

Psycho-Social Attributes of Kenyan University Athletes: Social Learning and Motivational Theories Perspectives

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the psycho-social attributes of university athletes. These psycho-social attributes included, the influence of significant others, reasons for specializing in specific sport, motives for participation and players' retirement prospects. Questionnaires were administered to 674 players drawn from 21 universities which participated during the 3rd edition of Kenya interuniversity championships held from 17-21 December, 2011 in Nairobi, Kenya. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, i.e. frequencies and percentages. Results indicated that the university athletes had late entry into sports, 90.1% joined sport due to enjoyment, their continued participation was due to success 92.8%, greatest influence to participate in sport came from themselves 97.6% and 83.1% will be engaged in recreational sport after retirement from competitive sport. The study recommends that universities sports personnel rethink, design and implement talent identification and nurturing programmes. Coaches and lecturers should guide university athletes further their education alongside participating in intercollegiate sport so that they can have alternative career choices upon retirement. Further studies need to be conducted to unearth the personal, psychological, technical and tactical attributes of university athletes.

Keywords: Interuniversity Championship, Sports, Athletes.

Introduction

Many positive educational benefits have been found to be associated with intercollegiate sport participation. Studies support the thesis that collegiate student-athletes were more often engaged in academic and campus activities than their non-athletic peers (Williams, Sarraf & Umbach, 2006). Student athletes are also more likely to transfer learned and work skills and character traits (i.e, integrity and work ethics) into their career fields (Weiss, 2001). On the reverse studies report different conclusions in opposition to the benefits of sport participation. Studies indicate that athletic participation had either negative association or no effect on male collegiate student-athletes academic motivation development and learning ability (Wolniak, Pierson & Pascarella, 2001). Other studies also found that students who participated in intercollegiate athletics did not have better Grade Point Average(GPA) or greater outcomes in cognitive learning and motivation when compared to those students who were not athletes (Shulman & Bowen, 2001., Wolniak et al, 2001).

There are many factors which are associated with successful athletic performance in different athletic contests. These factors include the genetic constitution of the players, technical and tactical preparation, physical and psychological attributes. Career orientation and paths of an elite athlete is constructed by the socialization process in which socialization agents (significant others), socio-cultural influences, the self and the environment have significant roles to play (Stevenson, 1990; Philips, 1993).

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The interaction between an athlete and socializing agents' changes over time as is evident in the different phases of becoming involved and committed in a quest for sporting excellence. Athletic identity could be developed and maintained by the influence of others as well as the athlete himself/herself and it shows how one's athletic involvement and experience can affect the person psychologically and cognitively (Anderson, 2004). The role of significant others (parents, brothers and sisters, teachers, coaches and peers) in sport socialization has been a topical issue in sport sociology. Numerous research studies have alluded to the fact that for athletic ability to be translated into good performance, the athlete must get support and encouragement from significant others (McPherson, Curtis & Loy, 1989; Ipinmoroti & Ajayi, 2003; Rintaugu, 2005). It has been reported that a significant number of successful athletes come from families where family members are involved in sport (Rintaugu, 2005). Research studies have also shown that parents transmit attitudes and values about physical activity in general and sport in particular, pay activity fees, are powerful role models and provide physical and emotional support to their siblings (Grevis, 1991; Wasonga, 1996).

Beyond the family support, the athletes get play partners from their peers and from the neighbourhood while teachers and coaches have been credited to be instrumental in determining continued participation in sport by young athletes. Social learning theory as propounded by Bandura (1971) underscores the importance of significant others as they are role models and provide the necessary social reinforcement for participation in sport. Bandura's social learning theory demonstrates the effects of identity formation and learning through the observation of models as represented by significant others (parents, family members, the coach or team members) (Stroot, 2002). The two major influences that contribute to athletes pursuing an athletic career are success and positive support from significant others.

Several theories have been propounded to explain why man engages in physical activities and sport, and the values he receives from such participation. Some of these theories overlap and have been given different nomenclatures and many of the reasons listed in the theories of why man participates in sports are working together subconsciously to motivate and induce sport participation (Gitonga, Njororai & Wahome, 2003). For example, competence motivation theory (Harter, 1981), achievement goal orientation theories (Nicholas, 1984), social exchange theory (Thibaut & Kelly, 1959) and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) have all been applied by sport psychologists and sociologists to guide research in participation motivation and attrition. However, consensus has remained elusive and understanding motivation as it reinforces human action is one of the key issues pursued by sport psychologists and educators for purposes of theoretical development analysis. Motivation is considered critical to sport participation and performance because it demonstrates the intention, activation and regulation of the driving force of behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In the light of these theoretical underpinnings, it is important to evaluate the participation motives of university athletes. Such information will be useful to coaches, managers, parents and significant others to motivate athletes to continue seeking excellence in sports.

