

# INVESTIGATING DROP OUT IN EX-JUNIOR RUGBY UNION PLAYERS

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## **ABSTRACT**

Traditionally, research in the area of drop out has used a qualitative focus, commonly studying aspects such as early specialisation, self-motivation and self-efficacy, and educational ages in relation to drop out. Research in the area of Rugby Union has generally adopted a quantitative stance, and has looked at injury, elite players, and season long studies with large samples. However as a consequence, in depth qualitative data on the actual experiences and personal feelings of young rugby players that contribute to drop out is limited.

Ten male ex-Rugby Union participants, who were U19 colts players of the same high level English side, were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. An interpretive framework was adopted in order to analyse the data emerging from the interviews. By using a qualitative approach, the research uncovers more about the multitude of factors that can influence drop out in young individuals.

The findings of this study related strongly to Bourdieu's Habitus (1978), and Situated Learning Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and concluded that a number of key themes contributed to drop out. These included injury, disruption to the squad in terms of changes in team personnel, and declining enthusiasm for the sport. As a consequence of their drop out from Rugby Union, the participants stated that they missed the vibrant social atmosphere, often gained new activities, and commonly experienced feelings of anxiety when returning to the rugby club.

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# **Investigating Drop Out in Ex-Junior Rugby Union Players**

## **Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Introduction to the Chapter**

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the direction of this case study, in addition to justifying the need for this particular research area and why this field was chosen. The research area and research questions will be briefly discussed and the chapter will also introduce the methodology being employed, in addition to providing an overview of the thesis layout.

### **1.2 Introduction to the Research Area**

Rugby Union is a popular team sport amongst men, women and children, in over one hundred countries across five continents (RFU, 2011a). The growing popularity can also be recognised by the addition of Rugby sevens to the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro (IRB, 2010). The Rugby Football Union, the English Governing body, contains clubs of varying sizes and levels, with 156 clubs running U19 colts sides currently competing in England (RFU, 2011a), in addition to the twelve U19 Premiership academies. This research aims to investigate players who previously played and dropped out at age nineteen, and the increased profile of the sport justifies the selection of this topic area.

Similar to the rising publicity and popularity of rugby, the world of research has seen recent enhanced recognition of the environmental, psychological and social issues in sport, which have subsequently led to a greater focus on the participatory aspects, (e.g. Green et al., 2005; Kirk, 2005; Bailey et al., 2010). One such area is drop out, which has received increased research interest over the last decade in many sports, in addition to education, and society

(e.g. Zaff et al., 2003; Abernethy & Bleakley, 2007; Wall & Côté, 2007; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008). The need for in depth data discovering contributing factors which lead to participation and drop out has resulted in increased research employing detailed individual interviews and ethnographies (e.g. MacPhail et al., 2003; Toms, 2005; Toms & Kirk, 2006). In addition, research previously conducted on rugby commonly includes elite adult players (e.g. Best et al., 2005; Brooks et al., 2006), season long quantitative investigations with large samples (e.g. Fuller et al., 2007; 2010), and the physiological aspects such as injury (e.g. Walsh et al., 2004; Berry et al., 2006; Brooks & Kemp, 2008).

### 1.3 Outline of the Study

Research on youth drop out in sport has received great attention in some areas, for example researchers in compulsory education have generally looked at early and mid adolescence, where there are proven higher levels of drop out at primary to secondary school transition and post GCSE (e.g. Green et al., 2005; Toms et al., 2009; Lunn, 2010). Also, other sports such as football (e.g. Mahoney & Cairns, 1997), and American sports such as baseball, American football and basketball (e.g. Ewing & Seefeldt, 1996) have focused purely on drop out, but work is scarce in Rugby Union. The amount of rugby research including any level of focus on drop out is limited, and again explains drop out in terms of injury (e.g. Smith & Sparkes, 2002; 2004; 2005; 2008; Sparkes & Smith, 2002; 2003), or burnout (e.g. Cresswell & Eklund, 2005; 2006; Hodge et al., 2008).

This suggests a lack of research into late adolescent/early adult drop out in Rugby Union, and this is the hole in the current research literature this case study will try to eliminate. It is hoped that providing this fresh information can influence Governing bodies and policy makers, highlighting issues that link to drop out and therefore using initiatives to combat



them. The research could also influence Rugby Union from a sports performance perspective, as prominent results in the data have the potential to greatly influence coaches and clubs in ensuring their athletes are in a positive and thriving environment, to obtain optimum performance from them. It also possesses great value from a social, health and well-being perspective, as it may create awareness of issues that can arise in junior rugby environments that have both positive and negative effects on the athletes.

#### 1.4 Methodological Background

As previously mentioned, the majority of research conducted in Rugby Union has undertaken a quantitative approach, using methods such as recording competitions, individually monitoring players and compiling statistics, (e.g. Duthie et al., 2006; Fuller et al., 2008; Cunniffe et al., 2009). This case study sought to discover the reason or multiple reasons that led to the ex-players dropping out, in addition to understanding their previous sporting lives, current activity levels, and sporting interests. To achieve this, the study used a qualitative, interpretive approach, to produce quality narrated experiences that can create a picture of the atmosphere that encompassed the club, and to attach greater importance to participant experiences and feelings. Interviews were semi-structured to ensure they were flexible and allowed new questions to be brought up.

#### 1.5 An Overview of the Thesis

This initial chapter provides a brief explanation of the rationale behind the thesis and summarises its focus. Chapter two reviews the relevant literature, in addition to highlighting the significant references that have shaped the course of the research. Chapter three contains a justification for the chosen research methods and clarifies each stage of the research process. Chapter four discusses the themes and findings from the data, providing links back

to the previously mentioned relevant literature. The final chapter draws conclusions from the research, addresses implications and introduces initiatives for limiting future drop out, and highlights potential research matter for the future.

### 1.6 Chapter Conclusion

A general introduction to the research area has been established and the rationale behind the chosen topic explained, as a result of the relevant issues in the field. The selected methodology has been outlined and the chapter has also given a general summary of the thesis structure. The next chapter provides an overview of the literature relevant to this study.

## **Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction to the Chapter**

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature related to Rugby Union and drop out. Furthermore, taking a central theme is Bourdieu's (1978) Habitus, and Situated Learning Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991) as theoretical frameworks. Other areas covered include the sociological and environmental issues, many of which surround the sports club. In order to achieve a healthier understanding of Rugby Union, its history and structure, this chapter begins by offering a brief background of these areas.

### **2.2 Club Structure of Rugby Union in England**

There are 1900 Rugby Union clubs in the RFU, from grass roots to elite level, and around 2.5 million individuals currently participating in England (RFU, 2011a). There are vast potential benefits to young individuals participating at sports clubs, as Sport England and Government policies have become focused on developing club sport over the last decade (MacPhail et al., 2003). Typical Rugby Union clubs possess one or more adult teams, and a mini and junior section from about age five to seventeen. Some clubs possess an Under 19 colts side (age eighteen and nineteen), although there are only 156 registered colts sides in England (RFU, 2011a). Also, female rugby teams are growing rapidly (RFU, 2011b). The problem lies that some clubs either have no U19 colts team, and therefore at age seventeen many players are reluctant to transfer immediately to adult level. Although conversely, for clubs that do run a colts side, the standard of adult rugby succeeding colts rugby may be too high for them, or they might begin work or University.

Research suggests that in England, individuals with experience of University and other examples of higher education participate in less sport, and that as age in younger males

increases, participation decreases (Sport England, 2010). Even in New Zealand, where Rugby Union is the national sport, statistics prove that male participation in the sport dropped from 16% to 11% after age seventeen (SPARC, 2001), which links directly to common ages for individuals in higher education. This research is based at a Rugby Union club possessing an Under 19 colts squad, in order to uncover the reasons that led to player drop out, and central to any participatory issues is the role of the club.

### 2.3 Sports Club Structure

The idea that sports clubs are socially constructed is suggested by Kirk & MacPhail (2003), who found in their study of an amateur athletics club that parents portray different positions in sports clubs and that the roles are then assumed and expected to be fulfilled regularly. This can harness their children's participation and influence the stage at which they drop out, depending on the level of parental involvement. Further research notes that the position parents and also players hold in sports clubs greatly affects the degree to which they both participate, ranging from peripheral to full members (Kirk & MacPhail, 2003; Toms & Kirk, 2006). However, this seems to ignore individuals who may have become full members and no longer wish to be, apart from their emotional ties to their teammates, parents, and club. Their findings imply that parents need to hold esteemed club positions for their children to succeed and avoid early drop out, whilst some youths will have participated at a high level and maintained their participation with little or no parental involvement at club level.

The concept of sports clubs being socially constructed links closely to the notion that the structure of sports clubs can act similarly to traditional families (Toms et al., 2008). Toms et al (2008) suggest 'the family' of a sports club is constructed and perpetuated by players and their family members portraying different social positions, and familial involvement in the

sports club has been found vital to participation (e.g. Kirk & MacPhail, 2003; Toms & Kirk, 2006). Club members often ascribe to the values, beliefs and support networks that represent the ideals of traditional nuclear families (Toms et al., 2008), resulting in individuals experiencing strong emotional ties to the club environment, whether participating, coaching, or being actively involved. However the research ignores individuals whose parents are not involved in their sport, which, it is suggested, makes social integration difficult in sports clubs as families with similar habits to the club are more suited to the culture (Zevenbergen et al., 2002).

On the other hand, it has also been found that sports clubs engage those not of the 'natural member' mould to participate by holding social functions (Gray, 2004) and showing a welcoming nature (Payne et al., 2009). However, MacPhail (2004) found that the sports club in her previous athletics club research (e.g. Kirk & MacPhail, 2003) were keen to promote themselves as a 'family' club, which may alienate those not from a traditional nuclear family. The perceived importance surrounding the aura of a 'family' club is also prevalent within families; Monsaas (1985) claiming that parents involved their children in clubs to provide a work ethic representative of their household. This highlights the fact that varying parental outlooks on their children's values will produce differences within a club or squad environment, and that the ethos of many clubs may not represent the ideals of parents, especially those of differing class or from a non-traditional household, both influencing potential drop out.

Furthermore, long-term sports club engagement can be crucial in the development of young people (Light, 2006), and these significant club experiences may decrease the probability of later drop out. However other activities could provide similar individual development and it

should not be implied that sports club participation is beneficial for all young people (e.g. MacPhail & Kirk, 2006). This highlights the varied effects sports clubs can have on individuals, perhaps due to the tight-knit atmosphere that attracts certain members and isolates others. The feeling that clubs produce a family style atmosphere can often be explained by the positions commonly held by parents of participants, often acting in a similar way to that of a traditional household. This can place those who are not from a nuclear family at a disadvantage, questioning whether the concept of a 'family' atmosphere is actually beneficial for everyone.

Green & Chalip (1998) highlight the importance of the social construction of sports clubs. Their study used parents with children enrolled in soccer camps, and found parents often introduce their children to sport, providing the 'volunteer labour' necessary to maintain their participation and prevent drop out. However, parents enrolling their children in soccer camps lasting only a few weeks cannot be compared to maintaining the participation of their offspring in sports which may span many years, suggesting the 'volunteer labour' for the latter is greatly increased. Coakley (2001) added that youth sport participation at all levels depends on parental ability to invest money, time and personal involvement. However, what both studies should draw attention to is the impact on individuals of a lower socio-economic status or broken family, as the findings of Green & Chalip (1998) and Coakley (2001) suggest these participants could encounter a clear disadvantage.

For example, in Rugby Union, young participants of low socio-economic status may suffer in terms of transport, equipment, and social position. Côté (1999) added that costs of registration, equipment, and transport impact greatly on households, suggesting parents able to make greater sacrifices stand a better chance of their adolescent continuing in sport. This is

relevant to rugby as increasing amounts of protective clothing and equipment are being recommended (e.g. Finch et al., 2001). However, Côté's (1999) research only studied four families containing elite junior sports participants, which provides rich data but a small and focused sample, inadequately representing wider society. The impact that the social construction of sports clubs can have is evident, and the elements of social structure and common practices are further explained by Bourdieu's (1978) Habitus.

