

# **The Quad-Lemma: how the Rugby Players Association Benevolent Fund was established to address the welfare needs in the professional format of rugby union**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This article looks at the evolution of retirement preparation for male professional rugby union athletes in the English Premiership. Rugby union became a professional sport in 1995 allowing rugby to become a stand-alone career. This alteration in employment structure resulted in stronger athletes, thus resulting in an increase of injury making a career in sports more uncertain. In an effort to address the growing concern of injury-induced retirement, the Rugby Players' Association's created the Benevolent Fund<sup>1</sup> in 2001. The Foundation was to provide assistance to players during times of injury and provide educational opportunities to assist in career transition. This article highlights how the transition to a professional game created the 'Quad-Lemma' of rugby injury and how the Rugby Players Association was created to address the welfare concerns of the new professional format of rugby union.

Kanemasu and Molnar (2013) highlighted the lack of formal support mechanisms that 'ex' professional rugby union players have available to assist in career transition. While there are factual accounts for the need of such mechanisms (Mortimer 2016; FitzSimons 2003), there is a significant lack of academic research on the design and delivery of formal programs to assist in the career transition for the professional athlete. This lack of literature is directly linked to the limited amount of programmes that assist professional athletes during times of career transition. Anderson and Morris (2000) identify that the programmes that provide assistance are designed to assist the elite amateur athlete, while only a few are designed to address the needs of the professional athlete (Alfermann, 2000; Wylleman et al. 2001; Anderson and Morris 2000). Sports federations, national governing bodies, or independent groups who have a connection to the sport manage a majority of these programmes. The focus is to provide opportunities that establish life after sport by providing access to education, expand social networks and developing transferable skills. This article hopes to provide greater insight into the underdeveloped area of career transition research from an organizational perspective.

Within the existing literature on career transition of the professional athlete, two dominant themes emerge. The 'voluntariness' of the athlete's retirement (Erpič, Wylleman, and Zupančič 2004; Anderson and Morris 2000; Webb et al. 1998; Baillie 1993; Baillie and Danish 1992; Werthner and Orlick 1986; Ogilvie and Howe 1982; Lerch 1981) and how well planned and prepared an athlete is for retirement (Alfermann, Stambulova, and Zemaityte 2004; Elder and Rudolph 1999; Baillie and Danish 1992; Werthner and Orlick 1986; Ogilvie and Howe 1982; Lerch 1981; McPherson 1980).

Both themes provide an athlete's perspective, which only provides one side of the transition story. The career transition process needs to be examined within the context of the athlete's life (Wylleman, Alfermann, and Lavalley 2004; Coakley 1983) including factors such as age, gender, race and the support systems an athlete has access to during their career transition (Coakley 1983). The literature is almost

exclusively from the perspective of the athlete not an organization (Stambulova 2000; Stambulova, Stephan, and Japhag 2007). To help address this existing gap, this article will examine the mechanisms of care provided by the current professional structure of rugby union in England.

On the 26 August 1995, the International Rugby Board (IRB)<sup>2</sup> announced the professionalization of rugby union (Collins 2009). A major factor that called for the transition was Rupert Murdoch's attempt to acquire a greater market share of the lucrative Rugby League television revenue in Australia (FitzSimons 2003). Murdoch was planning to offer salaries to elite level players from across the globe to create an alternative rugby product. Any player who accepted Murdoch's offer would violate the amateur regulations and no longer be eligible to participate in international test matches. In addition, there was a shift in sports policy from a 'sport for all' to elite level performance and professionalism (Houlihan and White 2003).

Tony Hallett, secretary of the Rugby Football Union (RFU), warned of the consequences if the IRB voted against professionalism and remained an amateur game.