Research on athletes' specialization in sport has reported numerous and diverse findings and the pros and cons of early specialization, have been viewed differently by sociologists and psychologists. However, studies in the west have revealed that athletes who represent their countries in global competitions such as World Cup and Olympic Games began participating in sport at the age of 12 years (Clarke, 1980; Therberge, 1997). Indeed, Hill (1993) reported that baseball players in their study took part in baseball after having participated in other games. Burnett (2005) found that the mean age of specialization of South African athletes in the sport in which they competed at international level was 15.7 years. Athletes start out in their sport at the ages of approximately 8 to 12 years of age, one or two years later, athletes start competing at club level and some 3 to 4 years later on to national level. A first selection for a national team occurs somewhere between 17-19 years of age while a first Olympic selection is achieved during their early twenties and finally athletes do end their involvement in high level competitive sport at approximately 30 years of age (Clarke, 1980).

Athletes cannot continue being involved in competitive sport through their lifetime. They are called upon to retire either voluntarily or involuntarily from a given sport due to age, psychological fatigue, poor performance, injury, new interests, conflict with occupational demands, family pressures and a shift in the relative importance of sports compared with other age-appropriate activities (McPherson, Kurtis & Loy 1989; Blinde & Stratta, 1992). Most times, athletes are caught up with retirement by surprise and they face untold challenges when they retire from active participation in sport.

Baillie and Danish's (1992) survey of former baseball players regarding their preparation for post-athletic careers found that many felt unprepared for life beyond sports. Theories of thanatology and social gerontology have been applied to address retirement from sports with diverse outcomes (Duquin, 1980, Blinde & Stratta, 1992, Baille & Danish, 1992, Rintaugu & Mwisukha, 2011). Indeed, Greendorfer (1985) opined that competitive emphasis, lack of enjoyment and coaching style are main contributing factors to early retirement from competitive sports participation.

Therefore the purpose of this study was to determine the psycho-social attributes of university athletes. Understanding psycho-social attributes of the university athletes is critical to the development of their sporting careers and will enable stakeholders to provide meaningful assistance as well as create an appropriate nurturing environment. This is consistent with the need to study university athletes and unearth some factors such as family and psychological factors that influence performance. Thus, the study was guided by the following objectives.

1. To establish the influence of significant others in socializing university athletes into sports.
2. To determine the participation motives of the university athletes.
3. To find out why university athletes specialized in their current sport.
4. To examine retirement prospects of university athletes.

Methodology

Design

A descriptive survey design was used to collect data.

Sample

Data were collected from 674 participants who competed during the third edition of Kenya universities sports championships held from 16-21 December 2011 in Nairobi, Kenya. The championships involved 21 universities with 7 public and 14 private universities. The study targeted 1000 participants and with random sampling the return rate was 674 (434 males and 240 females). This represented a return rate of 67.4%. The participants mean age was 22.44 + 3.89 years with an age range of 16-30 years. They were participating in ball games, racket games, martial arts, athletics and swimming shown as in table 1.

Table 1: Demographic details of the subjects

		n	%
Gender	Male	434	64.39
	Female	240	35.60
	Total		
Type of sport	Team games	536	79.52
	Racket games	54	8.01
	Swimming	23	3.41
	Athletics	40	5.93
	Martial arts	21	3.11

Research Instrument

A self-administered questionnaire was utilized for data collection. The questionnaire had two sections. **Section A** sought the participants' bio data such as age, playing experience, family members engagement in sports while **section B** had sport-specific issues concerning reasons for specializing in sport, motives for participating in sports, influence of significant others and retirement prospects. Items on the influence of significant others had Likert-type response scale, i.e. positive, negative, no influence and not applicable which were scored on a four point scale. Items in the other sections regarding reasons for specializing in sport, motives for participating in the sport and retirement engagements, required categorical responses, i.e. 'yes' or 'no'.