#### 2.4 Habitus and Rugby

Habitus is explained as “a generative schema in which the forms of elemental social structures come, through the process of socialisation, to be embodied in individuals,” (Nash, 1999; 177) resulting in people necessarily acting in such fashion that the current structures are replicated and given effect. In team sport it can depict the squad environment, Bourdieu (1984) stating that practices are generated by a certain habitus and consequently, all practices demonstrate evidence of the structures of the habitus that produce them. This suggests each team or squad will have their own specific habitus produced from within, that functions in its own unique fashion as a result of the distinctive environmental conditions placed upon the team.

In any team, a habitus can be exhibited in the way a team plays and trains, their attitude to the game, and their team ethos (Bourdieu, 1978). However this ignores how teams react to external cues, and other environmental pressures that may force them to change from their natural game. The importance of developing a habitus is clear, as whilst the execution of physical force is vital in rugby, an equally important dimension involves gaining embodied understandings, intuitions, and anticipation, which can only be gained by regular squad interaction and shared culture (e.g. Light & Georgakis, 2007). However Bandura (1969)

suggests individuals gain these qualities as young children, socialised by significant others such as parents, observing and imitating their behaviour. This suggests that whilst the ability to form a habitus may begin at a young age, the capacity to successfully use this in teams or group environments may require further maturation.

Traditions of expressing masculinity within a habitus can also illustrate the notion that sport is passed down through generations, and as the new generation are often socialised in the particular club environment during youth, the ‘habit’ of spending time in the specific setting is reproduced. Light & Kirk (2000) use the idea of masculinity to explain this, as a form of masculinity was passed down over generations of boys at an Australian school, “reproduced through the discourse and corporeal practices that constituted both the boys’ engagement in rugby and their lived experiences at the school outside rugby” (Light & Kirk, 2000; 165).

However it is not known whether the masculine ideals were established from within the school rugby environment, or from families with similar cultures, living and sharing common values in similar surroundings. Toms & Fleming (1995) agree participation in sport is handed down through generations and even from older siblings, in addition to the fact that the likelihood of involvement is increased when amongst relatives of the same gender (e.g. Whannel, 1999), especially relevant in the male dominated sport of rugby.

Bourdieu’s (1978) Habitus applies well to team sport, especially in youth teams where individuals grow up and begin their entire experience and habitus in their particular sport together. Nash (1999) adds that the system reflects the entire history of the group and is commonly acquired through the formative experiences of childhood. In addition, as habitus is acquired through occupying a position within the social world (Bourdieu, 1978), each individual has a unique variant of the common habitus in their team, although team members



holding similar team or social positions will possess a similar habitus (Ritzer, 1996), highlighting the various effects the culture has on different characters. In individuals with a lower social position, possessing a different habitus to those higher up the social ladder may mean they relate less to others and are more inclined to drop out.

The habitus of a team or group can work as a code generating meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions, specific to those living and immersing themselves in the team culture (Bourdieu, 1978). However, Fenton & Pitter (2010) found that although many athletes that ascribed fully to the rugby culture became ‘core members,’ certain players who did not completely immerse themselves were seen as low-status team members and less socially integrated as a result, which may increase the likelihood of drop out. However, their research was conducted amongst high schools and universities, where in addition to the sporting environment, there are wider social positions and hierarchies that may increasingly affect low-status members.

These long-established dispositions of a habitus are introduced and inspired by the objective structural circumstances placed upon the group (Bourdieu, 1978). Furthermore, the habitus acquires an enduring legacy and reproduces its values through individuals, for lengthy periods that can often outlast the original material conditions that created it (Bourdieu, 1988). In a rugby team for example, the principles and culture created by certain individuals are passed on to new members (e.g. Bourdieu, 1990), and are even carried on by these players once some of the original team members may have dropped out and ceased involvement, suggesting the habitus is a continually developing process. However, what is ignored is how or whether players who drop out continue characteristics of the team habitus in their ‘new’ lives, without the sport and group culture.

An additional reason that a habitus works as a developmental process is because it constantly undergoes minor adaptations, as a consequence of new encounters experienced together as a group (Bourdieu, 1978) and different personnel, whether they are new players or drop outs. Howe (2001) supports this, finding that the introduction of professionalism created adaptations to the habitus of Pontypridd RFC, as training and frequency of injuries increased amongst the squad. However, it could be perceived the other way around, and argued that the habitus of the squad, not professionalism, enforced changes to training and injuries, as a result of team and individual dispositions. The complex process would involve training and thinking in a different way, whereby the difficulty of attempting to adapt the performance of skills learnt in a certain way links to Lave & Wenger's (1991) Situated Learning Theory.

## 2.5 Situated Learning Theory

Situated Learning Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991) develops the idea of learning as specific individuals through a relation to particular social surroundings, that build and represent an individual as a learner, making them learn as a "certain type of person" (Lave & Wenger, 1991; 52). However, from a sporting perspective, it cannot account for differences in individual skill performance, whereby individuals will perform skills and roles in various ways even if they have been taught how to perform them by the same coach in the same drill or practice. There are two central themes to Lave & Wenger's (1991) theory, the first of which is communities of practice, which Kirk & MacDonald (1998; 380) understand as "referring to any collectivity or group who together contribute to shared or public practices in particular spheres of life." One example could be a rugby team, who in turn can be just one group amongst a larger club, comprising other teams with various shared experiences, and using Bourdieu (1978), a different habitus.

Lave & Wenger (1991) state that the social and cultural context in which learning takes place is highly influential on how the individuals learn, and that their activities help them make sense of their specific area. In rugby terms, this may include certain commonly practised drills, which shape the way the players perceive the game, specific to their team as the experiences are shared. Performing certain drills or practices frequently may also reinforce social positions and roles amongst the team, further defining the environment in which they participate in. Howe (2001) agrees that training with club members sees a specific social code followed, where drills are repeated until they become automatic, defining the way the players learn. However, a disadvantage of this is that what is learned cannot be detached from the communities of practice that produce and maintain knowledge, creating difficulty for individuals to learn in other contexts and possibly influencing drop out.

In addition, the social hierarchy of the community of practice is said to “define possibilities for learning,” (Lave & Wenger, 1991; 98) and can underpin the involvement of its members and whether they continue or drop out, supported by Fenton & Pitter (2010), who found that a player’s observed status depended on his experience playing rugby and social connections to other team members in high school rugby teams. However, it is difficult to apply this research to a sports club, as the setting of high schools and universities means that players will already hold a social position amongst their entire school, which is likely to affect their rugby connections and subsequently their rugby status.

This introduces legitimate peripheral participation, the second theme central to Situated Learning Theory, stating how an individual’s involvement and participation in a community of practice is meaningful, and can affect them and others within the group (Lave & Wenger,

1991). In sports, or more specifically rugby teams, legitimate peripheral participation is evident by non-selection, not being part of the 'core' of the group, or other financial and environmental barriers, all of which will affect drop out. This does not mean individuals cannot become 'full participants,' but all participation occurs within sets of relationships whereby each member begins as a newcomer or novice, and can move towards full participation with further shared experiences and new relationships. However the theory does not distinguish the importance of ability to perform in addition to ability to learn (e.g., Lave & Wenger, 1991), as individuals without the necessary level of sporting skill may struggle to become full participants regardless of how well they learn, and are more likely to eventually drop out.

Lave & Wenger (1991) suggest that the social hierarchy and positioning of members with the community of practice can determine the full access of individuals to full participation. Kirk & Kinchin (2003) add that a learner's trajectory towards full participation can only be realized through increasing their mastery of knowledge, skills and dispositions. However these attributes will never be mastered if they are restricted by the barrier of their social position within the group, resulting in likely drop out. Peripheral participation can be developed by shared experiences which can develop identity and membership, constructing knowledge by active involvement in meaningful social team activity. However, regardless of social position, one area that can slow or prematurely end the trajectory towards full participation is injury, which has seen a plethora of research in rugby (e.g. Bathgate et al., 2002; Headey et al., 2007).

## 2.6 Injury

Injury is another important area that links to drop out in Rugby Union, often resulting in highly competitive and motivated players being forced to cease their participation. It has also been found that enforced drop out as a result of injury can produce difficulties for individuals including problems in establishing new body-self relationships, where the body is no longer active and ex-players often struggle to accept this (e.g. Smith & Sparkes, 2002; Sparkes & Smith, 2002; 2003). However, Wiese-Bjornstal et al (1998) discovered that individuals will encounter various psychological and sociological responses to injury, which suggests that Smith & Sparkes' participant reactions to their injuries suffered in Rugby Union may differ to individuals seriously injured in other sports. Smith & Sparkes (2005) stated that once no longer participating, the individuals involved can feel anxiety at what they feel is a loss of masculinity and athletic identity, and commonly experience feelings of hope that their injuries may somehow be cured. However, their research was only conducted with small samples of males, from a similar culture that played the same masculine sport, whereas using a larger and more varied sample could produce various new findings, altering their results.

The risk of injury is also a contributing factor to drop out in rugby, as a number of studies have researched burnout in youths as a reason for ceased participation, (e.g. Cresswell & Eklund, 2005; 2006; Hodge et al., 2008). Their findings concurred that individuals suffered low motivation, high expectations, low competence and autonomy, and feeling entrapment. However, these studies only took place in New Zealand and Australia, who share a similar focus on sport and rugby in particular, and therefore the findings cannot be applied globally and are culturally bound. Weiss & Duncan (1992) added that individuals suffering concerns about their physical competence and likelihood of injury are more likely to drop out.

However, the research used participants aged 8-13, an age range where individuals are at a

transition stage of physical, emotional and social maturation, (e.g. Zeijl et al., 2000), and are likely to differ in comparison to the findings of nineteen year old sports participants, although concerns over physical competence may always be high in rugby due to the physical and robust nature of the game. Furthermore, young elite athletes can end up burnt out and injured as the recipients of great pressure from parents or coaches or high intensity schedule (Strachan et al., 2009), leading to drop out. However, it should not be assumed that all pressure on youngsters is negative, as Lee & Maclean (1997) in their study of parental pressure on age group swimmers found that some young performers enjoy being pushed harder.

## 2.7 Teammate Influence

Teammates can also influence participation (e.g. Keegan et al., 2010; Mays et al., 2010) in rugby, Miles (2000: 23) finding that individuals often act in line with the group's perception of the "legitimate way to behave and consume." McNeal (1995) studied the effects of extra-curricular activities on American high school drop out, and adds that individual team roles and the youngsters' predisposition to participate are key to their continued participation or drop out, as commonly there are dominant members that comprise the central hub of the squad (Ntoumanis & Vazou, 2005). Coleman et al (2008) found that friendship groups were the primary participatory influence, and this may have heightened effects in adolescent rugby players, when individuals are more likely to be influenced by teammates as a result of reduced parental involvement (e.g. Zeijl et al., 2000). However the research of Coleman et al (2008) suffers from a gender bias as it only used females, and is therefore less relevant to this research using male participants. Therefore, whilst the role of peers and teammates is clearly significant and especially relevant during adolescence, the role of the coach in Rugby Union should not be underestimated.

## 2.8 Coach Influence

Research states that the most influential individual in athletes' sport experience is their coach (e.g. Côté et al., 2003; LaVoi, 2007; Boardley & Kavussanu, 2009). Also, Boardley et al (2008) found that the majority of players in rugby teams showed more commitment and effort when perceiving their coach to be high in competence. However individual sports were not studied, which may produce different results in comparison with rugby as there is no influence from team mates, who may also affect desire and effort. It has also been argued that athletes with high coach perceptions exhibit higher satisfaction (Myers et al., 2006; Boardley et al., 2008) and are therefore less likely to cease participation. Jones et al (2004) agree that the importance of relationships between coach and athlete outweighs coaching methods, as obtaining and maintaining athlete respect should take precedence (Potrac et al., 2002). However these studies were conducted in top level English football, which cannot necessarily be applied to rugby, as it is likely there are different connotations attached to the coach-athlete relationship.

Seefeldt et al (1992) reviewed the effectiveness of youth sport initiatives in America, and added further strength to the argument for the importance of the coach-athlete relationship, by stating that a common reason for individuals discontinuing their sporting participation was not getting on with their coach. However, their research also found that some participants stated that another reason they dropped out was because they found their sports too competitive, which suggests athletes may not have had actual problems with the coach as an individual, but disagreed in terms of what the coach wanted them to do, as they were not interested in participating. In addition, a poor coach-athlete relationship might not be as significant in individual sports, as the coach and athlete have to work together, whereas in

rugby teams the poor relationship may be magnified, as coaches have the power to either deselect or continue to not select players they do not get on with. However, this ignores the fact that the same coach of a team may encounter strong and positive relationships with other team members, suggesting that any interpersonal conflict may result from clashes in personalities or poor communication. Jowett (2003) adds that a lack of understanding between the coach and athlete's needs and desires can prevent the dyad from continuing. This suggests that coaches often do not understand how to get the best out of their athletes, and may not appreciate the different ways they need to motivate each different individual, which is especially important in Rugby Union due to the variety of physical and mental requirements needed for different roles.

