and rigorous phenomenology that encouraged researchers to describe the methods they used in their studies in detail (Tesh 1990).

The fourth moment (1986 to 1990), is termed the "crisis of representation" by Denzin and Lincoln. Issues of gender, class and race were called into question by the critical and feminist epistemologies. Research and writing became more reflexive. [In a general sense, reflexivity refers to the relationship something could have with itself (Garfinkel, 1967)]. Denzin and Lincoln call attention to the double crisis of representation and legitimation which challenged the human scientist. The first crisis revolved around the assumption that qualitative researchers can directly capture the lived experiences of those they study. The crisis of legitimation, on the other hand, concerned

the use of traditional criteria for evaluating and interpreting qualitative research. Old goodness criteria such as validity, reliability and generalizability were retheorized by qualitative researchers.

Presently, we are in Denzin and Lincoln's fifth moment which is shaped by the dual crisis of representation and legitimation. There is still a focus on representing the individual or group being studied. however, the concept of an objective and detached researcher is discarded. The emphasis is no longer on "grand narratives", rather qualitative researchers are focusing on "specific problems and specific situations" (Denzin and Lincoln. 1994b. p. 11).

While qualitative research has continued to gain influence in the social science fields, the emergence of qualitative methods and the debates associated with them have had little impact within psychology until the 1990s (Woolgar, 1996). Throughout its history, attempts were made to promote qualitative methods in psychology, but these did not lead to any change in research practice (Richardson, 1996). In fact, Tesh (1990) reports that the word "qualitative" is rarely used in American psychology. European psychologists appear only slightly more open to qualitative research traditions. A report by the Scientific Affairs Board of the British Psychological Society in 1991 recognized that there was a growing interest in the utility of qualitative methods in psychological research, but at the same time, claimed that psychology departments do not have the competence nor the expertise to train undergraduate and graduate students to employ these methods (as cited by Richardson, 1996). Henwood (1996) attributes the lack of an interrelationship between psychology and general qualitative inquiry to psychology's commitment to experimentation and the scientific method. However, while psychology

appears to remain one of the last strongholds of positivistic philosophy in the social sciences, there are signs of a growing interest in qualitative philosophy and methodology in the discipline. In fact, recently there has been a movement against experimentalism in psychology, and especially in social psychology, and towards qualitative approaches (Hammersley 1996).

### Advantages of Qualitative Research

Miles and Huberman (1994) call qualitative data sexy: "They are a source of well-grounded rich description and explanations of processes in identifiable local contexts. With qualitative data one can preserve chronological flow, see precisely which events led to which consequences, and derive fruitful explanations" (p. 1). They go on to state that qualitative data have a certain "undeniability" in that words and descriptions are often more meaningful and convincing to a reader than a series of numbers on a page (Miles & Huberman 1988, 1994).

Qualitative methods are especially geared toward exploration, discovery, and inductive logic (Patton, 1990; see also Bryman, 1988). Inductive analysis begins with specific observations and builds towards general patterns. One major advantage of qualitative research is that it focuses on unconstrained events in natural settings. Thus, the influences of the context are taken into account. In fact, the emphasis is on a bounded phenomena grounded in its natural context (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Qualitative methods are also good for examining an individual's subjective experiences and for exploring important individual differences in experiences and outcomes (Swain, 1991). Finally, since qualitative research tends to focus on a relatively small number of cases

(sometimes only one), there is a richness and wholeness to the "thick descriptions" that authenticates them and has a strong impression on the reader (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Qualitative methods can be used to uncover and understand phenomena about which little is known (Strauss, 1990); to make sense of phenomena or situations without placing pre-existing expectations on the phenomena (Patton, 1990); to obtain intricate details of phenomena that are difficult to acquire with quantitative methods (Strauss, 1990); and, to obtain in-depth and detailed information about a small number of people, and to explore relevant individual differences in experiences (Patton, 1990). In effect, it allows researchers to "ask new questions, answer different kinds of questions, and readdress old questions... in a number of areas where the dominant paradigm has failed or is inappropriate" (Fetterman, 1988, p. 7). In sum, qualitative research is useful to researchers in psychology because it provides them with new ways of defining and exploring relevant research questions, and of conducting research.

### Problems and Limitations with Qualitative Research

While the previous section highlighted some benefits and uses associated with qualitative research, I will now examine some of the problems -- cited from the literature and my own experiences -- that have been associated with this type of research. First, qualitative research is labour-intensive work. Often data collection extends over many months (and in some cases, years). The sheer volume of data can be overwhelming to code, organize and analyze. Furthermore, if the researcher opts to thoroughly examine only a few cases, the adequacy of the sample, as well as the generalizability of emerging findings, may be questioned (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Second, the trustworthiness and the quality of the interpretations and conclusions are oftentimes a source of concern in qualitative research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Bryman (1988) effectively reiterates this concern in the form of a question: "how feasible is it to perceive as others perceive?" (p.73). For example, qualitative researchers rarely enter a research setting as a 'tabula rasa', rather they bring with them a focus of interest, as well as various personal predispositions, which may not reflect the subjects' viewpoint (Bryman, 1988). Whether qualitative researchers are able to provide valid accounts from the perspective of others (those being studied) has proven to be disconcerting for many critics (Bryman, 1988). (This concern represents the crisis of representation alluded to in an earlier section.) Bryman goes on to note that the presentation of the participants point of view by qualitative researchers actually consists of three ingredients: 1) the participants' view of the world; 2) the researcher's interpretation of this world view; and, 3) the researcher's "construction of his or her interpretation of the native's view of the world for the ethnographer's own intellectual and cultural community" (p.80). While this discussion focused especially on ethnography, it applies equally well to most other forms of qualitative research. Pidgeon (1996), however, warns that we should not take a naive view of the role of induction in inquiry since researchers need "some theoretical resources to guide the process of interpretation and representation" (p. 82).

The final problem with qualitative research stems from the lack of explicit methods, rules for drawing conclusions, and verification techniques in qualitative research. These issues are a cause for concern for mainstream psychologists who tend to prefer explicit, well-established, practical guidelines on which to model their own research (Pidgeon and Henwood, 1996). As a result, these researchers may lack

confidence in qualitative findings. Similarly, qualitative research, as an umbrella term, incorporates different and disparate positions (Pidgeon, 1996). Hammersley (1996) refers to the tensions arising from conflicting intellectual positions as the "dilemma of qualitative methods". This dilemma originates from joint commitment to, sometimes, incompatible positions. For example, attempting to accommodate the objective (attempting to reflect the participants' account in an objective and neutral manner) and the subjective (the constructivist notion of subjectivity of the researcher in generating new understanding and theory) in the human sciences.

Mainstream psychology resists qualitative research as unscientific. However, as Smith (1996) notes, their conception of what constitutes science is very narrow. Because of academic psychology's inclination towards the natural sciences, traditional researchers -- while having extended their studies beyond the laboratory -- are still predisposed to conduct objective, value free, positivistic research wherein measurement of the hypothesized relationship between dependent and independent variables is sought (Smith, 1996). In effect, qualitative research is seen by many traditional researchers as a violation of (and assault on) this tradition (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994b). According to Giorgi (1995), limiting the definition of science to the model defined by the natural sciences leaves psychology in the precarious situation of either meeting the criteria of the natural sciences, or else declaring that it is not a science. However, science is actually a multifarious endeavor with ample reach and scope to accommodate qualitative psychological research (Smith 1996).

Science is "a cultural institution invented by humans in order to gain the best possible knowledge about the world and the people in it" (Giorgi, 1995, p. 26). There is

no single way to define science and scientific technique (Smith, 1996). Yet, the conventional scientific approach has been dominant in psychology and the social sciences, in general, for so long that many researchers simply accept it without first examining its assumptions (Eisner, 1990). Nonetheless, there are many tenets of mainstream psychological research which can be challenged: for example, statistical correlational analyses ignore the individual case, but it can be argued that if something occurs only once, it is still worth examining and understanding. Furthermore, Smith (1996) relates how physics, *the* natural science, is now critical of, and growing away from, the premises of the Newtonian scientific paradigm which conventional psychology values and imitates. He goes on to offer Heisenberg's uncertainty principle as an example. A portion of this principle deals with the fact that when researchers measure particles at a very fine level, they must interfere with the particles themselves. Hence, the new physics is redefining its epistemological stance in light of new developments within the field (e.g., knower and known can no longer be considered independent). So long as psychologists are satisfied with measuring observable behaviour, then the scientific positivistic approach is applicable, but if psychology wants to gain knowledge about the human experience, new approaches are needed.

### The Quantitative/Qualitative Paradigm Debate

The term 'paradigm' was brought to our awareness by Thomas Kuhn. In brief, research paradigms are basic belief systems or assumptions that guide the thinking and actions of the inquirer (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992; Guba & Lincoln, 1989, 1994). Adherents of a given paradigm follow a set of assumptions, beliefs and conventions which provide the foundation for their definition of good or bad science (Sparkes, 1991).

Paradigms are human constructions, and cannot be proved or disproved (Guba, 1990).

They are simply, "the most informed and sophisticated view that its proponents have been able to devise, given the way they have chosen to respond to the three defining questions" discussed below (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.108).

When combined, beliefs about the following three issues constitute a paradigm:

Ontology -- "What is the nature of reality?"; epistemology -- "What is the relationship between the inquirer and the known?"; and, methodology -- "How should the researcher go about gaining knowledge of the world?" (Denzin & Lincoln 1994b; Guba, 1990).

These elements, taken together, constitute the basic beliefs (paradigm) that guide each researcher.

Ontology concerns reality. Quantitative researchers, adhering to a scientific paradigm, maintain a realist ontology whereby there is one knowable reality that is independent of human perception. This reality can be divided into parts (variables) and studied separately from the whole. Inquiry can eventually converge on reality. Some quantitative researchers (those working in the post-positivist tradition) are *critical* realist in the sense that they believe that reality exists, but that it can never be fully apprehended by humans because of their imperfect and limited sensory and intellectual accouterments (Guba, 1990). In contrast, the qualitative paradigm -- rooted in phenomenology -- asserts that there are multiple, socially constructed realities. Thus, advocates of the qualitative paradigm tend to endorse a more relativistic conception of reality (Firestone, 1987; Guba, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 1988). Our views are relative to "a framework, to a form of representation, to a cultural code, and to a personal biography" (Eisner 1990; as cited by Sparkes, 1991, p. 108).

The epistemological issue deals with the researchers role in inquiry. One's epistemological stance depends on how the ontological question was answered. For instance, if a researcher adopts a realist ontology, he or she will conduct inquiry in an objective and detached manner in order to discover "how things really are" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108). The quantitative researcher is committed to a dualist-objectivist epistemology: The researcher is independent from the known (dualist), and assumes a position of detached objectivity in order to avoid bias (objectivist) (Firestone, 1987; Guba, 1990). Recently, a modified objectivist epistemology -- wherein objectivity remains the ideal, but can only be approximated by striving to be as neutral as possible -- has been adopted by some quantitative researchers (Guba, 1990). The qualitative paradigms, in contrast, follow a monistic-subjectivist epistemology: It is impossible to separate the researcher from the researched (monistic), and the qualitative researcher becomes immersed in the phenomena under study (subjectivist) (Firestone, 1987; Guba, 1990).

The methodological question concerns the approach the researcher employs in his or her attempts to gain knowledge about the phenomena of interest. Answers to the methodological question depend on the ontological and epistemological position adopted by the researcher. The quantitative researcher typically employs experimental (or correlational) and manipulative designs whereby hypotheses are generated and variables are controlled in order to test the hypotheses (Firestone, 1987; Guba, 1990). Conversely, the qualitative perspectives utilize a hermeneutical and/or dialectical methodology. It is hermeneutical in the sense of developing joint constructions between the researcher and the research participant through iterative interactions. It is dialectical in the sense that

constructions are compared, contrasted, and reconsidered in the aim of generating one (or few) constructions with high consensus between researcher and participants (Guba, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

### Differences Between Qualitative and Quantitative Research

As has been indicated, researchers working within different paradigms have different views of the world, of the relationship between themselves and the world which they study, and of how to go about gaining knowledge of this world. They also differ in what they want answers to, in their conceptions of the nature of truth, in the context they chose for discovery, and in their guidelines for pursuing and assessing data. "They speak with different tongues and hear different voices" (Sparkes, 1991, p.107).

Typically, the purpose of quantitative research is confirmation and verification of hypothesized causal relationships between variables. Quantitative researchers are disposed to reduce inquiry to a small focus by formulating a priori hypotheses and seeking only answers to those questions (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). A structured research strategy, usually paper-and-pencil or physical device, that yields hard, reliable, objective data is the preferred approach (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Hammersley, 1996). They hold that truth is independent of the inquirer and that every action can be explained as the result of some cause. The goal is to predict, develop generalizations, and ultimately, build theory based on nomothetic knowledge (i.e., objective knowledge that is independent of the knower and focuses on the development of general laws) of these cause-effect relationships (Martens, 1987). In the quantitative paradigms, theories are primarily etic; that is, they are analytical theories developed from concepts coming from the researcher (Firestone, 1990). According to Creswell (1994), a quantitative study in

the social sciences that is consistent with the assumptions of the quantitative paradigm "is an inquiry into a social or human problem, based on testing a theory composed of variables, measured with numbers, and analyzed with statistical procedures, in order to determine whether the predictive generalizations of the theory hold true." Findings are judged to be adequate when procedures are well designed and carefully conducted, therefore when the criteria of rigor -- internal and external validity, reliability, and generalizability -- are observed. Specialists in the field are also called upon to judge the goodness of findings submitted for publication in peer-reviewed scientific journals.

In comparison, the purpose of qualitative research is the discovery of insights into how human experience is created and given meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994b; Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Research is commonly carried out in the natural setting of the phenomenon of interest, and the researcher's primary task is the nonjudgemental recording of these events. In addition, unlike their quantitative counterparts, many qualitative researchers hold that the notion cause-effect is simply a human subscription. Rather, they accept that elements are in constant interaction, each shaping and being shaped in an infinite number of complex ways (Guba & Lincoln, 1988). Researchers in the qualitative tradition take an expansionist and holistic stance; i.e., they pursue an understanding of phenomena as wholes, in a way that reflects their complexity (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Accordingly, they tend to favor rich, deep descriptions and working hypotheses about why things work the way they do in a particular case, event, or situation (i.e., idiographic understanding). The representativeness of these descriptions and of the researcher's understanding of the phenomena are fed back to the participants, who then judge the authenticity (validity) of the interpretations that emerged from the

inquiry. Thus, concepts are emic (coming from those being studied), and there is collaboration between the researcher and the researched at every stage of the inquiry (Firestone, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 1988). In sum, a qualitative study "is an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting." (Creswell, 1994).

Conventional position against qualitative paradigm. A condensed examination of the quantitative basis for rejecting alternative qualitative approaches to knowledge accumulation suggests that conventional scientists see qualitative research as "too soft": hence, too subjective and full of bias (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994b), too unreliable with too few agreed upon criteria for analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1988), and insufficiently generalizable (Guba & Lincoln, 1988). Therefore, the knowledge statements derived from qualitative research are considered dubious from this perspective. However, it was soon realized that these critics were applying the assumptions of quantitative, positivistic science to the new qualitative approaches even though these are inappropriate and unfair premises on which to judge the alternative paradigms (Guba & Lincoln, 1988).

Clearly, each tradition has its own concepts of truth, and the appropriate procedures for discovering truth. Unfortunately, this does not insinuate that equal status is conferred upon each tradition within the research community, nor does it imply that each paradigm is open to the other. Traditionally, science has emphasized quantification. Sciences that can be reduced to numbers are called 'hard' sciences, while less quantifiable sciences are relegated to the class of 'soft' science. As alluded to earlier, within the social sciences, and especially within psychology, there has been continued effort to attain the

status of 'hard' science. This has led to the conviction that only quantitative data are valid (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). However, if the conventional quantitative paradigm is so legitimate, why then is it increasingly being called into question by so many researchers?

Qualitative position against conventional paradigm. Interest in the alternative qualitative paradigms as a means for examining human and social phenomena grew out of a dissatisfaction with the conventional scientific paradigm. One of the main problems with experimental psychology is that it acts as if its experiments are (in principle) not unlike the experiments in natural science. This ignores the fact that in psychology the 'object' of study often is a conscious human being. In effect, it treats humans "*as if* they were natural objects" (Van Langenhove, 1995, p. 22; see also Giorgi, 1995). The study of human life experience cannot be equated with the study of natural objects. First, while it is clear that the natural sciences are causal sciences, this is not so evident in the social and human sciences where 'subjects' can reflect on their actions, and alter their course if the desired outcome is not being achieved. Thus, human action is meaningful to the actors themselves. Human action is laden with intentions, goals, desires, expectations and purposes. Conventional scientists look for the causes of behaviour and ignore the 'human' element in its subjects (Gage, 1989; Van Langenhove, 1995).

Second, by focusing on a selected subset of variables, conventional scientists strip the context from consideration, as well as the meaning and purpose human beings attach to their activities (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). By reducing complex behaviour to a small set of variables, they are destroying the very phenomena that they wish to study (Martens, 1987).

Finally, scientific methods were developed to be applied to natural phenomena that are "stable and uniform across time and space" (Gage, 1995, p.4), however, this is not the context of the human and social experience. The methods, concepts, and criteria of the natural sciences were not developed to deal with this 'consciousness' and intentions in its phenomena. When human scientists began borrowing the natural science model, they never evaluated the effect that "a conscious human subject as 'object of study' might have on the framework that [they were] imitating" (Giorgi, 1995, p. 25).

While the full range of criticisms against the natural science model, as applied to human and social science, cannot be examined here, other criticisms include: Applying an etic (outsider) theory to phenomena that may have no relevance to the individuals, groups, or societies being studied; developing statistically significant generalizations that are not applicable to the individual case; and, placing too much emphasis on verification of a priori hypotheses, and glossing over the discovery process of inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). For a more detailed examination of the critiques of the quantitative paradigm see Guba & Lincoln (1994), Van Langenhove (1995), and Richardson. (1996).

#### Methods and Paradigms Explained

There are explicit distinctions between research methods and research paradigms. The term 'methods' simply refers to the tools and techniques that the researcher uses in his or her inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1988). Examples of methods include questionnaire, observation, and interview. All methods can be utilized in any paradigm; however, some are commonly associated with qualitative paradigms, while other methods are associated with quantitative paradigms. Thus, while unstructured interviewing is a qualitative method, there is nothing stopping a proponent of a quantitative paradigm from using this

method in his or her inquiry. In fact, qualitative research can be conducted within a positivist framework, a post-positivist framework, a social constructivist framework, or most other frameworks. Likewise, quantitative methods and numbers can also be used in the qualitative paradigms. (Note, the qualitative approach to human research encompasses a whole family of qualitative paradigms, such as social constructivism, interactionism, critical realism and feminist approaches. Similarly, positivism and post-positivism are among the quantitative paradigms. Each of these traditions have their own distinct answers to the ontological, epistemological, and methodological questions.) Qualitative methods are favored in qualitative paradigms, however, because they are best suited to the fundamental assumptions of these paradigms (Fetterman, 1995; Henwood, 1996).

According to Guba & Lincoln (1994), the paradigm debate is not a debate about methods, since either quantitative or qualitative methods *can* be used within the different paradigms. To them, a choice of methods is secondary to the epistemological and paradigmatic choice. Epistemological issues influence the researcher's choice of methods since the gathering, analysis and interpretation of data is carried out within this broader conceptualization of what constitutes legitimate and worthwhile research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Essentially, there are two versions of the quantitative-qualitative debate (Bryman, 1988): First, the technical version of the debate concerns the choice of numerical or non-numerical methods. This decision is based chiefly on pragmatic grounds, such as sample availability and time constraints. Henwood (1996) notes that the danger of these technical arguments is that they often presuppose that a researcher would always conduct controlled laboratory experiments with carefully manipulated and

precisely measured variables, if only it were feasible or possible to do so (e.g., having to settle for a correlational study because it is not ethical to manipulate the variable under study). In this version, the value of qualitative research as a means to knowledge accumulation is not acknowledged in its own right. Second, the epistemological version of the debate is the version that Guba and Lincoln prioritize. Here, the debate leads to either the quantitative view (experimental, positivist, and realist) or the qualitative view (naturalistic, interpretative, and constructivist) (Bryman, 1988). The choice of method is subsidiary to the position one takes in the epistemological and paradigmatic debate (Henwood, 1996).

Once we are willing to admit that people do not behave like "billiard balls on a table", it becomes harder to accept the natural science model for the study of human behaviour. However, simply eschewing quantitative methods for qualitative ones does not solve the problem. The heart of the issue is the paradigmatic assumptions which underlie the method. While the qualitative paradigms seem in a better position to examine the complexities of human behaviour and social interaction, proponents of qualitative paradigms do not benefit from simply believing that theirs is the better approach. I hope that researchers do not deny that the paradigm debate is meaningful, or simply ignore the debate and reaffirm that the scientific model is the best without first examining other options. In order for science to proceed, the research community ought to remain open and curious enough to inform themselves of the full parameters of the debate (see Sparkes, 1991).

## CHAPTER 3

### **Orientation and Purpose of Present Research: A Pragmatic-Eclectic Perspective**

*"Always listen to the experts. They'll tell you what can't be done and why. Then do it."*

-- Robert H. Heinlein (as cited in Patton, 1995).

Many researchers (e.g., Egon Guba & Yvonna Lincoln) subscribe to the notion that how you construe the world and conceive of your role as a researcher influences every step of the research process -- from the questions you ask, to the design you develop, to the analysis you perform. To them, you either believe that there is a real objective and knowable world out there, or you believe that reality is relative and a social construction. Called purists, these researchers argue that assumptions cannot be changed, abandoned, or modified to fit the phenomenon under study (Salomon, 1991). This perception suggests a linear process in which researchers first commit to a philosophical stance, then base their research topics and strategies on these beliefs (Hammersley, 1996).

Another subset of researchers, the pragmatists, conclude that in practice, however, we typically inherit our methodological and philosophical orientations from other researchers in the field. Consequently, the notion that our approach to research is built upon a set of fundamental philosophical assumptions is too simplistic (Hammersley, 1996). According to Salomon (1991), research paradigms are human constructions made to study selected aspects of the world, and consequently, they should be selected on the basis of the phenomenon being addressed by research. This represents an eclectic approach to research wherein the paradigms simply present different methods that are "appropriate according to purpose and circumstance" (Hammersley, 1996, p. 167).

Paradigms reduce decision making in research by telling researchers what is important and legitimate to study, as well as what methods are rightful. The problem is that paradigms eliminate the need for long epistemological consideration, and can serve as "blindens which keep researchers from even considering the potential of methodological alternatives" (Patton, 1988, p. 129). Following Hammersley (1996), I believe that what is required is "a methodologically aware eclecticism" (p. 174); so, what is required is for researchers to be open and aware of the full range of methodological and philosophical options. An increasing number of researchers are approaching research from a more pragmatic and ecumenical perspective since the phenomena of most studies, in practice, do not correspond precisely to a standard methodology. Most studies require the researcher to adjust the methodology advocated by a given paradigm to suit the peculiarities of the context or setting (Miles & Huberman, 1988). However, choosing methods is not likely to be a simple matter of fitting the research techniques to a particular problem as suggested by the pragmatists. Nor is the choice of methods as rigorously determined as the purists would have us believe (Firestone, 1987). Instead, a researcher's choice of methods is likely guided by a number of factors, including paradigmatic considerations, such as his or her views of the world, as well as more practical considerations, such as time constraints, limited resources, and "political" conditions within the scholarly community.

The study of transition experiences appears to be an area suitable for qualitative exploration. In fact, Blinde and Stratta (1991) have suggested that quantitative orientations may not have adequately captured the essence of the transition experience. Rather than relying on researcher-imposed and theoretically-driven criteria, it would be

more appropriate for researchers to reexamine sport transition with an emphasis on enlarging the knowledge base by examining the athletes' own perceptions of the phenomenon (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985). While few studies have examined transition experiences from an experiential perspective, there is a need for qualitative research to allow athletes to describe their own experiences (Allison & Meyer, 1988).

Accordingly, the methods used in the present research are qualitative however, my choice of a guiding paradigm was more eclectic. For example, epistemologically, I give credence to many of the tenets of interpretivism (described below) and social constructivism, but methodologically, I have adopted a more practical and pragmatic stance (see Miles & Huberman, 1994, Patton, 1988) wherein contextual, political, and time constraints influenced my choice of methodology.

### Interpretivism

Interpretivism is an umbrella term which encompasses many approaches to human and social research, including: symbolic interactionism, constructivism, and feminist perspectives. However, Schwandt (1994) divided interactionism into interpretivism (e.g., interpretive anthropology, symbolic interactionism, and interpretive interpretivism), and constructivism (e.g., radical constructivism, social constructivism, and the constructivist paradigm). This section, and use of the term interpretivism, is based on his distinction.

Interpretivism (as well as constructivism) was developed in reaction to the development of a natural science for human and social studies. Interpretivist ideas also stem from pragmatism, hermeneutics, 'verstehen', and phenomenology. The primary goal of interpretivism is "understanding the complex world of lived experiences from the point of view of those who live it" (Schwandt, 1994, p. 118). Thus, interpretivist inquirers seek

to portray the emic (insider) point of view. Interpretivists adhere to a relativist ontology. They believe that there exist multiple socially constructed realities that are devised by individuals in their attempt to make sense of the world and of their experiences. "That is, particular actors, in particular places, at particular times, fashion meaning out of events and phenomena through prolonged, complex processes of social interaction involving history, language, and action" (Schwandt, 1994, p.118). Constructions are usually shared, however, this only makes them more agreed upon, not more real (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Moreover, different constructions are not more or less true, just more or less informed or sophisticated (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Thus, 'truth' is a matter of the best informed and most sophisticated construction on which there is consensus at the time of inquiry. Interpretivism (and constructivism) seeks to understand the world of those they study by teasing out the constructions that actors in a situation hold, and then interpreting those constructions (Schwandt, 1994).

I characterize the epistemological axiom of interpretivism as a form of 'objective subjectivity'. Interpretivists struggle with the conflicting notions of phenomenological subjectivity and Cartesian objectivity found in the natural sciences. Interpretation, itself, involves forming constructions of the constructions of the people being studied. While interpretivists value the subjectivity of experience, they seek to disentangle themselves from that experience and provide an objective account (Schwandt, 1994). Most interpretivists deal with this paradox by claiming that even if we are dubious of positivism and post-positivism, we are still accountable for the trustworthiness of our findings, and as a result, we must avoid subjectivity and error through the careful use of

methods (Schwandt, 1994). Thus, they chose the "middle ground of methods" (Schwandt, 1994, p.119).

Methods are not given prominence in interpretivist literature since its primary concerns are knowing and being. However, the hermeneutical methods (hermeneutical because it involves interpretation) must lead to understanding of the processes by which meaning is created, sustained, and modified within a particular context. Interpretivists go beyond mere description of the actor's interpretations of their world, by taking that description and using it to formulate their own interpretations of the lived experiences of the actors (Schwandt, 1994). Interpretivists view explanatory theories as "interpretive, grounded, and hovering low over the data" (Schwandt, 1994, p. 118). Methodologically, the present research is a pragmatic blend of phenomenological descriptions of the transition experiences of football players into professional leagues, hermeneutical interpretation of their accounts of this transition experience, social constructivism's dialectic notion of contrasting divergent views with the goal of achieving consensus between researcher and researched, and post-positivism's adherence to tests of rigor, such as reliability, validity and generalizability. A more complete discussion of these issues can be found in the following chapter.

### Semi-Structured Interviews

The qualitative semi-structured research interview is neither a highly structured survey nor a free flowing conversation. In the semi-structured interview, a set of questions are generated to guide the interview. Respondent's are encouraged to describe -- in their own words -- their world view, experiences, and opinions about specific situations. The method is active and flexible. The interviewees are free to organize and

prioritize their answers, and to place special emphasis on themes that are important to them. The qualitative research interview allows for rich description of themes which emerge from the respondents themselves. During the course of the interview, or in subsequent interviews, the researcher is able to follow up on interesting statements, and clarify ambiguities (Smith, 1995).

If properly constructed and administered, the semi-structured research interview can lead to a trustworthy and reliable understanding of the transition experiences of these athletes. Furthermore, guards against concerns of interviewer bias, distortions in interpretation, and poor reliability can be incorporated in the design of the interview schedule and in subsequent analysis of research data.

First, in constructing questions, it is important that they be value neutral, open and jargon free (Brenner, Brown & Canter, 1985; Smith, 1995). Therefore, leading questions must be avoided, and questions should be formulated in a way that allows the respondent maximum opportunity to discuss and explain his or her views or experiences (Smith, 1995). For example, the interview begins with general questions designed to allow the respondent to discuss what is important or relevant to his or her experiences. These general questions are then followed by more specific probes to elicit discussion of specific concerns. Furthermore, the questions should be written in the respondent's language, with terms and expressions that are familiar and comfortable to him or her (Fontana & Frey, 1994).

Second, bias which may result from face-to-face interaction between the respondent and interviewer can also be minimized. For example, same sex interviewers are often used when there is concern that the respondent will have difficulty identifying

with an opposite sex interviewer. Another means of minimizing this type of bias is training the interviewer to adopt a neutral and non-judgmental stance (Patton, 1990).

Finally, concerns for the trustworthiness, validity and reliability of the themes and categories which emerge from analysis of the interviews can also be addressed. First, tape-recording the interview can be a means of capturing a more complete record of the interview. While tape recordings do not provide completely objective accounts since the transcriber is still required to make some interpretations (Smith, 1995), the nuances and idiosyncrasies of responses are preserved. A full account of the interview is also available for future reference and for verification by objective parties. In addition, biases emanating from transcription can be minimized by providing a copy of the transcribed interview to the respondent for verification. This contact can also be used to follow up on the interview and clarify any ambiguities. Second, the reliability of the emerging themes and categories in data analysis can be verified by an objective third party. Finally, the validity of the findings can be confirmed by the respondent's themselves. This process is referred to as "authentication" (Harré & Secord, 1972) or as a "members check" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

In sum, semi-structured interviewing is especially suited for the present research since the transition experiences of football players into professional leagues is a very complex and personal process. In order to understand this experience, it is important to penetrate the social and psychological world of the athletes, and to examine idiosyncrasies, as well as commonalties in experience. This is facilitated by qualitative interviews since the respondent is treated as an expert in the area and is given the maximum opportunity to tell his or her story in rich detail. Careful planning of the

qualitative interview process (i.e., minimizing interviewer bias) helps ensure that the emerging themes and categories represent the lived experiences of these athletes.

### Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the experiences of athletes making the transition from collegiate to professional football using semi-structured interviews resulting in a description of themes and patterns involved in adapting to the transition. Ultimately, the goal of this study was to use the findings to develop a set of guidelines for helping athletes make the transition from amateur or college football to professional football. The transition from amateur to professional football was defined generally as the period leading up to and following the signing of a professional contract, and the acceptance of salary for one's athletic performance. The primary context of this transition is the pre-season professional football training camps.

My inquiry was guided by the following three research questions:

- 1) How is the transition from amateur to professional football leagues experienced by athletes?;
- 2a) What, in general, helps facilitate this transition for the athletes?;
- 2b) What makes this transition problematic (or harder) for the athletes?; and,
- 3) What, if any, differences are there between athletes and their contexts whose transitions are successful and athletes who are unsuccessful or struggled with the transition?

## CHAPTER 4

### Method

*"If you want to know something about someone, ask them; they might just tell you".*

*--George Kelly*

#### Participants

A total of 22 professional football players from both the Canadian Football League (CFL) and the National Football League (NFL) volunteered to participate in the study. One interview was not included in the final analysis because the respondent did not match the criteria for inclusion (i.e., having attended, at minimum, one professional training camp), bringing the total to 21 participants (11 CFL and 10 NFL players) ranging in age from 22 to 37 years, with a mean age of 26.5 years.

#### Materials and Measures

*Professional Athlete Self-Interview Schedule.* The assessment measure was designed for the purpose of this study. The overall structure was based on Schlossberg's (1981) model for assessing adaptation to transitions. The self-interview schedule was designed to explore (a) the context in which the transition takes place including pre- and post-transition environmental characteristics which contribute to, or interfere with, successful adaptation; (b) the features of the transition which are relevant to the athletes' experiences and which help explain the meaning athletes attach to becoming professional players or, conversely, not becoming professional players; and (c) the characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition, with particular emphasis on psychosocial characteristics such as motivation, self-esteem, self-worth and personal values.

Schlossberg's (1981) model for analyzing human adaptation to transition has been used by some researchers examining transition experiences in sport. For example, Swain (1991) and Parker (1994) used the model to study withdrawal from sport, whereas Pearson and Petitpas (1990) examined several transition experiences, namely not making

the team, injury, and retirement from sport. These applications of the model have revealed that it is useful in developing an understanding of the transition experiences of athletes, and in examining the meaning the transition has for the athlete, the context in which the transition takes place, and how the individual reacts over time (Swain, 1991). In sum, this interactional model is helpful in studying sport transition since it strives to account for differences and variations in transition experiences (Swain, 1991; Parker, 1994).

The development of the self-interview schedule followed a multi-stage "discovery" approach. First, the investigator engaged in conversations with people who are, or have been, involved in the transition between amateur and professional football. Second, material from these preliminary conversations, as well as from Schlossberg's (1981) transition model, was used in the development of items for the semi-structured self-interview schedule. Finally, a two-step vetting procedure was used to ensure the face validity of the questionnaire. In the first step, the interview schedule was reviewed by several experts in professional football in order to determine whether the overall scope of the questions, as well as their structure and language, was applicable and appropriate to the sport. The second step to ensure face validity consisted of administering the preliminary draft of the self-interview schedule to four professional football players in a personal interview format. Following the interview, these athletes were asked questions on the format and content of the interview. Questions included: "What would you suggest I change/improve for the next interview?"; "Did I ask questions that were relevant to your experiences?"; "Were the questions clear and easily understood?". The self-interview schedule was modified based on these discussions. This pre-testing ensured that the self-interview schedule included all necessary probes and contained enough information to enable the athletes to respond meaningfully.

Throughout the data collection process, the self-interview schedule was further modified and adapted as new information and understanding revealed topics which

needed additional exploration. Furthermore, throughout the data collection process, necessary probes were added, and questions were re-worded and re-structured in order to maximally encourage the athletes to discuss their transition experiences. This process of ongoing revisions is consistent with the qualitative research tradition (e.g., Patton, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

All items of the self-interview schedule were open-ended, and most questions were followed by one or more probes. The self-interview schedule was designed to read and flow like an informal interview. The first section of the self-interview schedule focused on two wide-ranging topics; i.e., expectations and preparation, which were highly relevant to the individual's transition experiences. Beginning with such face valid questions helps to build rapport and trust between researcher and interviewee (Partington, 1995). Discussion of these topics were structured using funneling techniques in which the respondent's general views were first elicited and established, then more specific concerns were subsequently probed (Smith, 1996). The nature of these questions enabled the respondent to discuss the transition in his own terms and to focus on what he felt was important to his own experiences before being "funneled" into more specific questions.

The next three sections of the self-interview schedule were generally framed around the three primary factors which affect the outcome of the transition process identified in Schlossberg's (1981) model. Thus, section two focused on the context in which the transition took place, the third section contained questions which pertained to the particular transition (i.e., transition from amateur to professional football), and the fourth section dealt with the individual characteristics of each athlete which may have had an impact on adaptation. While the questions in these sections were more specific than those found in section one, they were still open-ended and were designed to serve mainly as a guide for the respondent. The self-interview was concluded with a "validation" section in which the athlete was asked whether there was anything, not covered in the interview guide, that he felt was important to explain his experiences in

becoming a professional football player. Finally, each athlete was then asked to fill in relevant background information. (See Appendix A.)

### Procedure

Stratified purposeful sampling techniques were employed in subject selection (Patton, 1990). The sample was comprised of three subsamples representing professional athletes in various stages of the transition from amateur to professional football, including: six veteran professional players (more than four years professional experience); ten newly-established players (one to four years professional experience); and, five athletes who struggled (or are currently struggling) with their transition to professional football (released during their first training camp or regular season and having since retired from professional football, or having struggled to make the practice roster of a professional team with little hope of establishing a career as a professional).

Within these three categories, subject selection was primarily opportunistic and based on availability and willingness to participate in the study. However, an effort was also made to ensure general subsample equivalence; e.g., playing position (offence/defence), professional league, and professional team. (See Tables 1 - 3 for a more detailed description and comparison of the three subgroups). Participants for the self-interviews were identified and contacted through the assistance of their professional sports agent, as well as through other professional football players (i.e., snowballing sampling techniques). Athletes and former athletes were contacted by telephone or mail in order to describe my research interests and to ask for their collaboration in the study. Each athlete was informed that the purpose of the study was to gain an understanding into how athletes adapt to becoming professionals, and that their experiences and expert knowledge was invaluable in this pursuit.