The instrument was validated by a team of PE specialists who were university lecturers in research methodology and sports sociology. The draft questionnaire was modified based on their comments and suggestions before it was used for data collection. The questionnaire was also piloted among 26 student-athletes derived from a middle level college.

A reliability coefficient of 0.73 after Split-half method was obtained and considered adequate for data collection (Borg & Gall, 1989). In order to collect data for the actual study, questionnaires were administered to the players in the games village with the assistance of their team managers and games tutors. The players' responses were coded and analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Results

The demographic details of the participants and their parents are presented in tables 1 and 2

Table 2: Parental SES of the subjects

Education	Father	%	Mother	%
No formal	34	5.3	37	5.8
Primary school	24	3.8	37	5.8
Secondary up to form 4	68	10.7	111	17.3
Secondary up to form 6	47	7.4	53	8.3
Middle level	187	29.4	191	29.8
University	277	43.5	211	33
Occupation				
Professional	178	30.5	91	15.3
Managerial	51	8.7	44	7.4
Skilled	42	7.2	41	6.9
Commercial/business	89	15.2	141	23.8
Armed forces	62	10.6	21	3.5
Unskilled	19	3.3	42	7.1
Teaching	100	17.1	125	21.1
Farmer	28	4.8	26	4.4
Health worker	11	1.6	41	6.9
Civil servant	4	0.6	4	0.67
House wife	-	-	17	2.9

Table 1 shows that 434 (64.39%) of the respondents were males while 240 (35.60%) were females. This is constant with sociological literature that sport is a male dominated enterprise. It is apparent that team games had the majority athletes 536 (79.52%) followed by racket games 54 (8.01%) swimming (23, 3.41%) athletics (40, 5.937) and martial arts was the least with 21(3.11%). Team games which were the student-athletes featured in the championship was football, hockey, volleyball, rugby Basketball, Handball and Netball. These traditional sports are very popular in Kenyan educational institutions starting in primary schools, secondary schools to universities.

Table 2 shows that a majority of student athletes had their father's education as university (277, 43.5%) followed by middle level college (187, 29.4%) while the same trend is reflected in their mothers' education of university (211, 33%) and middle level colleges (191, 29.8%). It is apparent that the university athletes came from families where the parents had "good" education. On the other hand, 178(30.5%) of the athletes fathers were engaged in professional occupations followed by teaching (100, 17.1%) and commercial /business (89, 15.2%). Their mothers were mostly in commercial business (141, 23.8%) followed by Teaching (125, 21.1%) and professional occupation (91, 15.3%). The athletes specialized in their respective sports at the age of 14.48 years. Thus, it is apparent that the athletes may have participated in their current sport for approximately 8 years. The reasons for specialization in their respective sport are presented in Figure 1 below.