A lack of understanding is common when a team or an individual gains a new coach, which could create disruption and uncertainty amongst players in a rugby team, who have previously established themselves and their roles as part of the group. This relates to Situated Learning Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in that individuals will previously have learnt in a certain way with certain practices, whereas the introduction of a new coach may change the way they learn, the drills they follow, and maybe even their role within the squad. However, this ignores the idea that a team environment is constantly undergoing adaptations as a result of the complex social atmosphere, presenting the argument that athletes should be used to change and accept it more freely, although their acceptance may depend on maturity, which links to age.

## 2.9 Age

Age also affects participation in rugby, with research finding parental involvement and influence on children peaks at age 10-12 (e.g. Zeijl et al., 2000), although this disagrees with



Bandura's (1969) idea that individuals are socialised as young children and it is at that age where they are most influenced by their significant others. Fallon & Bowles (1997) state that as adolescence continues and young individuals develop, they experience less parental communication and are more likely to drop out of sport. In addition, Fallon & Bowles' (1997) research used white middle class participants, which could be judged to relate strongly to Rugby Union as it holds a history of existing as a white and middle class sport. However it could also be argued that only using white middle class participants lowered the validity of the study as other ethnic groups from similar or different environments were ignored.

Kirk (2005) also highlighted the importance of early age childhood experiences in sports participation, which were often governed by social class (Kirk et al., 1997; Kay, 2000), again linking to Rugby Union due to its middle class reputation, suggesting lower class individuals may be alienated from the game. However, placing such importance on early age childhood experience ignores individuals who begin their sports participation at a later age, who are often successful regardless of lack of early childhood experiences. In addition, Roberts & Brodie (1992) found higher SES youths were more likely to continue to participate throughout these adolescent years when sports careers are most vulnerable, as a result of parental support and disposable income, suggesting that by their middle class stereotype, young Rugby Union players should receive more support and should be less likely to drop out. Bailey et al (2010) agree that familial SES impacts on participation until around the age of late teenage years, when the socio-economic surroundings of the young individual themselves take effect, and without the parental support and disposable income the likelihood of drop out is increased.

There is also a documented ‘drop off’ in participation when students leave compulsory schooling at age 16 (e.g. Green et al., 2005; Lunn, 2010). In addition, Maia et al (2010) found constant increases in participation until 16.8 years, although this is specific to one country as it took place in Belgium, and ignores worldwide education age differences, which could affect the stage of drop out. These findings do not agree however with the notion of PE providing effective pathways to lifelong sport participation (e.g. Kirk & Gorely, 2000; Green, 2002). Sallis et al (1997), studying the effects of a two year exercise program on youngsters in America, stated that school is the key establishment for promotion of sport and physical activity. However the only noticeable improvements in their findings occurred after club coach introduction, suggesting local clubs and initiatives may be more beneficial to prevent rugby drop out by increasing enthusiasm.

#### 2.10 Enthusiasm

Rugby is a male dominated sport, and Grieser et al (2006) state that young males in sport continue participating for competitive and personal recognition reasons, and consequently, failure can damage enthusiasm, particularly if young males view their performance levels as worse than their teammates (Mason, 1995), resulting in low competence (e.g. Slater & Tiggemann, 2010) and higher likelihood of drop out. However, their generalisation that males are competitive ignores large numbers of individuals who participate for enjoyment, which is common in rugby as it often possesses the image of being a social and enjoyable game. In addition, many young individuals will drop out of their particular sport, for example Rugby Union, simply because they are no longer enthusiastic about participation, feeling they have outgrown their junior sport and pursuing other interests. This is common in young individuals who began their participation at an early age, Côté (2004) describing them as ‘early specializers.’

Smith (1998) agrees that many adults participate for mastery-orientated motives. However, the research was only carried out amongst runners and joggers, who may be more likely to participate in activity as a leisurely past-time, as rugby can be highly physically demanding, especially at an adult age, therefore requiring more enthusiasm and drive. Furthermore, Bailey et al (2010) suggested ‘early specializers,’ (e.g. Côté, 2004) individuals who have centred their attention on one sport from an early age, may use up their ‘quantum of commitment’ and by the vital transition stage of late adolescence, may have just had enough of their sport. Although for long-serving individuals within a rugby team, who have consequently become full participators within the community of practice (e.g. Lave & Wenger, 1991), it is suggested that athletes are reluctant to drop out, regardless of a lack of enthusiasm, so as not to hurt the feelings of their parents (Lally & Kerr, 2008). However, the research of Lally & Kerr (2008) was carried out amongst gymnasts, where the parent and athlete experience a much closer, intense and interactive relationship as a result of the sport’s individual nature, which may differ in the team sport of rugby.

### 2.11 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter began by providing background information on the sport of Rugby Union, and the club structure in England, and information about U19 colts rugby. It went on to review and evaluate the relevant literature concerning Rugby Union, and other research in the field of drop out and youth sport. Key theoretical frameworks such as Bourdieu’s (1978) Habitus and Lave & Wenger’s (1991) Situated Learning Theory have been identified, as a consequence of their relevance to the field of study. Overall, this chapter has provided an overview of the literature related to this field, whereby the findings of this research can be evaluated against it. The following chapter will focus on the research methods employed in

this research, and offer a rationale for, and an explanation of, the selected topic and research design.

## **Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction to the Chapter**

This chapter will begin by summarising the research area and explaining why this area has been selected for research. The chapter will also offer a rationale for the selection of a qualitative, interpretive framework for the research, in addition to detailing the phases of data collection, interpretation, and analysis. Furthermore, the researcher and his background are discussed, as well as the potential difficulties of performing qualitative methods.

### **3.2 Area of Research/Methodological Paradigm**

Upon review of the current literature, it seems that a large amount of research in the sport of Rugby Union employs a quantitative perspective. An example of this is the trend of Rugby Union research compiling injury statistics (e.g. Gianotti & Hume, 2007; McIntosh et al, 2009), in addition to other common factors such as using elite adult Rugby Union players (e.g. Best et al., 2005; Brooks et al., 2006), and match analysis (e.g. Duthie et al., 2006; Cunniffe et al., 2009).

Brett Smith and Andy Sparkes (Smith & Sparkes, 2002; 2004; 2005; 2008; Sparkes & Smith, 2002; 2003) used a qualitative approach in their rugby research, to investigate enforced drop out as a result of spinal cord injury, but there is no rugby related qualitative empirical research that assesses the impact of sociological and environmental factors that can lead to drop out.

Other research in rugby that does make any mention of drop out (e.g. Cresswell & Eklund, 2005; 2006; Hodge et al., 2008) ignores the sociological and environmental aspects that may have an effect, which have been proven as key factors in other sport research (e.g. Kirk et al.,

1997; Côté et al., 2003; Kay, 2003; Kirk & MacPhail, 2003; Coleman et al., 2008).

Consequently, this suggests that there is a distinct lack of research into late adolescent drop out in Rugby Union, and this is the gap in the literature this research aims to fill.

However although the research focused on drop out in Rugby Union is limited, the current and predominantly quantitative research in Rugby Union has been successful in providing knowledge on areas that can relate to drop out, such as the high physical demands that the game places on players (e.g. Cunniffe et al., 2009), how injury can play a key part in their lifestyles (Berry et al., 2006), and the high levels of pressure at an elite standard (Howe, 2001).

In order to actually assess the factors contributing to drop out, using a qualitative approach in Rugby Union teams is a constructive step in enhancing the amount of literature in the area. In particular, using a qualitative approach can capture the social constructs, beliefs and behaviours that occur, which can be applied to teams or groups of any nature (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

The aim of the researcher was to delve deeper into the factors that can lead to drop out at late adolescent/early adult drop out in Rugby Union, by uncovering the participants' overall rugby experience, starting from when they began playing the game. Approaching the area from a relatively fresh perspective in terms of Rugby Union research, by exploring participant experiences, can allow others to identify with it, which could pave the way for a growing number of similar cases that could be brought together to create a bigger picture of drop out in rugby and sport.

### 3.3 Rationale for the Research Method

In an effort to uncover the multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge in the ex-rugby player participants, a constructivist, interpretive approach was taken in conducting this research. Lincoln & Guba (1985) state that those who use the constructivist, interpretive paradigm gravitate to the production of reconstructed understandings of the social world. Therefore, the research undertakes a subjectivist epistemology, naturalistic methodology, and relativist ontology, as the researcher is of the view that researcher and participant both construct knowledge, in a natural setting. In terms of qualitative research, this is evident by using methods that will study participants in their own comfortable environment, asking open questions to explore their experiences, and by building a relationship with the researcher. The multiple realities the researcher and participant both bring to the research are as a result of them both holding their own beliefs, values and experiences (e.g. Robson, 2002).

As there are multiple realities (Robson, 2002), the research questions cannot be completely established ahead of constructing the ‘reality’ with the participants (e.g. Robson, 2002).

Relating interpretivism to sport, it can be understood in that individuals participating in sport are affected by various external social factors, but have the freedom to react to them in different ways, taking into account concepts such as feelings and emotions. Strengths of adopting an interpretive approach include the researcher gaining a closer perspective and understanding of the participants, and being able to explore and uncover their explanations (e.g. Gratton & Jones, 2004).

### 3.4 Research Approach

Qualitative research is described as a situated activity that locates the observer in the world (e.g. Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Important characteristics of qualitative research include

attaching more importance to understanding experiences and feelings (MacPhail, 2001), offering rich description and explanation (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and producing more natural responses (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). Researching from a qualitative perspective requires an interpretive and naturalistic approach, with qualitative researchers conducting their studies within the innate settings of their participants, in an effort to understand or interpret phenomena by the meanings they assign to them.

The suggestion that the researcher interprets the data by the meanings they bring to them is explained by Denzin & Lincoln (2008), who suggest that the researcher approaches the world with their own individualised set of ideas. Based on their own beliefs and experiences, they bring their own structure for the procedure, their own precise group of questions, and their own research design. This ontology, epistemology, and methodology shape how the researcher views and behaves (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), and are unique to any individual, affecting the way in which they enter the field.

These aspects can influence question choice, interpretation of responses and data analysis (e.g. Gratton & Jones, 2004). In addition, there is the concept of epoches, where the researcher can differentiate between their experiences and subjective pre-suppositions (e.g. Maso, 2001), and can put the ‘contaminatory’ knowledge to one side. However, this is difficult as it may be hard for the researcher to distinguish in their own minds, the knowledge that is ‘contaminatory’ and the knowledge that is not. This is especially relevant in qualitative research as the researcher has to be considered part of the process and a research instrument engaging in higher levels of participant interaction, and cannot avoid this. In acknowledgement of the fact that the interpretations of the researcher can affect the study, a brief section describing the researcher is provided.



### 3.5 The Researcher/Researcher Bias

I have played rugby for 16 years, reaching Regional U18 level and currently captaining an adult club side, competing amongst a number of elite players. Furthermore, I am working towards an RFU Level 3 coaching certificate, coaching both at adult club level and as an employee of an RFU Championship side, in a wide range of schools. Gaining coaching experience in both inner city schools and rural public schools, in addition to completion of an undergraduate degree in the field of sport and coaching, has led me to gain further interest in the participatory aspects. Also, involvement in a rugby club from childhood has given me further interest in the workings of a sports club, and how it affects individuals.

Having participated in Rugby Union for many years, I possess a strong awareness of the subject area, and advantages in experiencing the entire growth process, encountering many players arriving and departing from my particular club. As a result, I may be able to identify with participants' experiences or appreciate their answers more greatly, in addition to being more aware in terms of the follow up questions asked and subject knowledge, when immersed in the same field as the participants (e.g. Amis, 2005).

However I am aware that my personal and professional background, besides the relationships with the participants, could create a bias in the findings. The researcher brings their own assumptions and preconceptions that can affect the way they behave, and therefore the way the participants behave in the research setting (Robson, 2002). Also, the questions the researcher asks can best represent the results they want to gain and can be shaped by the culture they come from, in addition to the way they interpret data based on background and experiences.