An interview package consisting of an introduction and informed consent sheet, the self-interview schedule, a cassette tape, and a stamped return-addressed envelop was sent to the athletes. This interview schedule was used by the participants as a guide for

them to "interview" themselves using a tape recorded format. All self-interviews were audio-recorded in order to capture the verbatim replies of the informants. Furthermore, since most study participants, when given a choice, prefer talking over writing, it was felt that the oral format would be better accepted by the athletes. Using this approach, a response rate of 40% was attained. When necessary, brief follow-ups either by mail, telephone, or in person, were used for clarification of passages in the transcript. In addition, when important issues emerged from the interviews and resulted in modifications to the self-interview schedule, an attempt was made to contact previous participants so that they might also answer the questions.

At the conclusion of the self-interview, each informant was asked about his overall impressions of the interview (Partington, 1995). Specifically, each athlete was asked the following: "Is there anything else you feel is important to explain about your experiences in becoming a professional athlete?" and, "Do you think you have explained your experiences as completely as possible?". These questions were intended to serve as controls for bias and as a check on the authenticity of the self-reports. This procedure incorporated the strengths of athlete interviewing for exploratory research (see Orlick and Partington, 1988), while avoiding travel costs for the investigator, and possible scheduling inconvenience for participants.

Confidentiality was stressed, and permission to audio-record was obtained from all participants. Furthermore, due to the sensitive nature of some questions (i.e., perceptions of coaches and teammates, drug abuse, and personal relationships), each athlete was assured that the audio-tape would be securely stored. All tapes were numbered for identification, and all names were replaced with code numbers when the oral data were converted to typed transcripts. At the conclusion of the study, all tapes were erased. Finally, when quotations from self-interview transcripts were required to support reported results, these quotations were edited to ensure that the speaker remained

anonymous, as well as to protect the identity of teammates, coaches, and franchises referred to by the athlete.

### Data Analysis

Transcribing interviews. As soon as possible after having received a self-interview tape, a full transcription of its content was undertaken. When necessary, the respondent was contacted by telephone or by mail for clarification of any vague or ambiguous areas (Patton, 1990). Any changes or additions resulting from these follow-up contacts were subsequently added to the transcribed text. While transcriptions were verbatim, obvious grammatical errors and conversational phrases, such as "you know", were edited in order to facilitate reading of quotations taken from interview transcripts.

Organizing the data. The analysis of unstructured interviews aimed to identify an organizing system of categories which adequately represented the information provided by those being interviewed (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In organizing the data, I asked myself the following question: "What categories, concepts, labels are necessary to account for the phenomena of importance in this text?" (Pidgeon, Turner & Blockly, 1991). According to Patton (1990), there are two sources to draw from in organizing the data: (1) the questions that were generated during the conceptual phase of the study; and (2) insights and interpretations that emerged during data collection. The present study used a combination of these two sources in organizing the data. Schlossberg's (1981) model of human adaptation to transition provided some order and framing to the transition problem. The model was used in order to incorporate specific concerns which emerged from conversations with athletes and to organize the questions into three wide-ranging categories: the context of the transition, characteristics of the individual in transition, and the particular transition itself. Thus, Schlossberg's (1981) model was a useful tool in organizing and structuring the questions presented in the self-interview schedule, itself. However, initial readings and analysis of interview transcripts revealed that questions, and responses to questions, in the interview schedule were best

reorganized into the following six general content areas: expectations for professional football, preparation for professional football, perceived differences between college (amateur) and professional football, challenges faced by athletes undergoing the transition and their responses to these challenges, individual characteristics of the athletes involved in the transition, and attributions for success.

Qualitative analysis. Each question, as well as its attached probes, in each section was examined and analyzed separately. Within each question, however, data analysis followed an inductive approach wherein the categories and themes of analysis emerged from detailed and repeated reading and study of the self-interview text. Specifically, a two-step process to data analysis was employed: First, each question was read carefully and "tags" were created (Côté, Salmela, Baria & Russell, 1993). Tags are labels used to identify topics for each segment of text. In the present study, data analysis followed the procedures outlined by Rennie, Phillips, and Quataro (1988) in which the data were broken down into meaningful units, as opposed to a word-by-word or line-by-line analysis. This tagging process helped to rearrange and organize the data. Second, tags were compared and grouped according to common themes in order to create categories (Côté et al., 1993). Categories were examined to ensure both homogeneity within category and heterogeneity between categories.

When analyzing the interviews, both cross-case analysis and case analysis were employed (Patton, 1990). Cross-case analysis involved grouping together answers from different people on central issues. In essence, cross-case analysis involved ordering the greatest concerns in terms of commonality. Thus, cross-case analysis is similar to the first descriptive stage in quantitative analysis which shows how the sample as a whole scored on the variables under study. In order to ensure parsimony, a criterion for including a category in the final results was established. Consequently, only those categories which were endorsed by at least 25% of the sample were reported.

The second type of analysis, case analysis, involved writing a prototype for the two extreme groups studied (i.e., veteran professional athletes and struggling/unsuccessful professional athletes). Here, general group consensus for a particular category, as well as general group omission of responses in a category, was examined and reported. Subsequently, these two extreme groups of professional athletes were compared and contrasted in order to discover any differences. Consequently, in addition to the above mentioned 25% inclusion criterion, responses were also considered categorizable when at least half of a particular sample (e.g., 3/6 veterans) gave a similar kind of response. (It should be noted that in certain exceptional cases comments which were endorsed by fewer athletes than indicated by these criteria were categorized if it was apparent that the statement was personally important and key to the athletes' experiences.) Therefore, if a category did not emerge in the cross-case, or overall analysis of the data, but characterized an extreme group (i.e., veteran or struggling/unsuccessful groups), the category was used in the build-up of the prototypes. In sum, there were two inputs into the prototypes: First, differences between groups that readily appeared when examining the distribution of responses in an area (e.g., expectations, preparation, etc.); and, second, themes which, on occasion, were expressed, and conceptually validated, by a particular group, but not supported by enough people in the other groups.

Post-hoc quantitative analysis. Quantitative analyses were conducted to confirm the major between-group differences inferred from the content analysis. For any one of these major differences, the quantitative analysis included the following steps. First, a set of interview questions was identified for which some mention had been made by respondents of the theme underlying the major difference. Second, the total number of responses given by each group for this set of interview questions was determined. Third, within these two sets of responses, the number of responses coded as related to that theme was obtained for each group. Next, a chi-square test was used to determine whether

veterans and struggling athletes differed in terms of these obtained frequencies (See Senders, 1958).

Issues of reliability and validity. Many steps were included in the methodology of the proposed research in order to address concerns for reliability and validity. First, the proposed self-interviewing procedure minimized the risk of interview bias which may occur in face-to-face interviews. Second, all self-interviews were audio-taped in order to obtain the complete verbatim replies of the informants, including descriptions, anecdotes, and other subtleties of speech. Since many people prefer talking over writing, it was felt that the verbal format would be better accepted by the athletes and, consequently, would result in more complete and representative responses. Limitations stemming from the effort required of the person completing an open-ended written questionnaire, and from the writing skills of the respondent, were thus eliminated. Third, verbatim transcription of the self-interviews were completed as soon as possible after the audio-tapes were received from the athletes. Moreover, clarification of responses was sought via telephone or personal interview, when necessary. Fourth, to ensure both the reliability and validity of the categorization process, independent research collaborators were used to check the consistency and the representativeness of the categories. This was accomplished by providing independent collaborators the verbatim interview transcripts and asking them to generate their own category scheme in order to verify the validity of the categories generated. Categories were compared and any disagreements in categorization were resolved through discussions. To lessen the demands placed on individual collaborators, eight collaborators were used, with each being responsible for a smaller section of the interview transcripts. Next, collaborators were provided with the agreed-upon categorization scheme, and were asked to indicate which elements of the interview fell under which category. Reliability was calculated as follows:

$$\frac{\text{(number of agreements)}}{\text{(total number of agreements + disagreements)}}$$

Finally, direct quotations illustrating each category were also provided in order to ensure the reader that the category labels were truly representative of the phenomenon in the data.

Content validity, as well as face validity, of the self-interview questions was determined by asking four professional football players whether the questions adequately reflected their transition experiences. Validity was further ensured by asking all respondents whether there was anything that they wanted to talk about concerning their transition experiences that was not covered in the self-interview. Thus, the experts in the transition experience, i.e., those who have experienced it, were given an opportunity to express whether the study had a broad enough conceptualization or understanding of the topic. Second, criterion validity was verified both through convergence of the data, or regularities in the data for each research group, and through divergence, or differences in the data between groups. Finally, in order to establish authenticity of the results (Harre & Secord, 1972), a "members check" (Creswell, 1994) was conducted by sending key highlights of changeable elements of the veteran prototype, and key highlights of changeable differences between veterans and struggling/unsuccessful football players, to representatives of each research unit (e.g., potentially changeable characteristics and orientations such as preparation for football were included, while characteristics that cannot be changed such as life histories, and boyhood passion for football were not included). Results sent to the athletes for authentication were exactly as they appear in this thesis, except for the omission of findings which are not amenable to change. The two veterans included in this phase of the study were asked whether the report was representative of the concerns which they had expressed in their own interviews, and whether anything needed to be added or changed to the report in order to make it a useful set of guidelines for football players who are struggling with the transition. In addition, since the ultimate purpose of the present study was to develop a useful set of guidelines to help athletes undergoing the transition, three athletes from the sample who were still

trying to make it in professional football were sent the same material and asked to indicate which findings were the most useful in helping them to become successful professional football players. Next, these athletes were asked to rank-order the three most important and useful findings for each section. Items which were labeled as top three by all athletes were maintained as most useful and relevant to athletes in transition. This step provided me with an indication of the most personally important or relevant findings to the transitional athletes themselves.

## CHAPTER 5

### Results

*"A single conversation across the table with a wise man is worth a month's study of books."*

-- Chinese Proverb

Prior to undertaking the qualitative content analysis of participant's responses, all questions in the self-interview guide were reviewed for possible shared themes, after which questions and participants' responses were then reorganized into the following six general content areas: *expectations* for professional football, *preparation* for professional football, *perceived differences* between college (amateur) and professional football, *challenges* faced by athletes undergoing this transition and their responses to these challenges, *individual characteristics* of the athletes involved in the transition, and, finally, *attributions about what helped most* in becoming a professional football player.

A two-stage strategy was adopted for reporting findings in each content area. First, for each of the several questions in a content area, a descriptive overview was given of types of comments provided by participants, ranked by commonality. To present findings for each type of comment, observed frequencies were given in parentheses (i.e., number of athletes whose responses fit the category/number of respondents), and representative quotations were provided. The second stage involved highlighting any differences noted in the types of comments made by participants in the "veterans" versus the "struggling/unsuccessful" groups. Representative quotations of veterans' responses were provided.

Before reporting results, it is necessary to provide assurance of content validity and authenticity of the self-interview schedule, as well as inter-rater coding reliability.

### Validity of the Professional Athlete Self-Interview Schedule and Self-Interview

#### Transcripts

When the 21 participants in this study were asked to discuss any topics not covered in the self-interview schedule which were important to them during the transition from amateur to professional football, only five took advantage of this opportunity (i.e., 1 veteran, 3 newly-established players, 1 struggling/unsuccessful player). Each of these athletes discussed a different aspect of the transition (i.e., feelings of control and self-esteem, unwritten norms for socializing in professional football, the influences of money on an individual, effort and hard work in realizing your goals, and post-football feelings towards the transition experience). All issues raised in this final section could easily be incorporated into other sections of the self-interview schedule. Thus, it is evident that these athletes considered the self-interview schedule to be content valid, i.e., it adequately covered all important elements of the transition experience.

Authenticity of the transcribed self-interviews was verified by returning a copy of the verbatim transcription of the self-interview to each participant and asking him to verify its content for accuracy and completeness. None of the athletes had changes to make, indicating that the transcribed self-interviews were authentic and complete.

Finally, inter-rater reliability for all items was good, and ranged from 77.1% to 96.5%, with a mean reliability score of 88.1%.

### Expectations

Athletes' general expectations were examined by asking about their feelings and thoughts immediately after being invited to a professional try-out and about their general expectations for professional football; then, more specific questions were asked about their expectations for coaches' demands, for team-mates, for tasks, for fans and media, and for the future of professional football; finally, they were asked whether their expectations were met, as well as what had surprised or caught them off guard.

Feelings and thoughts after being drafted or invited to try-out for first professional team. Most of the athletes (14/21) indicated that they felt good when they were drafted or invited to try-out for a professional team. The following quotations demonstrate the positive emotions these athletes experienced upon being drafted or invited to try-out for a professional football team:

(Interview 18) What was running through my head? That's kind of hard. A lot of things were running through my head, but mostly just calling my parents and telling them that I was going to go to the CFL combines. I had a little bit of an idea before that that I might have an opportunity to go play professional football. At first I thought playing professional football would be kind of a somewhat glamorous life. *The day I got drafted, you know, was probably one of the happier days of my life; you know, running up and down the street yelling and screaming. A lot of fun.*

(Interview 22) For anyone I'm sure it's very exciting just to get the opportunity to have a chance at playing pro football and you put all the time in through high school and college and work, and putting all that effort into training. It's your dream to make it to the top, and I was very excited when I actually signed a professional contract.

As can be seen below, some athletes (6/21) stated that they experienced mixed emotions (e.g., positive emotions mixed with apprehension or anxiety) when they were drafted or invited to try-out:

(Interview 12) Well you never really know until the day you're drafted. There's a lot of things that go on. You see your friends moving on to that level. You know that you have the possibility or the chance of becoming a professional athlete, but even as you go into the Combine and you get ready for the draft, there's a lot of rumors going around and you hear a lot of things, but that really just means that you're going to have the chance to become a pro. Once you get drafted and go to your team, there's still a lot of work that needs to be done to make sure that you still stay a professional football player. *So, I was very excited. It was a childhood dream of mine.* It was not something that I lived my life strictly to be a professional football player, which is something that came as I made different decisions throughout my life as I was growing up. So I feel that I was very fortunate to land in a position that I was because you hear some of the stories about those people that lived their life strictly to be a professional athlete. I was actually very fortunate to be able to experience a lot of the things that these people don't and still achieve that goal of being a professional athlete.

It's really a feeling that's hard to express. *It's the culmination of a childhood dream and there's a lot of excitement, but there's also a little bit of anxiety. You're going to be picking up and leaving a surrounding that you're very familiar with and going to a new city and a new team, as we talked about earlier, you know. That can be a little bit intimidating, but there's also that excitement of making the next level -- of being able to be a part of something that you've always dreamed of. So, it's very exciting. It's something that is very difficult to explain to people, unless they have a dream that they would really want to be able to fulfill in life. And you just tell them, "well it's very similar to being able to fulfill that dream that you've had". But, there's still a lot of anxiety that goes along with it. I mean, you're very, very excited to have the opportunity, but very, very nervous about the big changes that are going to be coming in your life.*

Some athletes (7/21) indicated that being drafted or invited to try-out for a professional team was their dream come true. A representative quotation follows:

(Interview 14) Well, it's been a life-time dream, so running through my head was making the team so I could accomplish a goal and live that dream, pretty much. It felt great when I got invited to play for the [NFL team].

Finally, as the following quotations demonstrate, many of the athletes (7/21) indicated that they immediately began thinking about how to prepare for the upcoming opportunity in professional football:

(Interview 5) First got drafted, you get that kind of your head's spinning and you're not really sure what's actually going on, but there's, for me, a couple of days of joy unleashed, or however you want to describe it. Congratulations coming from everywhere. Just a great feeling, you know, everybody's happy for you. *And that's great, but then the realization that, man, I better start training. What have I got myself*

*into? And, how's it going to work out? Asking thousands upon thousands of questions to various individuals about what I'm going to have to face. But, the first couple of days after being drafted felt great and then, like I said, it's just one more thing to prepare for after that. Now you've been drafted, you've got a place to try out. Now, you just have to bust your ass for preparation to meet your goal.*

(Interview 15) When I finally got to go to a pro team and had a chance to go to my first mini camp, you're so anxious, and I remember I couldn't sleep, and all week I was just, you know, *"what can I do to get ready?" because the draft happened and then the next week we had the mini camp, and it was like "what more can I do?"*. You know, *I had been preparing my whole life, but what more can I do?* And this week it's just such an anxious feeling, and when you finally get out there and you're just such a nobody among all these guys that are just such great players, that it's just an incredible feeling; and, when you finally get out there and you learn the offense and start running some plays and catch some passes -- *"I get to catch passes!"* -- and that kind of thing, it's just incredible; and you're going against guys that are such great players. It was an awesome experience and something, you know, that is very hard to explain, but it was just incredible: *Dream come true.*

General expectations. On first reading, it was evident that general expectations could be categorized in terms of *evaluation, positive/good* (10/21), *negative/bad* (8/21).

The first quotation appearing below illustrates positive expectations, while the second quotation illustrates negative ones.

(Interview 21) My first year I thought I was going to be playing for a Canadian football team in [American city], but that didn't work out, so I sat out a year. And, I wasn't really sure that I was going to play football anymore, but I was still trying to play. So, yeah, I found out about [football team]; and, very excited. *My expectations, I didn't really think it would be that much different from college football.* I knew that the competition would be a little tougher. What else? Not sure. I just don't think I had too many expectations either way. I was just thinking more about myself and I knew I was prepared to be there and was working-out every day, so I felt good about myself going into that situation. *My biggest expectations was that I would play well, and show people what I could do.*

(Interview 1) I didn't know what to expect. I thought it was going to be very competitive and basically I just wanted to prepare as much as possible. I didn't have any idea. I'd just heard from other people, other players who had been there, and I kind of learned that way. *They were just telling me that don't really like listen to other players because it's pretty cut-throat. They're not really going to try to help you. They're going to try to do something bad for you. Kind of look out for yourself. If you have any questions, don't ask other players, they'll be looking out for themselves or their friends or whatever. Just go wait for the coaches. So I got the impression it was very competitive.*

d The next reading revealed that the responses could also be categorized in terms of the following *types of general expectations*: performance expectations, such as physical skills and demands (14/21); contextual expectations, such as atmosphere (8/21); and outcome expectations, such as making the team and earning a big salary (7/21).

(Interview 15) After my college career I really didn't know what to expect. We had a lot of guys from my university that had played pro football and I had heard some things, but for the most part I thought it would be fairly overwhelming, and it would be a hard adjustment, but one that I could make. I've always felt positive about it. You know, coming from high school to college, that was a big change because all-of-a-sudden you're back to being a little fish in a big pond; and, that was a tough adjustment and I assumed it would be very similar to that, where the competition level once again is raised another level and the speed of the game and the mental aspect of the game would be a lot worst. I'd heard that that was one of the hardest things about adjusting to pro football is it became more of a mental game because everyone was so gifted athletically. And, that would prove to be true.

(Interview 3) Well, I guess in college for me it was kind of like a family atmosphere. You were constantly hanging-out, none of your friends were married. you're always eating meals with them, you go everywhere with them. you live with them -- six, seven of them. Because I'd always lived with at least five of us. So going into the NFL, I knew, number one that I was going to be on my own -- it would be a completely new situation: two, I'd be far away from home where *everybody* in my family lives; and, then number three, is *I was prepared for just a seedier, you know, bunch of thugs. You know, there's going to be drugs everywhere. Everybody's going to be scary and just nasty, dirty, mean, cheating on their wives. I was just expecting a bad scene.*

(Interview 4) *I thought that it would be a great way to make a living.* I thought in a lot of ways that it would be easier than college because you wouldn't have classes. It would just be work and nothing else. So, I thought that it might be a little bit easier time-wise. Although the season is a lot longer than college; so, I knew that would be a lot more difficult. So I knew that it would be a much longer season, you know, a pro season is about twice as long as a college season, you have twice as many games. and it goes from about the middle of July until about Christmas. College is like the first or second week of April until, for us, until about Thanksgiving. So, I knew that it was going to be a long haul.

A third reading of the athletes' general expectations revealed that some of the athletes (8/21) appeared to use a *common strategy* on which to base their expectations;

namely, seeking the advice of football experts, such as other professional athletes', football coaches, and physical trainers. For example,

(Interview 19) *Well, the college I went to, [name of American University], we had a lot of professional players come out of there, and quite a few of them had come back. I knew I had an overall idea of the physical things I'd be expected to do, and the toughness of a football training camp, and just that it would be a lot quicker and a lot faster. I think I, like a lot of people, glamorized what it was going to be like. My whole idea of professional sports was what I saw on TV -- professional football, especially what I saw on TV -- and I think like anybody else, I know I do it when I go back to school, I tend to leave out the bad parts about professional football. So, I know the people I always talked to made it seem really interesting, a lot of fun; and, the money was always a huge aspect of it.*

Finally, a few of the athletes (6/21) indicated that they *did not know what to expect* or that they did not have any expectations for professional football.

(Interview 22) Going into my first camp, I really didn't know what to expect from football. I wasn't sure if I could compete at this level -- if I was as big, as strong, as fast as the other guys. And, that's about it. You just don't know what to expect.

Expectations for coaches and their demands. The most frequently endorsed theme was *type of relationship expected* between the respondent and his professional coach, with many of the respondents (11/17) indicating that a business-type relationship was expected, and, some of the respondents (5/17) indicating that the relationship between coach and player would be non-social. The following quotations illustrate the business-type, non-social relationship that many of the athletes expected to have with their professional coaches:

(Interview 15) I had a lot of expectations in the NFL. I think anytime you haven't been involved in something, you always have a picture in your mind about it. *And the coaches, I assumed it would be real business-like. I had never really had any coaches in college that had come from pro back to college, but we'd had some players and they said it's a lot different. They treat you more as equals instead of pupils, as much. And I say that because most of the guys that are playing professional football are men and I think they treat you more like men. They expect you to do more than them having to baby you along as much.* So their demands, it's going to vary from coach to coach, it's going to

vary from team to team, and depending on how the head coach, as well, treats his players, as far as their demands on you.

(Interview 11) When I first got drafted to [pro team], I knew that there was going to be a lot of players there and the CFL coaches would demand absolutely the best that you could put out or you're out the door. *The difference between college and pro here is, I mean, it's a business. If you're not producing, it's basically, "see you". They try and separate the personal aspect – whether they like you or not – from the fact that if you screw-up in practice or whatever then they'll just find somebody who they feel can do the job.* So, my expectations about the coaches' demands stressed me out a lot because I wanted to play and I felt that I could, but it would depend on how the coach looked at you. If you screwed-up, then you're in trouble.

(Interview 9) I never really thought about the coaches too much, like I thought they were like *these big figures on the team and you couldn't really talk to them and that kind of thing, and I assumed they demanded quite a bit from you on the field.*

Type of relationship expected with professional coaches were followed by expectations for *coaches' performance demands* (12/17). The following quotations typify how athletes expressed their expectations that their coaches would place many demands on them to perform:

(Interview 22) I expected the coaches to be very demanding at this level since you're now getting paid to play football and this is your job. *You have to do whatever you have to do to perform on the field, whatever, watching film, or doing extra work, taking extra reps at practice. You know, you have to do what the coaches expect of you.*

(Interview 17) The CFL coaches and their demands on the field: I knew that it was more of a business -- or at least I thought it would be more of a business -- and I guess it turned out to be true. You weren't as much like "buddy-buddy", with the coach, I guess. These are my expectations I'm talking about. And, you knew that it was more a job for everyone and they had to win, kind of thing, so *they were going to demand top performance; and, if you couldn't do it, someone else would.*

Expectations for professional team-mates and team chemistry. In terms of expectations for team-mates, the most frequently occurring theme was one of evaluation of the expected quality of relationships between team-mates -- negative expectations

(9/15) or positive expectations (5/15). An example of a negative and a positive expectation for relationships with team-mates, respectively, appear below:

(Interview 19) I was thinking that when I heard all these horror stories of team-mates making rookies do things -- you know, shave their hair, heads -- just training camp my first year would be brutal. I'd be getting abused by all the veteran players.

(Interview 9) I think I thought it was kind of like a college atmosphere, like everybody would get along and everybody would work well together, as far as the chemistry.

The next most common theme was an evaluation of the *expected team chemistry* - bad team chemistry (5/15) or good team chemistry (4/15). Two examples of expectations for team chemistry follow. The first quotation is typical of expectations for poor team chemistry, while the second represents expectations for good team chemistry.

(Interview 10) I didn't think there'd be too much at first because everyone's really battling each other for the pay cheques, so I didn't think there would be too much teamwork at the start, although I felt that that would change as time went on. When the cuts were made, I felt that the team would start to gel.

(Interview 22) Going in I expected a very positive attitude from the other team-mates. I figured most of the time you hear coaches preaching of, "team before me", and "the team must come first".

A third theme in athletes' responses (9/15) was one of expected barriers to good team-mate relationships and team chemistry. Types of expected barriers included the business-like atmosphere of professional sports, established cliques on the teams, as well as racial and age barriers. Two illustrative quotations are given below. The first quotation demonstrates how cliques on professional teams can be barriers, whereas the second quotation discusses how high turnover and the business-like atmosphere in professional sports can also serve as barriers to good team-mate relationships and team chemistry:

(Interview 20) I think I expected the guys on the teams to be a very close-knit group, as far as sort of like a family. And anybody young, like myself or any of the other rookies coming in, were sort of like step-kids coming in, or someone trying to come in and break-up that family because I know once you get a group of guys together playing for a longtime, a lot of them end-up getting to be pretty good friends, and you're almost taking food from the kids mouths or something so to speak, or you're upsetting sort of these little cliques they got put together, and that's about basically what I found out later on. Yeah, I think that's true. I think my assumptions and expectations for that were pretty right on.

(Interview 12) With team-mates, including teamwork and team chemistry, because of the business-like atmosphere and the uncertainty of team-mates being there from year-to-year, I heard a lot of people tell me coming in that you didn't have the close friendships that you did on the collegiate level where you're with guys for four to five years at a time, knowing that they were going to be there unless they were, unfortunately, failed out of school. In the NFL, I was told that, because of business decisions and other things, that you could have a good friend on your team and he could be cut or released that season, or possibly the next year, so I was worried about the friendships and the chemistry.

Expectations for team meetings and learning new plays (tasks). Many of the athletes stated that they expected meetings and new plays to be *harder than in college* (12/16). This is illustrated with the following two quotations:

(Interview 13) Everything that I was going to see at camp was going to be a surprise to me and I didn't really know what to expect, *although I heard things about, "oh it's two-a-days" and "oh it's three hour practices" and "boy it's just tough, mentally draining, and they pop things up on you and it's hard to keep track. You got to know your plays. You got to study, study, study. And, you go out there and work, work, work"*.

(Interview 14) I knew that they were going to be harder. But I didn't realize that they were going to be that relaxed. I thought they'd be a little more up-tight, but I was wrong.

Other themes which were discussed by a few of the athletes include basing their expectations for meetings and learning new plays on information obtained from experts in professional football, and being apprehensive about a new style of football (e.g., resulting from having changed playing position).

Expectations for fans and the media. First, it was found that the most frequently occurring theme was one of *evaluation, positive* (9/16), *negative* (3/16). A quotation which demonstrates positive expectations for fans and the media is provided below:

(Interview 22) Coming from a small school and college, *it was nice to expect large crowds at the game and a great atmosphere*, and that's what it's come to.

Next, expectations for fans and the media could be categorized in terms of *amount and intensity* as compared to college -- more than college (8/16), and same as college (3/16). The next two quotations represent expectations for more media and fan attention than in college:

(Interview 14) Well, the fans are a little more crazy for the most part throughout the NFL versus college. Now, I knew that, so my expectations would be that there was just going to be a bunch of nuts wearing stupid hats and bare-chested in the middle of December. So I thought it was going to be pretty much wild, which it pretty much is.

(Interview 15) Coming into the NFL, the fans are so crazy about it, being a professional sport and being one of the top sports in the U.S., and the media as well. I mean, it's something that's covered with every news cast and entire shows are dedicated to it. And that's something I grew up watching so I really expected it to be just that way with reporters around, that kind of thing.

Expectations for the future in professional football. First reading revealed that the most commonly discussed theme was the *stability of professional football*, with most of the respondents (13/20) indicating that there is no stability in professional football. Only one athlete indicated that, as a rookie, he expected professional football to be a stable profession. The following quotations typify how athletes expressed their expectation that the future in professional football was unstable:

(Interview 15) When I was first becoming a professional athlete, I didn't feel a lot of stability. I didn't feel a lot of stability there, no security. I wasn't counting on making the team so, as far as career, I'm going to try to play as long as I can, but at the same time, I feel like it's a temporary thing. I don't feel real secure with it, and I don't think you really

can unless you are one of the elite. So, that was something that was tough, but at the same time, I look at it like I'm going to go as far as my ability will take me.

(Interview 16) *Well, you get a lot of realism when you go through camp because you see people getting cut, you see people getting fired, you see people screwing up and losing their job. So as far as stability, there is no stability. In my rookie year, I was happy to get a cheque week-to-week. An example is when I went out and bought my first car. I was going to buy this nice fancy car and I said, "forget it" and I went out and bought a \$5000 car because I didn't know how long the longevity of my career was going to be. Going into my second year, I'd been through it already and still didn't feel too stable in it. But now I'm in my third year. I've been starting for three years, as far as security goes, I feel pretty secure. It's cocky to say, but I know that at least I feel that if this team gets mad at me and wants me to leave, I'll be able to find a job elsewhere because I have those two years -- two-and-a-half because we're in our sixth week of this season -- and the more you play, the more confidence you get, and the more stability and security you feel in your job.*

After categorizing the responses on stability, the next reading suggested that the *duration of professional football* as a career was another theme (14/20). As shown below, the majority (10/20) of these types of responses indicated that the athletes expected professional football to be temporary:

(Interview 8) Ha ha ha! Ooh, definitely not stable or secure in any way. *Each week* you're thinking, "Am I going to make it to the next week?...great; Am I going to make it to the next week?... great". Then you see people getting cut all around you that you think are pretty damn good. And, you're figuring, "well, why in the hell are they keeping me?...Oh well, I'm probably next week. I'm probably next week." So, *I saw my pro career as, if it lasted two weeks; great. If it lasted a month; great. If it lasted a season; great. Secure and stable? No way. Temporary? Definitely.*

(Interview 22) I was just excited to get the opportunity to be a pro athlete, and I'm just happy to be here, and take it day by day, and I don't really worry about getting cut or anything like that now. If you let that bother you it could affect your performance. I just view it as a temporary thing and if I stay around long enough, that's great, and if not, I'm not going to dwell on that.

Another common theme was for respondents to discuss *possible barriers to a long lasting and stable career* as a professional football player (10/20). Potential barriers included high turnover, injury, age, politics, coaches, and performance. The next couple of quotations typify the concerns that many athletes had when discussing the lack of

stability and permanence in professional football. The first quotation discusses the role of coaches, whereas the second quotation focuses on the role of politics in breeding a sense of instability.

(Interview 18) When I first became I professional athlete, when I first signed that contract, I thought it was the most stable, secure thing in the world. *However, once I was in training camp, I realized that professional football is probably the most unstable job that a person could have with the philosophy that a lot of coaches have of, "you're only as good as your last game", as somewhat hard to really view football as a career.* I view it as something right now that I enjoy doing, and it's something that I'm not going to do for a long time, but I enjoy doing it now.

(Interview 6) Right now my pro career is not very stable, secure, yet. Not really worried about it. I'm confident that I can play. *But, a lot of things in the NFL are more, I guess, more politics. There is more politics involved. It all depends on how much money they're giving people. Even if you are playing better than somebody they're giving tons of money to, they may play that person just to justify all the money they're giving him.*

Finally, some of the respondents (8/20) discussed their *attitude* towards the apparent instability in professional football, with most (6/20) of these athletes indicating that they *chose not to worry about the future* of professional football. An example is provided below:

(Interview 3) It's certainly not stable, it's not durable, and it's not permanent. But, you realize that. It's part of the game. The average career of an NFL lineman is four years. *I mean, you see exceptions. You see people play 15 years and you see kids play one year. Like I said, I use to stress-out: "I have to. I have to. I have to". Now, "I want to! I want to! I want to!" But I don't need to, and that takes some of the stress off. Definitely takes some of the stress off because now, hey, I did make it.* You associate some of your worth with your job. So, hey I was at the absolutely top level in American football. NFL is *the* best that you can ever get, and I hit it. So, let me find another field and hit it again, and that's fine.

Expectations realized versus surprises. On first reading it appeared that most of the *athlete's expectations were met*. This is *especially* true for the *on-field football expectations*, such as practices and meetings, learning new plays (14/21).

(Interview 12) *I think they really have [been met]. And, the ones that caught me off guard, I think I answered those during the [self-interview]. I think everything from a football standpoint, I was really prepared for. It's something that I've been doing since probably I was eight years old.*

(Interview 16) Yes, pro football has lived up to my expectations. I mean, I said earlier, this is now a job and, win or lose, I have to do my job. And, was I surprised or caught off guard? No. This is what I anticipated it would be like and you see it right away, day one when you get in there. You know, all the guys there learning, trying to figure everything out and earn a spot. So, it pretty much is what I thought it was going to be.

Some of the respondents stated that their expectations clearly were not met (6/21).

For example,

(Interview 21) *My first year, it didn't live up to all my expectations. For one thing, the team chemistry was something that I was very surprised about. The guys on the team were more about themselves and more into themselves and how they were. And, I just think it wasn't the greatest bunch of guys in the world because since then I've played on some teams that did have much better mixes than that team had. There was a lot of cockiness, lot of bickering among guys; and, I wasn't really used to that. I'm a pretty quiet guy. I don't talk a lot until I get to know people, and it takes me a while to know people because I don't really give a lot of myself -- I don't really show a lot of myself -- when I first meet people, so it was a little tough for me to get involved with the team and to feel a whole part of the team, so I didn't have a good time when I first got there. I thought I was ready for the work part of it, but still that was a little tougher than I thought it would be: the two-a-days practices, my arm was killing me. I remember going out there towards the end of the two-a-days and just feeling like I couldn't even lift my right arm, but I didn't want to say anything because I didn't want to let anyone know that I was injured -- not really injured, but just hurting a lot. So, it was a little tougher than I expected probably.*

After categorizing responses in terms of having expectations met, the next reading revealed that all of the athletes except one stated that he was *surprised or caught off guard* by some aspect of professional football. The most common surprise was the atmosphere surrounding professional football (15/21). Most of these athletes (11/21) indicated that they were negatively surprised by the atmosphere in professional football.

(Interview 5) *One of the things that definitely did not live up to my expectations was the level of coaching. I thought moving from college to pro you'd just get that high -- a super high -- level of coaching and you'd become a better football player just from what you*

can learn from these coaches. It's not the case. On every team they have their good coaches, maybe one's the defensive coordinator or whatever, but from my experience, there *are* a few coaches on every team that are there because it's an old boys network. *That's disappointing, you know, not getting the most out of the coaching, from the coaching aspect. Another thing that caught me off guard, I guess, was the way guys got cut. You don't see that in college usually.* You know, usually you don't make cuts or you don't even notice the guys disappearing. Usually guys quit on their own accord, but when a professional football player got cut, especially a friend of yours or whatever, it was kind of different. *And, I noticed that a lot of the vets didn't try to get terribly close to the rookies. Especially the ones they thought were gone, they wouldn't waste their time on because they knew they were going to get cut anyway. It's kind of an attitude of "better you than me", which is kind of surprising. That took a little getting use to, the fact that it was a business. In fact, it took me into my second year. Into my second year, I still didn't really treat it as a business. It was more of just fun. That was one of the things that was a good surprise too, how much fun it was hanging-out with the guys and being around a group of characters like they have in every locker room. It was quite funny. I don't find you get that kind of character person in a college locker room.*

(Interview 22) Yes, football has lived up to the expectations. It's a very difficult sport. People just think that these guys are getting paid millions of dollars -- not that in the CFL we are, but we're still getting paid to just play football -- but it's a lot more than that. There's a lot of stress in this business: whether you're going to be here one day and you're not going to be here another day. It's a tough part of the game that people don't realize. And, that part of the game has really caught me off guard. It's not like college football where you're on scholarship and you're guaranteed your money. Here, you could be getting a game check one week and you could be home the next week.

The next most common surprise was the on-field football (6/21), including meetings, practices, learning new plays, and quality of coaching, as well as outcome and cuts. All on-field surprises, except quality of coaching, were positive.

(Interview 11) In terms of meetings and learning new plays, my expectations would be that it would be really difficult just because I thought that the plays were going to be really complex and they expected you to pick it up right away and it wasn't like that. The meetings were very simple and we went over the plays until everybody understood it, walked through it.