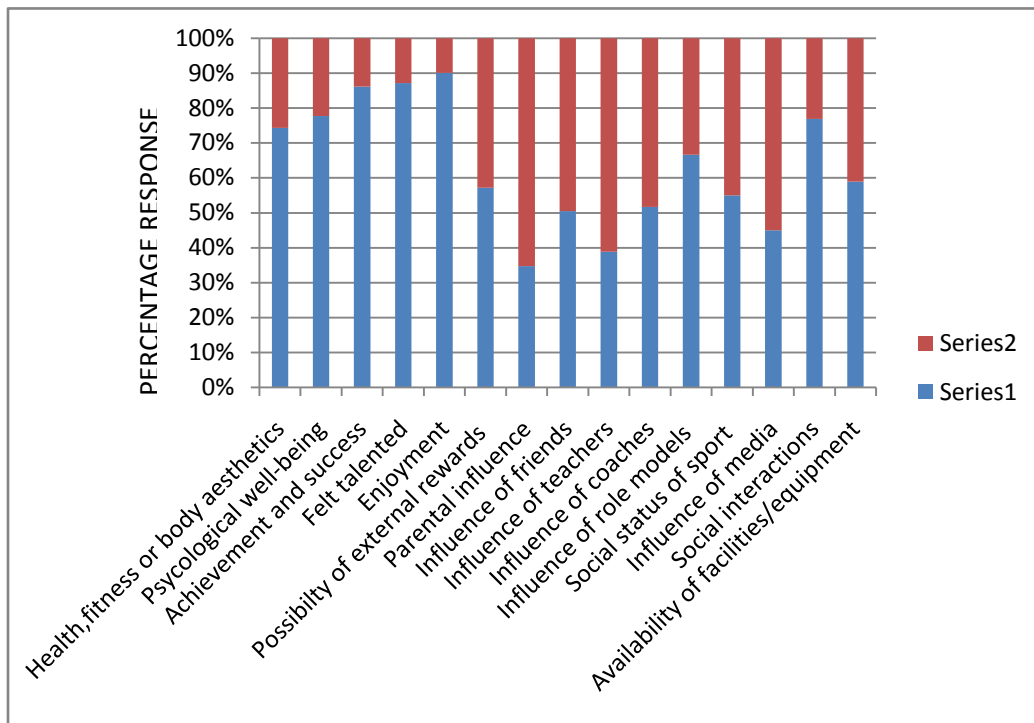


Figure 1: University athletes’ reasons/motives for specializing in their specific sport.

From Fig.1, it is evident that the first five motives or reasons for participation in sport of the student athletes were enjoyment (90.1%) followed by talent (87.2%), possibility of achievement (86.2%) psychological well – being (77.8%) and social interactions (76.9%). The least motives which spurred participation in specific sport were influence of parent / family members (34.7%), followed by influence of teacher’s (38.9%), influence of media (45%), influence of friends(50.5%), influence of role models (51.7%) and the possibility of external rewards (57.2%). The motives which made the student athletes to continue participating in their current sport are presented in table 3 below:

Table 3: University athletes’ reasons for continued participation in their specific sport

Reasons	YES %	NO%
Success in sport	92.8	7.2
Financial rewards	50.4	49.6
Career opportunities	69.2	30.8
Travel opportunities	68.1	31.9
Recognition	57.2	42.8
Status /prestige	59.7	40.3
Talent	90.8	9.2
Desire to win	89.7	10.3
Personal development	88.6	11.4
Self- actualization and belief	82.4	17.6
Religious belief	27.2	72.8
Possibility of employment	55.5	44.8

The reasons for continued participation in specific sport of the student athletes as shown in table 4 were success in sport (92.8%), followed by talent (90.8%), desire to win (89.7%), personal development (88.6%) and self actualization and belief 82.4%. The least reasons for continued participation of university athletes were religious belief (27.2%), followed by financial rewards (50.4%), possibility of employment (55.5%, recognition (57.2%) and status /prestige (59.7%). The influence of significant other’s in specialization into sport of the student athletes is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Influence of significant others on the socialization into sport of University athletes.

Significant others	Positive %	Negative %	No. influence %
Family members	82.8	5.6	11.7
Spouses/boyfriend/girlfriend	73.5	9.9	16.6
Coaches	90.7	3.3	6
Teachers/lecturer	69.4	8.1	22.5
Friends/peers	87.3	5.4	7.3
Teammates	95.5	3.0	1.5
Yourself	97.6	1.7	0.7
University	78.6	8.2	13.2

Data in table 4 show that the greatest socialization into sport of the university athletes came from themselves (97.6%) followed by team mates (95.5%) and coaches (90.7%). Least socialization into sport of the university athlete’s influence came from teachers (69.4%), boy friend/girlfriend (73.5%), and University (78.6%). The future prospects of the student athletes after retirement from competitive is presented in figure 2.