If the Board goes against the trend, then each country would have to answer for itself. The only choice after that is to break away and go play your own game. Whether it is a professional game or an unprofessional game. (Llewellyn 1995)

In addition, Hallett contended that amateurism had been dead for many years:

It's not the death of amateurism, because amateurism was in rigor mortis for some time. But now we have to make a choice. Either we're going to enter into this sort of fulltime-playing, high-level stuff where it's impossible to imagine it being amateur; or else we aren't. (Thomsen 1995)

If the IRB did not accept professionalism, Hallett was fearful that the Northern Hemisphere clubs would risk weakening the national test teams through a loss of player talent.<sup>3</sup> Additionally there was a growing scepticism of the amateur values in rugby union. The presence of shamateurism,<sup>4</sup> made it difficult for the RFU to defend that amateurism was still a core value (Collins 2009; Richards 2011; Dunning and Sheard 2005). Both contributed to the world's rugby unions accepting professionalism. A consequence of rugby union transitioning into a professional format was that rugby became a stand-alone career. This shift in employment structure put in motion a four stage process which has been coined by the article's author as the 'Quad-Lemma' of rugby union. Stage 1: rugby union became a standalone career. Stage 2: the creation of the rugby academy allowed for Stage 3, the athlete to become bigger, faster and stronger (Olds 2001; Norton and Olds 2001), which resulted in Stage 4, in an increase of injury severity (Kaplan 2008; Brooks and Kemp 2008; Bathgate et al. 2002; Garraway et al. 2000). The 'Quad-Lemma' highlights how the new professional model affected injury and athlete welfare. Because of the failings of the professional structure, the Rugby Players Association emerged in 1998 to protect the employment rights of the athlete. This was followed by the creation of the Rugby Players Association's Benevolent Fund in 2001 to provide programmes to assist with injury and career transition.

The article will establish that because of the professionalization of rugby union and the emergence of the 'Quad-Lemma', the existing mechanism of care was not sufficient to address the new concerns facing the professional player. Through the use of semi-structured interviews of the Rugby Player's Associations' Benevolent Fund Board of Directors, as well as professional rugby players, the article is able to establish the evolution of care provided to players by furthering the development the 'Quad-Lemma', followed by establishing the lack of existing care in the new professional format and finally by showing the creation of the Rugby Players Association and their Benevolent Fund to address the welfare gaps which existed in professional rugby union.

## **The Quad-Lemma of professional Rugby Union in England**

### ***Step 1: Rugby as a stand-alone career***

Prior to professionalism, those who played rugby for club and for country had a non-sporting career that ran alongside their amateur rugby union playing career.<sup>5</sup> If a player would happen to retire, due to injury or by choice, that player would simply return to their non-sporting professional position. On this subject, Benevolent Fund Trustee Vic Luck remarked:

When the game went professional it stopped that [other additional] career. So you would be in financial services (Luck is providing an example of a possible type of employment a player might have before rugby became a stand-alone career path). You get a bit of leeway training two afternoons a week. It might slow down your career a bit but it would not stop you from having a professional career. Then you get injured, so you are not playing rugby anymore and you just carry on in financial services (Luck, Vic. Personal Interview. 3 October 2011).

Because of the professionalization of rugby, the player is now without an automatic career path once the rugby career is terminated. David Barnes, former professional rugby player, identified how the new professional game eliminated the need for an additional career:

Traditionally, and quite luckily, most [pre-professional players] were university educated. They came from good backgrounds. They had good jobs alongside their rugby careers and so when they would get injured, it would be a seamless transition. When it went professional, all those jobs dropped away. We tend to find guys getting injured frequently with nothing to fall back on (Personal Interview. 28 September 2011).

Barnes's statement is particularly important as he highlights the new employment structure placed players at risk of being unemployed. The change in employment structure was noted during the early days of professionalism in a memorandum prepared by the Rugby Union Players' Association (RUPA) for the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport (RUPA 1999). The memorandum stated that players left full time occupations to pursue a career in rugby, and often coerced to do so. The memorandum noted that younger players were entering professional rugby at the expense of their own education and career development (Kaufman 1999). The new structure decreased the opportunity to develop additional skill sets that could help in the creation of a contingent employment path, arguably crucial to those in a career with