Prototypical Between-Group Differences in Expectations Held by Veteran and Struggling/Unsuccessful Professional Football Players

Several differences between the veteran group and the struggling group of athletes in terms of their stated expectations for professional football were found. First, the *veteran* (4/6) athletes were more likely than the struggling athletes (1/5) to state that being drafted or invited to try-out for a professional team was a "*dream come true*" and to *immediately begin preparing* for the opportunity. An example from the veteran subgroup is given below:

(Interview 20) I think it was complete euphoria. I was very, very, very excited. Almost disbelief, probably, and very flattered. I think -- flattered is probably the best word to use. I waited and waited, and waited. The draft day, or the draft process, actually took two days. I got drafted early the second day, so that first day was so long: Oh my God, it was long! And, two of my friends -- two of my college teammates -- got drafted that day, and then me and another buddy got drafted the next day, so it was just absolute hell waiting. You know, huge anticipation, but then again, disappointment every time a draft pick would go by and it wasn't you. You know, you're like, "fuck, come on, when am I going to go? I got a little list here showing that guys in my position that are x, y, and z are supposed to be good, but when am I? When am I? When am I?". So, when they finally called, it was a huge feeling of relief -- instant relief over me and then I think I started worrying about, "Okay who's on that team? What do I have to do to try to make that team? These guys are probably better than anybody I've ever seen before", blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. So, I think I got worried immediately after. Just started thinking about, "Am I going to be able to make it? Am I going to be able to make it?", type thing.

Second, the *veteran* athletes expressed that they had *all types of general expectations* -- performance (3/6), context (3/6), and outcome (2/6) expectations, whereas the struggling athletes almost uniformly discussed only performance expectations (4/5). Each of the three different types of expectations expressed by the veterans subgroup is represented in the quotation which follows:

(Interview 20) Thinking back about it, I don't know if I necessarily had any expectations of what it was going to be like. I think what was going through my head for the most

part, a lot of curiosity concerning my own ability, my own talent, and I think a lot of fear; wondering I guess if I was going to be able to cut it, if I was going to be able to make it in that league -- talking about the NFL. I don't know if I necessarily had any expectations of what it was going to be like. *I think I just thought, for the most part, it was just going to be a bunch of super-human type individuals who could run, jump, hit, throw, catch, just about anything -- block -- bigger, bader, and tougher and harder than anything you've ever seen before. The best guys you've seen in college, the guys in the NFL were going to be a million times better than anybody you've ever seen. I think for me it instilled a bit of fear in my heart, wondering what it was going to be like. To me it was like the great divide, where we had been in college and playing, even though I knew guys that were there and I knew guys that had been there before, I don't know, to me it was like crossing an ocean or something, getting to that next level. And I think, for the most part, I was just scared to death wondering if I could cut it and hoping to God that I got the opportunity to actually be there.*

Third, when discussing their expectations for the future in professional football, the veterans (3/5) discussed potential barriers to longevity in professional football, while the struggling athletes did not mention such barriers. An example from the veterans' subgroup is provided below:

(Interview 20) Temporary for sure. I never felt stable or secure *ever* the whole time I was there. I don't know how many people do. I think it's a very small number of people that can say they played their career -- the first part of their career even, for sure -- felt stable with it. I think a lot of people would almost be lying if they said they felt very stable and secure. *I think it breeds that, or it plays on that part of the human emotion, that you're worried sick. It's basically the unexpected, you don't know. So, I never felt completely secure, never. I just felt it was a temporary thing.* I was hoping it wouldn't be: I was hoping it would be a long-term thing, but I definitely wasn't sure. I wasn't confident in it lasting a whole long time. Like I said, I think in the back of my mind, I had pictured it lasting a long time, but I really didn't know.

Fourth, on the whole, veterans relied on information obtained through *contact with their social network in professional football* (10) more often than did the struggling athletes (2). An example of veterans' reported use of social network follows:

(Interview 12) Fortunately, I had some friends at college that had made the jump from college to professional football, so I had a little idea of what to expect just from what they had told me. But, I knew it was a difficult transition from high school to college and they told me that the transition from college to the NFL was going to be just as difficult. They

said the game moved at a much quicker speed and definitely took a little bit of getting used to.

Finally, the *veterans* (2/6), as a group, were less likely to state that they were negatively *surprised by the atmosphere* they found in professional football than were the struggling/unsuccessful athletes (4/5).

#### Authenticity and Utility of Findings Related to Expectations

Authenticity of what appears in the above section of results was confirmed by two veterans. An example of authentication comments by veterans is provided below:

*"Sounds like the successful guys anticipated the transition to a greater degree because they had more of a vested interest in a pro career."*

As for the utility of these findings, when three struggling athletes were asked to indicate the three most important lessons in these findings they all underlined the importance of immediately preparing after being given the opportunity to try-out for a professional team.

#### Preparation for Professional Football

Questions about athlete's preparation for professional football were organized into the following three categories: 1) preparation for the *opportunity* to become a professional football player. including preparation before camp, preparation for the "Combine" (i.e., camp to determine overall abilities and to generate a combined score to be used as an index for the draft), for training camp, for pre-season games and for team selection (i.e., cuts); 2) preparation for the *regular season*, following team selection; and, 3) retrospective reports on things to be aware of in preparation, as well as, *advice* to give to someone about to undergo the transition into the professional ranks.

### Preparation for the Opportunity to be a Professional Football Player

Preparation before training camp. In order to prepare before the professional training camps, the majority of participants lowered their goals from when they were in college (10/21), for example set a goal of making the team (9/21), rather than earning a starting position.

(Interview 14) Well, I pretty much worked hard my whole life, so I couldn't really change that and maximize my ability. I tried to work harder, but that's kind of the way I've worked-out my whole life. *The goals that I set were different because in college I wanted to start and be All-American and All-league and be captain and all that stuff, things that I've done, but I wasn't drafted so my goal was just to make the team. So instead of just, you know, trying to reach for the sky, I was trying to settle for the middle. I guess they were different because I was just trying to make the team.*

(Interview 5) *Goals, did set goals differently. Going from college to pro, kind of lowered my goals just to prepare yourself, not for disappointment, but thinking that it's such a higher level. I kind of had the realization that my goal was to make the team and to play on the special teams -- dress for games. I didn't want to be on the practice roster. But, I didn't set my goal to start. You know, I didn't aim for the sun, I kind of aimed for the moon, which it worked out for the best. I just kind of lowered my expectations. Going into college I set the goal that I wanted to start. But, going into pro it was the realization that, "You know what? If I'm going to contribute, it's got to be on special teams and I really don't want to be on the practice roster, so I'm going to set my goal to make the team and play special teams. Contribute that way. I certainly trained a hell of a lot harder two college seasons before going to pro, especially my draft year. Enlisted the help of and started training with a guy who played in the CFL. Trained together as hard as I could. So, that's kind of funny: You think that you're doing everything you can even to play a university sport, but it doesn't always end up that way. There's a lot of other distractions when you are in college. So, I certainly did train a lot harder, realizing that it could be a career.*

Most of the players (14/21) also acknowledged the requirement to *work hard* in order to be prepared for their opportunity to reach the professional level in football. The hard work and effort these athletes undertook is demonstrated in the following three quotations:

(Interview 20) I don't think I really changed anything. I'd always worked hard, I'd always worked as hard as I could at any endeavor I was trying, whether it was working

out in the weight room, what we did on the summer run program, or what we did for conditioning to stay in shape. I was the type of kid that was always there. I stayed every summer, never went home, never really went home at any time of the year -- went home for Christmas for a couple of weeks, and that was about it, but we stayed there year round, pretty much. And, I went into it, I think, with that same work ethic pretty much. I just worked my butt off, and just did exactly what I felt was my best; you know, felt like I was as strong as I could be, and in as good a shape as I could be. Did I set different goals? No, I never really was the kind of kid that sat down and said, "oh, well, let me write down goals for x, y, and z". I just had in my head what I thought I wanted to do in my life, which was give whatever I was doing my utmost, and I felt like I had done that leading up to it. I worked hard, I trained hard, I did some extra stuff with our strength coach in college, maybe did something with plyometrics just working on the physical part of it, jumping and things like that, just getting ready for some of the jumping things we had going on at the Combine, but as far as the strength and the conditioning, it was the exact same thing that I had done all the way through.

(Interview 6) *When I got the opportunity to try-out for the NFL, I stepped up my work-outs and they became much more intense. I worked much harder.* And my goals: I tried to make the team was my first goal. And, from then on, work my way up the ladder until I could get a chance to play.

(Interview 22) For me I really didn't do anything different. I've always been a hard worker and I just gave a hundred percent in the off-season, and worked as hard as I possibly could, not knowing what to expect, just that I could be in the best possible shape going into camp.

While increasing the intensity of their work-outs, many of the athletes (8/21) intended to undertake the *same physical preparation* they had throughout their college careers. For example,

(Interview 2) They do these conditioning tests, I mean, everyone has to do a bench press at 225 pounds and you're supposed to train for that, and I trained for that somewhat and I know that you have to pass those tests, but more of it's on the field, what you can do on the field. So I trained on my agility and stuff like that. *I trained basically how I prepared in college for each season coming up, but it was definitely more mental.*

In addition, some respondents (6/21) reported *seeking advice* and help from football experts, including professional players and agents. For example,

(Interview 4) You see, I was lucky because I went to the University of [name] and a lot of the guys there before me went to play in the NFL. They would be around a lot. They would come back and live there in the off-season, and work-out or take classes, or

whatever. So I got to meet a lot of those guys all along the way. *So, I had a lot of preparation because from the time I was 18 on, I met these guys and you could ask them anything. I learned a lot. So that's what I did, I'd ask those guys about everything. Yeah, we'd talk about football. One of the guys that played for a pro team, we had two classes together. So, we would go to class, and then go to lunch, and I would ask him all kinds of stuff. I would ask him about how he worked-out, about what their schedule was like, how he went about picking an agent, how he invested his money, just everything that I knew that I would have to do if I made it to that point. So, that was the biggest part of the preparation.*

Preparation for evaluation camp (Combine). Although the number of comments about preparation for "combine camp" was low, the most numerous were *negative* (14/16). Negative comments included concerns that too much stress is placed on the evaluation score yielded from this camp experience (6/16), the dehumanizing approach to the evaluation process (5/16), and not having enough time to prepare (4/16).

Demonstrative quotations are provided below:

(Interview 20) I thought the Combine was an absolute joke. I think there has to be some sort of an evaluation situation where you can see some kids do what they can do, maybe in a few areas. But, the NFL Combine ends up being like a freaking cattle heard. I mean, it's absolutely ridiculous. You're standing around for eight, nine hours a day for three days straight in nothing but a little skimpy pair of shorts. I'm not necessarily saying I was embarrassed to do that or anything, but it's so stupid. I think too much is based on how much a guy can bench press that one day, how high he can jump in the air, how fast he can run his 40, whatever. I don't know what more the emphasis is put on: If it's actually put on what a guy does on the field, or what they've seen him do on the field, or what they've seen him do at the combine, or a combination of both. Which I think it should be a combination of both, but sometimes I'm not really sure actually if it is that. Sometimes I think they put so much into, "Oh what's he running the 40?" or "What'd the kid bench press?".... I really get that feeling, that too much is put into that one day, or that one series of three days in a row of the testing. And, I don't think they necessarily care what a guy's personality is like. And, I think that's something that needs to have more attention paid to it. Some of these guys you meet are absolute idiots, but a lot of coaches say, "Who cares if he's a dumb-ass, and he looks like some kind of a fruit cake who might rob a 7 eleven store or beat some women?", whatever, "Can he play football?". And that seems to be the only thing that really matters. I think that's an absolute joke and that's an outrage.

(Interview 15) Going in my rookie year the way I prepared for the Combine in Indianapolis, you know, I really didn't have a lot of time because I'd played in some of the all-star games, our season ended late, and that kind of thing. So I didn't feel like I could

have done my very best because it was so early in February. So I didn't have a lot of time to train for it. So, I wasn't real happy about it and I don't feel like I did as well as I could have because I didn't have a lot of time. What's a shame is that's the barometer that they measure you on because all the players are there doing it and if you don't have a good camp, then that could really hurt you. You could have an evaluation camp that could hurt you as far as your draft status, and making a team, and eventually it could hurt you in salary and all kinds of things. So I didn't really like the way that was all handled, and even when you were there, the way you were treated. It was a real meat market and you find out real quick that you're a commodity and you're not really a person to them at that point, which is a little frustrating. And the way that you are treated, I don't think it was the best. They worked you hard all day and I don't think you were nourished well in food, in drinks. You know, something that your body has to be performing well and the food wasn't always great, and there wasn't always like a lot of healthy stuff to drink, and that kind of thing. So I didn't really like that about it.

Preparation for training camp. Although athletes' comments on preparation for training camp were sparse, some athletes (7/17) indicated having *increased their mental or physical preparation* for training camp. For example,

(Interview 1) Again, preparing for training camp, I attempted to work harder then I would be asked to work during the actual camp. I wanted the training camp to feel, at least physically, that it was easy. My attitude was to work as hard as I could and not let the surroundings intimidate me or affect my performance.

In addition, some athletes (7/17) indicated feeling *nervous, stressed, or scared* going into their first training camp. For example,

(Interview 9) I prepared for training camp just the way I said before. I was working-out really hard and running. Mentally, I tried not to worry about it, like I just tried to worry about each practice as they came and I had a couple of friends who were in the same training camp that I was, so that helped a lot, having somebody to talk to and guys that were going through the same thing. *I was kind of scared going into training camp, like I thought it was going to be the hardest thing and it pretty much was.*

And, some athletes (7/17) reported having *concerns about training camp*, such as concerns about the length of training camp, as well as performance and outcome concerns. For example,

(Interview 20) Training camp, I went into it with the same preparation and attitude that I did in college. I came into it as strong and as good condition as I could physically. And,

I think mentally, I always just geared down and said, *"Okay, this is going to be a long tough time, set your sights farther ahead, you know, a month down the road -- however long it was going to be -- and just get through it, don't miss any days, get as much out of it as you can, and just go out and work hard"*. That's all I thought I could do in college, and that's all I thought about doing later on in the NFL. What was my attitude towards it? I absolutely despised training camp. I hated it with a purple passion -- still do. I think it's ridiculous. I think you do need training camp. I think it's a good thing. I think it's just me being a baby, necessarily. I just hate it. *I can't stand constant football 24 hours a day, and just beating the hell out of yourself and your teammates all day, everyday*. I just think it's ridiculous, but like I say, it's a necessary evil. I think it needs to be done. *Sometimes I think it can be a little too harsh and it can drag on a little too long*, but it's something that we need necessarily. I think it's a very important part of the game, and the team usually is gelled -- its like a different team, it's night and day -- when training camp is over, as compared to when you started.

Preparation for pre-season games. Responses to this question dealt mainly with the *athlete's focus* during the pre-season games. Performance issues, such as playing well (10/16), and outcome issues, such as making the team (9/16), were discussed by many of the athletes. Two quotations are provided. The first illustrates performance concerns, while outcome concerns are presented in the second.

(Interview 13) The vets come in and pre-season games start and then putting on that uniform and walking out into that stadium. that was a thrill! I mean, I put on the [team's] uniform and I put that [team symbol] on a helmet. Put it on, and that's probably one of the most recognized symbols in the whole entire sporting world especially today. But anyway, at that time the only way I could describe it is that I was a little numb and I looked around the locker room and it was jamb packed with a bunch of guys that were still on the team. and I just was thankful that I had the opportunity. Either that was going to be the first. or the first and last time and I took a moment at that time to just reflect and be happy to have a year ago I was injured and I played five games. So, I mean, I was really happy to be actually given a chance to go out and play on a professional football team. We went to the game. *The game, you know, you're just running like a chicken without your head on, and running after everything, and trying to remember as many plays as you can, and doing the best you can. And we go back and after the game we go into the meetings, and the way they set it up is the whole team meets and pretty much everybody sees what the other guy's doing type of deal. Puts peer pressure on you if you're not doing well. You know, at the time, I didn't really like that technique but I can see how it worked.* But, you always think everybody's listening, but then half the guys are sleeping when the rookies are in anyway. So, when they call you up for a mistake, nobody's really listening but you, and you're thinking *everybody's listening*. That kind of deal. But, that was probably stressful. *It's the stress of the game because the number one*

*thing is performance. I don't care what you do or what you say, it's how you perform. I mean, you can say whatever, or make an excuse for whatever you want, but that really doesn't matter. The bottom line is performance and that's how they judge you, and that's how you stay around on the team.*

(Interview 9) We had trained hard like the first two weeks of training camp. *You know, we were working hard everyday and all-of-a-sudden you got this pre-season game coming up and if you do well during the pre-season game, it's pretty much going to get you on the team. so it was pretty stressful, these games.* I tried to prepare for it just like you would any other game. All-of-a-sudden you have this pre-season game where in college you take them as a joke just to get a couple of reps and let somebody else play, *where all-of-a-sudden this is your game to make the team.* so I tried to take it as seriously as I could. *My attitude towards it was, this was going to be the two games that decide whether I made the team or not.*

Some athletes (6/16) remarked that the pre-season games were their opportunity to play in games and to showcase their talent. For example,

(Interview 21) My career so far, preseason games are mainly my time to play, so *I really look forward to the preseason games because I feel like that's the main place that I can show people what I can do.* And they can see me in practice, but I've never been the greatest of practice players. I think it goes with needing a challenge and a goal, and practice doesn't really give me all that, but the games always do and I always get up for them and I feel like I play well 90% of the time. So yeah, *the preseason games are big for me and I always prepared greatly for them because I got to show them what I can do then.*

Preparation for cuts. In general, athletes' comments focused on their *attitudes toward team selection* (i.e., cuts) in their first professional training camp. Some of the athletes (8/16) adopted a positive attitude towards the cuts; for example, not worrying about cuts or just focusing on doing their best. For example,

(Interview 15) Leading up to cuts, it's a tough time. You know that the next cuts are coming and the cut-lists and you're waiting for somebody to come knocking on your door or give you a call on the phone. *And it's a tough time mentally, but it's something you have to go in where it's not the end-all be-all that you can make it be. So you have to go in, "look I'm going to do my best and I'm going to play", and that's kind of the mental attitude that I took. I can only play as good as I can play and if it's good enough for this team, fine; and if it's not, maybe it's good enough for another team; and if it's not, well then I'll move on. It's not the whole pinnacle of my career. I'm not going to feel like I had an unsuccessful career if I didn't make it in the NFL because a lot of good things*

*have come from my college, which was an education, and actually getting through four years of playing college football, which was good. But, looking to the cuts, it is a hard time and it is a hard thing to swallow that maybe you're not good enough. But, it is something you have to prepare for mentally, and know that it is there and it is a possibility.*

In contrast, some athletes (8/16) adopted a more negative attitude towards cuts in professional training camps: for example, worrying about cuts, expecting to be cut. and mentally preparing to be cut. For example,

(Interview 21) *The cuts are really strange for me. My first year especially I worried about getting cut. I think it's kind of an image thing, I've never been [cut]. Well, I got cut from a baseball team once in high school, and probably should have, but I didn't care too much. But, I just didn't feel like I should be getting cut from a football team and it worried me a little bit when I heard the coach talking about the quarterback or when I felt like he wasn't paying any attention to me, and it just got to be a thing in the back of my head like, "Is he planning on cutting me? What's the deal?", and I think it hurts me because I'm so quiet. Because I don't really assert myself, the coaches get kind of a different perception of me. They think I'm like that all the time, but I'm very different when I get in the games and have to take that leadership role, I make sure to grasp it, and just go for it, that's how I've always been and I don't mind telling anyone anything, but it's hard to get that out because I don't really express it too much. So, yeah, cuts I used to worry about. Now, and I think towards the end of the training camp, I still worry about it, but it doesn't factor in too much. I know that I can't worry about it or it affects my play and it affects my mind, and I need to be clear of all that, so I don't worry about it.*

### Preparation for the Regular Season

Few of the categories generated for this question contained enough comments to satisfy the pre-determined inclusion criterion. However, athletes (10/16) reported a *positive attitude* towards regular season practices and games, particularly that games were fun and that they were ready and prepared to give their all. Two examples follow:

(Interview 20) *They were very important. I mean, regular season games, that was what you were there for. That was the fun you were going to have because it was basically paying you off for all the bull shit you put up with in camp, basically during the week, getting to the point where you can play the game and actually have fun. I always got nervous before the games, especially like my first year there. They were very, very different. I didn't get to play a whole lot, but when I did get to play, going into those games, I was scared to death -- absolutely scared to death. Once I got in and got popped a*

couple of times, I felt okay about it. It was just like, "Hey, I've done this a million times before. It's just like college, just like high school. The guys are obviously a lot bigger and stronger, but it basically was the same game we'd always been playing. It was football. But, I was very apprehensive, I think, scared, because it was an unknown thing, and it was something I hadn't done before. And, I got to admit, if I was down in the NFL playing, I think I would still be a little apprehensive about it because it's been so long, but I think it could get to be -- just like anything else -- where it becomes old hat once you've done it several, several times, a series of years, whatever. But, at that point I was still really nervous about it, *and my attitude towards it was that it was pay-back time. It was the fun that you got to have, and I was always very excited, almost like a little kid at Christmas, on gameday and anything surrounding game.*

(Interview 19) You fall into a routine rather quickly when you do make the cut and you get into a regular season. There's no real adjustment you have to make. I think finding the rhyme-and-rhythm. I think just finding a break into the line-up my first regular season was the hardest thing for me to do: to show them that I could play, that I could play with the 'big boys' and get better every week. *I know I didn't play at all my first year, my time to shine was in practice, so that's one of the things I tried to do is practice, and show them that I was learning quite adequately and I was getting better and better as each week went along.*

In addition, some athletes reported *concerns or adjustments* (10/16) that they had to make during the regular season practices, meetings and games; for example, adjusting to a new structure for practices, meetings, and the season, as well as dealing with increased stress. Quotations are provided below:

(Interview 12) Coming out of training camp, it actually feels as though things slow down just because you have a little bit more free time and the schedule's not as demanding as it is during the training camp portion of the season. *But still, now that the pressure of the regular season comes in and the game's for real, the pressure really does increase a lot. The meeting time was something that you really have to get use to. You know, in college you have very limited meeting time because of the scholastic schedule. And, here in the NFL, with that being you're sole business that day, there's probably two to three times the amount of meeting time that we had in college, so that was something that you really had to get use to. The practices, themselves, they were different than the training camp practices, but our coach here, after we played our first game and didn't perform real well, started to pick-up the tempo of our practices wanting us to be able to practice as hard as we did during the week so we could apply it to the way we played on Sunday. So, that was something that was different also. As the practices in the regular season became more and more up-beat and up-tempo, it was something that we moved away from in college. You moved quick and wanted to have crisp practices but you were practicing against a scout team in the college level because you had so many guys on a team. But,*

*here in the NFL, with a limited roster, you were actually practicing against guys that are starters on your defense. It was something that was different there to get use to because you not only would have to do the things that you had to do to prepare for offense, but then you had to take some scout team work to give the defense a work-out, so that was something that took a little bit of getting use to.*

(Interview 22) As far as the pre-season goes, it's very stressful because you don't know if you're going to make the team, if all this work and all the past work has gone towards nothing. Once you make the team, it's a little bit easier, *but you still have to perform. And, if you don't make the plays and perform, you could still get cut and that just adds stress and that's a part of the game that you don't really like.*

### Retrospective Reports on Things to be Aware of in Preparation for Professional Football

Key things respondents had to change in preparing for professional football. Most of the responses (17/21) focused on *personal and social adjustments*. Athletes reported having to make personal changes, like adopting a different attitude, learning how much to train, and reorganizing priorities; as well as, social changes, like learning to be more open and adjusting to new team-mate relationships. Several comments on personal and social adjustments to be aware of in preparing for professional football follow:

(Interview 5) It's pretty funny, I mentioned in section one that it was a little disappointing to realize that you weren't giving it your all until I realized that it could turn out to be a career. *You know, you think you're training hard, but with college you get the added distractions. Going into my first year, and after my first year of playing pro with [first professional team], trained reasonably hard -- pretty hard -- myself, had no responsibility really except keeping myself in shape and looking forward to the next season. In the CFL, the way the money situation is, I think as you play more and more years, you train in direct relation to how much you are making. You can't afford to put everything aside and train for the whole off season, for six months or whatever, just to come back and play at a fairly piddly salary. Now, if they were to pay you a great sum of money, then of course you could afford to concentrate on the training aspect and getting prepared for the next season, but that's not usually the case in the CFL. Now, in the NFL that's what you have to do. I think you have to train basically the whole off-season. But, then again, they're compensating you for that. Once again, that's a little disappointing. You'd like to think that you are doing everything possible to be the best and in peak physical condition, but it's not always the case. Also, you develop kind of a mental attitude like they're not rewarding me for what I do, so why do it. You basically get the idea that you know exactly what you have to do to come in in shape and what you have to*

do to keep your job and basically, you do that, which probably isn't the best thing, *but you learn what gets you by and that's what you do.*

(Interview 16) *Well, like I said, I had to change the mental perception of football from a game I had fun playing to a job where I had to do my job. And it became a job because now you're getting money to do it. So, how did I handle it with the coaches and team-mates? Well, it's tough. It's humbling. You got to earn the new stuff.*

(Interview 21) *I think the biggest thing I had to get used to was not being in the mix, not being one of the guys that were the, I don't know, you say the alpha males or whatever. As a back-up quarterback I was just there. I felt like they could probably do with me or without me a little bit, and I didn't like that feeling. I like to feel needed and necessary out there. And, I had to get used to that again because that is how it started out in college, and then by the end of college I was 'the guy', and you have to go back down to the bottom of the rung again, so that took a little adjustment. Handled myself with coaches, that was about the same. I felt like I could talk more to my college coaches because I had known them for so long, whereas I didn't really let my professional coaches get to know me all that much, and I kind of regret that a little bit because I think it's necessary for them to know what the quarterback is like; and, that's something I'm dealing with right now. I don't feel like my coach here in [province of CFL team] really knows who I am or what I'm about, so I have to work on that, I think. That's something coaches want to know what their quarterback is like, and I need to let them know that I'm someone that can lead this team to victory. The team-mates, that's always a tough one for me, especially my first year because I don't really go out. I think that's one of the biggest bonding times, especially in professional sports. I find that everyone goes out, I find that everyone -- not everyone, but 95 to 98% of everyone -- parties a lot. And, I mean, it's a kind of charmed life. You can get any kind of women you want, you get a lot of things free, you get a lot of privileges that most people don't get, so I think a lot of football players take advantage of that and I'm not really the person that goes out. All through my professional career I've had a girlfriend in [American city], so I think it's a thing where I don't want any kind of a temptation on cheating on her. And also, I never have had that great a time going out. I mean, I've had some good times, but I figure if I'm going out, it's for one thing, and that's to pick-up on somebody, and I don't need to pick-up on anybody. so there's no reason for me to go out, and that might be the wrong attitude because, I mean, I wouldn't have to, but I know myself and anyway [laughs]. Yes, so getting to know team-mates has been all right for me. I deal better with them in one-on-one situations where I can just get to know them. My personality is so that I kind of blend into everyone and don't show off my real personality for a while. I'm kind of a nerdy type of guy, I think. You know, I'm not too cool. I can act cool and I can be on the cool side, but mostly I like to play around, you know, I like to joke around. *It's a little different from most football players, I think, so I have to just find the right mix with that.**

(Interview 13) In order to survive and make it, I think one of the key things, as a young guy, pretty much you got to be, I would say as for myself, I was a good listener. I'd be a really good listener and just try and take everything in. You're going to be treated

differently because for one, you're a rookie; and, *number two, you're trying to break into a little niche a players that have already been, some of them have been around together for eight, nine years. So trying to bust into that little pack of teammates is tough. And, some of them, they look at you and you might have took the place of one of their buddies and so it takes a while for them to open up to you, I guess, until they find out what you really about. What I did was, I pretty much kept to myself that first year and I went about my business like a business, and I listened a lot and I said very little. In fact, some of the guys probably thought I couldn't even talk. But I did that on purpose because I wanted to take in everything I could. So, that was pretty much my mental game I played to stay alive and make the team.*

Some athletes (7/21) reported *changes in physical preparation*, namely increasing effort, and improving technique, as key changes in preparing for professional football.

For example,

(Interview 1) Yeah, I think that when football becomes your job, you have to give priority to working-out and to preparing yourself for it, whereas when you are in school, you have to go to school and you have to try and fit working-out in. Here, you put a lot of priority on working-out and you feel guilty if you don't do it. You feel you're cheating yourself. Other things you try to fit in and around working-out. People think "Wow, you got an off-season: Six months vacation!" But, you still keep working it's just you don't get paid and you're doing it on your own. A lot of motivation from within.

Finally, some athletes (6/21) reported changes in their *mental approach* to the game; such as concentrating and being more focused, as well as, eliminating mistakes.

For example,

(Interview 15) In order to make it in the NFL, things that I had to change -- not necessarily change -- but just things that you really had to be sure of: There's not a lot of mistakes being made, and that's probably any professional sport. It's really a perfect game and the way it's perfect. I don't mean physically perfect, but mentally perfect. People know what they're doing and they know how to beat you, either if they're not better than you, they can beat you by their techniques and just technically beat you, or they can out-smart you, out mentally play you, or out physically play you. It's really perfect. You don't see a lot of mistakes. And people that make a lot of mistakes, aren't going to be out there. So that's a big thing if you're going to make it. You have to know what you're doing, you have to know you're assignments and you have to be able to execute them; that's huge.

Exploring changes in mental preparation. Participants reported two major ways in which their mental preparation had changed since college. First, they now try to *concentrate* harder and longer, and try *not to worry about things outside their control* (11/21). For example,

(Interview 22) The mental thing with me was just to take it day-by-day, and just to give it 100% everyday and not worry about what's going to happen down the line. Just give it 100% everyday and just take pride in the things you can control and don't worry about the stuff that you can't control, like cuts.

(Interview 11) Transition to pro football, crucial change in the mental game. well just *stay focused all the time*. It wasn't really a change, *it's just a different approach*. *You have to be ready for everything, and you have to realize what the consequences are if you're not ready. Because the consequences aren't the same in college. So, in terms of the mental game, you have to stay focused on doing each – even in practices, let alone games – little thing. If mentally you're concentrating on your footwork and your handwork, everything else will follow, and then you make the play. And if you can do the little things each time, you know that you have a chance.*

Secondly, athletes (11/21) now approach the game in a *more detailed* way, including "being a student of the game" by trying to learn from their mistakes and/or by trying to learn from the veteran players. For example,

(Interview 15) The way my mental aspect changes is just I had to develop a lot more confidence in myself. You know, you come in and you don't know what to expect from yourself, but you have to realize. "look, I'm the one that's going to have to get through this. I'm going to have to be mentally tough. *When I get beat, I'm going to have to figure out why, and figure out how to make yourself better, and why you're losing at certain things, and how to start winning some of those battles*". And that was a big thing for me when I came into the pros. *It was so mental and it was tough because there were some such great players and you get beat, a lot, especially when you are young because you're just not used to that level of football. And it took me some time, but I just kept working at it and kept watching some film and that kind of thing. You know, going into practice I had to make sure I knew all my assignments, so at least if I was making mistakes, they were physical. I was getting beat physically, but not missing my guy, or not taking the right step at him and that kind of thing. And, it was tough to always be up for practice and always be up for games, but it's something you just have to develop.*

(Interview 16) It was preparation -- mental and physical preparation. Physically, there was not much I could do besides get therapy and train. *But, mentally I mean I use to watch film,*

*know exactly what I had to do, where I had to do it and when I had to do it. So, as far as the preparation into the game and practices, it was huge. I mean, you needed to be on the ball. There was no taking it down a notch. There was no really not knowing what was going on. I use to get so nervous before a game just because I knew I had a job to do and if I didn't do the job, I wasn't going to be there.*

Best advice for someone coming into the league. While few comments were available about the best advice for newcomers (12/16), it appeared that athletes recommendations focused on *mental aspects* of the game (6/16), such as being focused, being versatile, and being mentally prepared by knowing your job. For example,

(Interview 19) *I think the biggest thing I can say to them is if this is really the goal that you are hoping to achieve. I think just sit yourself down and try and realize how good you are. or whether you think you're good enough to be there. and if you do. then hold on to that because really you are your only ally in there. and sometimes it takes a while for you to get there, and if you're the only one that believes in you, then you're going to be your strongest supporter and that will definitely carry you through some lean times. The best advice I can tell you is if you want to play professional football, be ready to be mentally challenged. I think the best thing you can do is really become a student of the game because everybody is physically the same. Everybody, by the time you get to our level, everybody is physically the same; you're not going to beat anybody just on physical prowess. I think the thing you have to understand is the way you can beat somebody is just by being more mentally prepared, and just understanding that to be mentally prepared you have to really study your opponents, study yourself, know your weaknesses, and know what you can do to cover them, and cover them up.*

(Interview 9) *I think the best advice I could give to someone coming up in the system to make it would be to be as versatile as they can, to be able to accept changes and stuff. You know, a lot of guys come in out of college like being the stars on their team. You know, say he's a middle linebacker and he wants to play professional, but that's all he wants to play is middle linebacker. You know, a lot of the professional teams, they won't do that, like they'll have a guy who's a middle line backer and they'll try to make him an outside line backer and you kind of have to be willing to accept that change. And, I think the more versatile you are, the more you have to offer the team. That's just more of a reason why they'll accept you. You know, everybody who goes to a professional training camp's obviously been pretty good in their college years, so just to have more to offer these teams is what they want, and to be willing to accept the changes. I mean, coming out of college I didn't really play special teams too much, but all-of-a-sudden my first year, I think that was a big thing that helped me make the team was that I could play special teams. And, you know, a lot of guys at my position wouldn't play special teams because it's more for linebackers. It's not really for a defensive lineman, and so I think a lot of guys have to learn how to take that change and take the advantages that they give*

you and try to do as much as you can because there are a lot of guys that are just as good as them, but if they have more to offer, I think that's a big thing. *And the best advise, you know, another good advice is just to be positive about yourself and believe that you can do it. You got to believe in yourself because after the first couple of weeks of training camp, they don't really give you that, you know, they make everybody feel the same and if you don't think, yourself, that you can do it, then nobody else around you is going to feel that way either.*

Other comments about advice for newcomers (6/16) focused on *attitudinal factors*, like being open to the advice from football experts, being positive, and doing your best. Two examples are given below:

(Interview 20) I think the best advice I can give a young guy is, never stop believing in what you can do. When you look around the league and you see guys that are playing in the league, even guys that have been great players in the league, they all started somewhere, they were all rookies at some point, and they all came out from colleges, universities, just like everybody else. They're not aliens from outer space, they're not super human, they're just regular guys that believed that they could do it; and, for whatever reason, it worked for them and they were there and they've been playing. You know, the guys that have been there for a while, and the guys that haven't been there for a while, whatever, they're all normal people, and they're all just like the young kid coming in. And, I think the biggest piece of advice I'd give a kid is don't take shit off somebody. Just know that you're just as important; maybe it doesn't appear that way, and maybe it's hard to realize at that point, but you're just as important a person as any of these assholes on the team. They're there trying-out with you, for that matter. You're just as important as anybody else, and you're there to get just as much of an opportunity, and just as much of a shake as anybody else. Go into it, work your ass off, give it all you got, and let the shit fall where it may. But, don't necessarily worry yourself to death. I know it's easier to say than it is to do, but just go in and give it all you got, and realize that you are an important person, and that you got just as much right to be there as anybody else. And, just let it happen. Obviously you're a good player if you've gotten to that point. Go in there and bust your ass and just let it happen. That's all I can say.