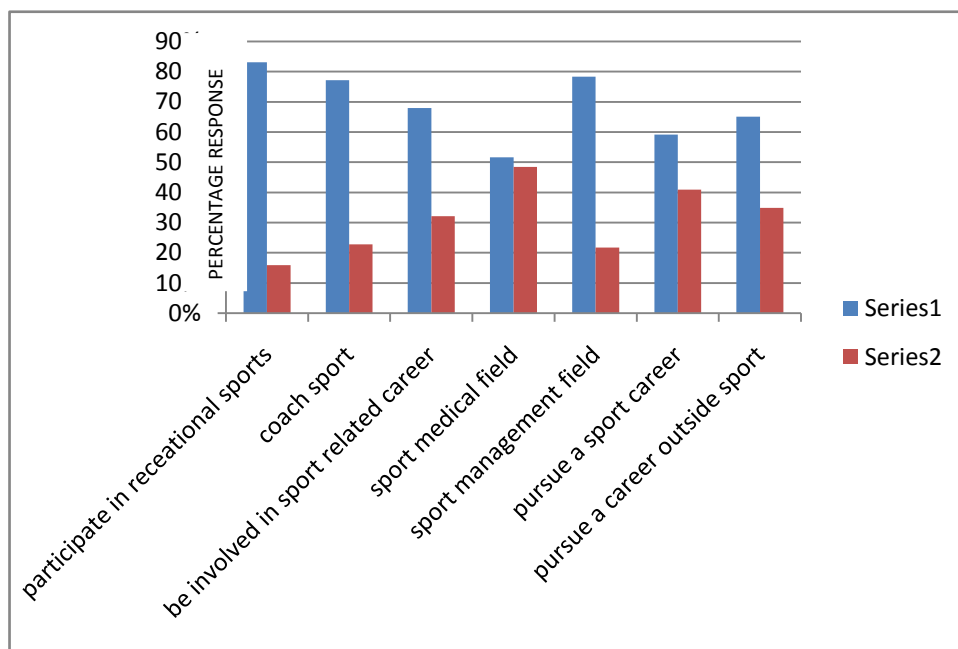


Figure 2. Future prospects of student athletes after retirement from competitive sport.

Results in figure 2 show that after retirement from active sport (83.1%) of the university athletes will be involved in recreational sport, 78.3% will be engaged in management of sport while (78.3%) will coach sport. The student athletes’ will be least involved in medical field (51%) and (65.1%) will pursue a career outside sport.

Discussion

Findings of the study show that a majority of University athletes are involved in team games of soccer, volleyball, netball, hockey, basketball and rugby. This is not remote as these games are very popular in educational institutions in Kenya. Secondly these types of sport are spectator sport and educational institution invests in them for quick publicity. However, most of the universities have these sports for recreational needs of the students. A few of these university athletes are selected sporadically to the Kenya national teams especially in rugby and basketball. Some of them may be playing for top sporting clubs in Kenya. Wamukoya (1993) indicated that many secondary schools in Kenya had established excellent traditions in competitive sport and games with team sport being more popular. Excellence in school sports competition will enhance the schools recognition and the possible promotion of the school head and teacher in charge of games.

The same scenario seems replicated in Kenyan universities where some of them especially private and church sponsored institutions use excellence in sports as a way of marketing their academic programmes.

Findings indicate that the student athletes come from families which can be labeled as upper social Economic status i.e. parents have university education and are involved in “good”/white collar jobs. These findings are in agreement with Akpata and Gitonga (2003) findings that parental social economic status plays a key role in socialization into sport of children. Indeed Givi (1984) opined that the social-economic status of the household is inheritably linked to the educational status of the prime care- givers (mother and or father) of the athletes and /or athlete who is already economically productive or professional. These findings are also supported in Mcpherson *et al* (1989) observation that as education increases, so does the likelihood of participating or encouraging ventures into sport or leisure. Njororai (1996) observed that social class or social economic status of the parents influences sport involvement of the child as it determines such choice as residence hence the neighborhood, leisure activities engaged in, the playing apparatus and even the kind of peer friends that one gets.

The university athletes specialized in their respective sport at the age of 15 years. These findings are supported in Gitonga *et al* (2011) and Burnett (2005) studies where the ages for specialization in sports of the affected athletes 17.37 years and 15.7 years respectively were. However, the dissonance in these studies is that they focused on elite athletes with many having formed /accepted athletic identities earlier than the university athletes. Clark (1980) and Therberge (1997) opined that athletes who started taking part in sport in their early ages had their socialization into sport began in childhood and continued through adolescence.

Socio- psychological literature is replete with studies on motives for participation in sport. Whereas numerous theories such as self- determination theory, achievement goal theory, competence motivation theory and social exchange theories have been utilized to study participation motives, consensus has remained elusive on the ranking of motives which spur participation in sport. University athletes in this study started participating in their specific sport due to enjoyment, talent, achievement and psychological well- being. These findings were also reported in earlier studies of Gitonga *et al* (2011) and Burnett (2005). Indeed athletes Burnett (2005) indicated that athletes initially became involved in sport due to the fact that they enjoyed participation and because they had the talent to achieve success during competitions. Internally, senses of achievement are essential drawbacks during the early stages of sport participation (Stevenson, 1990). In terms of gender differences men are more highly motivated by performance and ego-related factors such as challenge, strength and endurance, competition and social recognition when compared with women regardless of activity type (Douglas *et al*, 1997).