an unpredictable trajectory (Roderick 2006; McGillivray, Fearn and McIntosh 2005). Professional rugby players now had to deal with issues relating to the unstable nature of an athletic career (Roderick 2006; McGillivray, Fearn, and McIntosh 2005). Collinson (2003) and Doogan (2001) stated that the threat of unemployment provides a significant level of stress for workers. In sport, individual performance, physical conditioning and rehabilitation from injury is critical for retaining employment. Eakin and MacEachin's,<sup>6</sup> 'You are only as good as your last game' becomes an important concept for the athlete who is learning to manoeuvre the structure of professional sport. The athlete begins to realize that their performance, both in practice and in competition, determines their value on the team resulting in high rates of stress. McGovern (2002) pointed out that the stress could be exacerbated because the development of a professional career in sport does not follow that of traditional career. Just because one achieves entry onto the first team it does not mean they will remain on the first team. It is the fragility of a career in professional sport that places the athlete at the constant risk of career/contract termination. Professional rugby union requires athlete to focus all of their energies, at increasingly younger ages, completely on their rugby career. This focus hinders the acquisition of non-rugby-related vocational skills. Moreover, the physical nature of the game increases the risk of injury, adding to the uncertainty of a career in professional rugby. If an athlete is injured and forced from the game, that athlete has limited employable skills outside of sport thus at risk of extended unemployment. A significant contributor to the reduction of career skill development is academy structure.

### ***Step 2: Rugby players warehoused in academy structures***

The academy was designed to cultivate and develop high performance athletes capable of excelling in rugby union's new commercial structure. The Academy made a concerted effort to identify and develop elite athletes at younger ages. As it has been argued that by identifying talent at an early age has proven to be beneficial for athlete development (Hohmann and Seidel 2003). This approach defines the ethos of the rugby union academy.<sup>7</sup> Foundation Trustee Mark Campion identified the trend of pursuing a professional rugby career at increasingly younger ages:

We are drifting towards people coming out of school much younger and going into rugby academies, maybe immediately after GCSEs [General Certificate of Secondary Education], not even going to A levels [Advanced Level General Certificate of Education], and being a professional rugby player by the time they are eighteen, nineteen or twenty. You can see the emergence of professional rugby players even at the international level at quite an early age because they have been through an academy process (Campion, Mark. Personal Interview. 3 October 2011).

Foundation Trustee Luck echoed these sentiments regarding entering professional sports at an earlier age: 'Around eighteen, a key decision comes up: whether you go to university or play professional rugby'

(Luck, Vic. Personal Interview. 3 October 2011). One coach in the professional sphere stated that the choice between going to university or playing professional sport is not much of a decision:

Rarely is there a decision on the player's part that they put their education first, that they would choose a university course over being a professional rugby player ... I think I only had one case of a lad that actually decided to pursue university over rugby because he wanted to go to Oxford (Anonymous Coach A. Personal Interview. 21 March 2012).

The adoption of professionalism and the promotion of the rugby academy created a social transition within the playing community. Damian Hopley, RPA founder and CEO, compares the locker room composition from when he was playing for London Wasps to today: 'Most were public school educated, university educated. It is a bit of a generalization, but half of the players have higher education [compared with] ten or fifteen years ago' (Damian Hopley, Personal Interview, 28 September 2011). It is the position of Hopley that professional rugby players have fewer non-rugby qualifications than past players. This lack of qualifications concerns Hopley and the RPA as the limited qualification could stunt future employment if players do not seek opportunities for career development.

Career development opportunities are often sacrificed in order to earn a rugby union contract. Professional players have expressed that they did not 'want any distractions'; they wanted to give '100% to rugby and they were 'pursing the "dream" of playing professionally' (Gaston 2014). Athletes are willing to make sacrifices as the biggest concern facing a player is 'not getting a contract' and 'not getting to play' (Gaston 2014, Hughes and Coakley 1991). These concerns encourage the players to focus completely on their rugby career to ensure that they make the correct impressions on those who make contract decisions.