(Interview 13) I would say that the transition that you have to make coming out of college that I would tell some of the younger guys is don't worry about the numbers game because I've seen a lot of guys get caught up and everyday they're going "hey there's only six guys out there and there's ten guys that they're going to keep and six and ten..." and this and that and the other thing, what if, what if, what if. And you end up 'what-if'ing yourself out of the opportunities that need to be taking place. *And the most important thing I can say to any guy coming into the league is do your best. Everything else will take care of itself. If it's meant to be, it's meant to be. So, I mean, you go out there and you do your best, and you give it your best shot, and hey they got to take that and if you're worthy, or if it is a numbers game, well hey that's out of your control anyways. So,*

*no use in wasting that stress on that because there is so much other things that are stressful in this game: injuries, learning the play book, and all that other stuff as far as getting use to the team-mates. All that stress that you have to deal with. Worrying about making the team or if you're going to be that one that they pick is wasted stress. So, the best thing that I could say is just do your best and hopefully it comes up for the best.*

### Prototypical Between-Group Differences in Preparation by Veteran and

#### Struggling/Unsuccessful Groups

In terms of preparation for the transition from amateur to professional football, clear differences between the two extreme groups were apparent. As far as preparing for football events, such as training camp and team selection, veterans' seemed to display more adaptive attentional focus. For example, veterans reported being task-focused while preparing for training camp (4/5). Struggling athletes, in comparison, discussed thinking that training camp was going to be difficult, or displayed a maladaptive attentional focus (e.g., "screw you" for not inviting me to the evaluation camp) (3/5). An example of the veterans' attentional focus follows:

*(Interview 19) Training camp, I kind of knew what was going to happen in training camp, so I wasn't really surprised by a lot of it. I think just physically being beat up for six weeks like that was just one of the hardest things I've ever had to do in my life. Just I've never been so physically tired and so mentally drained in my life as I had been my first rookie training camp. There's just six weeks of doing the same thing, and trying to learn just a whole playbook in the first week, and trying to be ready for pre-season game, and getting caught-up in the whole hype of it -- those are kind of hard -- and trying to stay within yourself and understand what you have to do*

Differences between the two groups in terms of attentional focus can also be seen in responses to the question concerning preparation for pre-season games. Here, veterans display more adaptive attentional focus; i.e., they focused on their performance, and on giving their best shot (3/5). In contrast, struggling athletes focus on their performance, as well as on other issues such as outcome (e.g., cuts, making the team, being judged), and

on other people (e.g., family, friends, coaches). An example of veterans' focus is provided below:

(Interview 20) I always looked at pre-season games just as if they were as important as when they counted during the season because, I mean, in that aspect, especially in my situation -- I think a lot of guys can empathize with me -- when you're young like that, especially guys like myself and other guys in my shoes, we weren't drafted first, second round. so you probably -- it's not that you're probably not going to make the team, but you're not a guy who's definitely going to make the team, so the pre-season game is basically your proving ground where you showcase what you can do. *I prepared for it by getting my mind clear and by thinking about what I had to do exactly, and said, "okay, well, I got to play against so and so, so and so", and by that time you've watched enough film on the guy you know what his tendencies are and you know pretty much what to expect in certain situations on the field; you know where the ball's positioned on the field, what down it is, what point in the game it is, what they're going to come with, different alignments and things you've seen. You've got a pretty good idea of what's going to happen. So, anyway, just cleared my mind out and focused on what had to be done to play that particular guy, or those two or three guys, that I'm going to be seeing.* And, what was my attitude toward pre-season games? I think I pretty much said it. I thought that they were very important and I prepared for them just like it was a regular game.

Similarly, veterans were more likely than the struggling athletes to *adopt a positive attitude and attentional focus towards "cuts"* in professional training camps (6/6), such as focusing on just doing their best and/or not worrying about being cut. In contrast, all struggling athletes worried about the possibility of being cut. An example of the veterans approach to "cuts" is given below:

(Interview 19) Cuts are a different story, for me. I was a pretty high draft pick, so I kind of knew I was going to be around, and I've never really worried about cuts actually wherever I've been. The only thing that's going to take me away from a team is injury. But, I've seen how it affects other people, and I've kind of been a little scared when the phone rang a little bit, but I've always been able to kind of trust in my abilities and know kind of where I am and what I'm doing. So, I've never really worried about cuts that much.

When discussing the best advice to give a newcomer, the veterans' recommended strategy was different than that of the struggling athletes. Specifically, the *veterans* emphasized mental (3/5) and attitudinal strategies (3/5), such as *knowing your job, being*

*open to advice, doing your best, and believing in yourself.* The struggling group, on the other hand, emphasized *trying to stand-out and be noticed by making the big play* (2/4).

An example of the veterans' advice to newcomers follows:

(Interview 12) The best advice you could give someone coming up into a system like you did to help them survive and make it is really just to do the same things that you've done. Obviously you've been doing things correctly to make it to the point that you have. *Continue to do those things and just be willing to listen and to be willing to learn new things from your coaches. There's going to be guys on your team that have been playing in the NFL that are going to give you advice, and be very open to the points that they give you because they have been there, especially guys that have been able to maintain careers for six and seven years. They're going to be able to give you valuable information that you're not going to be able to get from your coaches. So, just continue to do the things that you've done to make it to that level, and then be very open to the advice that you'll be able to get from team-mates and coaches.*

A final group difference was found in the key changes made in their mental preparation. While the veterans (5/6) adopted a more detailed approach to football, such as studying the game, and learning from mistakes, this strategy was largely missing from the struggling group's reports (2/5).

(Interview 13) I just listened, absorbed everything I could, and I went out and tried to do exactly what they asked of me. Never complained about a thing... Basically, my mental approach to the game was, I went out and practiced like practices were games for me because, in fact, they were because I was not playing in the games much. So, every practice I went to, I took it as I was being evaluated, and I knew that with every step I made. So, I tried to do everything to the tee. And, I'm a real technician per se of my trade. I would say that is one of my strength. So I kind of just did basically that: Tried to learn the techniques as best I could, and absorb whatever the other guys had to say, listen to the guys that have done it. I was very fortunate to have some great players that I could learn under and to be tutored by. It's like [names two great players], and shoot [names two more] were the starters and those guys really had a lot of tenure, and they taught me. I mean, they taught me more in one year than I would learn in the four years of college about how to play defensive line.

#### Authenticity and Utility of Findings on Preparation for Professional Football

Again, comments by veterans on authenticity of findings were well-stated, confirmatory re-iterations of what was given. For example,

*"Worrying about being cut will add pressure: This added pressure can manifest itself in a negative way, i.e., making mistakes. Successful guys obviously stressed mental (maybe more than) and physical aspects. Making the big play is difficult; there are only a few in every game. Consistency through lack of mental mistakes will get a coach's attention".*

Struggling athletes found these findings to be useful, particularly the findings that veterans used mental and attitudinal strategies in preparing for the transition, such as knowing your job, being open to advice, doing your best, and believing in yourself; as well as, a more detailed approach to football, like studying the game, learning from mistakes, and learning from the veterans.

### Differences Between College and Professional Football

Differences between college and professional football were examined using a funneling technique. First, athletes were asked about the biggest difference they experienced between the two levels of football. After examining the biggest difference, athletes were then asked more specific questions; namely, differences in practices; differences in games; differences in their job, responsibility and status on the team; differences in relationships with team-mates; and, differences in everyday life.

Biggest differences between college and professional football. On first reading, it became apparent that the biggest difference perceived by the athletes was *an increase in the overall quality of the players* (10/16). Two illustrative quotations follow:

(Interview 19) I think the biggest difference between college football and pro football is there's sometimes you knew you were going to beat somebody just because you knew you were physically better than they were, and you never really had to gear yourself up to play. In pro football, you're going to meet those people who are physically better than you sometimes, or just as matched as you are, but I think that the best way you can beat them is by being more prepared than they are -- studying more film, understanding your game plan a lot better. That's the difference about the mental game in order to stay alive

and, I think, make the team is understanding that the more valuable you make yourself, and the more coaches can see that you understand what's going on, and you're not going to make any mental mistakes, I think that's where coaches tend to go a little crazy is when people tend to lose it that way. They can make one mistake that can kind of throw them out of a team. is in that mental approach to the game.

(Interview 9) I think just that the biggest difference was that everybody was kind of at your level. You know, in college there's like three, four guys on every team that were good and the rest of the team was average. You know, still good athletes, but not great. Then, all-of-a-sudden, you go to professional football where everybody's good and you got to fight all the time just to be one of those guys. I think that was the biggest difference: You had weak spots on college teams, where on professional teams, there weren't really weak spots; like, they might have been weak spots for professional level but everybody was pretty good, and then you just have the super stars. You know, it's a faster game, stronger game, that was it.

Some athletes (8/16) stated that the *mental adjustments* (i.e., time-management, learning how to always be at your best performance, staying focused, self-management, stress-management, and gaining self-confidence) required to play in the professional leagues were the biggest differences. Examples are provided in the following two quotations:

(Interview 15) The biggest difference between college football and pro football is just the level of play. You know, you come from college where just on average you don't have the athletes on the field, as you do in pro football. Each position is just somebody, someone, that is incredible, that excelled in college. Now they're excelling with some of the greatest players in the United States and the greatest athletes at any sport. *And, that was the biggest thing to, all-of-a-sudden, to mentally get over, "can I perform at this level?", and that kind of thing, and then to figure out you could, and then to have confidence in yourself. It's a big confidence game. And guys that play with confidence and guys that believe in themselves and figure out, that they can reach some of these goals and they can actually compete. You know, that was the biggest change.*

(Interview 16) As I said before, it's the attitude you take to the field. I mean, I played the same in pros as I play in university, but mentally it was a huge difference. I knew everything I needed to know. I knew my plays, I knew where I had to be, when I had to be there. It wasn't a joke. Again I bring it back to it's a job. The second you get a cheque, you owe the team what they're paying you for. So, that's the big difference. The difference, to sum it up, between college and the pros is the preparation. The mental preparation you put into football because you go from a game to a job and like anything, you know, in university working on your assignments it's half-assed having fun, but when you get a real

job where you're getting paid to do the assignments, you can't make mistakes. You got to take that extra care.

Some athletes (5/16) also reported the *negative, business-like atmosphere* (in which they experienced a *drop in personal status*) as the biggest difference. For example,

(Interview 3) The biggest difference between just the systems, college to pro, would be that in the pros it's all about money. It's not about the school. So, the general manager and the owner can go right over the head coaches head. You know, in terms of personnel. "I don't want him". "I'm not going to afford him". "we're not going to sign him". Even if the coach wants him. In college it's a whole different deal. The coach is the final word, unless the school fires the coach. Generally, the school doesn't step in. I mean they do have academic standards, "we can't get him into school here". But they don't say, "We like him but, we're not going to take him because he's too expensive". I mean that's just not even an issue.

Differences between college and professional football practices. Overall, it appeared that these athletes experienced professional practices as *less physically demanding* (8/17) than college. Two quotations are provided below:

(Interview 3) I look forward to it [professional practice]. I like going to practice. I mean, that's different. In college, practice was a pain because you got school, you got other things you're juggling, other things to worry about. But now, it's your job. Hey! I can't wait to get in there: It's a great job to have. I got people that are like me, we have the same interests obviously and the same goals because we're all on the same team. I enjoy going in there -- just the camaraderie, paling around with the guys. *Practices aren't that hard because, now that you're in the pros, you don't want to get anybody hurt in practice, so everything's a little easier. In college, people would torture each other in practice. There were other players on the team, some guy gets hurt in practice, so be it. The whole benefits more from the contact because you're getting more use to hitting. Where, by the time you get to the pros, we hope you already know how to hit and that you can keep everybody healthy so that we all last the season.*

(Interview 15) The way practices were different is in college we had really physical practices where we did a lot of hitting and we had practice, after practice, after practice like that. In the pros, you just don't do that because the season's so long and guys are older and you *know* how to practice, so practices are a little less physical -- you still do some hitting and then it depends on who your team is, as well, because it varies from team to team. But, that was a big difference from practice to practice. And, one thing about the pros is they don't keep you out there as long. In college, it seems like our practices would go forever and they would keep increasing the time and it just took

forever. In pros, you're on and off the field. You get your work done and you're gone, which was good.

Some athletes also reported that professional practices are *more mentally demanding* (6/17) than college practices; for example,

(Interview 1) Pro practices are not always physical ones. Sometimes the mental aspect is emphasized. Whereas college practices are always physical ones with a lot of hitting.

(Interview 11) Practices in college were tough. Practices in professional, it's more mental. You're dealing with a group of *men* that they *better* have the right physical approach to a practice and to the game of football, but mentally, is what you're getting paid for. So mentally, the practices were a lot more mental, about going through your proper footwork -- not beating the shit out of each other, but doing things properly.

Differences between college and professional football games. No clear differences were reported between college and professional games.

Differences in job, responsibility and status on the team. In terms of these issues, the most frequently reported difference (16/21) between college and professional football was an experienced *decrease in personal status* on the team. This can be seen in the following quotations:

(Interview 20) My job and responsibility were the same. Actually, I always played O line, so that's what I did. You know, your responsible for blocking somebody on every play. *My status on the team, from college it went from being an important guy who was asked his opinion, and I gave advice to young kids, and try to be a leader, to absolute obscurity. I mean, being an absolute, virtual unknown to probably every other teammate. I mean, they may know your name and they may know what you look like, but they're not necessarily friends of yours. Coaches don't necessarily know your name that well, whatever. Coaches know who you are and all that obviously because they studied about you so long. It's like going from being a relatively popular person to complete obscurity; for me it was like that.*

(Interview 15) Of course your job, responsibility and status change. All-of-a-sudden you come from being a senior in college where you were one of the main guys on your team. You were responsible for a lot; everyone knows you; they respect you on the team. Coming into the pros where all-of-a-sudden, for me, my ability all-of-a-sudden didn't stand out all that much on the team. You know, I'm a rookie, I'm a young kid. I didn't have a lot of respect yet on the team. That was something you had to adjust to when you

went into college, and now in pros there was that adjustment too. But, the thing is you're older and you don't necessarily like being treated like a peon and that kind of thing. So that was different, and your responsibilities change, and you don't have much on your shoulders, but you want to take on more, so you have to prove yourself.

(Interview 18) My responsibility pretty much stayed the same just because the position I played. *Status on the team was basically first professional team, you're a rookie, and you're pretty much considered by the coaches and the players around you that you don't know anything. It's kind of hard at times when it's like that, but it's just one of those things you have to overcome, and you have to understand that players have been there a lot longer than you have and they probably do know a little more than you do. It's sometimes difficult to think that the person is considering you somewhat brain-dead when it comes to playing football, even though you made it to the professional ranks that they're playing in.*

Along with a decrease in personal status on the team, some athletes reported being given a smaller job on the team (8/21), and/or less responsibility (6/21). For example,

(Interview 19) My first couple of years, for me, the difference between college and the pros, *my job was, I was on injured reserve; just another grunt, another kind of number trying to make a name for himself, and show that I was improving each game and each year on the team.* And, as that improved, most of my relationships with my team-mates did. I tended not to hang-out with most of the guys because I tended not to like most of the guys in pro football. I think there's an attitude -- there's a pervasive attitude -- in pro football, where there's a lot of egos around. And, I think, for me, I realized a long time ago that professional football was just a job for me, I fell into it more than I wanted to become a professional football player, so I didn't kind of buy into the whole ego thing that a lot of other guys did, and so I tended not to hang-out with them. I tended to try and find one or two people who had this kind of same laid back attitude that I had, and a lot of my friends were outside of football.

(Interview 17) Obviously a lot less than it was at university; like, I only played one game, but you kind of just find that you're the lowest man on the totem pole kind of thing *and you're just trying to make it and just worry about yourself. Whereas, when you're fourth year university, you feel a lot more responsible because of the leadership role. Not only do you do your job, but you make sure everyone else knows theirs and the team's ready and that kind of thing. For that one game [in pro's], I was just really worried about myself and "O.K., what do I have to do?" kind of thing.*

Differences in relationships with team-mates. As the following two quotations demonstrate, most athletes reported *getting along* with their professional team-mates

(12/20):

(Interview 1) It's still a bunch of guys trying to make a living even though they get paid a lot. When you're there you're not thinking about how much you're making, you're just trying to get through the day. It is a long day and guys, people, bond the same way. They hang-out the same way. If anything, maybe you're a little bit closer to more of the players because you're with them all day, as opposed to university, where you really only see them on the football field and that doesn't necessarily mean you talk to each other and you're friends or anything.

(Interview 3) Oh it's great. Some guys are married, so obviously we don't go out carousing all night. But, during the day, it's fine. It's like it was in college, just about. Maybe not as childish at times, maybe more childish at other times depending on what little games we're playing in the locker room. *But, you get close to your team-mates. It's a flighty business, here today gone tomorrow, but that doesn't stop people from bonding, and cliquing, and getting along.*

The next most commonly reported theme in terms of differences in relationships with team-mates, was one of *potential barriers to good team-mate relationships* in professional football (8/20). Barriers included unwritten social norms for socializing with teammates (e.g., rookies socialize with rookies), racial barriers, age barriers, family responsibilities, and high turnover. For example,

(Interview 14) *Well, the turn-over is so high that I use to have a lot of friends and then when they go get transferred or traded or cut, you still keep in touch with them. But, I think I just try to keep an open mind and treat everybody fairly because a lot of guys you just don't get along with due to where you come from and your race and stuff like that where it's out of my hands. All I can do is be nice to everybody.*

(Interview 22) As far as the relationship with team-mates, I found you're not really as close to the players as you are in college. In college, we all lived together, etc., but here everybody's all spread apart and the only time you're actually with the players is when you're at practice. Other players have responsibility with family and children to take care of, and there's a big difference there.

Differences in everyday life. In discussing differences which have occurred in their everyday living since becoming a professional football player, some athletes (9/20) reported having *more money* than in college. For example,

(Interview 19) Definitely one of the biggest things that changed for me was just I had more money. You know, I went from a poor college student to having more money than

I really knew what to do with. And just having a chance to do a lot of things -- help my family out, help my brother out, my mom, and, you know, finally own a car.

Some athletes (6/20) reported that the biggest difference in their everyday life was having to set new priorities. Two examples follow:

(Interview 12) There's just a lot more time spent here. You have to budget your time very well. It was difficult in college trying to balance academics and football, and having some free time to socialize, but in the NFL *now you find yourself, making good salary at a young age. You're able to do things that a lot of people at your age aren't able to do. And I think that can get you into as much trouble as benefits it can provide for an individual. A lot of the guys will get caught up in some things that really prevent them from reaching the level that they could reach as a football player because they just lose sight of the priorities in their life and they find themselves, at a young age, making a great salary. I think it's something that a lot of people have trouble dealing with. So, I think, your status as an individual really changes as you get to the NFL and you have to keep all those things in focus and you keep your priorities in line, or you could be one of the people that doesn't have the opportunity to have the career they should have because of things that they let slip because of the changes in their everyday life.*

(Interview 10) Well, one thing was my job. I had a steady job at [Canadian Crown corporation] and I had to quit that to try for football. I was only contract anyways. It was full-time, but it was temporary, so it wasn't that big of a deal. I got to go back after for a bit anyways until my contract was over. So, that's one thing. *You know, basically you live and breath football once you become a pro football player. You have nothing else but that. You have to put everything else aside and just football is your life. You probably don't even want to talk football too often because you just have it all day. I mean, you're basically practicing football in the morning, you're watching films in the afternoon, you're practicing again in the afternoon, you're watching films again at night, so it's just football, football, football. That's basically how it works.*

#### Prototypical Between-Group Differences in Perceived Differences Between College and Professional Football

Several key differences between the two extreme subgroups were noted in this section. First, while both groups clearly experienced differences in the quality of players between the two levels of football, the veterans (3/5) were more likely than their less successful counterparts (1/5) to discuss necessary *mental adjustments* to professional

football, such as self-management and not making mistakes. An example of mental adjustments discussed by veterans is provided below:

(Interview 20) The biggest difference for me was, I think, being a big fish in a big pond in college, and going to the NFL and being absolutely nothing. Being someone who, in college, you felt like you were somebody important, you felt like you were a good player, you know, it was obvious because you dominated a lot of people, to go in the NFL where you're barely struggling, trying to make a team, almost begging daily for your spot on the team, and feeling like, "Well, I'm not really worthy of even being here."; and, I think that was really stupid on my part to think that I'm not worthy of being here because the people there aren't superhuman, and they're just like everybody else, and if you keep that in mind, I think you're going to be okay. But, I think that was probably my biggest mistake in feeling that way. And like I say, I think that was probably the biggest difference for me is, the players, yeah, they're big, fast, and strong, and they get probably a step quicker when you get to pro football from college; but, what it turns into is a business, and you don't have a lot of coaches standing around you coddling you saying, "Oh come on, come on, come on", because they know if the kid is not going to cut it, there's ten thousand others out there that would love to have that position, so basically they're in control and they know it's supply and demand, completely. There's so many kids trying to get into the game, and so many vets and shit trying to stay into the game, and there's only so few jobs, so it is basically a buyers market. It is all laid out in front of you, all you got to do is pick what you want. But, I think the biggest thing is just the mentality, for the most part, of the players who play the game, or of the coaches. You don't have coaches saying, "Oh you're good, you're good. It's like it was in college, I'm here to watch out for you, here to take care of you."; no, that's not it, it's, "You get it done, or somebody else can do it". Boom, that's it!

Second, in terms of football practices, veterans (4/4) found the structure and organization of practices to be different from college; e.g., more intense, different duration, and having "scout" work. For example,

(Interview 19) The difference between college and pro practices is, first of all, the days were longer because we had to be there at eight o'clock in the morning, meetings all day in the afternoon, and then practices in the afternoon. So, you realized it was a job and not just something you did for fun anymore. You know, it was a nine-to-five thing almost. The practices became a grueling affair almost. And the practices were a lot harder -- there were more padded practices. In college we tended to have more walk-throughs and more just helmet practices, and in pros, every practice was crisp and had to be ran almost at full speed, and just more intense than in college.

The struggling athletes, on the other hand, reported experiencing professional practices as *less physical* (3/5) and *more mental* (3/5) (e.g., knowing their position and plays, and knowing proper technique) than college.

Third, in terms of differences in job, responsibility and status on the team, both groups noted a decrease in personal status and job assignments. However, only the *veterans* (3/6) felt an increased *pressure to perform* in professional practices and games. For example,

(Interview 12) So, I think there is a little bit more pressure on the individuals during the games to perform, and this goes along with your job, your responsibility, your status on the team because there is that possibility that you could be released or cut from the football team, and that really doesn't exist in a college level. *You really have to realize that you are out there to perform and to make plays on the football field, and it really is more of a job than it was in college.* In college, you're getting your academics paid for by the university, but very rarely will they just totally take a scholarship away from somebody because they're not playing well. Where here, at the NFL level, they will release you or let you go if you're not doing well; especially in this day and era of the league because of the salary cap implications, but those weren't there during my rookie year.

*Veterans*, like their unsuccessful counterparts, got along well with their professional team-mates: yet, discussed *potential barriers* to good team-mate relationships in professional football (3/5). For example,

(Interview 4) Well, in college there is a lot less turnover. Well that's not really true either because you've got a class coming and going every year in college. In college every year the seniors leave and the freshmen come in but you know that you are going to be with the guys you came in with... In the NFL, it is kind of the same because you come in and usually all the draft picks sign contracts roughly the same length, so you know that you are going to be with those guys for about three or four years depending on how long the contracts are, but usually they aren't shorter or longer than that. So, you kind of get to know those guys the way you know your college friends. *Except you don't live with them. Like in college you live with your friends and you have class with them in addition to playing football with them, whereas, in the pros, it is just your job and nothing else. So your relationships are more professional, I think, than social because all the older guys that you meet a lot of them are married and have kids, whereas in college that is rarely the case. A lot of times you don't interact with guys socially in the pros. That's*

*your job now and it's that or nothing. And it is just a lot more serious in that respect.* Some guys in college take football very seriously, but a lot of them knew that they were never going to play pro football, and the main reason that they are there is to go to school for free. They put as much or more emphasis on school as they do on football. Whereas that is never the case in the NFL -- everything should go under your job. While it's true that things are much more social in college than they are in the NFL, but you spend as much time with the same guys. In college, you can go in the afternoon, have your meetings, practice and leave. You lift whenever you can. But, in the NFL, you come in at nine in the morning and sometimes you're there until five or five-thirty. You are with the same guys all day, so you probably end up spending as much time with them. *But, it is all in the same setting. It's all work.* Whereas in college, you spend a little bit of time in class with the guy, a little bit of time in practice, maybe some time in the weight room; so, it's just split up more. You probably get to be friends with people a lot quicker when you're in the pros, you're around them all the time. You start in July and you go all the way until Christmas, and you're in the same meeting room with the *same* guys for *hours and hours* every day. You almost have no choice.

Finally, while the struggling group did not report any clear differences in their everyday life resulting from their professional experiences, the veterans all discussed having more money as a big difference. Interestingly, however, only one veteran felt the need to readjust his priorities during the transition to professional football. For example,

(Interview 4) *[My everyday living], it's like night and day.* In college you barely have two nickels scraping together. I was always struggling just to eat and pay the bills. And, you're always living in dumpy places and you got classes. You're just trying to get by; like food, you're scrapping for food... You're really on a budget. You're just trying to get by man. In college, if you had \$100 in your pocket, it was rare. You were loaded, it was great. Obviously I didn't starve or anything but it was just a drag. *Now money is not a concern.* That's another thing that is really different about the league as opposed to when I first got on. Guys are making so much more money than they were when I first started playing, which was in 1989... *Like I said, I just wanted to get into the league and play and make some money and save some money so that when I was done playing I would really be comfortable money-wise. But now, I've reached that and hopefully my career is not going to end for awhile.*

### Authenticity and Utility of Research Findings on Differences Between College and Professional Football

Authenticity of what appears in the above section of results was confirmed by two veterans. For example,

*"The mental capacity to absorb all the new terminology in pro football greatly assists the transition. Everyone playing pro football has ability or they wouldn't be there. Those who can combine cognitive aptitude with physical ability will succeed."*

As for the utility of these findings, the strugglers all underlined the finding that the biggest difference between college and professional football is the increase in the quality of the players, and that you have to realize that the other professional athletes are not "superhuman" and that you deserve to be there just as much as the other athletes in camp.

### Challenges and Responses

Challenges faced by athletes undergoing the transition from amateur to professional football and their responses to these challenges were examined with questions related to the following four topics: 1) Timing of the football transition; 2) challenges related to the "football" aspects of the transition: specifically, being on a new team, and feelings of control in practices and games; 3) challenges related to non-football life: specifically, living in a new city, and feelings of control in life outside football; and, 4) stress.

### Timing of the Football Transition

Most of the athletes (16/20) reported that the *timing of the transition was good* because it fit their life schedule (7/20), they were healthy, prepared and in good physical shape (11/20). Two examples are given below:

(Interview 5) Came at a great time in my life. I was done with school -- tired of it. Was working toward my degree. You know, working to graduating -- working towards graduation. But, school wasn't my favorite thing. I just did what I did to get by. At that point, I was just ready to move on. It was certainly time to move on. I was healthy.

Everything was fine, whatever. Everything was just great. Just certainly time to move on, which is nice.

(Interview 22) Yeah, it came at a great time in my life. I'm single and I really don't have any responsibilities except football, now. So, it couldn't have come at a better time. I have all the time in the world to work-out and put the extra time into football; so, it came at a good time. I was healthy and in shape, family's very stable and they gave me a lot of support. So, it couldn't have come at a better time.

The few reports of *transition problems* cited were mainly linked to problems with family and/or girlfriend (5/20). For example,

(Interview 3) *I wouldn't say particularly [good] because a couple of months before I got drafted my brother had a head injury from which it took him 14 months to recover and my other brothers were away at school. At one time everybody was in the same place, or they had gone to their schools, or what not, and come back. And now, my brother's in the army in [another state], my other brother's going to law school in [another state], my other brother is at home, drooling out of the side of his mouth and can't even walk yet and all-of-a-sudden I got to leave. It's just like "Wow!". Like I said, I like to have people around me, man. Even if I'd stayed home, people leaving left and right or incapacitated -- my older brother's injuries. So, it didn't come at the best time, but I'm not going to turn it down either.*

Transition problems may have been down-played because of the recognition that *timing cannot be controlled* or that the opportunity cannot be passed up (7/20). For example,

(Interview 11) Change into the pros did come at a good time in my life. I was healthy. I was in good shape. It was difficult, like I said, with my girlfriend, *but I knew that I couldn't pass up this opportunity, something I wanted to do all my life, because she would have a hard time with my leaving. I knew that I would never be able to live with myself if I said, "Oh well, she would be unhappy" or if I would have known that we would end up breaking-up because I was here and she was there and then I still would not have passed up my opportunity. But all-in-all it came at a good time.*

### Football Challenges

Being on a new team. Generally, being on a new team was not experienced as a challenge (11/19) mainly because athletes reported receiving *social support* from their

new team-mates (8/19). Two quotations are provided below:

(Interview 5) New team, no problem whatsoever. The guys were great. Certainly found that I could hang-out with any group on the team, but there are a couple groups of guys that were just funny and made life a lot easier. You know, you always know what was going on and were always there if you just want to shoot the shit with them and they let you know what was going on behind closed doors, the veterans that I hung around with.

(Interview 20) *It was kind of different, I think. I went into the team with, I guess, two or three other -- no, we had five, we had five -- rookie O-linemen on the team that year. and it was a decent group. I think that's why I have so many closer friends from that team than any others I've ever played for because we were all sort of in the same boat: We were young, we didn't know what the hell to expect, we sort of just clung to each other, which was a terrific thing. I mean, I'll say we had a really nice time that year. That first year wasn't too much of a transition. And, the other teams I actually went to and tried to play for basically had huge contingents of veterans and there was just one or two rookies trying to break in, which you get that clique atmosphere, you get that. "Hey this guy's taking food out of my kids mouth" type atmosphere, or that feeling from the guys. But, that first year, it was a really easy transition to make. It was a lot closer to college than anything I expected. I think that sort of gave me a false sense of what it was going to be like because I just assumed. "Hey this is the NFL. This is great. You know, we got a lot of people that I'm decent friends with", but as I said, it turned out to be that those were the closest guys that I developed -- those friendships were closer than anything that I developed while I was there.*

However, some athletes (8/19) did find being on a new team hard, often despite social support from team-mates. These individuals reported a range of *problems*, some linked to team chemistry and decreased status on the team, some to the structure and scheduling of practices and games, and others to personal deficits like shyness. For example,

(Interview 22) Being a rookie in my first camp out here, it was tough to get adjusted to being on a new team because the rookies are always getting picked out and picked on and having to entertain the veterans, so that was tough at first, but once camp got over, you become a bigger part of the team.

Feelings of control in professional football. About a third of the sample *reported being in control* in practices and games. For example,

(Interview 15) *Yeah, my transition to pro football, I felt in control of getting my job done. I made practice squad my first year and then I got activated. And so, I knew my job, and I knew, coming out of training camp, that I'd done some good things. You come from college where I knew what was expected of me: I'd had an offense I'd gotten used to, and I knew what was expected, I knew how to get it done, and I knew what they wanted from me in the off-season and in training camp. And coming to the pros all-of-a-sudden you don't always know what it's going to take to get your job done, and what they expect out of you, but you learn. I've always been a fast learner. I've always been a hard worker, so I was able to adjust and take care of my business and give them effort when they wanted it, when the coaches wanted it, which was pretty much all the time, but you learn what they want, and what your job is, and what your responsibility is, and you take care of it. You know, that's somewhat of a change.*

Another third of the respondents reported *not being in control* in practices and games for reasons such as not knowing what to expect, having to adjust to the structure of professional football as well as the higher quality of players in professional football. For example,

(Interview 1) I think as far as being on the field, I feel that when I was in university, I had a lot more control. Basically, no one is paying you and there is no one else really to do the job that I was doing. So, I mean, I could do anything that I wanted within reason. As opposed to in the NFL where you have to do exactly what you're told to do and if you don't, I mean, it'll be pointed out to you. There isn't really that much control involved.

A final third reported sometimes being in control and sometimes not. For example,

(Interview 22) In pro football it's all about production. If you can make plays and produce, you're going to get a job, but sometimes it's difficult in camp with the number of guys they bring in, to get the opportunity to get in there and get repetitions and make plays, so sometimes it's not up to you. You know, you don't have control of getting the chance to get in there. It's all up to the coaches to get you enough reps so you could show what you could do.

Some of the athletes discussed *strategies* they used *to gain control* (13/21). Most of these athletes (9/21) suggested knowing your job, doing your best, focusing on your own job, and learning from your mistakes. For example,

(Interview 14) Well, I have to say that you get beat every now and then. If it doesn't piss you off and if it like doesn't strike a personal, you know, personally get angry when that happens. well then I think that you become used to screwing-up. Of course, everything you do is on film. *So I think that if you don't change the things that you screwed-up, then you're eventually not going to be on the team, so that's one thing I certainly noticed about it. Just studying more film by myself.*

(Interview 3) I feel more in control now because I got more control because, number one, you don't have to worry about school. And, I mean, I never worried about it from an eligibility standpoint but. I should have done a lot better than I did. And that was a constant gnaw at me. "How do you manage your time? Why aren't you...?". You know, "I've seen a proof of good yet I did evil". *But, now I've just got one job. It's the one thing I got to do and I'm just going to throw myself into it. I may not be the most talented guy out there, but I'm going to be one of the most conscientious. I'm going to be one of the hardest workers.*

### Life Challenges

Living in a new city. Approximately half the sample (11/21) did not find living in a new city to be a challenge, although close to half of these (5/21) were either still playing in their hometown or close by. The following two quotations illustrate how athletes *did not find living in a new city challenging*:

(Interview 5) *Living in a new city, no real big deal.* Change has not been really easy for me all the time, but it's kind of exciting in a kind of out ways. It was kind of exciting in a kind of out did the sensation. "Oh, you know what? I'm changing", or "I'm going in a new environment, it's going to be tough" or "this makes me a little uneasy". For one thing, I moved into an apartment in [first pro city] my first season with a guy named [name], who was my linebacker coach at [nearby university]. And, he just happened to live in [first pro city] and commuted to [university] to coach. He was working at a prison there so he had a spot for me in his apartment. After training camp broke, I moved right in there and was set. Didn't even move in with anybody on the team which maybe was or wasn't the best idea, I don't know. Probably I didn't party as much which was kind of good -- could take it a little seriously, or more seriously; but, I also didn't have that kind of best buddy thing. You know, "me and him were rookies together, we're best friends because we lived together for the first year", whatever. That kind of didn't really clique like that. But, that was all right

(Interview 4) *Pretty good.* but my first two seasons, after the seasons were over, I went back to [old college city]. So I didn't live there year-round until my third year. I bought a house there. I just went back and forth through apartments for two years. But then after my third season, I stayed there and I bought a house. I moved into it and lived there all

the time. *It was really nice. I liked it because we had good guys on the team. We made good friends pretty early on and the weather was nice. It's a lot like here. People were very nice to us because in [city of first pro team] there is a really long tradition of the team being successful and people really love the team -- even in my first year, when we only won one game, people still treated the players very well. They were mad at the coach and they were mad at the owner and everybody else, but they were never really down on us. Plus, I didn't really have to adapt much. I did it a little at a time before I lived there year round.*

Of those who reported new city living to be a challenge (9/21), most (7/21)

seemed to *miss family and friends* due to distance from home (e.g., North to South, or

East coast to West coast). This is illustrated below:

(Interview 6) Living in a new city was kind of tough: you know, flying a thousand miles from my hometown, not knowing a soul, and being thrown into a professional football team with not a clue what to expect, that was kind of tough. But just like college, you quickly meet lots of new friends.

(Interview 22) At first, living in [pro city], I'm originally from the East coast of the United States, so I was a little home sick and I missed all my friends back home -- not that I wasn't enjoying playing football out here, I really like the football, but I just miss my family and my friends.

Some of the athletes (10/21) discussed what helped them to *cope with new city*

*living*; specifically, "playing the tourist" and learning to make friends fast. Two examples follow:

(Interview 20) For me, [city], was only about an hour-and-a-half from where I grew up, so it wasn't too unfamiliar, *but I've always been a big traveler, so being in a new city that year, I absolutely enjoyed the hell out of it. I love meeting new people, and I love discovering new things about a town, restaurants, just the geography of the town, what the town has to offer, the history of the town, whatever. I completely enjoyed being in the new city -- no problems at all.* I love the feeling of independence, I love being on my own, I love knowing I can take care of myself. So, you know, I'm living in a new town all by myself, got all the money I need, which was something that was definitely a plus. I think that's the biggest plus to me that I see from playing in the NFL. Yeah, I enjoyed what I did while I was there, I think for the most part, but the money was definitely the best part of it, and I think that just helped me adapt too. You know, I could get the things I wanted, I could go to the places I wanted, I could see and do the things I wanted to see and do, which to me living there was great.

(Interview 1) Yeah, I mean, it's always easy being in the place you grew up. You know a lot of people and all of the places and people you love are around you. Then you go to a new place that's far away and you don't know anybody and everything is new. It can be pretty lonely. If you don't have HBO it's pretty boring. *Yeah, hard, but you learn to live with it. You learn to make friends pretty fast. It's just something you have to get use to. It's not realistic to think that your girlfriend and mom can travel 3000 miles for a football game. or however far it is.*

Feelings of control in everyday life. Generally, control in life outside of football did not seem to be a problem for most of the athletes. Individual problems included a lack of privacy, problems with personal relationships, and family problems.

### Summary of Adjustments

This summary question asked athletes whether their adjustment to professional football was easy. Overall, almost half the respondents (12/20) clearly stated that the adjustment to professional football was *relatively easy*. For example,

(Interview 5) *Adjustment to professional sport was relatively easy for the most part.* The hardest things about it were learning to deal with fan attention or lack of privacy; always having demands put on you by fans. Actually it wasn't so bad, but like I said, you learn to develop a bit of a callousness when you need to. The other thing: seeing friends come and go. People get cut. Buddies get traded, get cut, retire, whatever. That's tough to deal with, I think, because the most important thing to me about professional football is the fun that goes on, the laughter and, in the locker room, the characters you deal with -- the different kinds of people you get to deal with from every walk of life. It's kind of funny, and you can just sit back in the locker room and it's like being on Bourbon street in New Orleans. You can just watch people; watch the way they act; watch what they do -- it's pretty funny. Our road trips are the jokes being played. You know, everything. It's a comedy. It really is a comedy.