There are steps to be taken that can reduce researcher bias, although the research inquiry is inevitably saturated with personal interpretation, and this can rarely be avoided (Behar & Gordon, 1995). Research states that the researcher should acknowledge themselves and their location, reveal their work as historically, culturally, and personally situated (e.g. Guba & Lincoln, 2005) in order to explain how this may affect the participants of the study.

I have attempted to be as objective as possible in conducting this qualitative research, as it is stated that by Guba & Lincoln (2005) that qualitative methods involving communication will always be reliant on the subjectivity of the researcher. As the subjectivity of the researcher is part of the process, steps were taken to minimise this, including a straightforward and uncomplicated interview questioning process and interviewing participants in the familiar setting of their old rugby club to make it easy for them to contribute data. Also, entering a different club to the one I grew up in allowed for the possibility of dismissing any previous prejudices. However on the other hand, my depth of knowledge and familiarity with the topic area should allow for greater overall understanding and perception than of an inexperienced individual.

The years spent in the area of rugby, whether in terms of playing, training, coaching, or socialising, have influenced me to believe that different factors can affect drop out in rugby. However, due to a lack of research in the area of adolescent drop out in Rugby Union, I strived to delve further by asking specific questions of the ex-players. Therefore this allowed me to develop my own awareness as a result of personal interest, showing a lack of agenda due to the learning on my part.

### 3.6 Research Methods

Interviews were the chosen research method to extract data from the participants, as it is seen as the pivotal source of data in social research (e.g. Kvale, 1996), conceptualised as a direct conversation (Charmaz, 2006). The nature of this process requires the individual participants to consider, reflect, and interpret experiences retrospectively. An advantage of using interviews is being able to gain the trust of participants and establish a rapport with them (Fontana & Frey, 2005), which is essential to interview success. In addition, the researcher's experience of being a rugby player may only have helped gain participant trust further, as participants might appreciate that the researcher has undergone similar experiences or situations to those they have endured.

Also, using interviews places the onus on the participant, enabling them to talk freely and openly, taking the focus away from the researcher (Corbin & Morse, 2003). This verbal nature of the interview allows the participants to express themselves using their own words, and even non-verbal cues may give messages which help in understanding the verbal response (Robson, 2002). On the other hand, interviews do possess disadvantages in that they are time consuming, and require careful and detailed preparation in terms of data recording and data analysis (Britten, 1995).

Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they are flexible and allow the researcher to probe for more information with subsidiary questions (Gratton & Jones, 2004). This is of great benefit to the researcher, as it allows them to broaden and deepen the data they acquire from the participants, if they are sharp enough to act on specific answers arising from the individuals (e.g. Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). In other sport research, semi-structured interviews were used (e.g. Coakley & White, 1992; Kay, 2000; Gilbert & Trudel, 2001;

Sparkes & Smith, 2002; Smith & Sparkes, 2005), where the interviewers had their initial topics organised but could be guided to some extent by the participant responses as to how the order of topics continued, and to how much attention is paid to different areas.

However once again, consideration of the researcher's part in the interview process cannot be forgotten, as knowledge is constructed reciprocally between interviewer and interviewee, resulting in meaning making, not data yielding (Hiller & DiLuzio, 2004). The researcher has an active role in the process (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995), and data are subsequently transformed twice, through the researcher's choice of questions and the ways in which the participants extract the significant parts of their original experiences to modify the experiences for the research.

### 3.7 Research Design

#### 3.71 Gaining Access/Gatekeepers

The purpose of the study was to comprehend the reasons behind each player's decision to drop out of rugby at age nineteen. It was felt that richer data would emerge from players high in performance, so a high level English Rugby Union club (pseudonym-Westfield Rugby Club) was selected as the research setting. However this was reliant on obtaining permission from official club personnel, who could grant access to the facilities for interviews.

Individuals who grant access are known as gatekeepers, who are trusted by group members and can create introductions to other members (Gratton & Jones, 2004). The groundskeeper of Westfield Rugby Club was identified for this study, initially contacted by telephone and communicated with in person the week before the study. Sands (2002) highlighted the significance of establishing and maintaining a strong relationship with the gatekeeper,

suggesting they are in command of the researcher's access to the participants and their group. The gatekeeper granted access and suggested a room in the clubhouse that would be undisturbed and suitable for interview.

The researcher then made contact with the prospective participants, and received a healthy response about interviews. All interviews were conducted during one week, with two interviews on each week day, from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> of July 2011. Participants were contacted initially through a social networking website and contacted further by telephone to make interview arrangements more easily. The researcher informed participants that he would be present at the rugby club on every evening of the selected week, from 6pm until 10pm, to enable participants to fit their interviews in around other commitments. Interviews were therefore taken at different times and the researcher spent time waiting at the club, although it was deemed important that the participants' lives were disrupted as little as possible.

Gratton & Jones (2004) highlight the significance of extra planning in the research setting to make participants feel more at ease. Westfield Rugby Club was selected as it was the club of the chosen participants before their ceased participation. Research has suggested the importance of using a setting that participants are familiar with, as in addition to recognising and knowing the surroundings, it may enable them to rediscover previous experiences when situated in the actual setting (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Once players arrived at the rugby club for interview, they were greeted by the researcher before entering the 'interview room' in the clubhouse. The tranquillity of the back room allowed for little disruption and an uninterrupted interview process.

### 3.72 Participants

Purposive sampling was used to select participants, as it was known to the researcher which participants were needed, and it is difficult to gain access to large numbers of participants who have dropped out, as they are no longer on the radar, thus eliminating other sampling methods. In addition, this enabled the researcher to satisfy the needs of the project (e.g. Robson, 2002). A relatively small sample was used, for the purpose of gaining detailed data, to unearth thorough descriptions, and to uncover the complex web of interactions that exist (Cushion & Jones, 2006) between the athletes, coaches, family, and socio-cultural context.

A clear criterion for selection was established, as recommended by Gilbert & Trudel (2004), and this sample criterion included individuals who had participated in Rugby Union for a minimum of five years, and dropped out at age nineteen. It was also considered important to use participants who had played rugby in the same team, to investigate whether these individuals dropped out for different reasons, or similar reasons concerning the squad or club. In total, ten participants were used who had played in the same U19 colts squad of Westfield Rugby Club (pseudonym), and participants' age ranged from 21 to 22 as they had dropped out around three years previously. There is an argument for bias in the selection of the ten participants, but they were selected on the researcher's knowledge of their previous drop out, and it is often very difficult and time consuming to contact ex-players for such studies, as they do not socialise with the same individuals any more. The individuals, previously known to the researcher as a result of their earlier participation in the sport, were identified as they matched the research criteria, and accessed individually through a social networking website. All individuals were contacted by the researcher on the basis that there had been no contact with them in at least three years leading up to the study, to reduce bias. The rugby club and

each individual player were provided with pseudonyms after contributing their data for the research, to fulfil the researcher's assurance that anonymity would be ensured.

### 3.8 Pilot Study

A pilot study can be described as a small scale version of the main research (e.g. Gratton & Jones, 2004). Before any work for the main research was started, a pilot study was undertaken for this investigation. The benefits of using a pilot study include to assess the likely completion time (Yin, 2009), to allow a practice of analysing the data involved (Robson, 2002), and to check that the wording and sequence of any questions is clear and easily understandable (Gratton & Jones, 2004). Many of these changes could then be made for the benefit of the main thesis.

The pilot study took place in May 2011, with four players of a different rugby club (pseudonym-Benway Park). These players were selected purposively by the researcher, as there was a deliberate effort to include a presumably typical group (Kerlinger, 1986). The participants were known to the researcher as individuals who had participated in Rugby Union at U19 colts level, before dropping out, similar to the prospective participants of the main study.

Although it could be argued the researcher was biased in the selection of these four specific individuals, they were simply selected as the researcher had knowledge of their drop out, and realistically, it is difficult to get in touch with many ex-players that have dropped out, as they are no longer participating and therefore are often no longer in the same social circle. Each of the four players was initially contacted via a social networking website, to offer a brief description of the research and to inquire in hope of their interest to participate. Once it was

confirmed that the individuals were able and willing to participate, meetings at their former club, Benway Park were arranged for the week of 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> May 2011.

One interview was taken each day on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, and upon arrival, individuals were presented with a consent form. The consent form offered participants a basic description of the research, described what was expected of them, and informed them of their ethical rights. These included that their data would be kept confidential and pseudonyms used to protect their identities, which they were free to withdraw at any time, and to confirm they understood what the research required. The consent form was useful in confirming that it was easy to comprehend, and in ensuring the research was ethically sound.

Once the forms were completed and returned, interviews began, with the researcher reminding participants of their rights at the beginning of each interview. Interviews were all semi-structured, recorded by Dictaphone, and lasted from 25 to 35 minutes. Interviews were digitally transferred onto the researcher's computer, protected by a password only known to the researcher, and were then transcribed into a Microsoft Word document. For further participant protection and increased security of data, each document was protected with a password only known to the researcher.

### 3.9 Ethical Considerations

There many ethical issues in research that need to be addressed, that question whether the research will be both morally and socially acceptable (e.g. Gratton & Jones, 2004).

Traditionally, science and research has been viewed as 'value-free,' and that the researcher could portray their research and results in an objective manner (Robson, 2002). However, the



subjectivity of the researcher is unavoidable and inevitable in qualitative design, therefore ethical issues take on greater importance.

The aspects of ethics to be considered include making sure of participants' informed consent, ensuring participants are not deceived, that data is kept confidential and identities anonymous, and finally that any recorded data is accurate (Christians, 2008). Furthermore, any research using humans as the object of inquiry requires extreme care (Fontana & Frey, 2005), and contains increased scrutiny (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) as a result of the possible consequences. Therefore steps were undertaken to avoid any harm to participants in this research.

Upon arrival at interviews, participants were provided with consent forms outlining the details of the research, and offered explanation as to the nature of their participation informed them of their ethical rights. Participants were also given a participant information sheet that informed them of further information regarding the study. To ensure anonymity and participants' identities being protected, their identities were kept anonymous, so that data was confidential to the researcher, and only the researcher could identify individuals from studying the data. Pseudonyms were used to represent participant names when writing up the results, and the participants were informed of this. In addition, school, coach, parent and peer names spoken in interviews were given pseudonyms to further guarantee anonymity.

### 3.10 Data Collection

#### 3.10.1 Athlete Interviews

Interviews were all semi-structured and complimented by an interview guide, which allowed a modification of the order of questions (e.g. Robson, 2002), in addition to creating scope for

a greater level of interpretation from the researcher. The interview guide was established upon the researcher's knowledge of and experience in rugby, as well as being based upon relevance to previous research results, as it is important that the researcher has an up to date knowledge of the subject area (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

A semi-structured interview approach enabled flexibility in the ordering of questions asked and how long was spent on each question (e.g. Fontana & Frey, 2005). In addition it allowed the researcher to introduce new questions, as a follow up to distinct data provided by participants that could have added vital information, key criteria for an in-depth interview (Robson, 2002). Interview questions were open to ensure participant responses were detailed, providing rich data instead of short, uncomplicated answers. This also allowed interviewees to become more comfortable in interviews from the beginning, the benefits including enabling them to talk continuously and with more continuity.

The interview process was also constructed to take the interviewees through their rugby lives, with the early stages of interview focusing on participants' entrance to rugby and their early experiences, before working through the rest of their rugby participation until drop out. Advantages of this included providing a structured and rational order for the questions, in addition to allowing the ex-players to follow a train of thought in their minds, where thinking back to one scenario could lead them in stages through their development.

Schwartz (1999) highlights the effectiveness of this method, stating that individuals remember their lives as social processes and in terms of their experiences with others. More data could perhaps have been extracted from the participants if the researcher had spent more time with them, for example, interviewing them on different occasions, which may have

affected their ability to remember certain experiences. Dates and times during the interview week were arranged prior to meeting with participants, so there were no problems with timings and all interviews went according to plan.

### 3.10.2 Data Recording

The interviews all took place in the same location, to make it a familiar and convenient place for the participants to get to, and to eliminate bias between individuals (e.g. Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). It was also thought that using the same location each time, with participants physically being in the setting where many of their rugby experiences took place, it may enable them to recall incidents they may not have otherwise remembered.