Once in the rugby academy, rugby can become an all-consuming environment that limits future opportunities for the professional player, as argued by Trustee Mark Campion:

It is the only community they know... they already started on a different route... yes, they may go to university, but they will really be heading to an academy much earlier. Once they are in an academy, their contact and exposure to the outside working world is not necessary. (Mark Campion, Personal Interview, 3 October 2011)

Campion is concerned that a career in professional rugby limits employment networks because of the focus required to follow a career in professional sport. If/when, the athlete becomes injured; all the athlete's professional contacts and skills are contained within the rugby world. As previously identified, the span of a professional rugby career is short and can be hastened by injury. This is significant, as the result of the rugby academy players increased in size, which increased the rates of injury.

### ***Step 3: Players became bigger, faster, and stronger***

Because of rugby union becoming professional and the establishment of the rugby academy, the rugby athlete became bigger, faster and stronger (Olds 2001; Norton and Olds 2001). The physiological capacity

and body composition of the professional rugby union player significantly evolved because of a rugby career focused physical training (Bell et al. 1993; Carlson et al. 1994; Tong and Mayes 1995).

The physical effects that professionalism has had on the rugby player's body mirror the effects that professionalism has had on athletes in other professionalized sports. For example, when basketball became a professional sport there was an increase in the height of the professional player (Norton and Olds 2001). When American football entered the ranks of professional sport there was a noticeable increase in body mass and strength (Norton and Olds 2001). Rugby union saw an increase in body mass, power and strength as they entered the professional realm (Norton and Olds 2001, Carlson et al. 1994, League 1993).

Between 1905 and 1974, the average mass of all players was 87.8 kg (193.5 lbs). The average mass for a forward position<sup>8</sup> was 92.7 kg (204.4 lbs) and 80.0 (176.4 lbs) for a back.<sup>9</sup> By comparison, between 1975 and 1999, the average mass of all players was 95.1 kg (209.65 lbs); forwards averaged 103.7 kg (228.6 lbs) and backs averaged 84.7 kg (186.7 lbs). This indicates an increase of 7.3 kg (16.2 lbs) for all players, 11 kg (24.2 lbs) for a forward and 4.7 kg (10.3 lbs) for a back. Olds (2001) identified that over a period of three decades, players in both the forward and back positions, increased their muscle mass as well as decreased their body fat percentage pushing them further into a mesomorph (muscular) somatotype. Olds (2001, 260) concluded his report by stating that the 'standard rugby union players (body mass) are well above those of the general population of young males', and have 'increased at a rate three to four times faster in the last 25 years compared with the rest of the century'. The focus on becoming bigger, stronger and faster increased the physicality of the game, thus resulting in more injuries and injury severity providing the fourth and final step of the 'Quad-Lemma'.

#### ***Step 4: Bigger, faster and stronger = increase in injury severity and frequency***

Llewellyn (1995) warned of the impact that professionalism would have on injury rates in rugby union, 'Total professionalism would turn rugby into a high risk career with short term prospects for the bulk of the players and the threat of injury and a premature end for some unfortunates'. Similarly, Garraway et al. (2000) suggested that the increase in player physical conditioning because of professionalism heightened the physicality of the game, resulting in increased severity of injury. Additionally, Malin (1997) argued that 'new fitness levels and hours of body building in the gym allows [rugby union] players now to crash into each other so relentlessly... This has added to the gladiatorial spectacle [of rugby union]...' Damian Hopley spoke in similar tones about how increased physicality became a focus of the professional game:

The game became aware of its own physicality; players become fitter, bigger, and faster. The sport became collision based rather than grace and skill. The rates of injury grew quite significantly in the first few years [of professionalism]. (Hopley, Damian. Personal Interview. 19 March 2012)

Hopley's words chime with those of James Robson, the British and Irish Lions<sup>10</sup> team doctor, who stated that players are 'too muscle-bound and too bulky', and that the current player is 'too big for their skill level'

(Mairs 2009). Hopley and Dr Robson suggest that players' attention to their physical development allowed them to develop a new level of brute force. This increased the rate of collisions, which in turn amplified the risk of injury and added to the uncertainty of the career.