Responses about adjustments faced by athletes reinforced findings from earlier questions. For example, athletes reported having to adjust to lower personal status on the team (6/20); playing better, more intense, football (5/20); and, moving to a new city (3/20). One new problem identified by a few athletes (3/20) was adjusting to having more money. One example of financial adjustments is given below:

(Interview 6) My adjustment, I think it's been pretty easy. I'm pretty much a laid back type of guy. In fact, graduating college and I want to get a job; it's the same deal. *The money aspect takes a little time to get use to because you're making a lot of money and you got to be careful with just going out and blowing it, wasting it, like a lot of people do.*

### Stress

Almost all the athletes (18/21) found the transition from amateur to professional to be stressful. Many of these athletes (14/21) were *stressed about outcome issues*, such as making the team. Two quotations are provided below:

(Interview 3) *Oh Yeah! I'd say definitely. It was extremely stressful because in college you're on scholarship, you're not going to get fired. You might get benched but you're sure not going anywhere. In the NFL, it's a business. They cut you. First during training camp they got the three cuts and you know what days they are, and you know you're on the bubble. You're not sure if you're going to make it or not. You're always waiting for that tap on the shoulder: "Hey, head coach wants to see you" because, you know, one of the coaches walks around with a list of the guys getting cut "Hey you got to go in. You got to..." . You just got to try and avoid him on those days. Ugh every year like that. That'll kill you just right off the bat. And then, you see people getting traded and released during the season. It isn't just "I made it for the year". Even after you make the last cut, you're still, "oh my God. I got to hang on for dear life". There's the stress of losing that job, constantly. It's not like that for everybody. These starters -- these million dollar guys -- they got security. But, a guy like me, hey phew, like I said, part of the stress I'm putting on myself because I got to make it. I don't have a back-up plan. I mean, I got a thousand back-up plans, but I don't have one that I've really said, "well that's what I'm going to do". So, I mean, I feel stress all the time. I get insomnia. I stay up all night during the season. In training camp you get so exhausted you just fall asleep and in the off season I sleep fine. But, during the season -- except for the day before the game. That's why I say it's the best nights sleep I ever get. I am just constantly thinking about scenarios, possibilities, nothing even specific, just a general tension.*

(Interview 10) *The only thing I found to be really stressful was whether you were going to be out of a job or whether you were going to have a job. You wouldn't know whether you were coming or going. That's the part that's stressful. It can affect your performance as well. You know, just not knowing where you stand, not knowing whether you're going to be there, if you're going to be playing football this year, or if you're just going to be there for training camp, or if you're going to be back at home. As far as being able to deal with the stress, you have to block it out and be focused if you can. You can't be stressed out during training camp, you're too busy playing football and you got other things on your mind, so you got to try to, you got to just try to be focused and not worry about stuff that's out of your control. Just worry about stuffs that's in your control, and that's going*

out there and doing your best, giving it a 110%, and doing whatever it takes to make the team.

Many athletes (9/21) reported stress associated with *pressures to perform*. Two examples follow:

(Interview 14) Yes, very much because I'm a perfectionist or I don't like to get beat, and when I do, I got to analyze every situation, you know, "how did I get beat?". It always happens, even now, just I don't get beat as much. How did I deal with the stress? Well I held a lot of it in. The only way to get rid of it when I was younger was just to go out and practice hard and fix the mistake: Get the confidence back.

(Interview 5) Stress, certainly. But, I think I'm just the type of person who puts stress on myself. That's why I need the locker room atmosphere, to kind of break that stress down. *I think the stress is just put on by myself, really. The stress to perform. The feeling that I don't want to let anybody down, let alone myself. I don't want to let myself down, but I don't want to let the other guys on the team down. I don't want to miss that tackle or blow an assignment and disappoint the other guys.* The stress I put on myself between college to pro was just the idea of, like I said, training really hard and asking every question just to kind of have an idea of what I'm getting myself into. You learn to deal with the stress and you learn to not put as much on yourself.

Other individual sources of stress included changing positions, injury, and being away from family and friends. In discussing *strategies to cope with the stress*, some athletes stated that they practiced distraction control by putting bad performances or negative experiences behind them and learning to relax, or they focused on football by giving it their all and learning from their mistakes (12/21); others maintained a life outside football where they could "get away" from the game (4/21). For example,

(Interview 17) What did I do to deal with this stress? I don't know, just dealt with it, I guess, by myself. I don't know, you talk to yourself. You talk to people as well, but you just say like all those clichés to yourself, like "don't worry about things you can't control" and that kind of thing. And just go out and work as hard as you can and that's all you can do. And, when you honestly think about those kinds of things, it's true like you shouldn't really feel like that because you can't control those things, and you just have to work as hard as you can.

(Interview 12) I think one of the most important things is to have a life outside of football. We talked about having friends on the team and teammates to help you along,

but I definitely think that you have to be able to have a situation where you can really separate yourself from being surrounded by football itself. And that was something that helped me out a lot my first year. Having some friends that you meet down here in [name city] that were not related to your business or your sport in any way, and it was a way that you could go out and relax and have fun, and not be worried about what was going on in your life or in the game of football. So that was something that I found was very beneficial to myself is having something where I could get away and have some friends that were outside of football, where you could just go and talk about things and not worry about that.

### Prototypical Between-Group Differences in Challenges and Responses for Veteran and Struggling/Unsuccessful Groups

While both groups of athletes felt their transition into professional football occurred at a good time in their lives, the sources of these feelings were different: namely, the *veterans* reported good transition timing because it was *expected* (3/5), while the *struggling athletes* reported good transition timing because it *fit in their life schedule* (3/5) and they were healthy (2/5). An example of a veteran's response follows:

(Interview 12) *I think it came at a great time. I think that you're ready for that at that age. I felt that I was in great shape. I was healthy. You finish your senior season in college and you're working towards this and you're preparing everything for it. From a personal standpoint everything in my life with my family was in a great situation. I really feel that it really wouldn't have been better for me to have come out early, or to have been a little bit later. There were some people that thought I had an opportunity to come out my junior year: The position I played in didn't have a lot of people, but I did not feel that I was ready physically at that time. Being somebody that wants to be as prepared as they can be, I thought it was very important for me to maintain my stay in college and play my senior year. You know, a lot of people worry about the possibility of becoming injured, but I really wasn't worried about that. I felt that if it was going to happen, then it was going to happen for a reason: and if you were injured and it was going to affect your future, then that was something that you would have to deal with at the time. I felt that I was ready for it. I don't think it could have come at a better time, and everything in my life seemed to be pointing in that direction.*

Although no clear differences were found between groups in terms of moving to a new city, *only veterans reported valuable personal strategies* for coping with new city

living (4/5), which included playing the role of tourist to get to know the city. For example,

(Interview 19) Well, it was a wonderful city. I moved to [city] and, for me, it just opened up a whole new arena of being able to travel and being able to experience new things. Spent a lot of time in the [educational institution], just hundreds of little museums, and great eclectic little places. For me, going from [college city] to [city of professional team] was one of the -- it was traveling to Europe it seemed like.

As seen below, veterans had few adjustments to make during their transition to professional football. They (3/6) also reported *accessing and taking advantage of the football social network* provided by their agents and new team-mates as a valuable strategy for coping with other transition challenges. Two examples of veterans' strategies are given below:

(Interview 19) Professional sport, it was pretty easy. I mean, the way things are set-up, it's set-up to be pretty easy for you. I plugged myself into a good agent, good money people, and, you just could learn with other people as far as how to *act* the part -- how to act that part. And, you know, I've always been a good mimic; how to act the way you think other people want you to act, or you think you're supposed to act in a given situation. So, the adjustment was easy to make, but just I wasn't very comfortable at it.

(Interview 12) It didn't take a lot of getting use to. I think you're out on your own; you have a lot more free time than you did in college; you have the ability to have money and travel and do things that obviously you wouldn't be able to do in college. And, I think that's the biggest thing. We touched on that a little bit earlier. *You have to be able to maintain that balance in life, and maintain the priorities that you've established, and know that the most important thing is to be able to be prepared mentally and physically to play football because that is what is going to provide you with the financial ability to do the things that you are doing right now.* If you don't lose sight of that, I think you're going to be fine, but if you forget about what's important in life and your priorities become confused, then I think that the possibility to have this taken away from you is very very real to happen to anybody. So, adjusting to it, it's kind of similar because there is a lot of carry over from college to professional level. There are some differences, but, as I said before, *the friendships that existed down here made the transition very easy.* You know, coming to a new city and a new team, I think you're very fortunate to have that situation that we had here.

This last quotation also demonstrates the importance of maintaining your priorities by being mentally and physically prepared to play football.

In contrast, struggling/unsuccessful athletes reported a variety of adjustments to contend with during the transition, including lower status on the new team, higher quality players, higher stress levels, and moving away from family and friends. However, some of these athletes (3/5) claimed that these adjustments were relatively easy to make. Generally, no strategies for coping with transition challenges were presented by struggling/unsuccessful athletes.

Half the *veterans reported feeling completely in control* in practices and games, while none of the struggling group reported feeling completely in control. This between-group difference was also apparent in comments on strategies to gain control: *Veterans advised working hard, being prepared, and learning from mistakes* (4/5). For example, (Interview 4) I'd probably think [that my feelings of control were] about the same [as in college] because regardless of what is going on around you, you're just playing your position and doing what you are supposed to do. And, the rest is just going on around you. So, naturally, the better you get, the more in control you are of what you are doing. But regardless of what you do, you know that you are not going to be able to control a lot of things that are going on around you. So, I don't think that ever really changes.

In contrast, athletes in the *struggling group advised standing out and getting noticed*, by going for the *big plays* or not getting beat on a play (3/5). For example,

(Interview 10) Well, I didn't feel in total control because there were *so many* guys competing. I was at a camp where there were 80 rookies and I think there was 40-something veterans coming in, it's like 16 rookies -- rookie receivers -- and 9 veterans, so it was ridiculous. They were only going to keep five. So, I didn't really feel that much in control. And, there were times where I felt it doesn't matter how good I do, they're probably not going to keep me anyways. *I did take charge and I did really well. I said, "I got to go for it. I got to make big plays" and I did that. Anytime we had drills I went for big plays and I thought I got the job done, you know, but I guess I wasn't, you're not in total control at that level.* There's other guys that they like better than you, like I said, it could be the height, the speed, or the weight. You're just not what they're looking for

even though you're a good player, you're just not what they're looking for. And, most pro athletes will tell you a lot of times, it's being in the right place at the right time. Even coaches will tell you that. So as far as being in control, you are to a certain extent. You know, if you do really well, I guess you can control your own destiny, but there are times where there are things that are out of your control -- you can't control. so it's not all in the control of the player.

Finally, both groups of athletes reported that the transition from amateur to professional football was stressful. However, *veterans' stress was derived from multiple concerns*, such as performing well (3/6) and attaining the desired outcome (4/6). In comparison, the *struggling athletes* only reported *outcome concerns* as their principal stressor (5/5). Athletes in both groups also used different strategies to control stress. Veterans tried to control this stress by maintaining an aspect of their lives which was unrelated to football, and by focusing on football at practices and meetings (4/6). For example,

(Interview 12) More anxious than stressful. There's just always that possibility that you're not going to be there, and that you're going to be released, so I think that *that's* the stressful part. There is a tremendous amount of pressure to perform on the football field, and I think that that's the stress that is involved in this career. If you're able to go out and perform well, I think it's easy to eliminate that stress. And you're able to go out and perform and it really hasn't any effect on the way you play. The biggest thing is just the fact that it is a business here. That it is somebody's business. This is a franchise that's owned by an individual, and he is in it for the love of the game, but he is also in it as a business investment and he's trying to create the most successful franchise that he can. So the stressful part is just knowing that if you're not performing well, that there is that possibility that you will be released from the team.

I think one of the most important things is to have a life outside of football. We talked about having friends on the team and teammates to help you along, but I definitely think that you have to be able to have a situation where you can really separate yourself from being surrounded by football itself. And that was something that helped me out a lot my first year. Having some friends that you meet down here in [name city] that were not related to your business or your sport in any way, and it was a way that you could go out and relax and have fun, and not be worried about what was going on in your life or in the game of football. So that was something that I found was very beneficial to myself is having something where I could get away and have some friends that were outside of football, where you could just go and talk about things and not worry about that.

In comparison, struggling/unsuccessful athletes attempted to control their feelings of stress by increasing their effort (4/5), practicing distraction control (3/5), and focusing on football (2/5).

### Authenticity and Utility of Research Findings Related to Challenges and Responses

Research findings reported above were authenticated by two veterans. An example of comments made by these individuals follows:

*"I think the ability to assimilate into a new environment, both socially and occupationally, would give one a better sense of control. Lack of a plan or lack of expectations by the struggling group would only add to the pressure of trying to make the team".*

Utility of these findings was also confirmed by three athletes who are, or were, struggling to make the transition. These individuals all highlighted the finding that veterans used strategies to maintain control, like working hard, being prepared, and learning from their mistakes.

### Characteristics of the Athlete

The following five athlete characteristics were examined: 1) motivation and desire to become a professional football player; 2) self-efficacy and perceived competence; 3) strategy and goals; 4) transition buffers, such as having alternate career plans; and, 5) football and identity.

### Motivation and Desire

Motivation and desire to play professional football was examined by three items: 1) Motivation and desire to become a professional football player prior to being given the opportunity to try-out for a team at this level; 2) motivation to play professional football

during the first few years of transition; and 3) Favorite and least favorite aspects of being a professional football player.

Motivation and desire to become a professional football player prior to being given the opportunity. Responses to this question indicated that becoming a professional football player was *personally important* or very important to these athletes (18/21).

Only a couple of athletes indicated that becoming a professional football player was not personally important to them. The next two quotations represent those athletes who stated that becoming a professional football player was important:

(Interview 20) Very, very, very important. It was something that I always thought about in the back of my mind. I was always flattered and almost disbelieving when that opportunity came around, but it was definitely something that I wanted, and definitely something that I was going to strive for. So, it was hugely important to me to become a professional football player.

(Interview 18) Going to university my last year, it was probably one of the most important things to me. That's what I set as my goal for the whole year as far as preparation, training for evaluation camps, and that kind of stuff; and, for that one reason, it was very important to me.

Athletes also indicated when becoming a professional football player first became important to them. For some of the athletes (7/21), becoming a professional football player had been personally *important to them since before college*. For example,

(Interview 6) I guess becoming one became important to me when I was pretty young. You know, every Sunday you'd sit down with your dad and watch the pros play. And then high school came and you started playing on Saturdays and still you watch the pros play. It was everybody's dream to always make it there. But, as far as working towards the goal of becoming a professional athlete, you can't really start doing that until your college years. Yeah, you can start to work towards the goal in high school, but you're still growing and developing. You don't know until you're done growing as to just how big you are going to be and how fast you're going to be, so mainly in college is when you start getting an idea and working towards the goal.

Some athletes (5/21) responded that becoming a professional football player became important to them at some point *during their college careers*. For example, (Interview 18) I think really maybe my first year university I kind of realized that maybe I could do it, and from that point I kind of always thought, "oh, maybe yeah that's what I want to do, play professional football".

Finally, some athletes (5/21) indicated that becoming a professional football player only became important to them *after having been given the opportunity* to play at that level. For example,

(Interview 5) Before I knew I was going to get the *chance* to become a professional athlete, I don't think it was super important to me. It was either going to happen, or it wasn't. I didn't dwell on it all the time. I didn't entertain those kinds of thoughts in my head all the time. I didn't live and eat, breath football. Once I knew I was getting the opportunity to become a professional athlete, then it became very important, going back to the idea of not wanting to fail, not wanting to get cut, not wanting to start something and not finish it.

Athletes indicated when they first began working towards becoming a professional football player. Many athletes (8/21) indicated that they *began working towards achieving their goal* of becoming a professional football player either during their last year of college or after their college commitment was completed. For example,

(Interview 12) It first became important to me when I was drafted. *You know, going into my senior year and finishing up, and going to the combine, and getting ready for all that, that's when it became important to me. Up until that point it was important to keep playing as best I could for my college team. But, once your commitment there was done, now I could start worrying about what my next step was going to be. At the end of my senior year is when you started to concentrate on it.* But, growing-up, playing it in the back yards, it wasn't something that I was working towards. In college as some of my friends that were older than me were drafted, the idea started to grow in your head that you were going to get the opportunity to because you had played with these guys on the field and felt that you could play at that same level. So, I guess it probably first became a goal as you started to see people in your sophomore, junior year of college move on to the NFL. But, growing-up just playing in the backyard, it was just fun. It was still a game then. And then you moved on to high school and then college, and really for me it started becoming a possibility -- maybe not a goal, but a possibility -- as I started to see some of my friends make that jump. *And then when my senior year ended, then it started to*

*become important for me to concentrate on that and to take advantage of the opportunity that was going to be there for me.*

Some athletes indicated (6/21) that they began working towards becoming a professional football player *during their first few years in college* football. For example,

(Interview 9) It was pretty important for me. It was something I always wanted to do, and something that was a big part of my life. Playing five years of college turned it into a big thing for me and it was just something I always wanted to do. I thought it was pretty cool and it was a good -- not that people *respect* football players, but people just kind of said, "oh". It's like a status symbol almost and it's something I wanted to do. I mean, when you play as a kid, you say what you wanted to be and that's what it was for me. You know, I used to bug my dad and tell him that I was going to play for the New York Giants because they were my favorite team as a kid. He just kind of said, "yeah that's great", you know, "whatever", but that's when it became important to me and it was something, you know, it wasn't a *huge* part of my life as a kid, like it was, I use to joke about it and I always liked football. *I started working towards that goal I guess in university. In high school I kind of put it off and didn't really think about playing professional, like it was just something that was way out there and, I mean, I still had to worry about making a college team and stuff. And then, once I started playing college and became successful playing college, that's when I started thinking about playing professional and so right at probably like my second year college like I thought, "wow this is what I want to do and I'd love to continue playing for all those years" and yeah so I was a kid I guess. That's when it started.*

Finally, a few athletes (4/21) indicated that they were working towards becoming a professional football player *since before college*. For example,

(Interview 22) It first became important as long as I can remember. I've always felt it was my destiny to reach this level, and I just kept working and working towards it, and eventually achieved the goal.

Next, most athletes explained what factors made them realize that they may be given the opportunity to play professional football, and should begin preparing. A variety of explanations were offered; for example, some athletes stated that they always knew professional football was their goal (4/21), others stated that they realized that they were more able and talented at football than their teammates (4/21), still others indicated that

they realized football may be their future after having received an award or having broken records in college football (3/21).

Finally, athletes indicated why they wanted to become professional football players. The majority of the respondents (11/21) were *intrinsically motivated* to become professional football players [i.e., a behavior is intrinsically motivated when it is performed for the pleasure and satisfaction derived from its practice (Deci & Ryan, 1985)]. Specifically, they wanted to become professional football players in order to achieve a dream and because they loved football and enjoyed the game. Two examples are given below:

(Interview 12) *I think the reason I wanted to be a professional football player is just something in the way I grew up. I watched sports all the time -- football being my favorite one -- and it was just going to be an unbelievable situation to be doing something that you watched as a child growing up. But, as I said before, I didn't live my life with this as my sole purpose. If it didn't work out, it didn't work out, and I had things that I would be able to do from that point.*

(Interview 21) Why did you want to be a professional football player? It's a good question. *I think that it's just a kid. I mean, from being a kid, I've always wanted to be a professional football player. Those are the guys that I've always thought were great: [names four great quarterbacks], those were definitely my favorite, favorite players at the time. I thought they were great. I thought they were the best thing in the world. And, I always wanted to be that and once I'd gone to high school and played well, and college and played well, and felt like I had an opportunity to play professional football, then I felt like I had to go for it. I've never had more fun doing anything than playing football and if I can do that and get paid for it then sheesh that's the best thing in the world, I would think. And, it's been a nice thing, you know. When you consider the alternative where I could be in a nine-to-five job -- and I don't think I could work in a nine-to-five job to tell the truth. I did for a little while and I can't stand it, I just can't stand it. You know, I've never been that type of worker I guess. I mean, I'm a hard worker, but I want to be doing something that I love to do. That's something I think my parents instilled in me, to always do something that you want to do; and, that's what football is for me, something that I've always wanted to do.*

Some of the responses were indicative of *extrinsic motivation*; i.e., performing a behaviour for instrumental reasons (Deci & Ryan, 1985) (7/21); such as, wanting to play

professional football in order to increase their social status and prestige, to earn money and future opportunities, as well as, for achievement (i.e., reaching the next level). For example,

(Interview 8) It wasn't that important. As I said, I didn't even think I was going to *play* pro football. As I said, I went and sold freaking cars, which was a real joy. So, it wasn't that important. I don't even watch sports, so like the thought of being a professional athlete wasn't anything great. *The competition level and the fact that I could get paid for it was why I went. I wanted to see if I could play at that level and the fact that I could actually get paid for it was kind of a neat idea.*

Motivation to play professional football during first few years of transition. More than half the athletes (12/18) offered rationales for why they play professional football that were indicative of *intrinsic motivation*: specifically, these athletes stated that they loved and enjoyed playing football. Three quotations follow:

(Interview 21) Because I love football. I love playing. I love the game. Right now I can't figure any better career for me at this time. I get paid to do something that I love. And, I haven't really got to do it too much, but for the possibility to do something I love, and that's enough for me right now.

(Interview 14) Well, *at this point in my life it comes down to four letters in one word. That would be love. I love to play the game.* Because there's a lot of shit you hate about it -- there is! Especially with training camp coming up. I could really go into that, but it's how you earn the money.

(Interview 22) I play just for the love of the game. You know, the feeling you get when you win a game, that's the ultimate feeling. It's like a drug, you're always fighting to achieve the win, which is the most important thing. And it's just a great feeling sitting down after a game with that feeling of achievement.

While some of the athletes who were intrinsically motivated also gave extrinsic reasons for playing professional football (5/18), few of the athletes offered responses which indicated they were exclusively *extrinsically motivated* to play professional football (4/18). Athletes whose responses indicated extrinsic motivation claimed they played professional football for the monetary rewards, for the prestige and identity of

being a professional football player, and because it was the only avenue to success

available to them. Two quotations follow:

(Interview 19) I became a professional football player, a professional athlete, because I really didn't see anything else I could do. I really didn't see anything else. This was the only door that seemed to me that I could step through and make a living at. I had a huge inferiority complex. I think, coming out -- in college and coming out of college -- for a long time, that I didn't see myself as, I don't know, smart enough or capable enough to really do anything else. I have to give football kudos for changing that attitude about myself, and making me realize that I have a lot of self-worth. And, I don't see myself as a professional athlete. I see myself just as somebody, just a regular person who was lucky enough to find something that he could do, and do well enough to get paid for.

(Interview 8) *The money!* And it's fun to play in front of all those people. It's a good adrenaline rush, the competition level. As I said, I don't really watch a lot of sports, but I'm very competitive and like that kind of stuff.

Favorite aspects of being a professional football player. For most of the athletes

(14/20), *competing, actually playing in football games*, is their favorite aspect of being a professional football player. Three representative quotations are provided below:

(Interview 12) Obviously the games on Sundays are great. It's difficult during the week, during the preparation when you're sore or tired, but playing the game is great. And then, obviously, it provides a financial benefit that is really something that a lot of people our age are never able to accomplish. So, the game days on Sundays are great, and then the ability that it gives from a financial standpoint at such a young age in your life to do things that you'll be able to for the rest of your life, provides you with great opportunities.

(Interview 22) You know, the feeling you get when you win a game, that's the ultimate feeling. It's like a drug, you're always fighting to achieve the win, which is the most important thing. And it's just a great feeling sitting down after a game with that feeling of achievement.

(Interview 18) That's a hard question, really. I mean, there's moments when I love being a professional football player, and there's other moments when I don't even want to look at a football. *My favorite part is being able to play in a game and all-of-a-sudden you don't realize that you're playing professional football anymore, rather that you're playing a football game -- you're actually enjoying yourself.*

Some athletes offered *money, lifestyle and opportunities* (9/20) as their favorite parts, while a few stated that the characters in professional football (3/20) were their favorite aspects. Two representative quotations are provided below:

(Interview 15) *Best thing about professional football is this lifestyle, really. I play professional football because, first of all, I enjoy it. If I didn't enjoy playing, I wouldn't do it; I don't think I would. I'd hate to say I'd be miserable playing, which I'm not. But, the lifestyle of playing professional football is wonderful, and I really enjoy it. It's not just money, money's nice. The financial security of the more years you play is great. But, at the same time, just being around the guys, and still being able to play a game, and going into packed stadiums, and seeing players that you totally respect, and watching great things happen on a football field by incredible athletes: There's nothing better.*

(Interview 20) *I think, the adoration of people. People thinking that you are special because you do it. The opportunity to make money, and make a relatively nice amount of money for what you put into it as far as the time for the year. That is probably the best part for me is the money and just people think it is a neat thing to do, and I agree with them.*

Least favorite (worst) aspect of being a professional football player. The *business atmosphere, instability and insecurity* of professional football were most frequently reported as the worst aspect of professional football (7/15). For example,

(Interview 1) *The worst part about being a professional football player is that it's so easy for it to end. All it takes is one play to get hurt and it could be all over.*

(Interview 11) *Worst part about being a professional football player is the not knowing – the stress involving the unknown. Not knowing if you're going to get cut. You know, you can get married and move your family to wherever you're playing and all-of-a-sudden get cut, or get traded. I mean, that's what guys have to deal with every day. I'm having a hard enough time with it now, let alone if I get married, have kids, put my kids in school say in [city] and next thing you know I get traded to [another city]. Just the unknown. There's no security. No guarantees, and that's something you have to deal with. And as long as I can deal with that then I guess I'll be able to play.*

### Self-efficacy and Perceived Competence

Self-efficacy was examined in two ways: First, athletes' sense of having the necessary skills, abilities and attitude to play professional football were examined; then,

athletes perceived strengths and weaknesses in playing football during the transition were examined. Perceived competence was also examined in two ways: First, athletes were asked whether or not they felt equal to other professional players in their position; next, athletes' were asked about their perceived chances of making their first professional team.

Necessary skills, abilities and attitude to play professional football. Athletes' responses indicated that more than half (11/20) clearly felt they *possessed the necessary skills, abilities, and attitude* required to play football at the professional level. Two examples are provided below:

(Interview 9) Yeah, I think I had the skills, and abilities, and attitude to do the job. I worked pretty hard in college, and then last off-season to prepare for that level, so I was pretty confident about my abilities. You know, I didn't know what *they* would think, but I knew for myself I was strong enough and fast enough and ready to play, like at that level.

(Interview 21) Yes, I definitely felt that way because I know what I can do. I went off in college, I did some really great things and yeah I know what I'm about; I know what I can do. And, so I didn't have any problems thinking that I couldn't do the job. I felt my skills, my abilities, my attitude were right for playing and for winning championship; and, I still do.

Many of the athletes (7/20) indicated that at the very beginning stages of becoming a professional football player, they were *uncertain of their skills, abilities and attitude*. In addition, a couple of athletes reported sometimes feeling efficacious and sometimes not feeling efficacious. For example,

(Interview 6) When I first became a professional football player, I truthfully thought I was going to get killed. I'd been watching these guys forever. I didn't think I was big enough, strong enough, fast enough. People told me I was, but I still didn't believe them. And, it took some adjusting when I got there. But, once I was practicing with them for a few days, I knew I could do it. It was just a matter of performing now.

Next, responses could also be categorized in terms of whether their feelings of efficacy stemmed from themselves and self-evaluation of their past and present

performances, or whether their sense of efficacy was generated by others, such as teammates or coaches. Here, most of the athletes (18/20) were *able to monitor and evaluate their own performance*, as well as compare their performance against their teammates, in order to determine whether they possessed the necessary skills and abilities to compete at the professional level. Three illustrative quotations follow:

(Interview 20) I think I always felt like I had the skills and abilities because I felt like I was just as much, or better, an athlete than the guys that were around me. Yeah, I felt like I did. Like I said, I felt like I was just as competent of an athlete as anybody around me, and I would compare myself, as far as just comparing myself to somebody else on film or whatever, guys that were on my team, whatever. I felt pretty confident in what I could do, I think.

(Interview 5) First becoming a professional athlete, it's hard to visualize yourself with the skills and abilities of the guys you see on TV. Sitting around my house in university, watching a CFL game, I couldn't visualize myself at that level. But, I think a lot of it had to do with the fact that it was on TV, and cameras, and lighting, and whatever turf. *It was funny that way because I just couldn't visualize myself tackling for instance, [great running back]. Sure enough, starting as a pro there comes a time when you are one on one with [great running back] and it's your job to tackle him and it's his job to get around you. Well, it just so happens, I tackled him. I think that was probably game 2 of my rookie season and that's when I realized that, "you know what? I'm here and I do possess that ability to do the job". It was pretty funny that it happened that way, but it's really hard to project yourself into that scenario.*

(Interview 8) Yes, I did, in some ways. *Like when we were practicing and we'd do one-on-ones in pass rush and stuff, and I was kicking a couple of guys butts occasionally, you know they'd kick my ass very many times, but I kick their butts a couple of times, and some guys from the NFL that had come down from [NFL team] and stuff would say: "well, how'd you do that?". There these guys that had played football in the States and stuff were asking me how to do it which kind of neat.* But, in another way, we were scrimmaging one time and I dove to tackle a guy and missed him and somebody ran right over my arm and left cleat marks in my arm. So, the speed of the game was something I had to get use to a little bit. But, *that doesn't take long.* It's survival of the fittest -- you either do it or you get trampled.

While most of the athletes used self-evaluation of performance, some athletes (8/20) reported also relying on the *input from* others, like coaches and teammates in order

to develop a sense of performing in a capable and productive manner at the professional level. For example,

(Interview 12) I was actually kind of battling with those thoughts my first year and into my second season. I had come from a small town and went to a school that had been heavily recruited and had been successful in college, but was still very nervous about coming here, especially when you came here and you saw the athletic ability that the people have. It was very intimidating. I think a lot of it had to do with just coming from where I came from and being recruited the way I did, and being around some of the other guys and knowing what their careers had been, you felt sometimes as though you did not fit in and you did not belong. *But that is just something that you have to deal with personally. If you didn't belong, if you didn't fit in, they wouldn't have selected you to be there. That was the one thing I would always fall back on: If I really didn't belong here, then they would not have drafted me in the second round. So they actually gave me the confidence that I lacked at times.*

Finally, respondents who indicated at times feeling as though they did not possess the skills, abilities and attitude to play professional football reported the source of their uncertainty. Most of these athletes (5/20) stated that they were somewhat *intimidated* by the other professional football players when they first arrived at training camp because they looked so good, big, and strong. For example,

(Interview 17) During the first training camp, like I said, *the first couple of days you're like, "these guys are bigger and faster" and stuff than what you are used to, but it's kind of what you expected.* So, and like I just said, I think I fit right in. I mean, I obviously wasn't a star or anything, but I think I fit in as far as being able to get the job done kind of thing and play at that level. Physically, I was on the same level. I was in very good shape. And, mentally, I think I was pretty much prepared and that kind of thing.

Perceived strengths and weaknesses in playing football during the transition. In terms of perceived *strengths* in their playing, many athletes (12/16) reported the *physical aspects of the game*, such as speed, strength, athletic performance, and physical shape, as their strong points during their first professional training camp and season. For example,

(Interview 1) In my first year I was physically ready to play. I couldn't have been more physically ready. I played well. I believe well enough to make the team. But, I believe I could have been more consistent because sometimes I would try to think too much and I

made some mistakes: These were mistakes from inexperience. I would have liked to have had the chance to work through them.

(Interview 11) *My first training camp, my physical, just my physical play was the best thing about my playing ability.* Probably recognition of plays and defenses; that's what needed work. I mean in college you see the defense line up in front of you. and you go out. and you smack somebody. But in the professional level the players are so smart and so fast that you have to anticipate and *know* through recognition what the other person is going to do. And, that's what needed work.

Some athletes (8/16) reported that their *mental approach* to the game of football. such as not making mistakes. learning from mistakes. always wanting to improve and giving full effort. was their strongest point in their first professional training camp and season. For example.

(Interview 4) Some games are better than others. You're always going to have mistakes here and there. but as long as you keep that to a minimum and not get hurt. Those are the most frustrating things: when you screw something up and when you get hurt. well obviously when you lose. But. usually if I'm healthy. I can play pretty well. Good enough to where you'll go in and watch game film Monday and feel pretty good about what you watched. You know. you don't feel embarrassed or anything. You're not getting beat. So. yeah. for the most part. usually after a game. I feel pretty good about how I played. but there are always a couple of things that bother you.

In terms of perceived *weaknesses* in their playing during their first training camp and season. about half the athletes (10/16) reported having to work on and *improve their mental approach to football*. Specifically, the athletes reported making too many mistakes. having to learn more about the game and their position. and having to learn how to "push" themselves and work on their own. Two examples are given below:

(Interview 9) I probably needed to gain a little weight and *learn more my position and how to get off blocks and stuff.* I guess that was the big thing that needed work for me.

(Interview 15) In my first camp and season. things that were good about my playing was. I was good raw talent. I could catch the football well, and I had good feet, and I was blocking. My techniques needed some work, I think. Mentally, I think I was good, like I think I picked up on things pretty quick, *but I think something I needed to be was a little more aggressive and take things on myself more.* That's something I had to work on. A

*lot of things were left up to you, and that's something where you really have to push yourself a little harder, and I think I learned how to do that more, but it's something I didn't do great early on.*

Perceived equality to other players in same position in professional leagues.

Some athletes (12/20) stated that, during their transition into professional football, they *felt equal* to other athletes in the league in their playing position. Specifically, many of these athletes (7/20) reported that their athletic ability equaled that of other players. For example,

(Interview 20) Yes [I felt equal to other players], pretty much, I think. The time I was there, I was a young guy with a lot of raw ability, so I felt pretty equal to a lot of players. A lot of guys had -- or a few guys -- had more playing time than I did at that time, but I felt pretty equal to them as far as my athletic ability.

However, some athletes (8/20) indicated that they did not feel equal to the other athletes. (Four athletes indicated feeling both equal to and inferior to other players.) Most of these athletes (6/20) reported that they *did not feel equal to many of the great veteran players* and that they *needed more experience* as professional players. For example,

(Interview 14) Yes and no. I mean, there are some players who are just absolutely great. The guys who were on my team were All-pro which is the highest accolade, other than maybe a team accolade would be the Superbowl. But, for individuals, your peers vote on you to go to Hawaii and all the guys I was playing by were at that level, so I felt kind of inferior because I needed a lot of work.

Some athletes (7/20) discussed a *strategy* they used in order to increase their sense of competency. Strategies included always wanting to work hard, learn, and improve.

An example follows:

(Interview 6) I'm satisfied with myself to a point, but you can always get better as an athlete. Even as a professional athlete, you always feel the need to improve because everyone around you is always improving. And, times are changing. If you don't improve you're going to get left behind.

Perceived chances of making first professional team. During their first training camp, about half the athletes felt that their *chances of making the team were good*. These

athletes listed a variety of reasons for their optimism; for example, some stated they were high draft choices, others that they were practicing well and improving compared to others, still others stated that they felt they would make the team because the team philosophy or team make-up favored them. Two quotations follow:

(Interview 12) *At that time I thought my chances of making the team were good. I was a high draft choice. There was a change of coaching, with a new staff, and a new system was being put in place -- they were moving towards a youth movement. Being one of their draft choices in the original draft for the franchise, makes you feel good. I always felt good about my chances of making the team, but there were times when you weren't playing well and you worried. You always had that in the back of your mind because you'd seen it happen. During that rookie season, as I mentioned before, they created an environment where there was a lot of changes being made from week to week. so it was like walking on egg shells at times. But you still felt secure in your situation with the team.*

(Interview 9) The chances of making the team, I felt they were pretty good. When I first got there and saw how many guys were there I was pretty worried about my chances, but once we started practicing and stuff, I didn't feel out of place at all, and that's a big thing. It's just to get used to, to get comfortable to, being there and to realize that you are not out of place and that you are just as good as everybody else, and that everybody else is going through the same thing as you. So, I thought my chances were pretty good.

Some athletes (5/20) reported *not feeling confident that they would make the team* their first year. For example,

(Interview 11) Well at the time, I mean, when I got to [first professional team], there's rookie camp, 99 people in rookie camp. I was 1 of, I think, 18 offensive linemen just among the rookies, and there were nine or ten veterans coming at main camp and considering that most CFL teams only keep six guys, seven tops, with maybe one on the P.R. [practice roster], all-of-a-sudden I'm sitting there going, "Holy shit! My chances aren't that good". But, I mean, throw out training counts, that's what training camp's for. Those who are prepared, make the team or end up getting traded. Those who aren't, get weeded out.