All interviews took place in a rarely used room in the Westfield Rugby Club clubhouse, where it was important that there would be no interruptions or distractions (e.g. MacPhail, 2001). In addition, the quiet and calm setting of the room allowed for a clear audio recording with no background noises or disturbances. Prior to the interview process, the researcher had requested each participant to allow for up to one hour of their time to be occupied by the interviews. The same process was undertaken each time upon meeting with participants, with the researcher making the same introductory statements, to clarify the nature of the interview and purpose of the study (e.g. Robson, 2002).

Included in the introductory statements was an explanation to the participant that regardless of the fact they were known to the researcher, they should not assume that the researcher would understand a limited explanation of their experiences due to a healthy knowledge of the same field, and they were expected to fully describe their memories and recollections. It is stated by Lugg (1996) that researchers should not shed their affiliations but identify them

and understand the impacts they may have on the research. The participants were also asked again for their consent, reminded of the fact that they were able to withdraw at any time, and were lastly reminded that their data would be kept confidential and their identities anonymous. Punch (2005) states that ensuring confidentiality is of paramount importance as it is the single, most likely source of harm to the participant.

Completed consent forms were also returned to the researcher, and the individuals were all asked once more to communicate any further questions or reservations to the researcher. On completion of this stage, participants were always comfortable and willing to continue with the process. The majority of interviews went according to plan, apart from one occasion where a current U19 colt entered the interview room by accident, although this was in the introductory statements and the interview was easily restarted. Also, in one other interview the Dictaphone ran out of battery and had to be recharged. However the charging equipment was on hand and the Dictaphone was able to charge whilst the interview progressed.

Interviews were recorded using a Philips Professional 488 digital Dictaphone, and the interviews were digitally transferred onto the researcher's computer, which was protected by a password only known to the researcher. The length of interviews varied from 45 minutes to 55 minutes, and they were transcribed into a Microsoft Word document. For further participant protection and increased security of data, each document was also protected with a password only known to the researcher.

### 3.11 Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim, which was time consuming but important to ensure the correct interpretation (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005). Once transcribed, interviews were numbered and dated, and participants given pseudonyms to ensure their anonymity. In

addition, all interviews were stored safely, only accessible to the researcher. Thematic analysis was conducted, a process for encoding qualitative information (Boyatzis, 1998) whereby themes surfaced as a result of the interpretive framework, as the theory is obtained from the information. Various themes became apparent through the interpretive framework, which centres on the data emerging from the research. The theory is therefore derived from the data, gathered and analysed through the research process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Themes were generated inductively upon analysing the raw data, and after each transcription every interview was checked for information that came under any of the certain themes. These themes were constantly altered and modified as a result of analysing each interview, because new answers and information were often being produced. Using ten participants made comparison of participants and their experiences easier, helping to sort data into themes that were accurate representations of the information they provided.

A deductive process was also used in that themes were cut down to make the data more streamlined, as well as data being relocated to a more appropriate category when considered to have been misplaced. Contrasts and similarities were drawn between participants and common themes appeared. The small sample allowed a detailed analysis and cross-referencing of each participant and their experiences, which allowed themes to be constructed, and this would not have been as straightforward with a larger sample (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). Furthermore, the objectivity of the researcher was again of high importance when assigning themes from the data.

### 3.12 Establishing Reliability and Validity

Advocates of qualitative research avoid words like validity and reliability, preferring expressions including “credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability” (Robson,

2002, p.170) or “quality, rigor and trustworthiness” (Golafshani, 2003, p.602). Strategies such as continued observation, and lengthy engagement with the characteristics, attributes and traits most relevant to the phenomenon under investigation (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007) are viewed as effective methods against which the credibility and legitimacy of studies can be assessed. If the researcher has forged a trust with the participants and employs a healthy understanding of the culture that they are working in, participants are more likely to feel comfortable in their presence, see them as trustworthy, and provide honest and truthful answers during investigation.

In addition, the researcher needs to ensure they do not let their exploits be biased in sympathy with the field being used for investigation. There must also be an acknowledgement of the preconceptions brought by researcher and participants to the study, because it is unfeasible for either to not bring any amount of bias in their views and assumptions of themselves and the world (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

In reducing any type of bias during questioning, Martindale et al. (2007) propose employing the method of open ended questions to extract detailed and entire responses from participants, as a process to establish the trustworthiness of data. However the agenda of the participant and their ability to articulate honest and sincere views is vital in terms of maintaining the credibility of the research (Robson, 2002), instead of the participants feeling the need to answer questions in ways they believe they researcher wants them to.

### 3.13 Chapter Conclusion

Choosing a qualitative approach for this research has allowed the researcher to pursue in-depth data on the experiences of and factors that can lead competitive 19 year old Rugby

Union players to cease participating in their sport. The chapter also introduced the researcher and his background, in addition to detailing the potential difficulties of having inside knowledge and experience in the subject area. Furthermore, the chosen research methods were explained, providing a rationale for the use of a constructivist, interpretive approach, in addition to a description of the processes utilized for data collection and analysis. The consequent findings as a result of the analysis will be discussed in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 4: DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Introduction to the Chapter**

This chapter will investigate and explore the emergent themes from the interviews, relating them to previously mentioned theoretical frameworks such as Habitus (Bourdieu, 1978) and Situated Learning Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and the relevant literature concerning drop out in Rugby Union sports clubs. Upon analysing the interview data, a number of apparent themes emerged which led the findings to be divided into two areas, causes of drop out and consequences of drop out. Causes of drop out included injury, changes in personnel, and enthusiasm, whilst consequences of drop out included lack of social atmosphere, participating in new activities, and experiencing different feelings upon returning to the club. However, firstly a background on the interviewees' feelings about the club is provided. Interviewees have been provided pseudonyms of Tim, Carl, Neil, Dave, Billy, Tony, George, Troy, John, and Jim, and any other places, clubs, schools or people that may shed light on individual identities have also been given pseudonyms.

### **4.2 Background to the Club**

When questioned about how they viewed the club and how they got on with their teammates when growing up in the mini and junior section at Westfield, every participant responded with positive answers, highlighting the excellent atmosphere that surrounded them. Neil stated about Westfield that,

“It was a family atmosphere. All the parents got on.” (Neil, Interview 3, 5/7/11)

This observation emphasizes the esteem in which the ex-players held the club, and through Neil's mention of family, suggest the notion of a 'family club'. Toms & Fleming (1995)



concur that the way in which ‘the family’ of a sports club is constructed and perpetuated, by players and their family members portraying different social positions, is vital in terms of participation rates. Neil’s statement also supports the finding that club members often ascribe to the values, beliefs and support networks that represent the ideals of traditional nuclear families (Toms et al., 2008), resulting in individuals experiencing strong emotional ties to the club environment, whether participating, coaching, or being actively involved.

In addition, Billy commented about the club,

“I can’t really think of a better atmosphere to be in to be honest.” (Billy, Interview 5, 6/7/11)

The evidence given by the ex-players indicates that they viewed the atmosphere at Westfield as very positive, and felt comfortable in their social positions amongst friends and other parents or coaches, who Neil felt he could describe as family. MacPhail (2004) supports the importance that the aura of a ‘family club’ can transmit, as the sports club in the research was eager to be promoted as such, citing catering for all ages and abilities as a strength of a family atmosphere. The individuals’ high regard of the rugby club also disagrees with the view of Sallis et al (1997), who stated that school was the key establishment for sport and physical activity.

#### 4.3 Causes of Dropout

The three dominant themes emerging from the interview data began with injury, whether permanent, mild, or simply players concerned about risk of injury. The other themes included changes in squad personnel, in terms of coaches or players, and enthusiasm amongst the individuals, whereby low enthusiasm often contributed to drop out.

#### 4.3.1 Injury

The first theme that emerged was injury, which has been found to increase drop out in youth sport (e.g. Butcher et al., 2002; Emery et al., 2006). The participants citing injury as a reason or contributory factor to their drop out were divided into three sub-themes; serious injury, mild injury, and risk of injury.

##### 4.3.1.1 Serious Injury

Two interviewees, Neil and Tony, had suffered serious knee and spinal injuries respectively, and were advised by doctors to cease their participation in the sport. Interestingly, both individuals had played to a high standard of rugby, with Tony having played for England U16s, and Neil representing the region at age group level. In addition, these two players had reached the most competitive level amongst all the interviewees, which supports various pieces of research highlighting the dangers that high level rugby can have in terms of injury (Brooks et al., 2005; Gianotti & Hume, 2007; McIntosh et al., 2009). In addition, Neil and Tony expressed how they would have continued participation had it not been for their injuries, relating to the work of Williams & Ford (2006), who found individuals playing at representative level were more likely to prolong their involvement in a playing capacity. Both players clearly hoped to continue playing, as they had attempted participation after short lengths of time away from the game in the hope that their injuries recovered. However Tony stated,

“I wasn’t playing fit, I wasn’t playing at my best, I was just playing for the sake of playing.”

(Tony, Interview 6, 6/7/11)

It could be suggested that Tony still attempted participation as it was all he knew, as he stated it had become a habit and a routine, in addition to expressing hope that his injury would subside. This also relates to Smith & Sparkes (2005), who found that seriously injured ex-rugby players in their research commonly experienced concrete hope that their injuries would somehow be cured. This can be counter-productive as it can prevent individuals from constructing a new body-self relationship (Smith & Sparkes, 2002; 2004), allowing the injured ex-players to continue adopting the persona of an active player, in an attempt to maintain their role amongst the squad. It seems Tony and Neil still saw themselves as players, despite inevitably carrying the knowledge that they would no longer be able to participate, as they may have been unwilling to accept their new body-self relationship. Eventually, Neil required a knee surgery to replace his cartilage, and Tony required multiple surgeries to remove one vertebra and shave another, ending their participation permanently.

#### 4.3.1.2 Mild Injury

Jim mentioned in his interview that he had suffered a hamstring tear which sidelined him for a month, yet used this as a contributory factor to his drop out. He stated that,

“It was at that age where everyone was moving on and getting better and bigger, and I just missed out on that period.” (Jim, Interview 10, 8/7/11)

Generally speaking, a one-month period of inactivity should not provide such drastic consequences, and for example, in comparison with the off season period where a few months rest are commonly taken by the majority of players, individuals are not left falling behind others. In addition, research suggests that muscles will generally have developed to near their capacity by age eighteen (Blimkie & Sale, 1998), so for players of this age and

above, a period of one month for a mild muscle tissue injury should not provide undue hindrance to regaining health, or more significantly lead to drop out. This creates the impression that Jim could have used his injury as an excuse to mask the fact he no longer wished to play rugby, as he had already also expressed a loss of interest in participating, and using the reason of injury helped enable him to retain his masculinity. The research of Wiese-Bjornstal et al (1998) supports the view that individuals may respond differently psychologically and sociologically to injury, which may lead them to use the injury as a reason to cease participating in the case of declining motivation and interest (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

#### 4.3.1.3 Risk of Injury

A further interviewee, Tim, did not actually receive an injury, but on more than one occasion during interview mentioned he was concerned about the increase in physicality as he matured, and stated that he,

“Couldn’t compete with some of the weight people had.” (Tim, Interview 1, 4/7/11)

This suggests that Tim was concerned about his bodily stature and physicality, which in his playing position of prop is a key aspect of the game, and without it he may be risking injury. Weiss & Duncan (1992) add that concerns over physical competence, (overly apparent in Tim) can be related to amotivation and consequent drop out. In the lead up to his drop out, he was training three times and playing competitive matches three times every week, and with the added pressure of school studies, stated he was suffering from fatigue and burnout, which can lead to a higher risk of injury (e.g. Strachan et al., 2009). The repeated reference to physicality relates to the findings of Cresswell & Eklund (2005; 2006) and Hodge et al

(2008), in that young rugby players ceased participation due to low competence and motivation, in addition to the finding that high intensity schedules can induce burnout in young sportspeople (Strachan et al., 2009). However his drop out as he explained it, as a result of burnout, may be another example of attempting to retain masculinity by providing an excuse that allowed him to bow out gracefully, shielding his concerns over increased physicality.

#### 4.3.2 Changes in Personnel

A key issue that a number of participants mentioned affected their drop out was changes in personnel, whether in terms of coaching or playing personnel. Three sub-themes comprising disruption to the family, relationships with coaches, and relationships with teammates have been established.