Rugby is an inherently physical game. This physicality means that there is a high level of risk of injury involved at all levels (Board 2006). Rates of rugby injuries are three times higher than in both football (soccer) and American football. Statistically, one out of four rugby players will be injured during a season (British Columbia Injury and Prevention Research Unit 2017). Fuller et al. (2007) examined the 2003/2004 and the 2005/2006 English rugby union seasons to identify types of contact that are the mostly likely to result in injury. They found that the majority of injury occurs in the 'contact phase of play, with the main cause being the tackles<sup>11</sup> (24–58%) ruck<sup>12</sup> (6–17%) Maul<sup>13</sup> (12–16%) collision<sup>14</sup> (8–9%) and scrum<sup>15</sup> (2–8%)' (Fuller et al. 2007: 862).

Recently, research has focused on both general head injuries and concussions in sport. (Gladwell 2009; Marshall and Spencer 2001). Concussions comprise 24.6–25% of all reported rugby injuries (Marshall and Spencer 2001; British Columbia Injury and Prevention Research Unit 2017). The long-term effects from head trauma can be life altering. At the third International Conference on Concussion in Sport hosted at Zurich, Switzerland in October 2008, several potential outcomes of traumatic brain injuries were discussed in relation to sports-related concussions including amnesia and depression (McCorry et al. 2009). Concussions should be of particular concern for the professional rugby union athlete due to both the high rate of physical contact that occurs in the sport and the potential for career ending injuries.

Fuller et al. (2007) argued that the high risk of injury is in part related to rugby union being a high contact sport. Combine their argument with Olds's (2001) observation that the body mass of the rugby union players increased, it becomes clear just how much impact the contact can have. The work of Fuller et al. (2007), Olds (2001), Norton and Olds (2001) provides evidence to support Brooks and Kemp's (2008) argument that when physical contact is made at higher levels of momentum and with greater levels of force, the result is an increase in the amount and severity of injuries.

Regardless of the causes for the increase in injury, the fact remains that since the transition to professionalism injury severity rates in rugby have increased (Garraway et al. 2000; Brooks and Kemp 2008; Kaplan et al. 2008; Bathgate et al. 2002). This supports Brooks and Kemp statement (2008, 51);

Rugby union has changed in recent years because of several rule modifications and the 1995 advent of professionalism. Trends in rugby union injury epidemiology include: higher incidence of injury than other team sports, an apparent increase in injury risk in professional and amateur games since the advent of professionalism.

The increase of injury only amplifies the instability of a career in professional rugby. The increasingly limited skills outside the sport of rugby, only heightens the risk of unemployment once the professional sports career is completed. Without employable skills, the risk of unemployment rises. If there are no

programmes to assist with the transition from a career in professional sport, the player could be left with limited employment options. It is the contention of this article, that the lack of player-focused programmes in the new professional game was a result of poor planning and ill-equipped structures of management. As a result of that failure players need a voice to represent their rights. Thus, the need for a Trade Union to represent the players. That need was answered with the creation of the Rugby Players Association, which would eventually establish the Benevolent Fund.

### ***Creation of the RPA and the RPA Benevolent Fund***

Foundation Trustee Campion described the transition to professionalism to a canoe going over the edge of Niagara Falls:

It was a sudden revolution; it was not a planned transference... this was not something that people sat down and said in five years' time we have a plan or strategy to be professional... I think in the United Kingdom we were riding the canoe that went over the Niagara Falls of professionalism and wonder[ing] what the hell was going on. (Campion, Mark. Personal Interview. 3 October 2011)