Some athletes (8/20) reported *not feeling in control during the selection process*, which may have affected their sense of self-competence (e.g., they were 'kept in the dark',

or the team had already signed contracts with too many players in the same playing position). Illustrative quotations follow:

(Interview 19) Only because I was such a high draft pick. I knew that they had to keep me because they had spent so much money on me. I didn't think I was playing well enough to be kept. *You always feel like a mushroom when you're in the pros: They keep you in the dark, and they feed you crap. And, so you never really know what's going on, even if you think you're playing well, and you are playing well, they never tell you what's going on, so you never really know.* What I knew from my circumstance, because I was a high draft pick, I was going to get kept.

(Interview 15) All I knew is I just did what my ability could do, and everything would take care of itself. *There are a lot of guys that have a lot of ability, and just sometimes it comes down to being in the right situation and that's something you don't know at the time, but it really comes down to that. Sometimes really good players don't make a team, and sometimes you can't figure out why, and it's just a weird game.*

### Strategies and Goals

Strategies to impress the coach and be successful. Almost all the athletes (18/21) reported *knowing what they should do* in order to impress the coaches and be successful during their transition into the professional leagues. Only two athletes reported clearly not knowing what strategy to adopt in order to succeed. Athletes' reported strategies to impress the coaches and make the team during their transition were organized into three categories. First, the most frequently reported strategies involved the *athletes' physical approaches to playing and practicing football* (16/21). Strategies which focused on physical aspects of the game included, improving technique and skills, making big plays, playing hard and hustling, and avoiding being physically beat during a play. Two demonstrative quotations are provided:

(Interview 14) Yeah, I did. You know, I'm short but I always knew I had the ability, quickness, and strength, and blah, blah, blah. I just needed the confidence to play. And I knew that the only way to get that was by playing, but yet I wasn't getting a lot of playing time. *I thought to be successful as a pro athlete, I was certainly going to have to improve my techniques and skills. Well, skills I guess would be God-given abilities -- skills and*

*abilities, well which I just needed to keep working hard on those, which I have.* At times I need to change my attitude too, because sometimes I get a bad attitude and I have to go back all the way, you know, to when I was a kid "why did I first play?"; because I love the game. And even now, it's, you know, the most money I've made was the year we were 2 and 14 and I was the most miserable. I was injured, the most miserable, yet it was the most money I made. So, some people motivate by money and I have been and I was the most unhappy in my life in this game, so I kind of re-bounded and had to retract in my life and pretty much realize that I just love to play the game. So, I think that's why I'm at where I'm at now.

(Interview 10) *I thought I did know what to do to impress the coaches. I thought I had to make an outstanding play that would really open up all their eyes.* I thought I did that on the last day before the big cuts that they did. I thought I'd made a couple big plays that opened up their eyes 'cause at one time that was when they were talking, the receiver coach was mentioning that that was a great play that I had made.

The next most frequently endorsed strategies for impressing the coaches involved the athletes' *mental approach* to practicing and playing football (12/21). Athletes reported strategies such as trying to learn as much as they could, listening to advice, doing what they were told, not making mistakes, and being focused. Two quotations are provided below:

(Interview 5) Yeah, I think I knew what I had to do in order to succeed or to achieve. I think I realized that I had to work as hard as I possibly could. But, I also felt that if I worked as hard as I possibly could and it didn't work out, then that would be fine with me. *I think to be evaluated as a good performer, I realized that I couldn't make mistakes. You have to eliminate as many mistakes as you can and you have to learn from your mistakes so that you don't make them again. I think that's what I thought you had to do to become a good performer.* There are certainly individuals on teams that are evaluated as good performers for other reasons: You know, whether they are buddy-buddy with the coach, or they are a bit of a "kiss-ass", who knows. But, I think for me good performers are someone who does the job to the top level on the field.

(Interview 4) Yeah, because I knew they were going to move me to center because the guy who was currently playing center when they drafted me was like 35 years old and he was not going to play much longer. So, I knew that that was what they were going to do. So, that was a good feeling because it showed that they had faith in me, at least, because I had never played it and they planned on doing it anyway. I thought; "well, you know, they think enough of me to draft me and try me out at something that I've never done before. They must have faith in me to think that I'm good enough to do it". So, that's always a good feeling, to know that they believe in your ability. *So, I knew that I had to*

*learn that position. And that's what was expected of me, to contribute. So, I just tried to do everything I could to get it down.*

The third set of strategies to impress the coaches and make the team involved *attitudinal approaches* to the game (9/21), such as doing your best, getting noticed, being serious and professional, and remembering to have fun and enjoy football. For example, (Interview 17) Not as much as I think I knew probably by the end, or now. Just as far as standing out kind-of-thing and *making sure you stand out* and making sure you *make* them notice you because you might not be noticed otherwise.

(Interview 6) Well basically, *you just got to bare down and play hard football*. I mean, *do the best you can and hope things work out for yourself*.

Goals during the first professional season. Athletes' reported goals were organized in two categories. First, most athletes (16/19) set a goal to *increase their status on the team* (e.g., earn a starting role, make the active playing roster) and/or to *make more of a contribution* to the team (e.g., play in games). Two quotations follow:

(Interview 15) During training camp my goal was to make the team. I didn't care about starting, I didn't care about playing time, I didn't care about what I had to do to make the team. I didn't care what they wanted me to do, if it was practice squad, if it was starting, if it was playing special teams, I mean, I didn't care. My goal was to make the team, and then from there, I felt like I could make more goals. *But, I was on practice squad my first year, so I really didn't have to worry about playing, but at the same time, my goal was to show these coaches -- because I was going against our first team defense all the time because I was running scouts team -- show them "hey, I can compete against these guys". And I used it as an opportunity to get better, to propel myself into the next season as playing. So, that was my goal to just get better throughout the season. And I really did, I could see a big difference in my play from the beginning to the end of the year, and in the confidence with which I played.*

(Interview 20) *During the season, my goal was to actually play as well as I could actually play when I got the chance to play, which wasn't, like I said, a whole lot during that first year.* So, I felt like, whenever I was called on, I needed to be ready, which that can be a little tense; not really knowing when you can get a chance to go in the game, but just always feel like, or always try to, put yourself in a position where you've prepared mentally, and physically are able to perform when you actually are called, when you have to. That was my situation because I wasn't a starter, so whenever I got a chance to get in there -- when somebody got hurt or whatever, or we were beating somebody bad,

whatever was happening, or getting beat really bad -- just being ready for that. Reach your goals? Yeah, I made the team after camp, and I actually when I did play, I played pretty good, so I feel like I achieved that.

The next most frequently reported goal for the first professional season was to *improve and minimize mistakes* (6/19). Two examples follow:

(Interview 13) I would say the biggest things that are responsibilities are: Being on time, not making mistakes, being mentally into it. And, all that takes is concentration and dedication and discipline and all those great words. But, you got to want to get better and you got to want to achieve. And, I think those things are just in me, innately. I mean, I don't really ever sit down and think, "oh man I need to do this, do this, do this". I'm not really that big of a goal setter, I would say. I pretty much let things go by, although if you look at them, it might stink to have them unorganized, but it's sort of, I guess, a routine for me: I'm always on time. I like to work, I like to work-out, I like to work at practice. So, these things, I don't know if I set them as goals unconsciously, but those would be good goals to have. You know, to make minimal mistakes, and I probably make the least amount of mistakes at my position. And I don't credit that to consciously thinking of constantly thinking of it. I just do it. I mean, that's just the way I am.

(Interview 19) The goals I set for myself during training camp and during the season, I knew I was going to get kept, but I wanted to make sure that I improved every week so the reason that they kept me was there. And, I wanted to improve every week for myself too, and give myself a reason to be there. I was still very insecure, but I think I tried each day and each practice to do something better: To get myself in better shape, to get a little stronger, to be in there watching film a little longer, those sort of things. I think, those things I learnt from watching other people do it, and understanding that I needed to do it to be there.

### Transition Buffers

Alternate career plan going into training camp. Results for this item were mixed, with some athletes (8/17) indicating that they had formulated an alternate career plan going into professional football, and some athletes (9/17) indicating that they had no back-up career plan. Few athletes offered rationales for having a back-up plan going into their first professional training camp. However, some athletes did rationalize their choice not to have another plan going into training camp. These athletes (5/17) indicated that

they were confident they were going to make it and/or that they wanted to *concentrate on football* and put all their effort and attention into making the team. For example,

(Interview 12) Well not really. *Coming in I felt comfortable that I would be here on the team.* You know, how long my career would last, I really didn't know. A back-up plan in the future would be really just to fall back on my degree that I received from college. So, I was really going to take things one at a time. *I really don't like to be worrying about what the future has until that situation comes up. I just don't think you can be as productive, doing what you're doing, if you're worried about a back-up plan.* So, was just going to come and play in the NFL as long as I possibly could. Then when that ended, I was going to move on to the next career possibility, whatever that was. And I had my degree from school so I felt comfortable that I would be able to get a job and I would worry about it when that came around. But until then, I'm just going to continue to play and we'll just have to wait and see what the future holds.

Post-football plans. More athletes (10/21) reported *not having made plans* for the day when they could no longer play professional football, than athletes (7/21) who had made plans for that day. Among those athletes who had not made future plans, half indicated that they were *simply focusing and concentrating on football*. Few athletes provided explanations for having made future career plans. Two examples are given below. The first quotation represents those athletes who did not report having made any alternate career plans for the day when their professional football careers ended. The second quotation represents those athletes who reported having made plans for their future without professional football.

(Interview 3) I'm not worried about it. I mean, I haven't made anything specific like, "I want to do this, I want to do that". Right now I'm just winging it. I'm going on the assumption that I'm going to make it; whether that's realistic or not, that's what I do. And, when I don't, I'll deal with it. But, I don't want to have a back-up plan. Because if you have something you can fall back on, generally you fall back on it. I don't want a safety net because I just don't. I mean, I got ability, I got an intellect, I'll be able to do something. And I got money so if I want to go back to school, that's not going to put me in the hole. I'm not going to worry about it.

(Interview 21) Yes, I mean, I have my degree and in my off-season I plan on getting an internship or going on job interviews just to be prepared for the future.

Hanging it up. About half the athletes (10/21) clearly indicated that they were *not looking forward to leaving professional football* and "hanging it up". For example,

(Interview 2) No, I don't want to [hang it up]. If I could play until I was 40, I would, but definitely my body isn't going to hold up to that. I love the game. I've talked to a lot of guys who have just recently quit and started jobs -- not quit, but retired. It's the real world. It's not fun and games anymore. It's different; it definitely is. When I used to train with [my friend], tell me how many different guys would come into the gym for six hours to play? Workout and play racquet ball and squash and whatever. I mean, come on, that's a great life, but you can't do that all the time. I wish you could.

In contrast, only three athletes clearly indicated that they were looking forward to "hanging it up"; while some athletes (5/21) indicated at times looking forward to the end, and at times not looking forward to the end, of their professional football careers.

Reasons for looking forward to the end of professional football were varied, but included wanting to pursue other interests, and ending the pain and stress associated with professional football. In comparison, many athletes (14/21) provided reasons for not wanting their professional football careers to end, namely *still loving and enjoying the game and missing the camaraderie* found among professional football players. The two examples of this given below also illustrate the issue of personal control in how retirement is experienced.

(Interview 12) I think it's going to be difficult because of the things that I've mentioned that I like so much about the game: the friendship, the camaraderie, the competition, you know, playing on Sundays. Hopefully when it's time for me to give up the game, I'll be able to do it on my terms. That's the one thing that I hope I'm able to do. I hope that I'm smart enough to know when I can't be a contributor to the team anymore and I can walk out on my own terms. And from a financial standpoint, because of what the sport has provided, it's something that I won't have to worry about. So, I really feel that I'll be able to make that decision and walk out feeling good about myself and knowing that the time is right and that it was time for me to step down. So, when the time comes, as long as it's on my terms, I won't be dreading it and it won't be something that'll be tearing me up inside. But it will be difficult to walk away, just because of all the friendships and the things that go on in the game.

(Interview 5) No not really. I don't look forward to the days when football is out of my life. I certainly don't want to coach or I don't want to be involved with it when I finally do retire or get cut. I guess, that's a point that I should probably bring up. For the most part, the worst thing about playing professional football is the idea that you don't get to say when it's over, or not many people get to say when it's over. Some people do retire. That's great for them. If people can retire, that's great. But, for the most part, most professional athletes are *told* when it's over: "You're cut, you're released, you're not good enough", whatever, "you're too slow, you're too whatever. This guys better". That's a disappointment. I don't think that's going to make me retire at the top of my game or retire early to save face or save getting cut. you know, in the final years. But, no, I don't look forward to hanging it up. And, it is a disappointment knowing that what will probably happen is I won't get to choose when it's over.

### Professional Football and Identity

Importance of football to athlete's identity. When asked about the importance of professional football to their identities, many athletes (15/19) reported that they feel football is *important or very important*. For example,

(Interview 9) Pretty important. You know, you do something, when you go out and go through school and you study whatever, law and stuff, you don't want to graduate and be an unsuccessful lawyer; you want to go out and be as successful a lawyer as you can. Well, it was the same for me in football. I played football for four years and that was pretty much the majority of my life in college; that was a big part of it. And, *now* all-of-a-sudden I want to succeed at it still. It's not something I want to give up on. I don't want to just quit on something that I feel I'm good enough to play and enjoy playing still. And also, I don't want people to see me and say, "oh yeah, he was good at college [football], but now he can't play anymore. He can't play in a professional league". So I didn't want that, and I always looked at it that way, like I didn't want to fail at something that I worked so hard at. So, I *want* to keep going and I *want* to play. So, it is pretty important to me to be playing. It makes me feel pretty good.

Next, athletes indicated why professional football was important to them. Some found professional football to be *important* to them because of *the opportunities and benefits*, or because of the money, earned through the sport (9/19). For example,

(Interview 20) I think it's given me a lot of opportunities; its helped broaden my horizons. I don't think it's necessarily exactly who I am. I don't think I'm limited to just saying, "Well, I'm a pro football player", which I think I have a lot more to offer than just that. But, I think it has definitely given me a lot of self-worth and a lot of, like I say, opportunities, and helped me be a well rounded person. I guess the most I've gotten out

of it is it made me realize that it wasn't all that I was, and, like I said, with the opportunities that were presented, I think it helped me become a more well rounded person and gave me the opportunity to actually taste a whole lot of what life had to offer as far as in that arena and the things that were involved in that.

Others stated that professional football was *important* to them because of their *achievements and accomplishments* in attaining such an elite level (6/19). For example,

(Interview 8) It was important because I felt that I got to the professional level at *something* in my life. I've been playing since I was freaking eight years old, I better have got that far. So, *that* aspect was kind of important. that I could maybe know that I got to that level and respect myself for that. That was kind of cool.

Next, responses could be categorized in terms of whether football was a part of the athletes' self-identities. Some athletes (8/19) plainly stated that *professional football* was an *integrated part of their identities*. For example,

(Interview 4) Yeah, well. that's how everybody thinks of you. Because I think that as you get older, people think of you more in terms of your occupation. Because when you're younger, you don't have one necessarily, you're just a student or whatever. So, then once you get a job, that's part of your identity. Yeah, that's the way everybody thinks of you. But, it shouldn't affect who you are. Well, obviously it's going to in certain ways because you're going to be treated a certain way. *I guess, as long as you don't let it affect how you act. It should just naturally become part of your identity, just like anybody's job should. It shouldn't be more or less. It should be really important to you, and personally, I take a lot of pride in being a football player because it's a really rare occupation and not many people can do it, and I know that I've been physically blessed to do it. I think that's why people look up to it, because it's rare and you require certain skills that a lot of people don't have. So, I'm proud to be a football player and I'm glad that it's part of my identity. And, when I'm done playing, I can look back on it and be proud of what I accomplished and have Super Bowl rings and stuff. But, I don't think that's really going to change me personally -- going from being a football player to not being one -- I think I'll pretty much be the same person. I think most of the people who knew me before I was a football player and know me now, I think they pretty much feel I'm the same person.*

Finally, as illustrated in the previous quotation, many athlete's (11/19) expressed *mature attitudes about football and their identity*. They emphasized that their identity was not limited to their professional football careers. Rather, they stated that their *self-identity and self-esteem* derived from *multiple sources*. For example,

(Interview 15) *Being a professional football player and how important that is to me now and to how I am, I don't think it, by any stretch, defines me. You know, I'm not defined by being a professional football player. People that don't know me maybe see me as a professional football player, but I think I'm defined by other things and I would never want my identity to be solely, "yeah, he was a great athlete, and a great football player and that's all he ever was". I want to, you know, be someone that's well-read, and has other interests, and is good at other things, and has developed other talents other than just my athletic ability. You know, I don't want to be looked at as, you know, that's my only thing. And to people around where I live and my family, you know, of course, they'll introduce me and that's a big deal. "yeah, he's a professional football player" boom! I want people when they meet me and actually get to know me, they see me as more than just that, and they realize, "hey yeah, this guy's a great football player" and that kind of thing, but "he's a great guy and we like being around him, and he's a kind person, and he's good to children, and he's good to" -- eventually my wife, I don't have one -- "his wife, and family's important to him, and he works hard" and, you know, there's other things other than football.*

(Interview 12) *It's given me an opportunity to do things that I never would have been able to do. I'm able to do things for my family, my parents and brothers and sisters, for friends. My wife and I will be able to live a life that we never would have been able to do had it not been a career that I was able to accomplish. So it's been tremendously important. And, it's really something that will shape the rest of my life. There's a possibility that my career after football could be related to the sport of football itself, so this could be something that will be a vehicle that I've used for 20 to 30 years to make my living. So, the importance really can't be measured. It's just something that's created situations and given me the opportunity to do the things that I just never would have been able to do from the point of being able to travel to places I never would have been able to do, to have a house that I never would have been able to have, to do things for my parents that I never would have been able to have done, to take care of my brothers and sisters. It really has afforded me an opportunity to do things for the people that I love in my life that I never would have been able to do had I not been a professional football player. So, from the standpoint of creating that situation, I think it's very important. As I pointed out before, it wasn't important from a point that if I didn't make it, it was something that was going to just totally put me into a position where I was not going to be able to do anything to function in society. I did not live my life to become a professional football player. So, this point is important from a standpoint that it's provided me with a lifestyle that I wouldn't have had, but it wasn't important to me growing up that I live my life solely to become a professional football player.*

Personal changes since becoming a professional football player. Many athletes

(11/20) stated that they had changed since becoming a professional football player.

Athletes claimed to have changed in a variety of ways. Many athletes reported *changes*

*in their personality* (e.g., being more self-confident, and having more self-worth), *in their maturity, and in their values and goals* (10/20). For example,

(Interview 9) I think just my self-confidence has grown a lot, like coming out of college, as far as being a football player, I felt good with my university friends or the guys I played against, because they knew that I could play, or they felt that I could play. And now I was always, not self-conscious, but worried that other guys didn't think I was good enough, that kind of thing; and now I kind of feel that I am. Like inside I know, well I know I made it and I know that I made a team and that I'm pretty confident in the fact that I can go out and say, "I play for a professional football team", and that makes me feel pretty good. It's just my confidence has gone up -- my self-confidence. I think that's about it. I haven't got cocky or anything; it's just more confidence for me.

(Interview 15) *The way I've changed after I've become a professional player is my goals have changed, and, I don't know, when you're young, you see things for now. I've always been able to look down the road and say, "this is where I want to be", but you never know how you're going to get there. And I think more and more the way things have changed is I see more and more how I'm going to get to the ends of some of these goals that I've set.* And it's not necessarily just football, but football has shown me, some different aspects of my life and how things have changed for me goal-wise as far as my career. You know, there's other things I'm interested in, and I think football's opened that up for me. I think if I would have gone into something else, instead of football, I think my paths would have been even more different. That's hard to even say, but I think paths have changed for me, and the way I look at my life. I think it's changed; it's led me down a certain way. It's hard to explain.

(Interview 20) I think in the long-run of being cut and going to different teams, and just seeing life out there, and realizing that's not all that life has to offer, I think I've realized that it wasn't all that I was, and I realized that I do have a lot to offer than just pro football. But my self-worth has definitely improved just realizing that just because you're a pro football player doesn't mean you can't be kind to people and you can't be a nice guy. I think I've definitely changed in that aspect that, "Hey, I've been given an opportunity to do something that most people won't ever get the chance to do, and people look up to, so why not be a nice guy and sort of pay-back maybe some of those opportunities that you've gotten?" Just let people know that professional football players, and professional athletes aren't any different than anybody else they just had an opportunity and had maybe some blessing from up above, or wherever it may have came from, that they were able to actually play a sport for money.

In contrast, when asked how they have changed since becoming professional football players, other athletes (7/20) reported not having changed. For example,

(Interview 21) *I don't think I've changed all that much. I feel like I was a pretty good person coming into it. I still feel like I'm a pretty good person. I think if football can do anything it can kind of change you if you let it, and it can, because you get so many privileges because people like you because you play professional football and not because of who you are, you can be changed. I think you can let that dark side out pretty easily as a professional football player, and I feel good that I haven't let that out hardly at all. Yeah, I think I'm pretty grounded. So, don't think I've changed all that much. I mean, knowing more about the world, more about people from different areas is nice, and that's changed me maybe a little bit. That's all.*

Injury and identity. Few athletes reported not playing football for a period of time in their first two seasons as professionals due to injury or to not signing a contract (5/21). However, for those athletes, missing a portion of their transitory training camp or regular season seemed very difficult. They expressed concerns about *not being able to prove themselves* and, as a result, *feared losing their jobs* (3/5). For example,

(Interview 15) *I've had several injuries, but nothing that made me miss football for too long. I did miss two months of training camp after my first year. It was tough because I felt like I wasn't getting any opportunity to prove myself, and I felt like I wasn't going to make the team because of an injury. And that kind of played with my mind a little bit, but it's something that was out of your control. And injuries, you have to realize, are going to happen because it is something you're using your body so much.*

Attributions for being top in another field. Almost all athletes (19/20) claimed that they believe they would have made it to the top, or would have been successful, in another field. Athletes listed the characteristics that they possessed which helped them succeed in football and would help them succeed in another field. *Hard work and effort* was the most frequently reported characteristic (8/20). For example,

(Interview 1) *Yes, I think it's hard work that gets you to the top. I honestly believe that, whatever else I would have done, I'd worked hard for that too. I mean, I chose football because I liked football, not because I was big or tall or anything. I just chose football back in grade 9 because I liked to play football. Had I been surrounded by something different -- karate or something -- I think I would have been one of the best karate guys right now.*

(Interview 15) Yes, I do think I can make it another field. I think what it really comes down to is how hard you're willing to work. And, you know, I think hard work's what got me here, and I feel like if I can put that energy to something else, why can't I be successful at it? I don't think there's anything holding me back but my own self and what I'm willing to do. If I'm willing to work hard, I don't see why I can't do well at something else like I've done at this.

Some athletes (5/20) reported *that football helped to instill qualities* that would help them make it to the top in another field. For example,

(Interview 10) Yeah, I do think [I would have made it to the top in another field]. I think a lot of professional athletes could make it in a lot of different fields. They possess competitive natures and abilities to focus and concentrate on goals that are not always apparent in other individuals. If you look at a lot of companies, big companies, they often recruit athletes in university. [Large insurance company]'s been known to do that and they often, even now, they often recruit professional athletes, as well. There's a reason for it. I mean, most professional athletes that do go out in their own field *are* successful and they know it takes hard work and perseverance and they'll do whatever it takes to get the job done. Although this may not be true for all cases, I do think on a majority that playing professional football would definitely help someone's career in whatever they decide to do, whether that be their own thing, or working for someone else, or whatever it may be.

Finally, a few athletes (5/20) claimed that their success came from within themselves; for example, being a successful person. This is demonstrated below:

(Interview 9) Yeah, I think I could have made it to the top in another field. I know in university I didn't really take school all that seriously, or not as seriously as I took football. *I think if I would have concentrated on something, or eventually when I give up football and start concentrating on something else, I'll be successful at it. I think it's just me and the way I am, like I want to succeed at everything I do. Like I don't want to get into something half-assed and not put my full effort into it, and I think that's pretty much the key to anything you do, is to be able to be into it 100% and I think I have that quality, so I think I would have been able to make it to the top in another field.* I think that's it.

## Prototypical Between-Group Differences in Characteristics for Veteran and

### Struggling/Unsuccessful Groups

On average, becoming a professional football player became important to the veterans at a much younger age than the struggling/unsuccessful group [i.e., before college (3/5) and after college football season over (4/5), respectively]. For example,

(Interview 4) It was everything. Seriously, I wanted to play since I was like five years old. I don't know why. I just remember watching games on TV when I was five years old. I loved football right from the get go. And right away I thought, "Man, I would love to do that when I grow up". I was lucky because a lot of people don't know what they want to do. They just go back and forth and try different stuff. I was lucky. I always had something that I wanted to do. I started playing football when I was nine and just liked it a lot. I liked watching it, liked playing it, and just from that point on. Like I said earlier, you have each step: You go to high school, then next step, if you play good enough, you get a scholarship and you go to college, then the next step is to get drafted. So, I was lucky that everything kind of went the way I wanted it to.

While maybe only a small distinction, the *veterans* reported that they were motivated to play professional football by love of the game and by a *lifelong dream to be a professional football player* (3/5). For example,

(Interview 14) Well, as long as I can remember I've always wanted to be a pro football player, you know, little kid out playing in the yard. So, I think it was pretty much important to achieve a dream. So, I'm glad I was able to do that.

In comparison, the *struggling/unsuccessful* athletes reported being motivated by a *lifelong dream to be a professional athlete in any sport* (2/4). Furthermore, veterans reported appreciating that they had talent and ability, and consequently realizing that professional football was a serious career option (3/5); whereas, for some of the struggling/unsuccessful athletes, it was only after receiving an award for their college football performance that they realized professional football may be an option for the future (2/5). Finally, *veterans* reported that *playing football games was their favorite*

aspect of professional football, while *struggling/unsuccessful* athletes reported *money*

(3/4) *for doing something they love* (2/4) as their favorite part about professional football.

An example from a veteran transcript follows:

(Interview 19) *My only favorite part about being a professional football player is the game. There's a purity in the game, and there's a camaraderie and a closeness that you feel with the players on the team, and just being there understanding that you are one of a rare percentage of people in the world that gets to do this. And, that didn't really hit me until one day somebody told me the stats of like 2% of the people who play football in college ever get to start in a professional game for more than a certain amount of time. And, I achieved that, and that really blew me away and made me understand what I have really done because I just came fumbling around, not really understanding how lucky I had been. But, there is a purity of that Sunday afternoon that they can't take away from you -- they can't commercialize it, and they can't can it, and they can't share it with everybody else -- that you only get with those 11 or 12 people on the day when you're out there and you execute a perfect play and you score a touchdown, and there's a joy in the eyes of others that you see, and it's reflected in yours. You know, the hug of a touchdown, or the locker-room mentality where you don't get that feeling, that kind of joy and release. I have never really found it anywhere else, and I think that is one of the only things that kind of keeps me in there.*

Although the veterans were inconsistent in their reporting of the least favorite aspect of professional football, the *struggling/unsuccessful* group reported *not liking the instability* associated with professional football (2/4).

Both groups of athletes generally *felt they had the skills, abilities and attitude* to play at the professional level. This sense of efficacy stemmed from their *self-evaluations* of their performances; for example, competing and winning, knowing they had trained, worked hard, and had ability. The following quotation comes from a veteran player:

(Interview 4) *Once I first started playing and I did okay, I thought I did. I had confidence in my abilities. Like I said, I knew that I could do it because I was doing good in practice, like in training camp you go against other teams and I did well against those guys doing scrimmages, doing drills against them. And, in the pre-season, you play against other teams. I did pretty well in all that stuff. But, then the season came and I just had to sit on the bench. You know, you don't play. I just thought, I don't understand why I wasn't given a chance because I felt like when I was given a chance, it went pretty well. So, I was like, "Shit man, I just wish I could get into a game and try". So, finally I*

did and it went well. My coach came up to me and -- like I said there were 4 games left - - said to me, "We're going to start you in the game this weekend and chances are you're going to start the rest of the year". So, I kind of knew that unless I blatantly screwed-up, I was going to be playing the rest of the year. So, I thought "Great! I get to play a month -- four games". *And then when I got out there, it went really well. I had a good game, all the games after that went really well. So, that's when I really knew; and it was a really nice feeling because if you think you're ready to go, then you go out there and you get your ass kicked, you would think, "Oh my God. How could I be that wrong?". But, like I said, just going back to the training camp, you know whether you can play or not. You're either beating that guy or he's beating you. You can also tell from the guys around you, if they say to you, "I wonder why the coach isn't putting you in?" or something like that, then you know that they think that you're good enough too, which means a lot. Yeah, so long as you are not wrong.*

In addition to relying on this type of self-evaluation, the struggling/unsuccessful athletes also counted on *feedback from coaches in order to feel capable* of competing at the professional level (3/5).

While both groups felt capable of playing professional football, veterans (but not struggling/unsuccessful athletes) reported not being given enough playing time to confirm their feelings of efficacy (3/5).

Veterans and struggling/unsuccessful athletes also differed in their reports of what was good about their playing and what needed work during their transition. Specifically, *veterans* reported that their *mental approach to practices and games was good* (4/5). For example,

(Interview 19) I think the only thing good about my playing in my first year was that I never gave up. If I was beat, I'd go back and go after the same person, and try and get better, so that that same person couldn't do the same thing to me.

Veterans did not consistently report having to work on and improve a particular facet of their playing. However, the two most successful veterans both reported *never being completely satisfied with their playing and always wanting to improve*. An example is given below:

(Interview 12) I came from college as an option full back so one of the things that they mentioned was that they were going to bring me in to be a blocking back. I blocked quite a bit in college and that was my strong point. [In professional football, I] still found that very difficult just because of the athletic ability of the guys that were on the field. So, that was one thing that I didn't think I was going to need a lot of work on, but ended up being as much as everything. *I think you always have to feel as though you have to work on things. Once you feel that you are complacent in your abilities, I think that's when you get into trouble. So, I've always felt that I've needed to continue to work on things, and continue to improve on things from year to year. I never really like to feel satisfied with my performance.* Coming into my first training camp, you know, the biggest thing was just trying to fit in, you know, doing the things that were asked of you and, you know, worrying about what was going to be needed to work on after you tried to find your niche in the team.

In contrast, *struggling/unsuccessful athletes* reported that their *physical play was their strong point* (5/5), whereas their mental approach to practices and games needed work (4/5).

Interestingly, *veterans reported not feeling equal* to players in the league because there were so many good experienced players (5/5), and they needed to learn and improve before they could attain that level (3/5). For example,

(Interview 19) No, I didn't feel equal to other players in my position in my league. Right away I could see the differences, especially just on my team alone, the starter at the position I was playing, I could see the immense differences between me. He was a real student of the game. He really understood about leveraging your body position, whereas I just played to be physically overwhelming over somebody. I couldn't do that over here, people were just about the same size, so I couldn't to that. I had to understand the leverage game a little more, and be quicker off the ball, and more explosive, and understand that I needed to get stronger in the weight room.

However, the *struggling/unsuccessful athletes* generally felt they were equal to other players in the league, especially in terms of playing ability (3/5) and physical condition (2/5).

In order to increase their sense of self-competence, veterans adopted *strategies* such as learning from experienced professionals and always trying to improve. This can be seen in the following quotation:

(Interview 12) My position is kind of unique, not all the teams in the league use a full back, so there's really not one of us on every team in the league. Definitely did not feel equal to anybody on that level. There were a few players at that time who were outstanding full backs in the NFL: [names 4 players], guys who had been in the league for -- [names another great player] -- several years, and [I] did not feel at all that I was on their level. I had watched them play and knew what they were able to do, and did not feel that I was at their level, at all. It was something that gave you something to strive for, and I think that that is good. I've never really felt that I've reached a level where I can sit back and think that I'm playing the best that I can. As I said before, I always want to be continuing to try and improve. So, I really did not feel equal to people around the league in my position at all -- and not even on my team. I was not a starter my rookie year, so obviously there were guys on my team that were better than me in my position. It's just part of the transition that you do at each level.

*Veterans* generally felt their *chances of making their first professional team were good* (4/6), partially because they were *high draft choices* (3/6). Struggling/unsuccessful athletes were mixed in their reports on their perceived chances of making the team, and few explanations were given.

Generally, both the veterans and the struggling/unsuccessful groups reported knowing what to do in order to impress the coaches and have a successful transition. However, their preferred strategies were different. *The veterans adopted mental strategies*, like learning their jobs, not making mistakes, and staying focused, in order to impress the coaches and be successful (5/6). For example,

(Interview 19) I think one of the things you have to do to impress the coaches is make the transition really quickly. If in your first couple days, you can pick-up on something that the veterans do, that you can do to show that you understand the scheme of things really right away, really impresses coaches. I think it impresses them if you do a little extra studying and you're a little bit ahead of where they think you should be at the time because coaches will usually give you kind of an order of how things are supposed to

progress in camp, or in your first season. But, if you make a little jump ahead and understand what's going on, that will really impress the coaches.

In addition, some physical strategies for success, such as *playing well and improving techniques and skills* were also reported by veterans (3/6):

(Interview 20) Yeah, I think I knew. I mean, basically you have to go out everyday and play better than, not necessarily the defense, the guys you're trying to block; but, play better than the guys that were lined up on the same side of the ball as you because, of course, you're competing against them because in the end they can only keep so many of you, and certain guys got to get cut. Yeah, I felt like I knew what I had to do, which was play hard and play well, actually I guess play well. What I thought about what I had to do in order to be a successful football player: keep your mind right; stay away from drugs; don't get side-tracked in the multitude of things that can side-track people when you get to that level, which would be, getting caught up in a crowd, jet-setter types, I think. That can slow things down, that can retard abilities necessarily; that can keep good players sometimes from becoming great players. I just felt if I kept my nose clean and worked hard that that's what I had to do to be successful.

In comparison, the *struggling/unsuccessful* athletes sought to impress the coaches by *being physical, making an outstanding play, and trying to stand-out and get noticed* (4/5).

In terms of goals for the regular season, veterans wanted to increase their playing status on the team and/or their contribution to the team; whereas, the struggling/unsuccessful athletes did not set goals for the regular season, other than to make the team (4/5). An illustrative quotation from the veteran subsample is given below:

(Interview 12) I don't think I set my goals high enough. I wanted to be able to make the team, and that was really my goal. But, once you made the team, you were contributing on special teams and in situations on the offense. But, you'd come from college as being a starter and being somebody that the team relied on to do things. *It was a difficult adjustment. So, I definitely had to re-adjust my goals after that, and instead of just being a member of the team, wanted to be a member of the team that would be counted on and be a starter and be somebody that would contribute to the football team and contribute to the success of the football team.*

Veterans and struggling/unsuccessful athletes differed little in terms of buffers, such as having an alternate career plan going into training camp. Only veterans mentioned that they would miss the camaraderie of professional football when it was time to "hang it up" (3/6). For instance,

(Interview 13) But, as far as looking forward to hanging it up: I don't know, sure, but then I'll definitely miss the camaraderie, the fellows, and all the friends and stuff, and all the great things it brings to my family, as well.

Some veterans reported having a back-up plan, and others not having one. Similarly, some *struggling/unsuccessful athletes* chose not to have a back-up plan going into training camp (3/5), however, they indicated that they preferred instead to concentrate *on professional football* (3/5).

In terms of football and identity, *veterans* reported that professional football had become an *integrated aspect of their personalities* (3/5), but not their only source of self-esteem and self-identity. Rather, their self-identities were formed from many different elements, such as being a husband, a good citizen, and a father. For example,

(Interview 14) Well, it's not the most important thing. I think I mentioned earlier about having a wife and kids and there certainly are two people or three people that are more important than it. I mean, it's great financial security for my family and that's an important thing in life. But, it certainly isn't what makes me tick. You know, if I had to, I'd go out and get four jobs to take care of my family. This kind of makes it easier. *Plus, it's something I love doing. I mean, I am a football player. I think it flows through my blood, but it's like anybody. You know, people take it from high school to college, some people don't go on after high school and it's still in their blood. Some people I played with in college, it's still in their blood. When I'm done it's still going to be in my blood. I mean, I love it. But, I think I'm at a point now where it doesn't make me the person that I am. I am the person that I am. Football is a great sport that, one day it's over and if that's all you have, well then it's pretty much an empty life after football.*

Struggling/unsuccessful athletes did not discuss this aspect of their identities.

### Authenticity and Utility of Findings Related to Characteristics of the Athlete

Authentication of the above research findings was obtained from two veteran players. Comments were confirmatory re-statements of what was given. For example, one athlete wrote:

*"It sounds like the successful players had an ideal to shoot for -- older guys who were established as good players, the desire to be like them. Many times, having something to prove is the difference between being average and being good; this might be something that is missing in less successful players. The fact that struggling players needed positive reinforcement from coaches illustrates the importance of confidence. A successful player who knows what's necessary to get ahead doesn't need to hear it from a coach repeatedly. Once again, admission of a deficiency in mental approach by struggling players proves that physical ability can't take you very far if you don't know what you're doing."*

Confirmation of the utility of these findings was also obtained by three struggling athletes, who indicated that the following two findings were most useful to them: 1) Never be completely satisfied with your playing; there is always something to work on and improve; and, 2) use mental strategies to show that you understand the scheme of things quickly, such as doing extra studying, learning from veterans, and trying to pick up on something that they do.