##### 4.3.2.1 Disruption to 'The Family'

The process of moving from mini and junior rugby (age 6-17) into colts rugby (age 17-19) seemed to unsettle some of the participants, with Dave, John, Jim, George and Troy all mentioning some level of discomfort with the mandatory change in coaching personnel. This relates back to Kirk & MacPhail's (2003) idea of a 'family' club, as many of the players and families who previously occupied team and social roles within the old squad may no longer hold their position, causing uneasiness. Many of the individuals had been coached by Dave's father Nick from a young age, and he was praised highly by all in terms of his coaching and personality. However, when new coaches were introduced to the players at colts level, Dave lost his place in the team and stated that,

“I was never going to get on as well with Andy and Adam (colts coaches) in colts after my dad had been coaching me for over ten years.” (Dave, Interview 4, 5/7/11)

Dave’s comment suggests he viewed the changing of coaches as a disruption, and a disruption of increased magnitude to him as the previous coach was his father. The change in coaches links to Bourdieu (1978), where he stated that each individual holds a unique position within a habitus, and in the Dave’s case, the change in personnel could have affected or altered his position, especially as his father was the previous coach. However Bourdieu (1978) also found that a habitus constantly undergoes alterations and adaptations, so it could be argued that the change in personnel is just another example of this, and therefore the players should accept that it may happen. This relates to the work of Sinclair & Orlick (1993), who found transitional changes and challenges have the potential to be perceived positively and negatively, depending on the individual’s perception. In Dave’s case, the change was evidently perceived as negative, as the personnel change removed the inextricable link he had developed between himself, his father, and rugby, a relationship he had become accustomed to and felt comfortable with.

Jim also felt that he did not get on with the new coaches very well, and mentioned that he did not feel he understood them. This highlights another example of a player failing or feeling unable to embrace the transition successfully, and Bailey et al (2010) state that without the ability to do this, individuals are unlikely to continue their involvement in sport, whatever the chosen level of participation. The impression is created that Jim had become familiar with the previously used coaching methods, and learning in a certain way under the old coaches, relating to Situated Learning Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), as individuals within the team will previously have learnt in a certain type of way as a result of their surroundings and

coach, and a change in personnel can affect this. For example, new coaches may perceive the game differently and employ a new game plan and drills, use different ways of thinking and original strategies, which may cause uneasiness and disruption to certain individuals.

George had travelled abroad for a year and returned for the second year of colts rugby, where he found that he came back to many different personnel and stated,

“I came back to a Westfield team which didn’t have that feel, with many different personnel, and I kind of got disillusioned with it.” (George, Interview 7, 7/7/11)

For George, the impression is created that he left the team that he enjoyed, and came back to a different family, which was unusual for him. The fact that George felt uncomfortable upon experiencing new coaching and playing personnel reinforces an idea from Bourdieu (1978), in that all practices demonstrate evidence of the structures of the habitus that produce them. In terms of changes in personnel, the previously established practices may have been changed, which has the potential to disrupt and upset the social balance. The modified practices under the new personnel introduce another issue for George, as Bourdieu (1978) stated that the durability of a habitus is one of its strengths. However if the same values of a habitus are reproduced due to its durability, and players such as George have rejoined a new ‘family’ where the social hierarchy has altered and they are starting in a lower social position, the long-lasting nature of the habitus may make this hard to change.

#### 4.3.2.2 Relationships with Coaches

Troy, who had played in the team for a number of years, dropped out during colts due to an incident before the players left the rugby club for an away game. He described how he was

informed as he arrived that he had been dropped for a player two years his junior, and that the colts coach described his previous week's performance as the worst he had ever seen a player in his position play. Troy stated how,

“It shatters your confidence really. And I never really came back after that.” (Troy, Interview 8, 7/7/11)

This one moment resulted in Troy's drop out; highlighting the importance that single negative comments or incidents can have on an individual's participation, as Troy admitted his confidence was destroyed. The critical incident that led to Troy's drop out is supported by Gilbert (2001), who found that an isolated negative emotional experience led to the decision of individuals to discontinue their sports participation completely. Similarly, Seefeldt et al (1992) agreed that a common reason for individuals discontinuing their sporting participation was not agreeing with their coach. Jowett (2003) adds that a lack of understanding between the coach and athlete's needs and desires can prevent the dyad from continuing, and in this case it suggests the coach did not understand how his actions would affect Troy. Jowett (2003) also interviewed an athlete who stated that they felt their coach purposely created problems and compared them to other athletes in a degrading way, which also affected them negatively. In comparison, the way in which Troy was dropped for the match in question also suggests that the coach went out of his way to publicly humiliate him, which for players who may possess low confidence can have disastrous effects, and in Troy's case, evidently led to his drop out.



As a possible result of his disillusionment on his return from a year abroad, George became unsettled and found that he was being selected in several different positions or as a substitute by the coaches, who he stated,

“Did in the end chip away at my morale a bit.” (George, Interview 7, 7/7/11)

George’s loss of morale suggests he had lost confidence in himself and his new coaches, and possessed a poor relationship with them, as his perception seemed that they did not value him as a player. Highlighting the importance of a strong connection between players and their coaches, Jones et al (2004) stated that coaching methods are outweighed in significance by coach-athlete relationships, which in George’s case contributed to his drop out. Although Boardley et al (2008) suggest coaching methods can also be a factor in terms of motivation; finding players were more satisfied and tried harder when perceiving their coach to be competent, relating to George’s comments about losing morale. His reduced game time as a result of his declining selection by the coaches suggests this resulted in him experiencing legitimate peripheral participation, (e.g. Lave & Wenger, 1991) although this can also be affected by not being highly established amongst the social hierarchy of teammates.

#### 4.3.2.3 Relationships with Teammates

George also suffered conflict and difficult relationships with a number of his teammates, which he described as friction, and that he felt a lack of support from them, supporting Keegan et al (2010) and Mays et al (2010), who stated that team members can affect whether their team mates continue to participate in rugby. He stated,

“For the first time in my life I felt like a (low) confidence player.” (George, Interview 7, 7/7/11)

He began to drop the ball and described how the players then invented a derisive phrase that was repeated every time he dropped it, which clearly affected his confidence. Orlick and Partington’s (1998) research supports this, stating that psychological factors as determinants of performance are crucial for success. His teammates’ mockery of his mistakes and performances, leaving him as the butt of the jokes, suggests he felt alienated from the group. This relates to Bourdieu’s (1978) Habitus which stated individuals possessing a lower social position may result in them forming a different habitus to other teammates, which could ostracize them and potentially facilitate drop out. As George had experienced difficulties with both his coaches and teammates, it was evident that he was no longer enjoying his rugby before his drop out, relating to the research of MacPhail & Kirk (2006) who found that sports clubs do not consistently provide positive experiences. His lack of enjoyment could be explained by the fact that instead of receiving strength and support from his teammates as would be expected, his experience of being part of a team became a negative one.

In addition to George, Carl and Jim had mentioned that there was an inner social circle, and John stated that,

“I was probably part of the in-crowd if you get what I mean.” (John, Interview 9, 8/7/11)

This links to Ntoumanis & Vazou (2005), finding teams have dominant members that comprise the hub of the squad, and McNeal (1995), who stated individual social roles are vital to participation. As a result of being belittled by his teammates, it suggests that George

was not in the so called ‘in-crowd,’ and in terms of Situated Learning Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), not being part of the group ‘core’ or residing low down in the social hierarchy can define possibilities for learning, often resulting in legitimate peripheral participation for the unfortunate individuals involved. It seemed George, who felt he lost his playing confidence as a result of teammate ridicule, may not have felt involved in the inner social hub of the squad, and could even have felt like an outsider. This could also have affected his confidence in his individual squad role, which along with his poor coach relationship contributed to his drop out. He felt his playing performances were not sufficient, he wasn’t in the inner social circle, and felt the coaches did not value him, which overall created a negative experience on three different fronts.

#### 4.3.3 Enthusiasm

Another theme that became evident was enthusiasm, as the individuals gaining maturity resulted in making their own decisions about continuing their participation, or beginning employment in certain cases. As a result, there are three sub-themes that include playing for parents or coaches, playing to remain in the family, and work.

##### 4.3.3.1 Playing to please Parents/Coaches

John and Dave had been involved in the team from a young age, with Dave’s father Nick the long-term coach of the team. Nick was a well known club figure, and John’s father was also heavily involved in the organisation of club activities such as Easter tours. They described a loss of enthusiasm and interest in their last years of participation, although John mentioned that he wanted to keep playing to stay loyal to his father. However Dave stated about his declining enjoyment and his father as coach,

“Towards the end it got to me, trying to please him instead of, enjoying it for myself.” (Dave, Interview 4, 5/7/11)

The impression is created that as they had played for such a long period within the team, it was difficult for John and Dave to let go, and even more so due to the high involvement of their parents. This links to Kirk & MacPhail (2003), who found parents fulfil roles that are then expected to be fulfilled regularly, and Toms & Kirk (2006), who found that the positions of the parents within the club can affect the degree of their offspring's participation. In addition, the suggestion of Bailey et al (2010) that premature specialists may use up their ‘quantum of commitment’ and by the crucial transition stage of late adolescence, simply lose enthusiasm for their sport may possess some truths in the cases of John and Dave. The impression is created that they had lost enthusiasm for rugby as they were amongst the longest-serving players and had specialized early, resulting in them both losing the desire to participate any more, leading to their drop out.

It can also be described in terms of Situated Learning Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), whereby the social hierarchy within the community of practice can define whether players become full participators. Clearly Dave and John had become full participators as a result of their long-term involvement and the roles of their fathers, and found it hard to detach themselves from the club environment despite their declining enthusiasm. Detachment seemed especially difficult as they did not want to hurt their parents; Lally & Kerr (2008) agreeing that the sporting disengagement of offspring can have a tremendous impact on parents' social and personal relationships. It also seemed like the pressure of the situation and unusual relationship with his father had eventually overwhelmed Dave as he stated,

“He had high expectations, and I just hoped I’d do everything I could do to fulfil it for him. It was kind of like, I mean towards the end it got to me.” (Dave, Interview 4, 5/7/11)

This relates to Hultsman (1993), who found that high parental involvement could act as the greatest ‘threat’ to participation, and in Dave’s case it inevitably contributed to his drop out.

#### 4.3.3.2 Playing to remain in ‘The Family’

The notion of the ‘family’ club surfaced again in John’s answer when asked about the reasons that led to him ceasing participation. John, who had described himself as part of the ‘in crowd’, felt that he had lost enthusiasm but wanted to stay loyal to Nick and his father, commenting that,

“It was great to see the lads, but I kind of just wasn’t as bothered about playing.” (John, Interview 9, 8/7/11)

The evidence suggests that as John and Dave had established themselves in higher social positions that were linked to the social roles of their parents, they were subsequently involved more deeply within the community of practice (e.g. Lave & Wenger, 1991), and more tightly bonded to their teammates. John’s answer also contradicts the finding of Grieser et al (2006) that young males participate for competitive and recognition reasons, highlighting the strength that team relationships can generate. However it supports evidence from Vanreusel et al (1997) that recreational athletes are more likely to drop out than competitive athletes, and by John’s own admission he did not want to pursue rugby seriously, experiencing declining enthusiasm. It seemed apparent John was lacking enthusiasm, but the fact he wanted to attend to see his teammates could suggest that the years of shared experiences he

enjoyed with them were vital, in terms of how he learnt and made sense of his surroundings e.g. Situated Learning Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and that leaving the club would present an entirely different and unusual environment to him. His desire to continue his relationships with his teammates creates the impression that he was playing to remain in ‘the family’.

Tony shared the same concerns about wanting to remain in ‘the family,’ but he showed more of a concern when commenting on his peers. As a result of injury, he stated,

“I had to duck out of training, and I felt the guys thought I was making it up.” (Tony, Interview 6, 6/7/11)

It seems Tony felt that his enforced absences from training would make other team members think that he was not bothered in fully ascribing to the team culture, and he was concerned that they may have resented this and perceived it as a loss of enthusiasm. This relates back to the work of Fenton & Pitter (2010), who found athletes who did not totally immerse themselves in the team culture became less socially integrated and increasingly isolated. In addition, being unable to train consistently meant that Tony could not be fully involved in the ever-developing habitus (e.g. Bourdieu, 1978) of the squad, missing out on newly established meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions that would uphold his social position within the community of practice (e.g. Lave & Wenger, 1991).