The rate at which the transition occurred did not allow proper management infrastructure to address the new commercial structure of rugby union. There was no clear plan for growth or evident understanding about how to transition to a professional sport. A memorandum prepared by the RUPA for the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport (RUPA 1999) identified several issues that explained the instability within the professional game. The large level of corporate sponsorship expected to come with the new game never came to fruition. Sponsors that did sign agreements withdrew their support or they did not renew their sponsorship agreements because of the clubs' weak financial conditions. The poor financial infrastructure was partially due to clubs' vying for players by promising salaries that were unsustainable without large levels of corporate sponsorship and strong revenues through ticket sales. The rush to acquire players prevented clubs from putting proper business plans into place or staff the back office with those with the skill set to manage a professional organization:

In some cases, unrealistic business plans were put in place and other situations hearts ruled heads totally. The clubs' administrators and officials simply did not have enough expertise to deal with and administer wage payrolls of between £1 million and £2 million pounds per year (RUPA, 1999:2).

The memorandum identified that poor planning from the beginning of the professional transition resulted in massive operational problems. The lack of operational structure bled into every facet of the game, including the employment rights and welfare needs of the new professional player. This lack of structure during this period pointed to the need for a players' union that would represent the employment rights and welfare interests of the professional rugby union athlete.

The memorandum further pointed out that the rush to professionalize the sport failed to provide athletes with proper programmes for retirement (RUPA 1999).

Injury and lack of programmes for transitioning the athlete became the focus of the RPA's Benevolent Fund. Directors of the Benevolent Fund feared that athletes, especially in situations of injury, were losing chances to engage in post-rugby career training/programmes.

Trustee Campion identifies the dual nature of the RPA and the Benevolent Fund in representing welfare rights of its membership:

The Benevolent Fund is about providing education and trying to beat the drum of education. We sponsor a lot of people doing training courses. We have an annual system of applying for grants for education, and I think it is a great use of the Benevolent Fund, building that bridge for employability post-career and the emergency fund for seriously injured people who need help very quickly in difficult circumstances. (Campion, Mark. Personal Interview. 3 October 2011)

As the Foundation matured, it adapted to concerns that arose from the new structure of professionalism and the emergence of the 'Quad-Lemma'. Trustee Campion identified how the Foundation shifted from providing redistributive welfare to preparing the athlete for a career once they retire,

The early days of the RPA were about putting in place a basic framework for the employment of professional rugby union players. The emphasis has moved to recognizing that the average working life span will not create independent finance for them to retire on, and there is a real need to have an education program – and this is where we started to move the Benevolent Fund. They will be better people for keeping contact with potential employment opportunities. There will come the day they finish rugby union be it through injury or natural retirement. They will need to have carried on some training and come out with some useful employment qualifications or access that they would not have done if they just stayed in their rugby club environment. (Campion, Mark. Personal Interview. 3 October 2011)

The RPA serve as the legal representation of the player in relationship to respective teams and the RFU. Hopley recalled in the early days, the RFU was adversarial while the owners of the professional teams were early supporters of the work of the RPA and each team in the premiership as a RPA representative which works directly with the players helping create an individual post career plan for athletes who are willing to participate in the 'Life After Programme'.

The Foundation incorporated career development programmes into the welfare discussion to help with the career transition. Trustee Campion explained that professional rugby is not lucrative enough to allow for retirement post playing career.

There is a financial hole; they cannot earn enough money as a professional player. They will have to get a job no matter what they do to sustain a living, and that process is going to be difficult... someone has to be there to help them make that bridge or in fact catch them in a real emergency-type situation which occurs. And with the level of greater fitness and greater collisions, this will only increase (Campion, Mark. Personal Interview. 3 October 2011).

The call to address the concern of career transition was based off the observations of RPA and reviewing the year on year injury rates as well as the increase in the amount the RPA members seeking assistance from the Foundation. All RPA members are eligible to apply for assistance from the foundation via an online application process or through their teams assigned Player Development Officer. The Player Development Officer works directly one-on one with their RPA members to help access training, education or networking opportunities which are specific to that players post career desires. The Player Development Officer also organizes other welfare links such as financial planning and mental health counselling. It is key that the Foundation transitions as many players as possible to secure employment. This helps ensure that the Foundation is not stretched beyond their financial capabilities and can continue to address the welfare concerns of the professional rugby union athlete who experience catastrophic injury. The quicker a player can transition into another form of employment, the less the risk of unemployment and the need for assistance from the Foundation. This can be seen in the following four examples of how the RPA provides medical assistance, financial support and education development, in addition to these examples the RPA provides counselling services and assistance with catastrophic injury.

The first example is the case of Robert Todd. Todd was diagnosed with a serious case of skin cancer which forced Todd to retire from the game immediately. Todd received direct financial assistance from the Benevolent Fund to help with his medical expenses. The Foundation assisted with Todd's education and purchasing of equipment to start his career as a chiropractor which provided him with the means for a career transition.

A second example can be found in the case of Leicester Tiger's Martin Castrogiovanni, who opened up a restaurant with the help of business relations forged by the Players' Association (PlayersRoom A 2011). A third example can be seen in, Andy Buist, who experienced a career ending knee injury at the age of 24. Buist accepted his doctor's recommendation to retire from the sport after his third knee operation. With the help of the Players' Association, Buist gained exposure to large media corporations, allowing him to open his own photography business (PlayersRoom B 2011).

A fourth example which highlights the Foundation's emphasis on educational development can be seen in Richard Haughton. Haughton is studying accountancy with the help of the Benevolent Fund. His interest in developing his educational skills was driven by the knowledge that his career in professional rugby union will eventually come to an end. Haughton stated in a Players' Room interview, 'As you start to get older you begin to think about what you are going to do when you finish and how to prepare for that situation.' (PlayersRoom C 2001, 22-23)

All of the examples provide evidence that the Benevolent Fund is actively promoting and providing training to athletes for a life after rugby. The Benevolent Fund came from a recognition of the lack of welfare mechanisms available to players during the advent of professional rugby union in England. The RPA's roots were in establishing consistency in the professional players' contracts and grew into providing

mechanisms for addressing the symptoms of injury. The RPA started with just providing retributive type of care to its current approach of player welfare by providing athletes with the means for a career after rugby.

Barnes provided a capstone statement which identified the arch of language used by the Trustees to define the role of athlete welfare:

Welfare for me is injury prevention, injury care both in the short and long-term care. So immediate care as well continued care, welfare is the day to day of how a club looks out for the player. As we evolve, the welfare takes a broader approach - setting up personal development, taking care of the educational development, vocational development, which is running up alongside after your playing career. (Barnes, David. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011)

Barnes's statement aptly addresses the purpose of this article. In it, he identified the motivations for the creation of the Association as a body providing mechanisms of care to professional rugby union athletes. When the game of rugby union transitioned to a professional sport, there was an absence of devices for addressing care in the professional format. The RPA and RPA Benevolent Fund was created to fill that void.

## **Conclusions**

This article aimed to establish a contextual understanding of the changes occurring in sport which allowed professionalism to advance in rugby union. The article established that in the 1990's the United Kingdom's sports policy underwent significant changes. The transition from a 'sport for all' to an 'elite performance' approach fostered an environment which encouraged and accepted greater levels of professionalism within the once dominant amateur sports market. While this transition in policy was occurring in the United Kingdom, the rugby unions in the Southern Hemisphere were undergoing a battle for control which would eventually force the rugby unions of the Northern Hemisphere to accept a professional format (Howitt 2005; FitzSimons 2003). Relatedly, the article identified that England's amateur code was being eroded by shamateurism, (Collins 2009) which consequently weakened the argument that amateurism was a core value of the code.

New problems surfaced with the acceptance of professionalism. These problems were identified as the second contextualizing feature of this article and were collectively called the 'Quad-Lemma'. The purpose of identifying the 'Quad-Lemma' was to highlight four significant changes which occurred as a result of the transition to a professional model. Each change on its own was negligible in terms of its impact on the sport; however, once combined they produced a significant level of concern for the welfare of professional rugby union athletes. The first factor this article established was that rugby union became a standalone career path. This was followed by the creation of the academy which led to the increased focus on rugby training, allowing athletes to become bigger, faster and stronger (Norton and Olds 2001). This resulted in the increase of injury severity in rugby union (Kaplan et al. 2008; Brooks and Kemp 2008; Bathgate et al. 2002; Garraway et al. 2000). The article identified that an increase in injury, which in turn, amplified the

uncertainty of a professional career in the sport (Roderick 2006). This article argues that as the result of the greater amount of career ending injuries along with the decrease of vocational skill and educational development, the professional rugby union athlete is at a risk of extended unemployment and social exclusion if not offered mechanisms of care.