### Attributions for Success

Items in this section explored the attributions the athletes made for their successes and failures in the transition from amateur to professional football. Attributions for success were explored in two ways: First, the factors to which the athletes had attributed their success were examined; then, elements of the transition which acted as facilitators,

as well as elements which complicated, or made the transition more difficult, were examined.

Attributions for success. Repeated reading of responses to this question revealed that attributions for success could be organized into three categories. First, as demonstrated below, athletes assigned their success to stable self characteristics, specifically *mental attitude* (13/20) and *physical ability* (8/20):

(Interview 1) I think because I wanted to and I took the time to realize that that's what I wanted to do and to think about it and to figure out how I was going to get there. There's a lot of people who want to get there but they just go through life, "Oh, I didn't get there". At some point, you have to stop and say, "How am I going to get there? What's it going to take?". It's not like I, or anybody else in the NFL, is some super human being. I think that what you'll find is mostly a lot of people who have made goals for themselves and found out what it's going to take -- especially someone in my position where they're not in a system to make NFL football players, as an American school would be.

(Interview 5) What got me as far as I got? Desire, I guess, for one thing; and, a fear of failure. That's kind of a funny thing with me, I don't like to fail. I don't like to lose. I don't like to fail and I think once I got the opportunity, one of the things I would have thought about, which is kind of a weird thing, is that there are X number of people that know that I'm getting this opportunity. Now, if I got cut, then there are X number of people that will know that I failed. That kind of fear of failure kind of motivates me a little bit.

(Interview 9) I think the biggest thing was that it was something I knew I always wanted to do. Something inside of me that I knew I wanted and always wanted to achieve, so I worked pretty hard at that. As far as like the physical, whatever, you know I never felt out-of-place. I was always a good size and good speed for my position, so I think the biggest thing for me was that that's what I knew I wanted to do and to go out and do it. And, my family was pretty good. They always supported everything I did, so that helped a lot too.

Second, athletes also attributed their success to unstable characteristics of the self (those that can be changed), particularly *effort* (10/20). For example,

(Interview 15) I think what got me to become a pro football player was just my persistence and my *work ethic*. You know, I've always had athletic ability, but never just incredible amounts. *But what got me was I was always in the weight room, I was always running, I was always doing something to make myself a better player. And all those*

*things after years and years culminate and come together until I was at the level where I was doing the little things right, and I was doing things to help a team, and I wasn't making mistakes, and I was a good influence, and that kind of thing.* And that kind of thing goes a long way, as well as athletic ability, which, you know, you're either blessed with, or you're not. And I had enough, but I couldn't have made it solely on my athletic ability; there had to be other things, and I think my work ethic and my mental preparation and my background, I think some of those things helped me.

(Interview 22) Definitely my work ethic. You know, I've always worked hard and did more than anyone else has done. While other guys were going out partying and drinking beer and into the girls and drugs, I'd be working-out and going home and getting a good night's sleep and doing the same thing over the next day, instead of getting drunk and being hung-over the next day and not having any motivation to put the time in. That's definitely got me as far as I got.

Finally, some athletes (6/20) also attributed their success to *social support* from coaches, family, as well as faith in God. This is supported by the following quotations:

(Interview 21) What helped me the most? *I think the support of my parents helped me more than anything, I think, getting me through. Them knowing and believing in me, and knowing I was good, helped me keep going when times weren't so good and when I didn't know if I was going to play again. Also, my college coach helped me out a lot letting people know about me.* Just not giving up: Persistence, I think. Persistence plays a big part in this game and I think you have to have it to survive in this game, and I had a lot of persistence, so, yeah, I think that those people helped me a lot.

(Interview 11) *Probably I'd have to say faith helped a lot. Faith in God and trusting the abilities that He gave me.* Just God-given ability and knowing what to do. God-given ability only gets you so far. Focus and intensity in terms of training, gets you where you have to go. People that get by just on their ability, they get sent home eventually, but the people that have ability and train, and don't take something for granted, they're the people that stick around.

Transition facilitators. The most influential element in terms of facilitating the transition from amateur to professional football appeared to be social support within football (13/21), including team-mates, college and professional coaches, and organization factors like team philosophy. Two illustrative quotations follow:

(Interview 1) Yeah, I think a lot of it is that when I realized that university football was over, I realized if I wanted to fulfill my dreams and play football at the next level, I had to kind of surround myself with the people to do it; so, I just tried to figure out who they'd

be and I guess one of my coaches helped a lot. He did a lot for me. He kind of set me up with the right person, the right agent and did a lot of work for me and gave me the confidence and then set me on the right path and told me the things I needed to do. So I went and got a track coach to prepare me and got a weight program and started working-out more and found out what I should be eating and when I should be sleeping. I decided that the information is out there, you just have to get it from the right people and you have to know where to look. The people you surround yourself with, that you get information from, can make or break a person. As far as family and girlfriend, they're all supportive and helped out a lot. I mean, when you make a big decision, you don't always know if it's the right one. People are supporting you and telling you they're proud of you and stuff and you just want to work that much harder to make them more proud. You want to work hard for everybody that's helped you.

(Interview 20) I think, for sure, that group of guys that I had. Those five young guys that we were together, we were able to lean on each other a little bit, and I think that definitely just having people you felt like were in the same situation as you, as far as being young and not really playing a whole lot -- some of us weren't playing a whole lot -- so, we were able to just sort of vent to each other.

A few of the athletes (4/21) stated that social support from outside football helped facilitate their transition, but clearly this source of support is not as important as support from within football.

Elements which complicate the transition. The only elements which complicated the transition from amateur to professional football, on which there was clear consensus, came from within professional football (9/19); specifically, system factors. such as politics in the selection process, support from professional coaches, and team-mates were all listed as having made the transition more difficult. This is demonstrated by the next two quotations:

(Interview 10) *Well, the only person that can really do that, I think, would be the coaches because they come up to you and give you confidence. They tell you that you can do it and that they're looking, and they're looking to keep you on the team and they're proud -- they're proud of the way you're playing and they think you have a good chance of making it. Your transition will be easier and they'll work with you more. If they don't do that, the transition might be a little harder, but as well, I think you got to keep it, it's in your own hands too. You got to be the guy who makes the transition. So, you got to be the person, or you got to be a good enough athlete to adapt -- adapt to the situation. But the coaching*

staffs' the only people outside of your own control that I think can change that. It's all in your hands. You have to be the guy who makes the transition easy, but the coaching staff can definitely help make it easier or harder.

(Follow-up probe)[For me, the coaches made the transition] *harder because I was given no input on what was going on. In my situation, the coaches weren't really helping out. They weren't good coaches. They didn't pat you on the back. They're all talk: "You're doing well. You're doing well", and then they cut you. I'm not 100% sure they mean what they say. It's a numbers game. If there are three guys they're considering, they'll say "good job" to all of them, but two get cut.*

(Interview 2) Maybe other players, "oh, you're not going to make it", or they don't need me, or that kind of thing. They're trying to mess with you because you're trying to take their job. Like each week more players are getting cut, and they're like "They won't cut [such and such] because he was here last year.", so you're like, "Well, whatever". But, I ended up being there and he didn't.

Some of the athletes stated that they did not experience the transition from amateur to professional football as difficult (6/19). For example,

(Interview 14) Nothing makes it harder. I mean, it's pretty much a cake life. You have to play your ass off though during the season.

#### Prototypical Between-Group Differences in Attributions for Success Held by Veteran and Struggling/Unsuccessful Groups

In terms of attributions for success the biggest difference between these extreme groups is that the *veterans* claimed that their *good mental attitude and approach to the game* (4/5) played a prominent role in their success, while unsuccessful players did not make this type of attribution. An example of attributions made by veterans is given below:

(Interview 4) Just work habits and ability. You got to have the ability. You either have it or you don't. But, the work habits kind of bring that out. Discipline; definitely in games. Practice, sometimes it's hard. Sometimes you're sore, tired, beat-up, or recovering from a minor injury. Sometimes practice is boring and it's hard to get up for it. But, you know, you still have to do the things that you know have to be done. Get ready to play on Sunday. And once you've played a few years and you know what you got to do to prepare to play well, as long as you do that, you'll be in good shape. And then the running and everything else goes in with that.

In attributing success, the *unsuccessful players* placed a greater emphasis on their *physical ability* (4/5) than did the veterans (2/6).

In general, it appears that the *unsuccessful group* experienced the transition into professional football as *more difficult* than did the veterans. This seems to be related to the fact that the veterans were somewhat better able to use support from their team-mates to facilitate their transition (5/6) than were the unsuccessful athletes (3/5). The following quotation is taken from the veteran subsample:

(Interview 4) Well, like I said, I had guys that helped me prepare -- guys that were already in the league. Once I got into the league, if I ever needed advice, I could always ask my agent for help, but that wasn't really necessary too often. If I had any questions, I would usually talk to the older guys on the team because it was the same thing. You could see that they were going through things that you were going through. So they could help you through the transition. So if you asked them what was going on, they would tell you because they have been doing it for a few years. Yeah, because you were always around guys that are older than you who have been through what you haven't been through yet. So, if you just talk to them, you can usually know what to expect.

#### Authenticity and Utility of Findings Related to Attributions for Success

Authenticity of what appears in the above section of results was confirmed by two veterans. For example, one athlete wrote:

*"Being able to use every resource at your disposal is crucial to experiencing success.*

*Struggling players emphasize physical ability; successful ones stress the importance of a mental approach. The big difference between the two groups boils down to discipline.*

*Physical ability is what you're born with and doesn't require any more work. But you can improve by studying the game and putting the time in (playbook, film, etc.)."*

As for the utility of these findings, when struggling athletes were asked to indicate the three most important lessons in these findings, they all agreed that the following

findings were useful to them: 1) If you have a question, ask an older player on the team; 2) good mental attitude and approach to the game plays a prominent role in success in professional football; and, 3) success comes from good mental attitude and effort.

### Additional Themes

The careful reading and re-reading of the transcripts for the purpose of coding the findings into the above categories revealed some concerns which were excluded by the coding criteria. It is consistent with the qualitative research tradition to acknowledge their presence in the study findings.

One of these minor themes mentioned in passing by some athletes (7/21) was a concern for unfairness or politics in team selection and in decisions as to who would be playing or not playing. For example,

(Interview 3) Love the fact that I made it despite the health problems that I've had. I'm proud of that. I won't go back to "I wish I could play" [laugh]. But I'm not ashamed of the fact that I haven't played. There's only so many spots and nobody's gotten hurt two years running. I mean, there haven't been opportunities. Not like I had a chance and didn't take it. I haven't even had a chance. Part of that has to do with politics and money. Paying the five guys up front a million dollars each, you're not going to bench one of them to play the minimum wage guy because then the general manager, who's above the head coach, or the owner is going to say, "Why are we paying him a million dollars and you're not playing him? I don't care if he's good or not, put him on the field.". And that's where the head coach doesn't have as much control as in college. Because in college, you got a senior and he's okay, but you got a freshman who's outstanding. Freshman's going to get the job because he's going to win; and, that's what counts. And winning still counts in the pros but money counts more, I think.

Another minor concern expressed in passing by the participants (9/21) was the difficulties associated with not knowing what to expect when entering the new professional environment. For example,

(Interview 6) Living in a new city was kind of tough, you know, flying a thousand miles from my home town, not knowing a soul, and being thrown into a professional football

team *with not a clue what to expect*, that was kind of tough. But just like college, you quickly meet lots of new friends.

Many athletes (8/21) also reported increasing their mental toughness during the transition from amateur to professional football. For example,

(Interview 19) I think the only thing I changed was understanding that I would be going from college -- from kind of being the premiere athlete -- to having to fight for my very existence as a football player in my first professional camp. My goals were a little different in that I wanted to learn as much as I can and make an impact. I didn't try and set myself up for the fall. When I was in college, I was an All-American and I won a lot of awards, but I knew that wasn't going to carry me through, or anything, in camp, especially as a professional. So, I kind of steeled myself to what was coming as far as being beat, knowing that these guys might be better than me now. *I think one of the things I really learnt was that you had to trust in your abilities because nobody's really going to be there to back you up. so I really set myself to be my own worst-enemy, my worst-judge and worst-critic. so that if anybody else tried to do it to me. they couldn't do it as bad. And so, I think the biggest thing is I prepared myself mentally for what was going on because I knew physically I could do the things. But, mentally is where I think the camp wears you down, is that it's six weeks of hellish nightmare, that so much is thrown at you, that it can take you out of your game -- you can forget that you are a good player, and you can forget what brought you there. I think that's one of the things I tried to prepare for, is more the mental aspect of it.*

#### Post-hoc Quantitative Analysis of Differences Between Veterans and Struggling Players

Given the rich detail and sheer scope of the preceding results, a recapitulation is provided in the first section of the discussion to represent the findings in a more parsimonious and, perhaps, useful format. This recapitulation shows that the major differences between veterans and struggling/unsuccessful players were in their readiness to utilize social networks, the extent to which playing football was either a mental or a physical undertaking, and the extent to which they felt mentally ready to compete at the professional level. An example of a self-interview item and typical answer, as well as a list of the items, which contributed to each major theme follows: First, use of social support network, "Who or what made your transition to professional football easier?".

Typical answer: "... but [the veterans] were very helpful, very friendly towards everybody. Everybody's working towards a common goal. So I think the biggest thing is having the guys relatively close to your age and coming in the class that you came in with, having good friendships there, makes that transition very easy." (Items: 1/1, 1/2b, 2/6b, 3/4, 3/5). Second, emphasis on mental aspects of football, for example "Knowing what you do now, what is the best advice you could give someone coming up in the system to help them make it?". Typical answer: "...I think I have a tendency to worry about things that I can't control, and when I stop worrying about those and just enjoy myself, I find I play much better and I have a much better time and don't worry about that crap..." (Items: 1/4, 1/5b, 2/1, 2/2, 2/3, 2/7a, 4/3, 4/1b, 4/4). Finally, third, mental readiness to play professional football, for example, "Before your first professional training camp, what did you expect professional football would be like?". Typical answer: "... we had a lot of professional players come out of [my college], and quite a few of them had come back. I knew I had an overall idea of the physical things I'd be expected to do, and the toughness of a football training camp, and just that it would be a lot quicker and a lot faster." (Items: 1/1, 3/2, 1/5e, 3/6, 4/4).

Each of these differences was confirmed through quantitative analysis involving a series of chi-square analyses. Table 4 shows significant between-group differences in the proportion of study participants whose interview responses endorsed these themes.

## CHAPTER 6

### Discussion

*"Quality is never an accident; it is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction and skillful execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives."*

-- Willa A. Foster

Evidence for the validity of the results will be presented before beginning the discussion of obtained results. There are several reasons for believing the research findings are valid. First, although the sample may appear small in contrast to modal studies in psychology, these study participants are special. They have a profound level of experience, and in some cases a high level of experience with the target of this research, the transition to professional football. Only 5% of college football players get a chance to try-out, and less than 2% successfully complete the transition. Second, each participant judged his interview transcript to be authentic. Third, the categorization of these data was done in a reliable manner. Fourth, the successful veteran prototype derived from these findings, and the highlights of between-group differences amenable to change were judged as authentic by veterans, and as providing a useful guide by those people who had struggled or were struggling through the transition.

Results of the study answer the three guiding research questions, namely: 1) How is the transition from amateur to professional football experienced by athletes?; 2a) What, in general, helps facilitate this transition for the athletes; 2b) What makes this transition problematic (or harder) for the athletes?; and, 3) What, if any, differences are there

between athletes, and their contexts, whose transitions were successful and athletes who struggled or were unsuccessful with the transition? In answering these questions, it is evident that there is some variability in reported experiences, and contexts, of the transition from amateur to professional football. However, many common themes among reported transition experiences were discovered.

In response to the first research question (i.e., How is the transition from amateur to professional football experienced by athletes?), it appears that the athletes felt good when they were drafted or invited to try-out for a professional football team. Becoming a professional football player had been personally important or very important to the athletes, who, for the most part, were intrinsically motivated to become professional football players (e.g., wanting to achieve a dream or loving football). Prior to beginning their professional football careers, most athletes in the study had positive performance expectations (e.g., expected demands and physical skills) for professional football. However, they did express an expectation that meetings and learning new plays (skills) would be more difficult than in college. As far as coach and teammate relationships, athletes express negative expectations, such as poor team chemistry, and a non-social business-type relationship in which professional coaches would make many performance demands on them. They also discuss many potential barriers to good teammate relationships, like competing for jobs. These athletes indicate that they did not foresee a long-lasting, nor a stable future in professional football. Finally, athletes report that their expectations for professional football, especially expectations relating to on-field football, were met. However, the biggest surprise to these athletes was the atmosphere in professional football (e.g., business environment, treated like a commodity). Athletes

indicated that not knowing what to expect when entering the new professional environment was a difficult aspect of the transition. Consequently, if we can describe what to expect during the transition, we may be able to facilitate adaptation to the new level of football.

In terms of preparation for professional football, athletes report lowering their goals (e.g., just wanting to make the team) from when they were in college. They acknowledge the requirement to work hard and make personal, social and mental changes in order to be successful as professionals. Changes include the following: adopting a new attitude towards football (e.g., business-like attitude), learning how much to train, being more open to the advice of experienced players, concentrating longer and harder, and practicing distraction control. Some athletes also mention in passing the need to increase their "mental toughness": i.e., not letting criticism affect them personally. Athletes acknowledge having to make other adjustments during their first professional football season, such as adjusting to a new structure for practices, meetings, and the season; and, generally, adjusting to the business environment (i.e., politics in team selection, more business-like relationship with coaches and often with teammates). These adjustments, as well as the overall higher quality of athletes in professional football and the athletes' reported decrease in personal status, required a more detailed approach to the game in which rookie athletes tried to learn from their own mistakes, as well as from the veteran players. Perceived challenges varied from player-to-player. For example, being on a new team was a challenge to approximately half the participants, and feelings of control in football were a constant challenge to about one third the athletes, and an occasional challenge to another third. The only aspect of professional football which was uniformly

experienced as challenging was the increased levels of stress. The high levels of stress were especially associated with outcome issues; i.e., making the team. Many athletes developed coping strategies to minimize stress, such as practicing distraction control, giving their all, and learning from their mistakes.

While the transition from amateur to professional was found to be stress-invoking, these football players feel they possessed the skills, abilities and attitude required to play at the professional level. In fact, most report feeling equal to other athletes in the professional league in their playing position, and state that they perceived their chances of making the professional team as good. These athletes seem able to self-evaluate and monitor their own performance by comparing themselves to their professional teammates to determine if they had the necessary skills and abilities to compete in the professional ranks. Physical aspects of the game, like speed, strength, athletic performance and physical conditioning, are predominantly reported as strengths during the transition. In contrast, the players' mental approach to football (e.g., learning about the game, minimizing mistakes, and learning to self-motivate and to work on your own) is the most common and important weakness reported by athletes. From the above, it is evident that the athletes' levels of self-efficacy and perceived competence were high, especially as related to the physical aspects of playing professional football. During the transition, athletes felt that they needed to work on and improve their mental approach to practicing and playing football. This is also reflected in accounts of strategies to impress the professional coaches during the transition, where physical strategies to practicing and playing football (e.g., improving technique, playing hard and hustling, not getting beat, and making big plays) were most frequently endorsed. Mental strategies for impressing

the professional coaches, such as learning, listening to advice, and minimizing mistakes, were expressed to a lesser extent. Athletes attribute their success in football to the following three factors: mental attitude (e.g., mental toughness, determination, desire, and having a dream), effort (i.e., hard work), and/or physical ability.

Finally, while participants were confident they would be successful in another career after football, they had not formulated post-football plans. Athletes were not looking forward to the end of their professional careers because they still loved the game and would miss the competition, camaraderie, and financial benefits associated with the sport.

In answering the second research question (i.e., What, in general, helps facilitate this transition for the athletes?: and, what makes this transition harder for the athletes?), athletes indicate that social support within football (e.g., team-mates, college and professional coaches) helped facilitate the transition. Interestingly, along with system factors in professional football, such as politics in the selection process, social support within professional football also complicated and rendered the transition more difficult. The role of support from individuals outside football (e.g., family, friends) in facilitating the transition from amateur to professional was minimal. In sum, it appears that social support from those in the new, professional environment is the most important element in this transition since its presence helps to facilitate the transition, and its absence complicates the transition.

The third research question deals with changeable differences between athletes whose transitions were successful and athletes who struggled with the transition from amateur to professional football. Although the two groups are clearly separable in terms

of their professional careers, they seem quite similar in terms of pre-transition status. For example, they do not differ in any obvious manner both in how they were acquired by professional teams (draft choice or free agent), or their playing awards in college. In fact, in terms of the latter, both groups of athletes had very successful college careers as suggested by their numerous trophies and awards. This is in contrast to their subsequent status as professionals. For example, many of the veteran players won awards as professionals. Moreover, veterans had long, and on-going, careers (i.e., range of 5 to 14 years), while the struggling/unsuccessful group had short careers (i.e., one to two years) or did not make it past their first professional training camp. Athletes in this group, who did manage to play in a professional league for a short time, were repeatedly cut, released or traded by their teams. To recapitulate, while the two extreme groups are indistinguishable by their college football careers, large differences in transition outcome are apparent. Many differences in responding were noted between the two groups. Here, only those differences which may be amenable to change are discussed; for example, differences which are amenable to change include how athletes prepare to play their best, and focus on things within their control. Differences not amenable to change include personal history, such as boyhood dreams and passions. Three changeable differences are given below.

First, the most obvious and frequently encountered changeable difference between these two extreme groups may be found in the veterans' greater readiness to use the social support offered from within the professional football network. While the struggling/unsuccessful group discuss the importance of establishing friendships with other players, veterans emphasize the importance of social support, and especially

seeking advice from others in order to be maximally prepared. Veterans sought, and were substantially more open to social support within football than were the struggling/unsuccessful athletes. Veterans continually counted on the football social network, especially their professional teammates, for guidance, to help familiarize them with the system, and to teach them new skills. During all stages of the transition (i.e., from before the draft to after team "cuts"), they asked questions of the more experienced players and were open to their advice. While the veterans used their professional teammates as friends, mentors, and teachers, the struggling/unsuccessful athletes only referred to their professional teammates as friends.

Perhaps one source of motivation for the greater emphasis on social support from within football derived from the feeling among those in the veteran group that they were not, at that time, equal to other players in the league in their playing position. In fact, veterans stated not feeling equal to other players in the league in their playing position because they needed more experience and there were so many "outstanding" veterans from whom they could gain valuable knowledge. Thus, they acknowledged their deficits and the need to learn from experienced players, as well as professional coaches. The less successful subgroup, on the other hand, report feeling equal to other players in the league in their playing position and appear to be less likely to seek advice from, and to learn from, more experienced players. In sum, veterans were more ready to seek, and utilize, the support from professional teammates to facilitate the transition.

The second changeable difference between the two groups is their recognition of, and emphasis on, mental aspects versus physical aspects of professional football.

Responses from veteran athletes indicate that they were more likely to focus on mental

aspects of the game than were the struggling/unsuccessful athletes, who were more likely to discuss the physical aspects of football. For example, the veterans' strategy to gain control in practices and games was to work hard, be prepared, study, learn from their mistakes, and get better. Struggling/unsuccessful athletes, on the other hand, suggest stepping-up, standing-out, going for the big plays, and not getting beat. Likewise, when asked what advice they would give new professionals, veterans offer mental and attitudinal strategies, including being mentally prepared, practicing distraction control, being open to advice, doing your best, being confident and giving your all. In contrast, the strugglers' suggest trying to stand-out and step-up, not holding back and going for the "awesome" play. This is also seen in the suggested strategies to impress the coach where veterans once again discuss mental strategies, like learning their job, doing extra studying, not making mistakes, staying focused, and being versatile. Strugglers, on the other hand, continue to focus on physical strategies, like "being physical", hustling, making an outstanding play, and trying to stand-out in order to get noticed. Other differences related to the mental/physical dichotomy are seen throughout the transcripts. For example, veterans report that their mental approach to football (e.g., making minimal mistakes, learning from mistakes, not giving up, and giving their all) was good during the transition, while the struggling/unsuccessful athletes emphasize that their physical ability and conditioning (i.e., athletic performance, speed, physical play, physical shape and strength) were good, but that their mental approach to football needed work (i.e., learning new position, recognition of plays, and overall mental performance). Finally, struggling/unsuccessful athletes report professional football to be less physical and more mental than college football, while veterans do not report this difference. It is possible

that the veterans had already adopted a more mental approach to football during their college careers and, consequently, were more prepared for the mental aspects of professional football than were the struggling/unsuccessful athletes.

Differences between veteran and struggling/unsuccessful athletes' emphasis on the mental aspects of football are also manifested in terms of performance intention and attentional focus. Overall, veterans seem to display a more adaptive attentional focus. Throughout the transition from amateur to professional football, veterans report being more task-focused than the struggling/unsuccessful athletes who are more readily distracted by extraneous factors such as stress, team selection, and transition outcome. In addition, veterans focus on doing "the little things" right, improving their technique, knowing their plays, paying attention to smaller details, and eliminating mistakes. Thus, veterans adopted a more detailed approach to football in which they became "students of the game". In direct contrast, the struggling/unsuccessful athletes focused on overall outcome. Their intention was to go for the big play, never get beat, stand-out and get noticed, rather than concentrating on doing each element of their job to technical perfection, and letting the end result (i.e., big awesome play) come from the successful execution of all the "little things".

The third changeable between-group difference lies in the degree of readiness for the transition expressed by both groups. For example, veterans are more likely than those in the struggling/unsuccessful group to report a variety of different general expectations, namely related to performance, outcome, and atmosphere issues; to report potential barriers to friendships in professional leagues; to report potential barriers to a long-lasting professional football career; and, to report that their stress during the transition emanated

from multiple concerns, such as performing well, and making the team. Furthermore, veterans were less likely to be surprised by the business-like, almost 'cut-throat' atmosphere in professional football. These differences in mental readiness may be attributable to the finding that veterans asked more questions and talked to more experts. Thus, they would be exposed to different perspectives, would have a better understanding of professional leagues and the process of becoming a professional football player, and would have formed reality-based expectations.

These three major qualitative differences between successful veteran and struggling/unsuccessful athletes were confirmed through chi-square analysis. More specifically, the number of times athletes discussed social support, mental approaches to practicing and playing football, and mental readiness for football were related to group membership. Thus, these differences were generated qualitatively and confirmed through quantitative analysis. In sum, it appears that veteran athletes utilized the social support network within football more readily; emphasized the mental aspects of practicing and playing football more often; and were more mentally ready for the transition into the professional level than their less successful counterparts.

Examination of the above three changeable differences between veteran and struggling/unsuccessful players suggests a superordinate structure in which all differences can be viewed in terms of one key element, namely, the veterans' greater concern for being prepared. Overall, veterans appear to display more interest in, and actions taken toward being fully prepared for the transition; as well as, interest in, and actions taken toward being fully prepared to do the best possible job in practices and games. Veterans' use of social support within football, their greater emphasis on mental aspects of

professional football, and use of more adaptive attentional focus, may be viewed in the service of being fully prepared and ready to do their best.

Although the obtained results are encouraging, potential caveats to this study must be addressed. The first is the seemingly low response rate of 40%. While this response rate suggests caution in interpreting the findings from this study, it should be noted that the rate is equivalent to, and in some cases higher than, the response rates obtained in other sport transition studies (e.g., Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985). It must be recognized that these are high profile individuals who have many demands placed upon them. Furthermore, they live throughout the United States and Canada; they often play in cities other than their permanent address; they are often being traded from one team to another; and many have added demands placed on them by sponsors. So, from that perspective, the obtained response rate of 40% seems about as high as can be expected. In fact, the veterans who participated in my study are among the very best professional football players in the world, and represent over 50 years of combined experience in professional football, 11 all-star awards, and 6 Championship titles. Thus, I have managed to tap a very elite and typically inaccessible sample.

The second potential caveat lies in the use of the self-interviewing procedure. In this procedure, athletes are sent a carefully designed interview schedule from which they are asked to interview themselves. The potential downfall to this method is the lack of personal contact between interviewer and interviewee which may limit the building of a trustworthy, empathic relationship in which the interviewee feels safe to discuss his experiences, and the interviewer is able to guide and probe the respondent in order to gain a complete understanding of the phenomena being discussed. In the present research,

however, face-to-face interviews were not feasible due to financial constraints. It was not possible for the principal investigator to travel throughout North America (i.e., participants lived in cities and played on teams as far away as Vancouver, Seattle, Houston, and Dallas) in order to conduct the interviews in person. However, if the participants are well oriented through a detailed contact letter and explicit instructions, and if the scope, wording and structure of the questions and the self-interview schedule have been proven adequate based on pilot work, then perhaps the participants are going to be able to completely and freely discuss their experiences, emphasizing what they feel is important and minimizing irrelevant questions, without researcher bias. The self-interview can be seen as providing a greater sense of anonymity, and less chance of reactivity (i.e., negative reaction to the interviewer which may bias responding) than the traditional interview. In support, athletes in this study discussed many highly sensitive topics, such as drug abuse, marital problems, and casual dating, which may not have been easy to disclose in face-to-face contact. Moreover, more thoughtful responding may result from the self-interview process since there are no time constraints and the respondents are free to take breaks, reflect on questions, and generally conduct the interview in a slow and thoughtful manner. In fact, study of the interview transcripts reveals that many of the athletes treated the self-interview process like a conversation. For example, athlete's repeatedly used my (the researcher's) name in their self-interviews, and they used the pronoun "we" when directing me back to earlier topics (e.g. "we talked about that earlier").

The third potential caveat is the use of retrospective accounts of transition experiences in which time and interim experiences may alter recollection of events. The

feelings that one expresses in the short term often are not the feelings that will be expressed subsequently. So, if we want total understanding of this phenomenon, when do we study it? In answering this questions, alternative designs may be postulated. First, a study with several immediate follow-up(s) over time may be developed so that as we keep revisiting the athletes, we get different perspectives and can come up with a more complete understanding of their experiences. However, the benefits of such a design can be minimized on pragmatic grounds since there is little chance that respondents would cooperate. Consequently, the mortality rate over time would likely be quite high. A second alternative to the present research design is to follow athletes right through the transition from amateur to professional by selecting several athletes and studying their transition in situ. While this design perhaps represents the ideal, it is not practical, nor feasible, given the high pressure business environment in which the transition is taking place. The professional football environment involves all the pressures and paranoia of big business, and the likelihood of anyone being granted permission from professional coaches, team owners, the professional football league, and the athletes themselves, is remote. For example, through my contact with one athlete, I was warned that one player in the study was approached by the Canadian Broadcast Corporation (CBC) to do a documentary on his first experiences in a professional training camp; however, team authorities outright denied the crew access to the player during their camp. The team authorities may be looking out for their own interests since the continual presence of outsiders introduces the possibility that other teams will have access to their "plays" and strategies for the upcoming season. For the athlete, the added distraction may prove too much, and may mean the difference between making the team and being sent home.

The final, and related, caveat lies in the fact that athletes in the study were removed from the transition, itself, by varying degrees. For example, interviews were conducted with athletes who were anywhere from three months to fourteen years removed from their first professional training camp. A large discrepancy in time since the transition also exists between veterans (i.e., range of 5 to 14 years) and struggling/unsuccessful athletes (i.e., range 1 to 3 years). However, this difference was inevitable since time as a professional was the primary criterion for inclusion in the study as a professional veteran. Moreover, struggling/unsuccessful athletes are difficult to find since they are less likely to discuss their experiences and let others know of their failed attempts. Furthermore, because of the professional socialization process in which failures are ostracized or forgotten (Hatfield & Sullivan, 1987), successful professionals have often lost touch and are no longer in contact with these individuals. Consequently, while it was difficult to get in contact with newly unsuccessful transitioners, it would have been nearly impossible to find unsuccessful athletes who underwent the transition during the same (or comparable) time frames as the veterans. Taking the sample as a whole, having athletes who were removed from the transition to varying degrees does not weaken the study since commonalities in responses were reported when describing how the transition from amateur to professional was experienced by football players.

With these potential caveats in mind, results can be related to findings in the literature. However, given the paucity of research on transitions into professional sport, the current findings must be considered in light of other literature on transitions, particularly career transitions in the general work place, transitions to life and work out of

elite sport, the general sport psychology literature, and finally, transitions into college or professional sport.

Findings in the career transition literature can be related, to some extent, to the problem of transition into professional football for two main reasons. First, it is evident that for all types of career transitions there are individual differences in a person's ability to move through the transition. Some individual's adjust with little difficulty, while others never successfully make a career transition (Heppner, Multon & Johnston, 1994). Second, like transitions into professional sport, job transitions encompass a period of discontinuity and flux where individuals must make many cognitive (adjusting to a new setting and demands), emotional (coping with a new social position) and behavioural (learning new tasks and routines) adjustments in order to achieve a new stability or synchronization. Specifically, career transitions involve a reorientation of goals, attitudes, identity, behavioural routines, informal networks, etc. (Ashforth & Saks, 1995; van der Velde, Feij, & Taris, 1995). These changes are also evident in the athletes reports on their experiences from amateur to professional football. For example, athletes reported having to lower their goals from when they were in college, having to adopt a more business-like attitude towards the game of football, having to adjust to a lower personal status on the professional team, having to reorganize their priorities, and having to make new friends and obtain information from veteran players, during their transition.

Research findings that the transition into professional sport was experienced as easy or somewhat easy by most participants is supported by the career transition literature. Throughout much of the literature one factor has consistently been found to facilitate and expedite adaptation to career transition; namely, the similarity of the old

environment and the new environment (Schlossberg, 1981; see also Ashford & Taylor, 1990; Nicholson, 1987). While the professional football environment is different from the old college environment in that there is more emphasis on money and business, there are no scholastic obligations, and there are higher quality athletes, many similarities between the two football environments exist (e.g., all the physical, mental, and social factors involved in playing football). Findings also unequivocally concede that the individual who has successfully undergone a transition in the past will likely be successful at adapting to another similar transition (Brett, 1984; Schlossberg, 1981). That is not to say, however, that transitions get easier with experience. Rather, it implies that the individual is "made of the right stuff" to effectively handle a transition of this nature. In the present research, athletes had successfully undergone the transition from high school to college. This gave them experience with adapting to a new system of football, new teammates, new coaches, and better quality players. A final possible reason why many athletes experienced this transition as relatively easy is also found in the literature. Transitions that are expected are typically less stress provoking presumably because individuals can prepare for the event (Schlossberg, 1981; Brown & Heath, 1984). In the current study, the transition into professional sport was often anticipated by athletes, especially successful veterans. Bridges (1991) suggests that eagerly and enthusiastically anticipating an event, and assessing the potential gains and losses of the event, are strategies which are helpful for individuals undergoing all transitions. The general finding in the current study that unsuccessful athletes were less prepared for the transition than the successful veterans was supported by Brown and Heath (1984) who claim that even highly predictable and expected events can be mismanaged and experienced as

stressful if the individual does not take advantage of the opportunity to prepare, or if the individual does not utilize appropriate preparation strategies.

Support for the use of information-seeking within the new environment (i.e., professional football) as an effective preparation strategy is also found in the career transition literature. For example, Moos and Tsu (1976), citing Caplan (1964) state that actively exploring and searching for information, as well as actively invoking help from others are effective coping behaviours that cut across different types of transitions. Other theorists (e.g., Nicholson, 1987; Wanous, 1980) also discuss anticipatory socialization wherein expectations are developed and revised prior to the actual transition. Nicholson (1987) adds that, in preparing for the transition, individuals should seek (and organizations should provide) a realistic preview of the new job, attempt to make advance contacts within the organization, and submit themselves to a critical self-appraisal. The link between social support, sense of control, and stress management is also evident in this body of research. For example, the primary stressor in career transition is apprehension or doubt about one's ability to meet the demands of the new job. Generally, all transitions are somewhat stress-invoking. Since stress interferes with an individual's ability to read the environment accurately and to take action, steps must be taken to alleviate anxiety if adaptation is to be successful (Ashford & Taylor, 1990). Some strategies are adaptive and facilitate transition (e.g., forming "mentor" relationships with experienced employees) while others are maladaptive and even destructive (e.g., withdrawal or avoidance). In sum, the possession of effective strategies to manage self and environment give transitioners a sense of control enabling them to explore their new environment. Therefore, the more transitioners know about their future working

conditions before they enter it, the better prepared transitioners are, the more quickly and effectively they will be able to cope with and adapt to their new tasks, colleagues and organizations. Successful veteran players sought out information from their social network within football. They asked advice of their more experienced colleagues, and generally tried to learn as much about playing professional football as possible. It appears that this information-seeking strategy was useful in helping them to prepare for the transition. Veterans held more realistic expectations than did the struggling/unsuccessful athletes. In addition, they expressed having a wider range of expectations than did their less successful counterparts.