#### 4.3.3.3 Work

Dave and Billy had mentioned that the main reason they both dropped out of rugby was that they began working in jobs that required them to work on a Saturday. However, their

scenarios are somewhat different; Dave stating that he had begun to lose interest in his long-term and main hobby after constantly being selected for the bench by the colts coaches. He commented that,

“I had to find myself a job, and the only job I could find that was good for me was one where I had to work weekends.” (Dave, Interview 4, 5/7/11)

Dave’s answer suggests that once he became the clear second choice player in his position in the coaches’ eyes, rugby was less important to him and work became a way out, relating to Ryan & Deci’s (2000) words that the human spirit can become crushed when individuals feel alienated. His suggestion that the job was the only one that was good for him implies that he was no longer as enthusiastic about participating, because if he had still held genuine enthusiasm, rugby would have been a higher priority. It could be suggested that Dave was experiencing amotivation, that can result from not valuing the activity (Ryan, 1995), not feeling competent in participating in it (Bandura, 1986), or not expecting it to produce the wanted outcome (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which in Dave’s last season of being consistently benched would not be overly surprising.

On the other hand it seemed Billy was still enjoying his rugby, but his loss of enthusiasm appeared after he started his job as a chef about which he stated,

“It cuts out your ability to play matches, which...doesn’t really inspire you to want to go to training.” (Billy, Interview 5, 6/7/11)

However there seemed no specific factor or incident that made Billy drop out, which relates to the finding of Cervelló et al (2007), that youth drop out in sport can occur as a result of a combination of areas, including conflict of interests or not having fun. In Billy's case it seemed that his conflict of interests was rugby with his chef job, and rugby was not as high a priority at that time, which led to his drop out.

#### 4.4 Consequences of Dropout

The ex-players were also asked questions concerning their current activity levels, what they missed about the game and how they felt about returning to the club. Based on this, the three themes that emerged included: absence of a social atmosphere, gaining other activities, and feelings upon their return.

##### 4.4.1 Absence of Social Atmosphere

The overriding consequence of drop out amongst the participants was the absence of a social atmosphere, which was clearly vital in maintaining their previous participation, and a commonly mentioned advantage of the 'family club'.

##### 4.4.1.1 Loss of Camaraderie

Amongst the actual playing of the game, the main aspect of participating in rugby that the individuals missed most was the camaraderie and relationships with their teammates. Dave mentioned that he missed,

"Messing about and the chats with all the lads, going out, just, just like seeing them every week, and being able to talk to them every week." (Dave, Interview 4, 5/7/11)



This draws attention to the fact that rugby is not mentioned at all as something that was missed. This suggests that even if the reason a team participates is for a sport, building bonds and camaraderie with teammates can actually overtake the sport in terms of importance for many individuals. Their expression of the loss of camaraderie links to Bourdieu's (1978) Habitus, in that they had become used to acting and behaving in a certain way with their teammates as a result of their habitus, and no longer have those individuals to communicate with, stripping them of the embodied understandings, intuitions and anticipations that they had built up over years of shared culture, (e.g. Bourdieu, 1978). In addition, what was also evident was that the only two participants providing no mention of missing their teammates were George and Troy, the two individuals that had experienced a fall out with playing or coaching members of the squad. George's case relates to the research of Weiss & Duncan (1992), who stated that young participants' competence in sport was highly related to being successful in peer relations and perceiving acceptance by the peer group. This creates the impression that as a result of experiencing conflict with his teammates, his perceived competence decreased which he attributed to his loss of form, and which may explain why he did not mention that he missed them.

#### 4.4.1.2 Desire to Play Again

As a result of their documented positive feelings for the club and the fact that a number of the ex-players stated that they missed the camaraderie of rugby, six of the individuals declared an interest in either restarting their participation very soon, or in the future. Billy stated that he was interested in joining Westfield's amateur side for pre-season training as,

“It would be great to see the lads.” (Billy, Interview 5, 6/7/11)

A point of note is that once the thought of restarting his rugby participation had been established, there was no question in Billy's mind that he would play for another club; it appeared obvious that if he did play, he would join a Westfield side that included several of his former teammates. This provides further weight to the argument that relationships with teammates are amongst the most important reasons for participation, which supports the research of Coleman et al (2008), who found peers were the primary participatory influence in sport, and the interviews undertaken for this research suggests the influence continues even once participation has ceased. In addition, the difficulty of restarting a sport during adulthood is documented in research, as the ex-players will have become adults, proven to participate in less sport as age increases (Sport England, 2010). Once in adulthood, there are many other constraints such as work and family which would commonly be considered more important than recreational sport, although Telama et al (2005) argues that active young individuals are more likely to be active in adulthood. Overall this suggests that whilst the majority of the individuals expressed an interest in playing rugby once more, the idea of being able to commit to participation may be more in hope than reality, which may explain why some interviewees found other sports or activities more suitable for them in adulthood.

#### 4.4.2 Gaining other Activities

The majority of players had also begun participating in new activities and sports since their rugby drop out, which for some may link to the absence of social atmosphere, and trying to recreate similar surroundings. Tim had joined the rowing club at University, citing about his motivation that,

“It wasn't necessarily to compete, it was for, the social aspect and that's what I used to play rugby for.” (Tim, Interview 1, 4/7/11)

Allen (2003) supports this, stating that youth sports participants frequently report social reasons for their sporting involvement. However, Stubbe et al (2005) disagree, as they found at around age seventeen and eighteen, common environmental factors play no part in sports participation, and that genes are of higher importance in maintaining a playing role. Their finding does however support the earlier statement from Tim that physicality was becoming a worrying factor for him at that age, and may have been a reason for his drop out.

After coming to terms with his knee injury, Neil found another way to fulfil his enjoyment of rugby, stating that,

“I was coaching, which kept me involved.” (Neil, Interview 3, 5/7/11)

This suggests that once Neil knew he could no longer be a part of ‘the family’ in a playing role, he did not want to be lost from the club altogether, so became a coach to maintain his involvement and sustain his love of the game. This relates to the process of integration by reclaiming lost aspects of the uninjured self and an initial process of inclusion of the injured self, one of five processes Yoshida (1993) found that injured ex-players experience. It could also be seen as a method of attempting to maintain or re-establish masculinity (Sparkes & Smith, 2002), a common historical ritual amongst rugby players (Schacht, 1996).

In terms of other individuals who had undertaken new sporting interests, Carl had joined the Royal Marines, Billy still visited the club regularly to watch the adult team, George had taken up American football, and Dave had chosen attending football matches as his new hobby. This implies that the individuals enjoyed being part of a team and club environment or

socialising with peers, whether performing the role of a player or spectator. Allender et al (2006) highlights the dangers that entering a new social environment can bring, including anxiety and lack of confidence. Nonetheless, the evidence implies that the participants felt uncomfortable without the supportive nature of a team atmosphere that they had become accustomed to over years of involvement, so tried to recreate their own habitus e.g. (Bourdieu, 1978) within a fresh environment.

Light (2006) agrees that participating in sports clubs for prolonged periods is crucial in the social, moral and personal development of young individuals, and being socialised in that atmosphere may lead those who cease participation to desire it once it is no longer there, although similar atmospheres may be hard to recreate immediately in new surroundings. This relates to the concept of habitus (e.g. Bourdieu, 1978) as individuals feel a need to hold some level of social position amongst others, which occurs through the social structures of the group becoming embodied in individuals, resulting in the structures and habits being replicated and established (Bourdieu, 1978). What is also apparent from the chosen new activities of the participants is that apart from Carl, whose new physical activity had become his job, the activities of the others evidently required less commitment than two or more rugby training sessions and a match every week. Bailey et al (2010) support this, finding that once the socio-economic surroundings of the young adult themselves take effect without the support of the family, their participation time may be decreased due to increased life commitments and responsibilities. Therefore this puts into question whether the individuals returning to participation in rugby would even be possible.

#### 4.4.3 Feelings upon Return to the Club

The majority of participants had been back to the rugby club since their playing days and before the interview, and they experienced various feelings upon their return to Westfield. Some players felt that little had changed and others stated that they enjoyed going back and it was nice to see old friends. However both Tony and Neil, who had ceased participation through injury and had been present at the club on multiple occasions since their drop out, found that their attendance at the club was difficult at first. Tony described that he was not used to not playing at first, and he stated,

“I felt not playing, I still had to prove myself in some way.” (Tony, Interview 6, 6/7/11)

For the injured players who had both played at a high standard, it was as if they had lost the position they previously occupied in their social world (e.g. Bourdieu, 1978), as if they were once a key team player, and were now ‘a nobody’. Ritzer (1996) agrees that individuals in similar social or teams will hold a similar habitus, which in terms of Tony and Neil returning as non-players, suggests that they will possess a different habitus to their former teammates, therefore relating less to them which may create anxiety.

Neil exhibited a similar anxiety upon his return, stating that he was nervous about returning and coming to terms with not playing would be difficult. Some of his apprehension seemed to concern actually informing people of his injury, as he said,

“After I knew I weren’t going to be playing it was a bit of a funny one telling people.” (Neil, Interview 3, 5/7/11)

This was because when he was first injured he had still attended club training in the hope that he could play again. This also may imply that Neil had not immediately accepted his new body-self relationship, (e.g. Sparkes & Smith, 2005), and did not want others to realise or accept it either so that his social position within the club was left unchanged. His statement also suggests an ashamed feeling of his new status, which relates to the injured ex-rugby players interviewed by Sparkes & Smith (2005), who felt they had lost their strength and masculinity, and one ex-player from their study (Sparkes & Smith, 2002), who felt he could not go back to his rugby club as he was worried he would no longer fit in.

After his altercation with a coach which led to his drop out, Troy displayed the largest apprehension in returning to the club, stating that re-entering the clubhouse was like,

“Walking into an exam hall. Like you’ve got a big knot in your stomach.” (Troy, Interview 8, 7/7/11)

This evidence highlights the trauma and mental effects that one specific incident had on Troy, and was so extreme that it contributed to him experiencing physical symptoms of nervousness upon his initial return to the club, over four years after the incident took place. This highlights the significance a negative coach-athlete relationship can have on performers, relating to Poczwadowski et al (2002), who found negative coach-athlete relationships can result in hurt feelings, and that conflict can impact upon relationship members’ levels of stress. The significance of Troy’s experience in his sporting life also supports the finding that the most influential individual in athletes’ sport experience is their coach (e.g. Côté et al., 2003; LaVoi, 2007; Boardley & Kavussanu, 2009). As shown by Troy and stated by Jowett

(2003), this can just as easily be negative as it is positive, which helps explain Troy's trepidation in re-entering the rugby club.

#### 4.5 Chapter Conclusion

This discussion explored the emerging themes from the findings of this study and related them back to previous rugby and drop out research, in addition to the theoretical frameworks of Habitus (Bourdieu, 1978) and Situated Learning Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The key issues surrounding the drop out of individuals were established and documented, and the personal outcomes of ceasing participation in rugby and the effect on the participants' lives were analysed. In the next chapter conclusions will be drawn, implications for future research highlighted, and suggestions for future research offers.

## **Chapter 5: CONCLUSION**

### **5.1 Introduction to the Chapter**

This final chapter will address the findings of this case study. After initially reviewing the research area, the chapter will lead on to provide a summary of findings from the study and any limitations it may possess. Any implications the study may have will also be discussed in addition to potential future directions for research in this field.

### **5.2 The Research Area**

This thesis set out to address the area of drop out at or after U19 colts level in the sport of Rugby Union, by attempting to uncover the reasons that led to the ex-players dropping out, in addition to understanding their previous sporting lives, and their current activity levels and sporting interests. As the majority of previous Rugby Union and Rugby League research had employed quantitative methods (e.g. Walsh et al., 2004; Best et al., 2005; Duthie et al., 2006), this study aimed to be different by selecting a qualitative methodology, to fill the gap in the literature involving research into late adolescent/early adult drop out in Rugby Union. This was done to attach greater importance to the experiences and feelings of participants and to uncover quality narrated experiences that offer insights into the culture and atmosphere of the club.

### **5.3 Summary of Findings**

The findings of this case study concluded that many reasons facilitate drop out such as injury, changes in personnel, and enthusiasm, in some cases regardless of a positive club rugby experience. Largely apparent was injury contributing to drop out and the significance it seemed to have on the individuals concerned. Enforced drop out left those certain participants facing difficulty in coming to terms with their new lives that used to revolve around rugby,



and it seemed evident they still saw themselves as players. As a result, they struggled to remove themselves from the persona of an active player, both for their individual mindset and in terms of how they appeared to their former teammates.