At the advent of professional rugby union, formal mechanisms did not exist to address athlete welfare, particularly as it related to the potentially negative longer-term impacts on an athlete's life. The article highlighted that because of their lack of qualifications and professional networks outside the world of rugby, ex-athletes increased their risk of becoming and remaining unemployed because of their participation in rugby union. In response to a lack of player representation, the RPA was developed to protect the rights of the player. Eventually the RPA established the Benevolent Fund to help athletes address injury as well provide formalized programmes to help those athletes who are transitioning from a career in professional sport. By illustrating the 'Quad-Lemma' in professional rugby union, this article responds to the call of Butt and Molnar (2009) as it highlights the role of the RPA and RPA's Benevolent Fund as key mechanisms created to address the growing issue of career transition in the professional sport of rugby union in England. However this article just provides the setting for greater amounts of research in the area of career transition research. Currently, there is no evidence that the programme is actually decreasing the levels of unemployment of former professional athletes. There is a need for greater levels of inquiry into effectiveness of the formal mechanisms of care: Do the programmes provide the services desired by those who they are meant to benefit. At what rate do players participate in available programmes and to what level are the programmes effective in their goal of creating career transition?

## Notes

1. Now known as RESTART.
2. On November 28 2014, International Rugby Board changed their name to World Rugby.
3. Amateur code of rugby union states that if any player received pay for play they would not be able to represent their country in international test matches.
4. A sportsperson who is officially an amateur but accepts payment.
5. Player could not receive any form of payment. If players did receive any compensation they risked being banned from playing for life. See Collins (2009) for more information.
6. as cited in Roderick, "A Very Precarious Profession: Uncertainty in the Working Lives of Professional Footballers" 246.
7. The academy scheme is run by the Elite Department of the Rugby Football Union in line with the World Class Performance Plan and is delivered on a local basis by the individual professional clubs. The regional Academy programme sits alongside the representative playing pathways and is athlete-centred, development-driven and competition supported... Each regional academy is accredited with an academy license based on their ability to foster an environment conducive to player development, and the underlying principles are to provide opportunities for players to fulfil their potential at an elite level and realise their dreams of becoming professional and international players of the future.
8. There are eight forwards on a team. These players use size and strength to get the ball and move it towards the opposition goal-line. Forwards are the line of defence, stopping the opposing team from moving the ball towards their goal-line.
9. There are seven backs on a team. Backs provide the speed and agility for scoring tries. Backs move the ball to search out or create weaknesses in the opposing team's defence.
10. The British and Irish Lions is a rugby union team made up of players from England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales.

11. A tackle occurs when the ball carrier is held by one or more opponents and is brought to ground.
12. A ruck is a phase of play where one or more players from each team, who are on their feet, in physical contact, close around the ball on the ground.
13. A maul begins when a player carrying the ball is held by one or more opponents, and one or more of the ball carrier's teammates bind on the ball carrier. A maul therefore consists of at least three players at the outset. These are: the ball carrier and one player from each team. All the players involved must be caught in or bound to the maul and must be on their feet and moving towards a goal.
14. No official definition for 'collision' is provided in the IRB rule book. However, it is commonly accepted as an out-of-control tackle where the ball carrier is knocked to ground rather than brought to the ground.
15. A scrum is formed in the field of play when eight players from each team, bound together in three rows per team, close up with their opponents so that the heads of the front rows are interlocked. This creates a tunnel into which a scrum half throws the ball so that front row players can compete for possession by hooking the ball with either foot.

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