The literature on career transitions suggest that information-seeking strategies, and support-seeking strategies are also used by individuals undergoing career transitions. Even under optimal circumstances, career transitions invariably involve an element of uncertainty. To help cope with the anxiety producing uncertainty, many individuals subjected to career transitions enlist the help, advice and support of family, friends, colleagues and counselors or other professionals. Colleagues, peers, old bosses, new bosses, can all serve as mentors to the neophyte, offering technical and task-related advice, but also emotional support (van der Velde & Feij, 1995). Recent studies have shown that the participation and support of work colleagues produce feelings of security and nurturance (Nicholson & West, 1988), and positively influence job satisfaction (van der Velde & Feij, 1995). Not enough assistance, on the other hand, creates anxiety and loneliness in the transitioner who must face the uncertainty of the new situation without guidance. Generally, transitioners need relationships with insiders who will guide the individual's reality testing.

The behavioural attributes shown in the current study to be needed for successful adaptation to the sport transition (e.g., goal-setting, information-seeking, wanting to learn) have also been examined and supported in relation to adaptation to career transition: Most notably were behaviours related to self-competence such as, an active coping style, high initiative, substantial planning, realistic goal setting and effort in attempts to attain the goals, and an ability to learn from both success and failure (Schlossberg, 1981). Acquiring appropriate responses to the new environmental demands also requires self-monitoring, self-evaluation and self-reinforcing strategies (Magnusson & Redekopp, 1992). Finally, successful transitioners are invariably flexible and willing to alter their behaviours as new and varied demands arise (Ashford & Taylor, 1990; Schlossberg, 1981).

Although researchers have begun to look at the internal psychological resources of the career transitioner, this work has been very brief and scattered. However, various personality variables and personal characteristics have been examined in an attempt to explain individual differences in adaptation to career transition. Individuals must maintain adequate internal conditions and health in order to succeed. Among the internal conditions linked to adaptation are a moderately favorable self-attitude and self-esteem (Ashford & Taylor, 1990; Schlossberg, 1981); internal locus of control and autonomy in decision making (Heppner, Multon & Johnston, 1994; Schlossberg, 1981); confidence and motivation (Bruce & Scott, 1994; Heppner, Multon & Johnston, 1994); optimism or hope (Schlossberg, 1981); and hardiness or resiliency (Rush, Schoel, & Barnard, 1995). All these personality variables were also revealed in the current study to be important in the transition into professional sport.

While the literature on career transitions is well developed, transitions within sport have not been thoroughly examined. Moreover, when researchers have examined transitions within sport, they have focused primarily on retirement from elite sport. Generally, this body of research supports the findings in the current study that social support (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990; Crook & Robertson, 1991; Baillie & Danish, 1992; Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993), preparation for the transition through anticipatory socialization (Crook & Robertson, 1991) and pre-transition planning (Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993), good personal management skills (Crook & Robertson, 1991), and a sense of perceived control over transition outcomes (Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993), lead to more successful adaptation to transition. In addition, this body of literature also supports the minor finding that politics and association problems render sport transitions more difficult (Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Finally, Parker (1994), in her study of the transition experiences of former major college football players who did not become professional players, found that these athletes, like the struggling/unsuccessful subgroup in the present study, believed that they had the skills and abilities to make it, but that the right circumstance did not present itself.

The general sport psychology literature also provide support for many of the findings in the current study, particularly the findings related to the stronger emphasis on the mental aspect of football displayed by the successful veterans. Elite sport has been identified as requiring more mental skills than physical skills (Nelson, 1987); and, mental readiness has been identified as an important factor in athlete's performance (Orlick & Partington, 1988). Consistent with the current findings, Nelson (1987) identified "commit yourself to be a learner" and "acquire performance-enhancing attitudes, beliefs, and emotions" (p. 257) as important mental skills in sport. Furthermore, McGaffrey and

Orlick (1989) identified focus control, distraction control, and mental preparation for quality practices as important mental factors related to excellence among top professional golfers. These skills are also evident in athletes who successfully managed the transition into professional football in the present study.

Finally, while I was unable to identify a study which examined the transition experiences of football players from amateur to professional leagues, some researchers have studied related topics, such as survival in professional baseball (Smith & Christensen, 1995) and professional hockey (Orlick, 1990), and transition into collegiate football (Brislin, 1981).

Results from the present study are generally in line with findings from these studies. First, Smith and Christensen (1995) revealed that an important psychological skill for good performance and survival in professional baseball was an ability to take advantage of the learning opportunities encountered leading up to (and during) the transition to professional baseball. Other important psychological skills included freedom from worry about extraneous factors, confidence, goal setting, mental preparation for practices and games, and coachability (openness to coaches' advice). Most of these factors were also revealed by the present study to be important factors in successful transition to professional football. In a similar study with professional hockey players, lack of commitment and inability to cope with the stress of a professional career were determined to be important factors in why athletes do not make the transition into professional hockey (Orlick, 1990). These factors were not found to be particularly important in the current study of successful transitions into professional football. However, when professional hockey coaches and scouts were asked what factors are

required for excellence in professional hockey, they listed hard work, ability to correct mistakes, never giving up, openness to advice, asking questions, staying motivated, and controlling a bad temper (Orlick, 1990). Finally, in a qualitative examination of the socialization process involved in becoming a college football player, Brislin (1981) found that team-mates provided important informal instruction on the language and skills required in college football, as well as on the accepted behaviour both on and off the field. In sum, it is evident that the findings related to use of the social network provided by teammates, and mental skills like learning and information-seeking are well supported by this literature.

Suggestions for future research include the following: Expanding the sample to include transitions into other professional sports, and taking into account race and gender. Moreover, using the information generated from the current study, additional empirical studies on the transition into professional football can be undertaken in order to predict successful adaptation into professional sport.

Considerable useful knowledge was gained from this study. First, understanding of the transition experiences of athletes from amateur to professional levels was obtained. Second, elements which hindered, as well as elements which facilitated successful adaptation were identified. Third, key differences between successful and unsuccessful transitioners were identified. Finally, the importance of social support, information-seeking, and mental and physical preparation for sport transitions was established.

The practical implications of this research are numerous. For example, it is apparent that the organization (professional football team) may implement certain strategies to help mold the transitioner to fit the organization's standard and hence,

facilitate transition. All organizations possess long-standing rules and standards of behaviour which facilitate daily functioning, minimize the effect of routine hassles, and make sense of problems. Individuals need information on the standards required by the organization and they need feedback to assess how well they are meeting the designated standards (Ashford & Taylor, 1990; Brett, 1984; Nicholson, 1987). In the professional football context, this could be accomplished by encouraging mentor relationships between veteran and rookie players.

Second, on the individual level, practical guidelines for helping football players in transition from amateur to professional status were developed based on research findings, and are given below. To be useful to busy coaches and athletes, the format of these guidelines would have to be changed; for example, the style should be neither scholarly, nor technical. These guidelines would be consistent with the style used previously with helping athletes in another transition, retirement from elite sport competition (i.e., Werthner & Orlick, 1986). Specifically, the format of previous athlete guidelines utilized "bullet" form presentation, quotations, and jargon (e.g., words and expressions) in the athletes' vernacular. With these cautions in mind, the proposed athlete guidelines are given in this last section.

### Athlete Guidelines for the Transition into Professional Football

**As soon as you get a call to try-out for a professional team, do the following things:**

- i) Make a list of professional players, coaches, trainers that you know, or that you may be able to get in touch with, from whom you can get important information.
- 2) Do your best to get in touch with these people as soon as possible. Ask them questions about all aspects of professional football: schedules, training, money, agents, etc. Get as much information as you can so that you know what to expect when you arrive at camp.
- 3) Write down what they say in your training log. Note all information about mental and physical preparation to practice, to play, and to live.
- 4) If you are shy or don't like asking questions, practice being more open. This is a very important element in preparing for professional football.
- 5) Based on information obtained from all your contacts, re-evaluate your mental and physical training and preparation, and make any adjustments you feel may be beneficial. However, in general, you should keep doing the same physical preparation that you have been up to this point. Obviously, you are doing something right.
- 6) Work on improving and mastering your mental approach to practicing and playing football; for example, practice your imagery techniques, and practice controlling distractions by focusing on the task at hand.
- 7) Set short-term training goals (both mental and physical). And, set long-term goals, like making the team, then making a contribution on that team.

8) Learn self-management skills, like arranging your own training schedule, knowing how much to train, arranging your daily priorities, and accomplishing daily tasks. From now on you are solely responsible for your own preparation and training.

9) For evaluation camps (Combines), be well rested, and mentally and physically prepared to perform your best. Train specifically for each event (e.g., the 40 yard dash; the bench press, etc.). Use imagery to rehearse having coaches, scouts, officials, and other players watching. Do not get caught up in other aspects of the combines, like the prestige and hype surrounding star players, and the "dehumanizing" approach to the camp (e.g., feeling like you are just a piece of meat -- "cannon fodder"). You should begin preparing for the evaluation camp early (if possible before the end of the college season) because players have indicated not having enough time to prepare adequately. This could have an effect on whether or not you are drafted, and in what round.

**Things to do and be aware of when you show up for training camp:**

1) Know and understand that this is a business-like environment. Recognize that this is an entirely new structure, with new priorities (money first), and new policies. No one knows you, or cares about you. Nobody is going to coddle you, or guide you through training camp. Realize that unlike college, everybody at this level is at least as good as you, if not better.

2) Understand that everybody's job is on the line. This includes coaches, assistant coaches, veterans, other rookies, *and yourself*. It is a survival situation.

3) Realize that veterans may ignore you or ostracize you, especially if you are threatening their job, or their friend's job. Be aware of the other barriers to building friendships in professional football, including the following: unwritten rules about who

socializes with who; racial barriers; high turnover rates; and other commitments, especially to wife and children.

4) With this last point in mind, you should also realize that these veterans are just guys, and that some of them may take the time to talk to you and answer your questions if you ask in the right way, at the right times.

5) Understand that you are now responsible for yourself. It's up to you to get to meetings and practices on time, to learn the plays by doing extra studying at night, to ask questions if you don't understand something, to make sure you get in for repetitions, and to be fully ready to perform when called.

6) Understand that there are higher quality players in professional football than in college, but do not be intimidated by other players who may look bigger, stronger, and faster than you. They are in the same situation as yourself. These veterans are not "superhuman", they are just given a chance to try-out, like yourself. You belong there as much as they do.

7) Realize that professional training camps are longer than in college. There will be a new structure for practices, meetings, and the season.

8) Understand that there is a possibility that you could get released that really does not exist at the college level. But, try not to worry about cuts. Just focus on doing your best.

9) Be aware of the politics in professional sport. Players are often "kept in the dark". Owners and general managers have authority over the coaches, and can make decisions on team selection, and on who plays in games, for reasons other than merit. Since these things are out of your control, just concentrate on doing your best.

**During training, several things are needed:**

- 1) You need to be as sharp as you can. Spend as much time as you can learning your plays. Get lots of rest to be physically and mentally sharp for each practice.
- 2) Try to make a few good friends with rookies with whom you get along and can hang-out. Use these friendships as social support.
- 3) Continue the important preparation strategy of getting as much advice from veterans as you can. Be open to any advice you may get from coaches and other players. They know the system. Veterans are going to be able to give you valuable information that you are not going to be able to get from coaches. Don't be afraid to talk to them and ask them questions. If someone is not receptive, do not let that discourage you and do not take it personally (remember: business environment).
- 4) Watch what the veterans do, and try to pick up on whatever you can. Learn by example.
- 5) To be mentally prepared for practice, set aside time each evening to study plays and spend some quality time imagining yourself executing moves and plays. See yourself execute the plays. Feel and know how you do each move. Imagine sharp, intense technique. Set-up different scenarios for your imagery. Try to predict your opponents next move. Again, ask someone for help if you do not understand a play, or need work on technique.
- 6) Focus on doing "the little things" right. Improve your technique, know your plays, pay attention to smaller details, and eliminate mistakes. Do not focus on making the big play, or never getting beat. These happen only rarely, and will never get the coaches

attention. Hard work, and "consistency through lack of mental mistakes" will get the coach's attention.

7) Be versatile. If you are asked to change positions, or play on special teams, take advantage of these opportunities. Find out exactly what you need to do to master the new position, and do it.

8) Learn to be mentally tough. Do not let other players' negative attitudes and comments affect your performance. Believe in yourself, but also determine whether there is merit in their criticisms, and make necessary adjustments. During meetings, your mistakes may be pointed out. Do not worry about what other players are thinking (the veterans probably are not listening anyway). Accept the criticism and be open to advice on how to correct the mistake. Work on eliminating the mistake. Visualization techniques will help if you do mental practice everyday.

9) Monitor and evaluate your own performance. Do not rely solely on feedback from coaches or other players to know that you are doing well (or poorly). Coaches may be too busy to notice everything you do. Judge yourself based on your performance in scrimmages, and drills.

10) Never be completely satisfied with your playing. There is always something to work on and improve.

11) Remember that training camp is stressful for everyone. Use strategies to control stress, like knowing your job, learning from mistakes, and focusing on football in practices and meetings. Also, you should have some time away from football. These strategies will help decrease your feelings of stress and also increase your sense of control. The better you get, the more in control you are of what you are doing.

12) Stay positive: At the end of the day, write in your log one or two good things that you did in practice, or that happened to you on or off the field.

13) Do not play the numbers game. Do not count yourself out before you get started. By focusing on things out of your control, you may be counting yourself out of important opportunities that need to be taking place if you are to be successful. Instead, try to focus on things that you can control, like learning your plays, improving your technique, eating well, and getting enough rest.

14) Deal with any family and/or girlfriend problems that may affect your concentration and performance. If a problem arises, set some time aside that night to resolve it.

15) Keep in touch with people back home. Do not suffer in silence. If you are lonely, phone somebody.

**After you make the team:**

1) Continue learning and improving.

2) Maintain your priorities. Stay within yourself. Your priority should be football, not the money, fame, and lifestyle that often goes along with being a professional athlete. Hard work, effort, and good mental attitude are what got you there. Hard work, effort and good attitude will keep you there. Keep your nose clean and work hard.

3) In your free time, get to know the new city. Lighten-up and pretend that you are a tourist.

4) Maintain other aspects of your life. Football should not be your entire life. It should be a priority, but not the only thing.

5) Next training camp, go in with the attitude that you have to prove yourself all over again.

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Table 1.

Description of 'Veteran' Subsamples

No.	Playing position	How acquired	Awards college	Awards professional	Status 1st year	Years professional
4	Offensive line (Centre)	Draft -- 3 <sup>rd</sup> round	First All-American Outland nominee	All-Madden; All-Pro (four times)	Back-up	7
12	Full Back	Draft -- 2 <sup>nd</sup> round	First All-East; honorable mention All-American	All-Madden; All-Pro (two times)	Back-up; starter	8
13*	Defensive line (Tackle)	Free-agent	None	All-Pro (two times)	Third string	14
14	Offensive line (Guard/Tackle)	Free-agent	First All-American; First All-Big Eight	All-World League	Practice squad; back-up	8
19*	Offensive line (Tackle)	Draft -- 2 <sup>nd</sup> round	First All-American; Outland Trophy	None	Practice squad	8
20	Offensive line (Centre)	Draft -- 6 <sup>th</sup> round	Freshman First All-American; First All-Conference	None	Practice squad	5

Note: \* non-white athletes

Table 2.

Description of 'Newly-Established' Subgroup

No.	Playing position	How acquired	Awards college	Awards professional	Status 1st year	Years professional
1	Offensive line (Guard/Tackle)	Free-agent	First All-Conference	None	Released; practice; back-up	2
2	Defensive line (Tackle)	Draft -- 2nd round	None	None	Back-up; starter	3
3	Offensive line	Draft-- 5th round	First All-Conference	None	Back-up	2
5	Linebacker	Draft-- 1st round	First All-Canadian; President's trophy nominee	CFL rookie-of-the-year	Starter	3
6	Offensive line (Guard/Tackle)	Free-agent	Unknown	None	Practice squad; back-up	1
9	Defensive line	Free-agent	First All-Canadian (three); Two J.P. Metras nominations	None	Back-up	2
15	Tight-end	Free-agent	First All-Conference	None	Practice squad	2
18	Free-safety	Draft -- 3 <sup>rd</sup> round	None	None	Back-up	1
21*	Quarterback	Free agent	League player of the year	None	Back-up	3
22	Linebacker	Free-agent	First All-American	None	Practice; back-up; starter	1

Note: \* Non-white athlete

Table 3.

Description of 'Struggling/Unsuccessful' Subgroup

No.	Playing position	How acquired	Awards college	Awards professional	Status 1st year	Years professional
8	Defensive line	Draft-- 4 <sup>th</sup> round	Second team All-Canadian	None	Practice squad	1
10	Wide Receiver	Free agent	First All-Canadian	None	Released	Training camp
11	Offensive line (Guard)	Draft-- 3 <sup>rd</sup> round	NAIA All- Conference (three times)	None	Practice squad	2
16	Offensive line (Guard)	Free agent	None	None	Back-up	2
17	Defensive Back	Draft-- 6 <sup>th</sup> round	First All-Canadian Second All- Canadian	None	Released	Training camp

Table 4.

Between-Group Differences in Proportion of Participants Who Endorsed Major Themes

Theme	Veteran Athletes	Unsuccessful/Struggling Athletes
Use of Social Network <sup>a</sup>	69% (18/26)	24% (6/25)
Emphasis on the Mental Side <sup>b</sup>	66% (47/71)	23% (15/65)
Being Mentally Ready <sup>c</sup>	64% (16/25)	20% (5/25)

<sup>a</sup>  $\chi^2 (1, N = 51) = 10.83, p < .01^{**}$

<sup>b</sup>  $\chi^2 (1, N = 136) = 9.93, p < .01^{**}$

<sup>c</sup>  $\chi^2 (1, N = 50) = 25.83, p < .001^{***}$

## Appendix A

### Professional Athlete Self-Interview Schedule

## Introduction and Informed Consent

I'm a sport psychology student working on my Master's thesis. After I graduate, I'd like to work with athletes. Maybe one thing I can help them with is adjusting to things in their sport life like overcoming injuries, big career changes like moving from amateur to professional sport or getting traded, and finally, retirement. For my thesis, I'd like to find-out what its like for players like you to move up from college to professional football. I've talked to four professional football players (NFL and CFL) who have gone through this change and they've helped me to know some of the most important questions to ask.

Since most people like talking better than writing, I've asked you some questions on the following pages, and I'd like you to answer each one by talking to me on the tape. Don't be afraid to tell it like it is because I'll be the only one listening. After I'm finished, I'll erase your tape and use your answers in a way that nobody will know who said what. If you don't want to answer a question, you don't have to, and you can quit the "interview" at any point.

If you want to talk a bit more about this change in your career or if you have any questions just contact either me, Debbie Stewart, at (phone) 613-738-0245; or my advisor, John Partington (fax) 613-788-3667.

I would like to inform you of our findings through an executive summary. If you would like a copy please leave a forwarding address on the back of this sheet. Also, once I'm done, I hope to publish my findings so that athletes like yourself, coaches and students can have access to them. Please check below whether you mind if I include some of your own words in my article. Any quotes I use will be completely anonymous so that nobody can tell who said what: Yes ☐ I give you permission; or, No ☐ I do not give you permission to quote our interview .

Finally, if you have any ethical problems with this study, contact Lise Paquet (Chair, Department of Psychology Ethics Committee, 613-520-2600 ext. 2692) or Bill Jones (Chair Department of Psychology, Carleton University, Canada, 613-520-2600 ext. 2648).

Thank-you,

Debbie Stewart

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Interview Questions

Before beginning, please look over the questions so that you have an idea of where the interview is going. When answering the questions feel free to say everything that comes to mind, even if you think it may be off-topic. You are the expert on this subject and everything you have to say is important. Please try to be as specific as you can and explain everything to me. Also, because I am interested in the transition to professional football, just talk about your first professional season when you are answering the questions (unless specified or you feel it is important).

### Section 1

Think back to just before your first professional camp (i.e., off-season before first pro camp):

1. Overall, what did you expect professional football would be like?
2. What were your expectations about:
  - a) professional coaches and their demands on/off the field?
  - b) the attitude of teammates, including team-work and team chemistry?
  - c) meetings and learning new plays?
  - d) fans and the media?
3. Has pro football lived up to these expectations (from questions 1 and 2)? Please explain why or why not. What surprised you or caught you off guard?
4. What did you change about the way you prepared for the opportunity to play professional football from when you were in college? For example, **leading up to your first professional camp**, did you set different goals? If so, what were they and how were they different?; Did you train differently? If so, what did you do differently?
5. **In your rookie season**, how did you prepare for, **and** what was your attitude towards:
  - a) evaluation camps (combines)?
  - b) training camps?
  - c) pre-season games?
  - d) cuts?
  - e) regular season practices and meetings?
  - f) regular season games?

## **Section 2**

**Now, I'd like you to tell me about any differences between college and professional football.**

**1. In order to survive and make it, what were the key things you had to change? (e.g., the way you practiced, prepared for games, and played in games; how you handled yourself with coaches and with teammates, etc.)**

**- Knowing what you do now, what is the best advice you could give to someone coming up in the system like you did, to help him survive and make it?**

**2. During your transition to pro football, what was crucial to change in your "mental game" in order to stay alive and make the team? Please try to be specific about your mental approach to practice and games.**

**3. What was the biggest difference for you between college football and pro football?**

**4. What differences did you notice between your college team and your first professional team, in terms of:**

**a) practices?**

**b) games?**

**c) your job, responsibility, and status on the team?**

**d) your relationship with teammates?**

**5. What things in your everyday life changed once you became a pro football player?**

**6. How did you handle living in a new city?  
How did you handle being on a new team?**

**7. During your transition to pro football did you feel in control of getting your job done in practices and games? If not, what did you do to take charge and get the job done?**

**- What about your feelings of control in your life outside football? If you felt out of control, like things were happening and you couldn't stop them, what were they and what did you do?**

### **Section 3**

**You've just told me about differences between college and professional football. Now, I'd like to know how some of these differences made you feel.**

**1. How did you feel when you first officially found out that you had a chance of becoming a pro? What was running through your head and how did you feel when you were drafted or got invited to try-out for a pro team?**

Please try to be as elaborate as possible.

**2. When you were first becoming a professional athlete, how did you view your pro career? As stable and secure, or temporary, or what?**

**3. Did this change into the pros come at a good time in your life?**

Or, do you think another time may have been better?

(For example, were you healthy and in shape? Was everything OK with your family?). If you think that another time might have been better, please explain why and tell me how it affected your move to pro football?

**4. Was your adjustment to professional sport easy or did it take a lot of getting use to?**

What took getting use to? (e.g., demands, money, travel, media/fan attention, moving to another city, changing your position on the team, or anything else that is important to you).

**5a. Who or what made your transition to professional football easier?**

**5b. Who or what made your transition to professional football harder?**

**6. Overall, was moving up to professional football stressful for you? How and why?**

How did this stress affect you and your performance?

What did you do to deal with this stress?

**7. How do you now feel about your experiences as a professional football player?**

Has it been a good or bad experience? How so?

## **Section 4**

**In this final section, I'd like to know about you as a person and an athlete.**

1. In your first training camp or season, did **you feel** you had the skills, abilities, and attitude to do the new job and to play at this level? Why? (What made you feel this way?)

- At that time, did **you know** what you had to do in order to impress the coaches and be successful? Please tell me what you thought you had to do in order to be successful as a professional football player.

- At that time, what did you think your chances were of making the team?

2. What goals did you set for yourself during training camp and during the season? Please try to be as specific as you can. Did you reach these goals?

3. In your first training camp and season, what was good about your playing? What wasn't so good and needed work?

- Did you feel equal to other players in the league in your position? Please explain to me why or why not.

4. What do you think helped you the most in becoming a pro football player?  
*What got you as far as you got?*

5. As a rookie going into training camp, did you have a back-up plan? For example, had you considered other career possibilities? Why or why not?

6. Before you actually made it, how important was becoming a professional football player to you?

Why did you want to be a professional football player?

- When did it first become important to you? For example, you played when you were a kid, liked it and it was important but, when did you first start working towards the goal of being a professional football player?

- Now, at this point in your life, how important is being a professional football player to you and to who you are? Please try to explain your answer as best you can.

7. Have you ever not played football for a long period (maybe because of a serious injury or an illness, etc.)? If yes, how did you feel about yourself during this time?

8. Why do you play professional football?

- What is your favorite part about being a professional football player?
- What is the worst (your least favorite) part about being a professional football player?

9. How have you changed since becoming a professional football player?

10. Have you made any plans for that day when you can no longer play, or choose not to play, professional football? Explain why or why not.

- Are you looking forward to *'hanging it up'*?

11. Do you think you would have made it to the top in another field? Please explain to me why or why not.

**Is there anything else you feel is important to explain about your experiences in becoming a professional athlete?** Do you think you have explained your experiences as completely as possible? *If you feel you have more to say, talk about whatever is important to your experiences in becoming a professional football player.*

## **Background Information**

***Thank-you!*** Now, the "interview" is over. Just take a couple of minutes to check-off the information below.

1. At what age, did you first start playing football?
2. College/University team \_\_\_\_\_
3. First professional team \_\_\_\_\_
4. Years in pro football \_\_\_\_\_
5. League: NFL/ CFL/ WLAF/ other \_\_\_\_\_
6. Playing position \_\_\_\_\_
7. Were you ever a professional athlete in another football league? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_  
If yes, which league? \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Were you drafted (what round?), or did you sign your first pro contract as a free-agent?
9. Did the team from the first pro training camp you were invited to keep you?  
No \_\_\_ Yes: practice squad \_\_\_\_\_ or active squad \_\_\_\_\_?
10. If you were activated as a rookie, did you play 3rd string \_\_\_; back-up \_\_\_; starter \_\_\_; other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_?
11. Awards in college? \_\_\_\_\_.
12. Awards as a pro? \_\_\_\_\_.
13. Are you still playing pro football? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_
14. Age \_\_\_\_\_.
15. Education: \_\_\_\_\_.
16. Family Background: Yearly household income growing-up:  
     Secure   (\$70 000+)  
     Average (\$20 000 - \$69 999)  
     Poor     (below \$20 000)  
     Race: \_\_\_\_\_.

## Appendix B

### Professional Athlete Self-Interview Schedule for Analysis

## Professional Athlete Self-Interview Schedule for Analysis

### Section 1: Expectations

1/1. Think back to just before your first professional camp (i.e., off-season before first pro camp): Overall, what did you expect professional football would be like?

1/2. Think back to just before your first professional camp (i.e., off-season before first pro camp): What were your expectations about:

- a) CFL coaches and their demands on the field?
- b) the attitude of teammates, including team-work and team chemistry?
- c) meetings and learning new plays?
- d) fans and the media?

1/3. Has pro football lived up to these expectations (from questions 1/1 and 1/2)? Please explain why or why not. What surprised you or caught you off guard?

3/1. How did you feel when you first officially found out that you had a chance of becoming a pro? What was running through your head and how did you feel when you were drafted or got invited to try-out for a pro team? Please try to be as elaborate as possible.

3/2. When you were first becoming a professional athlete, how did you view your pro career? As stable and secure, or temporary, or what?

### Section 2: Preparation

1/4. What did you change about the way you prepared for the opportunity to play professional football from when you were in college? For example, **leading up to your first professional camp**, did you set different goals? If so, what were they and how were they different?; Did you train differently? If so, what did you do differently?

1/5. **In your rookie season**, how did you prepare for, **and** what was your attitude towards:

- a) evaluation camps (combines)?
- b) training camps?
- c) pre-season games?
- d) cuts?
- e) regular season practices and meetings?
- f) regular season games?

**2/1a.** Now, I'd like you to tell me about any differences between college and professional football. In order to survive and make it, what were the key things you had to change? (e.g., the way you practiced, prepared for games, and played in games; how you handled yourself with coaches and with teammates, etc.)

**2/1b** - Knowing what you do now, what is the best advice you could give to someone coming up in the system like you did, to help him survive and make it?

**2/2.** During your transition to pro football, what was crucial to change in your "mental game" in order to stay alive and make the team? Please try to be specific about your mental approach to practice and games.

### **Section 3: Differences between college and professional football**

**2/3.** What was the biggest difference for you between college football and pro football?

**2/4.** What differences did you notice between your college team and your first professional team, in terms of:

- a) practices?
- b) games?
- c) your job, responsibility, and status on the team?
- d) your relationship with teammates?

**2/5.** What things in your everyday life changed once you became a pro football player?

### **Section 4: Challenges and responses**

**2/6a.** How did you handle living in a new city?

**2/6b.** How did you handle being on a new team?

**2/7a.** During your transition to pro football did you feel in control of getting your job done in practices and games? If not, what did you do to take charge and get the job done?

**2/7b-** What about your feelings of control in your life outside football? If you felt out of control, like things were happening and you couldn't stop them, what were they and what did you do?

**3/3.** Did this change into the pros come at a good time in your life?  
Or, do you think another time may have been better?

(For example, were you healthy and in shape? Was everything OK with your family?). If you think that another time might have been better, please explain why and tell me how it affected your move to pro football?

**3/4.** Was your adjustment to professional sport easy or did it take a lot of getting use to? What took getting use to? (e.g., demands, money, travel, media/fan attention, moving to another city, changing your position on the team, or anything else that is important to you).

**3/6.** Overall, was moving up to professional football stressful for you? How and why? How did this stress affect you and your performance? What did you do to deal with this stress?

## **Section 5: Characteristics of the athlete**

### **Motivation and Desire:**

**4/8a.** Why do you play professional football?

**4/8b-** What is your favorite part about being a professional football player?

**4/8c-** What is the worse (least favorite) part about being a professional football player?

**4/6c -** When did it first become important to you? For example, you played when you were a kid, liked it and it was important but, when did you first start working towards the goal of being a professional football player?

**4/6a** Before you actually made it, how important was becoming a professional football player to you?

**4/6b.** Before you actually made it, why did you want to be a professional football player?

### **Self-efficacy and Perceived Competence:**

**4/1a.** In your first training camp or season, did **you feel** you had the skills, abilities, and attitude to do the new job and to play at this level? Why? (What made you feel this way?)

**4/3a.** In your first training camp and season, what was good about your playing? What wasn't so good and needed work?

**4/1c-** At that time, what did you think your chances were of making the team?

**4/3b-** Did you feel equal to other players in the league in your position? Please explain to me why or why not.

### **Strategy and Goals:**

**4/1b-** At that time, did **you know** what you had to do in order to impress the coaches and be successful? Please tell me what you thought you had to do in order to be successful as a professional football player.

**4/2.** What goals did you set for yourself during training camp and during the season? Please try to be as specific as you can. Did you reach these goals?

### **Buffers:**

**4/5.** As a rookie going into training camp, did you have a back-up plan? For example, had you considered other career possibilities? Why or why not?

**4/10a.** Have you made any plans for that day when you can no longer play, or choose not to play, professional football? Explain why or why not.

**4/10b-** Are you looking forward to *'hanging it up'*?

### **Football and Identity:**

**4/6d-** Now, at this point in your life, how important is being a professional football player to you and to who you are? Please try to explain your answer as best you can.

**4/9.** How have you changed since becoming a professional football player?

**4/7.** Have you ever not played football for a long period (maybe because of a serious injury or an illness, etc.)? If yes, how did you feel about yourself during this time?

**4/11.** Do you think you would have made it to the top in another field? Please explain to me why or why not.

## **Section 6: Transcendent Attributions**

**4/4.** What do you think helped you the most in becoming a pro football player?  
*What got you as far as you got?*

3/5. Who or what made your transition to professional football easier?

Who or what made your transition to professional football harder?

### **Section 7: Authenticity Check**

Is there anything else you feel is important to explain about your experiences in becoming a professional athlete? Do you think you have explained your experiences as completely as possible? *If you feel you have more to say, talk about whatever is important to your experiences in becoming a professional football player.*

### **Section 8: Background Information**

3/7. How do you now feel about your experiences as a professional football player?

Has it been a good or bad experience? How so?

B/1. At what age, did you first start playing football?

B/2. College/University team \_\_\_\_\_

B/3. First professional team \_\_\_\_\_

B/4. Years in pro football \_\_\_\_\_

B/5. League: NFL/ CFL/ WLAF/ other \_\_\_\_\_

B/6. Playing position \_\_\_\_\_

B/7. Were you ever a professional athlete in another football league? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_. If yes, which league? \_\_\_\_\_.

B/8. Were you drafted (what round?), or did you sign your first pro contract as a free-agent?

B/9. Did the team from the first pro training camp you were invited to keep you? No \_\_\_  
Yes: practice squad \_\_\_\_\_ or active squad \_\_\_\_\_?

B/10. If you were activated as a rookie, did you play 3rd string \_\_\_; back-up \_\_\_;  
starter \_\_\_; other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_?

B/11. Awards in college? \_\_\_\_\_.

B/12. Awards as a pro? \_\_\_\_\_.

B/13. Are you still playing pro football? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

B/14. Age \_\_\_\_\_.

B/15. Education: \_\_\_\_\_.

B/16. Family Background: Yearly household income growing-up:

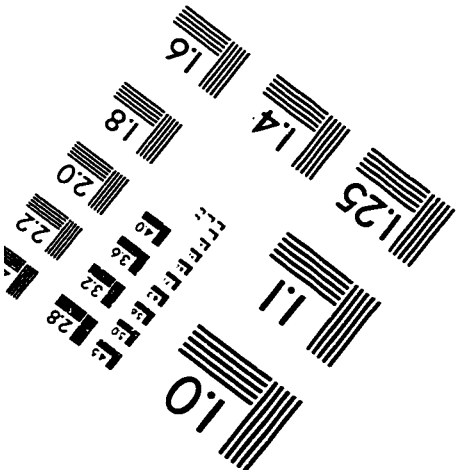
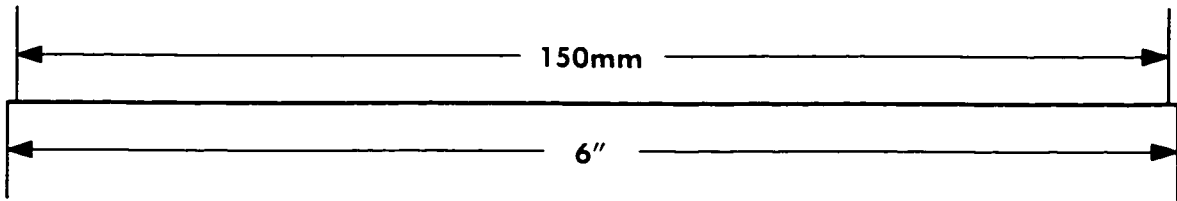
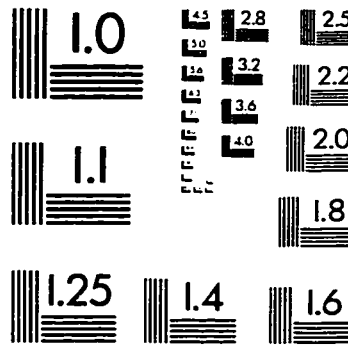
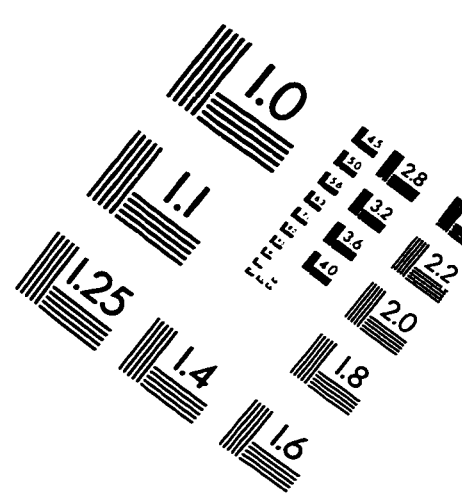
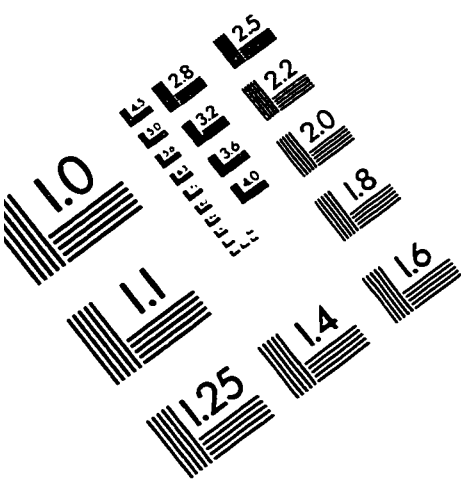
Secure (\$70 000+)

Average (\$20 000 - \$69 999)

Poor (below \$20 000)

Race: \_\_\_\_\_.

# IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



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