The findings also support Bourdieu's (1978) idea that habitus is acquired through occupying a position within the social world. For the interviewees who had all obviously dropped out, the majority of participants mentioned how they felt anxiety, felt like an outsider or felt uncomfortable coming back. However most of them also stated that returning made them realise that they missed rugby and their team, and that the club had been welcoming to them upon their return. This could perhaps be explained by the fact they were no longer actively performing the roles they previously occupied within the community of practice (e.g. Lave & Wenger, 1991), which effectively can alienate them as they are no longer experiencing the ever-developing habitus (e.g. Bourdieu, 1978) of the club, resulting in them feeling that they have been left behind. In addition, one participant even expressed physical symptoms upon his return such as his anxiety, although this was due to the humiliating and stressful circumstances he dropped out under after an incident with his then coach.

The vastly significant role of the coach also appeared as a common finding, supporting the research of Boardley & Kavussanu (2009), whether positive or negative. The interviewees all described the value and respect they held for their coaches that nurtured them until age seventeen, but the majority of them did not possess a great relationship with the colts coaches who replaced their previous coaches, evidently expressing a lack of enthusiasm or positive words towards them. It seemed that the change in personnel when moving from mini and junior level to colts level proved key in the decision to drop out, whether in terms of

experiencing an incident or friction with the new coaches or simply feeling unease at the disruption to the ‘family.’

However the majority of players described the overall club experience as extremely positive, perhaps supported by the fact that although the ex-players no longer wanted to participate in Rugby Union, the majority of the individuals gained new team activities which could be explained in terms of trying to recreate the social atmosphere they had previously enjoyed. Supporting this was the finding that the majority of participants stated that they missed socialising and communicating with their teammates. In addition, the ex-players valued aspects of their club experience such as the social atmosphere, camaraderie and teamwork in a higher regard than their performances and their physical participation in training or matches of Rugby Union. This suggests that although the club could not prevent these individuals from dropping out of Rugby Union, it at least provided them with strong team ethics, the importance of working with and supporting teammates, and an experience of a healthy club atmosphere.

#### 5.4 Implications of the Study

Care should be taken when generalising findings based on a small sample. The findings from this research were gathered from ex-players of the U19 colts side at a high level English side, Westfield Rugby Club. However a limitation is that it is unknown whether this data can be replicated at other Rugby Union clubs in England, suggesting wider scale studies may be more effective, although possibly more difficult to gain strong qualitative data. Also, the results were retrospective as the interviewees had to recall their previous experiences, and a disadvantage of this can result in participants selecting certain memories whether positive or negative, that can alter the outlook of their data.

The researcher also acknowledges the view that researchers bring their own assumptions and preconceptions (Robson, 2002) that can affect the way in which they interpret results, and to emphasize some parts of data as more important than others (Jones et al., 2003). As qualitative methods were used in the form of interviews that required detailed communication, the process and therefore the findings are particularly subjective. As is inevitable with a subjective interview process that investigates the in depth sporting life histories of individuals, the findings are a text to be read, interpreted and understood in their own way (Atkinson, 2002).

Contributions to new understanding within this area have been made in terms of documenting the entire rugby lives of young individuals until their drop out, allowing a more in depth analysis of how incidents may have affected them. Another contribution that adds to current research includes discovering how the individuals felt about returning to the rugby club since their drop out, highlighting the significant and various effects they felt and how their roles had changed in comparison to their earlier club experiences. The research also provides in depth data on the actual experiences of ex-Rugby Union participants who have ceased participation, and the study adds to the literature in this field.

However returning to the same club gives the study limitations in enabling participants to bring their own bias and prejudices, especially if they experienced particularly positive or negative situations during their participation. The understanding and knowledge of the researcher has also matured, as experiencing first-hand the explanations of individuals as to why they ceased participation has altered the way in which the researcher may previously have viewed certain aspects of the game.

The study supports elements of current research, firstly the significant role of the coach in the participation of individuals (Côté et al., 2003; LaVoi, 2007). The research has implications for coach pedagogy, as to deliver a complete coaching experience; coaches must centre their teachings on core values which they abide by themselves, communicate openly with players, and ensure they are attentive to each individual to provide the best atmosphere possible.

To do this effectively, they need to work in conjunction with their clubs, who need to develop blueprints for how they want their clubs to be run, and enforce their culture from the bottom up. The study supported research highlighting the significance of the sports club (Kirk & MacPhail, 2003; Toms & Kirk, 2006) and the importance of social atmosphere and camaraderie amongst teammates (Ntoumanis & Vazou, 2005; Keegan et al., 2010; Mays et al., 2010), and to gain the optimum benefits in these areas, a strong club culture needs to be instilled in players as youngsters and reinforced as they mature. Long term developmental plans for age group teams and initiatives for players after 16 would also be welcomed.

It is critical that governing bodies and policy makers take a front seat in creating new initiatives, to both promote the game to newcomers and maintain the current crop of players at all levels. They now possess a bigger challenge at grass roots level due to the current economic climate, with large declines in funding, specialist coaching, and school sports partnerships.

### 5.5 Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study provide a retrospective look at the experiences of ex-junior rugby players, in an attempt to uncover the reasons that led to their drop out. To gain further

information in this area and to see whether their experiences are common amongst club youth sections, other clubs could be investigated. In addition, as the data from this study was retrospective, it would be of interest to discover the experiences of players in youth sections as they happen throughout their junior years, which could offer predictions for drop out if they ceased participation at a later date. This may require a longitudinal approach to research, but may be more effective than asking individuals to use their memories, now which could be less reliable.

Furthermore, future research could also focus more on both coaches and players to ascertain the coaches' perceptions of how they act towards their team, as the way they view their actions may differ to how they are perceived by the players. This data could be used help to eliminate inconsistencies in player/coach communication and decrease levels of conflict or drop out.

Finally, it may be of use for future research to undertake a qualitative method similar to the approach employed for this study. Using a qualitative approach to produce detailed and rich data would be useful to determine whether comparable structures or initiatives are in place in clubs in other rugby playing countries. This data could be distributed to the RFU or club coaches to decide whether new strategies need to be employed in order to increase the amount of years that individuals participate in Rugby Union for, decreasing the level of drop out.

## 5.6 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the research area concerning this study, and provided a full summary of the findings. In addition, possible limitations of the methodology employed and the study

as a whole have been suggested. Implications of the research have been noted as well as recommendations for future research, to provide potential directions for other researchers in this field.

### 5.7 Concluding Remarks

This thesis set out to discover the reasons that led to the drop out of ex-junior rugby players at a high level English Rugby Club. It was found that a variety of factors contributed to the interviewees ceasing participation, ranging from uncontrollable issues such as injury to quite simply a loss of enthusiasm. In addition, the findings proved that regardless of the overall positive words and feelings the individuals had for the club, issues such as changes in personnel, or poor relationships and incidents with the coach or teammates could override this and leave long-lasting social, psychological and emotional effects on certain participants. Lastly, the findings showed that the importance attributed to teammates, camaraderie and social atmosphere greatly outweighed the level of value assigned to actually participating in the sport of Rugby Union. The significance of this finding and others should demonstrate to the RFU and clubs nationwide that team and community values need to be given paramount importance, promoted and stringently adhered to by coaches, to provide a continued positive, thriving, social environment for all.

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## **Chapter 6: APPENDICES**

### **6.1 Appendix A: Consent Form-Researcher Copy**

#### **Title of the proposed study**

Investigating Drop Out in Ex-Junior Rugby Union Players

#### **Fair Processing Statement**

This information is being collected as part of a research project concerned with investigating the reason or combination of reasons leading to drop out in ex-colt (Under 19 age) Rugby Union players, by the School of Education in the University of Birmingham. The information which you supply and that which may be collected as part of the research project will be entered into a filing system or database and will only be accessed by authorised personnel involved in this project. The information will be retained by the University of Birmingham and will only be used for the purpose of research, and statistical and audit purposes. By supplying this information you are consenting to the University storing your information for the purposes stated above. The information will be processed by the University of Birmingham in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. No identifiable personal data will be published.

#### **Statements of understanding/consent**

- I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information sheet for this study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions if necessary and have had these answered satisfactorily.
- I understand that my data will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used to disguise my identity.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. If I withdraw, my data will be removed from the study and will be destroyed.
- I understand that my personal data will be processed for the purposes detailed above, in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.
- Based upon the above, I agree to take part in this study.

#### **Name, signature and date**

Name of participant..... Date..... Signature.....

Name of researcher..... Date..... Signature.....

Contact Details: John Richards

Telephone:

Email:

## Participant Copy

### Consent Form

#### Title of the proposed study

Investigating Drop Out in Ex-Junior Rugby Union Players

#### Fair Processing Statement

This information is being collected as part of a research project concerned with investigating the reason or combination of reasons leading to drop out in ex-colt (Under 19 age) Rugby Union players, by the School of Education in the University of Birmingham. The information which you supply and that which may be collected as part of the research project will be entered into a filing system or database and will only be accessed by authorised personnel involved in this project. The information will be retained by the University of Birmingham and will only be used for the purpose of research, and statistical and audit purposes. By supplying this information you are consenting to the University storing your information for the purposes stated above. The information will be processed by the University of Birmingham in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. No identifiable personal data will be published.

#### Statements of understanding/consent

- I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information sheet for this study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions if necessary and have had these answered satisfactorily.
- I understand that my data will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used to disguise my identity.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. If I withdraw, my data will be removed from the study and will be destroyed.
- I understand that my personal data will be processed for the purposes detailed above, in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.
- Based upon the above, I agree to take part in this study.

#### Name, signature and date

Name of participant..... Date..... Signature.....

Name of researcher..... Date..... Signature.....

Contact Details: John Richards

Telephone:

Email:



## 6.2 Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet

### Title of the proposed study

Investigating Drop Out in Ex-Junior Rugby Union Players

### Description of the proposed study

The purpose of the research is to gain further understanding of the reasons behind drop out in 22/23 year old ex-Rugby Union players, who finished playing at age 19 before the transition to adult rugby. This may result from early experiences, or other constraints concerned with adult life. Participants will be interviewed in order to understand their complete sporting life, to uncover the reasons that led to their ceased participation, in addition to comprehending current life demands and why this may limit participation. The research has value in increasing researcher and participant knowledge, creating a wider appreciation of issues encountered, and how they affect each participant differently. It is especially necessary as there is currently a lack of drop out research in rugby, especially at this age.

### Invitation to participate and explanation of what participation entails

As potential participants, participation is voluntary and individuals have the right to withdraw at any time, and will be reminded of this during research. Participants must communicate with the researcher if they wish to withdraw, and can choose to have any data destroyed. Selection is based upon characteristics of U19 Rugby Union participation and subsequent ceased participation. The participant requirements include being honest with the researcher and recalling previous rugby or life experiences. The anticipated time commitment for the research is a maximum of one hour per interview. The research might affect the subjects in fully understanding reasons that led to their drop out, as the maturity gained since participation might allow for better reflection, enabling consideration of issues not previously contemplated. Participants should seek further clarification from the researcher if they do not understand anything prior to participating. Participant interviews will be recorded by Dictaphone and transcribed for data analysis. At the conclusion of the study, participants can choose to view a summary of the research findings.

### Confidentiality/anonymity and data security

All participants' identities will be kept anonymous, and all data confidential, only seen in pseudonyms by researcher and supervisor, and saved on an encrypted memory stick. The information that participants supply and that which may be collected as part of the research will be entered into a filing system or database, only to be accessed by authorised personnel involved in this project. The information will be retained by the University of Birmingham for 10 years, and will only be used for research, statistical and audit purposes. After 10 years, the data will be destroyed.

### Results of the study

The intended use of the results from the study is initially simply to answer the research question. If distributed further, the results could make Governing bodies and policy makers aware of issues that lead to drop out in their sport, so they can create initiatives to combat them. Feedback will be provided to participants through a debrief form, to provide them with a more complete description of the research and results, and to thank them for their part in the study.

### 6.3 Appendix C: Debrief Form

#### Title of the study

Investigating Drop Out in Ex-Junior Rugby Union Players

The researcher would like to thank you for participating and providing valuable information for this research. If interested in viewing the results of the research, there will be an overall summary of the results in the thesis.

Contact Details: John Richards

Telephone:

Email: