

Goals beyond goals

How one footballer is tackling the issues of retirement for sports professionals

A career in professional sport may seem a dream come true for many, but the question of what comes next is a very real concern. Sports careers are notoriously short, retirement coming at an early age or forced through injury, and trying to find something else to replace the intensity and thrill of sport is an enormous challenge.

It is exactly that fear which has driven footballer Robbie Simpson to start up a recruitment platform for sports professionals and elite athletes: Life After Professional Sport (LAPS). Having faced the fear of unexpected retirement himself during a period of contract uncertainty, he knows first-hand the issues facing sports people at all stages of their careers.



“I wanted to provide a service that’s genuinely helpful to people planning ahead or going through that transition,” says Simpson. “LAPS has loads of advice about looking for new careers and applying for jobs, and masses of information about training courses and qualifications that will suit sports people. The job adverts are a big part of it, of course, but we wanted to offer something with even more value.”

The issues facing ex-sports professionals have been made more public in recent years thanks to the great work of people like Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson, but the statistics make for shocking reading. Taking football as just one example, the chances of clinical depression after retirement rocket by 40%. 33% are reported to be divorced within a year of retirement, and as many as 40% will face bankruptcy within five years. The picture is similarly bleak in other top level sports as well: after such a highly dedicated, intense lifestyle, the fallout of retirement is often just too difficult

to manage. As Simpson says, “All too often athletes retiring from sport suffer a loss of identity and purpose. After so long performing at the very top, anything else seems dull by comparison, and they’re just not prepared for it. I wanted to do something to help.”

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Professional bodies like the PFA do provide support for players approaching retirement but there’s more that can be done. “There are thousands of elite athletes in all types of sport,” says Simpson. “Most of them retire really young. They have years and years of work potential in front of them – it’s all about preparing for that transition, and helping people to get ahead with the right training and qualifications. Sports people have so many qualities that are a huge advantage in business, but I think sometimes they sell themselves short.”



A popular feature of LAPS is the series of in-depth interviews with other sports pro’s who have already made the transition into new careers, including the likes of Dion Dublin, Jack Russell and Sophie

Christiansen to name just a few. “It’s amazing what people have gone on to do after sport,” says Simpson. “We’ve talked to everyone from artists to alligator keepers, bankers to jewellers.” It seems the sky really is the limit for life after sport – as long as you know where to get a helping hand. ☺



STAR QUALITY

LAPS has been attracting support and recognition from a lot of business people, including Sir Richard Branson, who recently endorsed the work of LAPS on his blog. He gave his own top 10 reasons why athletes are such a great proposition for employers, saying sports professionals are:

- Goal driven and achievement oriented
- Able to learn from failure, quickly
- Always developing new skills
- Good at taking direction
- Skilled at working well with partners
- Resilient
- Strong communicators
- Good time managers
- Full of grit
- Aware of what it’s like to be part of a team