Socialization into sport revolves around initial entry, sustenance and seeking for excellence (Bandura, 1971). Findings of the study indicate that student athletes’ entry into sport zeroed down to intrinsic reasons. However, their continued participation in specific sport was motivated by success, talent, desire to win, and personal development. These reasons were reported elsewhere (Burnett, 2005, Gitonga,*et al*,2011). Indeed, Burnett (2005) found that athletes ranked achievement, recognition of their talent and the desire to win and thus compete successfully as major components in the formation of their athletic identity and indicators of possible future success as an elite athlete. On the reverse, the least reasons for continued participation in sport of university athletes were religious beliefs, financial rewards, possibility of employment and recognition. Johansson (1992) indicated that perceived external rewards such as travelling and gaining experience as well as internal rewards in terms of personal development self-actualization and self-belief are recognized as least reasons for continued specialization in sport(Weiss, 2001) These findings find support in Duquin’s (1980) observations that athletes are most likely to participate in an activity in which they feel that they can provide and account for their successful outcomes.Mens tendency to seek out types of activity that provide for opportunities to demonstrate masterly and competence. According to social exchange theory as propounded by Thibaut and Kelly (1959), social behavior is motivated by the desire to maximize positive experience and minimize negative ones. An individual weighs the cost- benefits and satisfaction of a current situation with those alternative situations and makes decision accordingly.

Previous studies have shown that athletes are significantly motivated by their parents and peers to become involved in sports (Rintaugu, 2005). In fact, the three elements of socialization into sport include personal attributes, significant others and socializing situations. However finding of this study, showed that university athlete are influenced by themselves, team mates and coaches.

This contradicts findings by Mbaabu 1997, Ipnimoroti and Ajayi (2003), Carlson, 1988. Bloom (1985) reported that athletes in the study indicated significant influence from family members and especially parents. However the findings of the study showed that teachers or lecturers had minimal influence on the university athletes. This is in consonant with the findings of Gitonga *et al* 2011 and Synder and Spreitzer, 1990. The lack of teacher/lecturer influence is not remote as university athletes minimally and rarely interact with lecturers in the university beyond the lecture halls or laboratories. Indeed Njororai (2010) opines that institutions owe it to student's athletes to provide an environment devoid of discrimination, marginalization and one that promotes balanced emphasis on academics and athletics, quality faculty with healthy student and faculty interaction among others. Deliberate efforts to initiate or enhance student athlete and faculty interaction are needed in colleges. Faculty and staff are known to have stereotypes towards athletes such as dumb jokes who are over privileged ,pampered ,lazy and out of control(Flecher,Benshoff &Richberg,(2003).The lack of understanding creates and fosters stereotypes of student athletes as dumb jokes who are rewarded with good grades for academic excellence rather than academic ability.

Future prospect of the university athletes upon retirement from sport revolves around involvement in recreational sport, engagement in recreational sport and coaching sport. These findings are supported by Burnett (2005) in which a majority of the athletes indicated that they viewed sport coaching as the first option for a possible future career. Mc person, *et al* (1989) stated that many sport people do not have meaningful education to fall back to when their athletic careers. Morakinyo (2003) suggested that coaches and sport administrators should advise athletes about the importance of acquiring academic certificates in addition to developing their sport skills. However, these are university athletes who are pursuing other careers beyond athletic participation. Equally, Burnett (2005) opined that continued active participation in competitive sport or in recreation sport seems to be inevitable choice for athletes who have internalized the role of being an athlete with and or competitive life style over many years.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study have revealed that university athletes' entry into sport and continued participation in sport is spurred by intrinsic motivation factors. Secondly, the university athletes are significantly influenced by themselves, team-mates and coaches and their post- sport engagement will revolve around continued participation in recreational sport and coaching. This adds knowledge to the fact that socialization into sport is rather a continuous exercise and that the university athletes are becoming "slaves" of sport. Based on the above conclusion, the following recommendations are made.

1. That university authorities need to create numerous opportunities where the athletes can continue to pursue the intrinsic drives for sport participation. This can be done by having more sports infrastructure and specialized human resources in the universities. Nay, university athletes appreciate the influence of the coaches as they participate in sport.
2. University athletes need to be kept a breast with new knowledge in their sport participation. Indeed, the university athletes will continue with sports issues even after retirement from active sport.
3. Just like Burnett (2005) opined stake holders should take cognizance of the dynamics and the socialization of university athletes in order to provide meaningful assistance and create an optional uniting climate and resources. This is more prudent after bearing in mind the lack of teacher/lecturer and university influence among the university athletes.

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