



**GUIDELINES ON**

# **SURVEYING RETIRED PLAYERS**

**2020**

**WORLD PLAYERS  
ASSOCIATION**



# Introduction

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Among the principles that guide the work of the World Players Association is the commitment to a knowledge and evidence-based approach. We take great care that the policy positions we adopt are underpinned by reliable and credible research.

Accordingly, for the creation of policies and initiatives in the area of player development and wellbeing, obtaining robust data is a necessity. Therefore, player associations have taken to surveying players in transition, or who are retired, to better understand the multiple aftereffects of the professional sporting career. The gain is two-fold: First, this data can inform the design of and advocacy for policies and programs targeting current and future professional players with the aim of maximizing their holistic development and ability to transition successfully out of their sport. Second, it allows for the design and implementation of effective support services that meet the actual needs of the ever-growing cohort of retirees.

In 2018, the World Player Development Steering Committee conducted a literature review of player association research into retired players.<sup>1</sup> The study revealed that the surveys under consideration varied greatly in content, depth, scientific validity, concepts, wording and methodology.

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<sup>1</sup> Retrievable [here](#)

# Purpose

These *Guidelines on Surveying Retired Players* have been developed to offer assistance to player associations in surveying players in transition. They are meant to be informative, rather than prescriptive. They provide a comprehensive overview of the key considerations with the aim to promote greater quality, consistency and comparability of the research undertaken. We recognize that some affiliates have been successfully and continuously surveying their past players, yet we hope that closer alignment of the different research efforts will lead to richer and more robust aggregate data. In turn, this data can be effectively leveraged for advocacy and negotiation purposes on the global level as well as in regional and national settings. To this end we have included a set of core questions and measurement tools that we recommend be included in any retired players survey conducted or commissioned by World Players' members.

Please consider these guidelines a living document. Feedback with regard to improvements, additions or omissions is welcome at any point.

The guidelines will address the following items:

-  **1 PURPOSE STATEMENT**
-  **2 BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS**
-  **3 KEY STUDY AREAS**
-  **4 SURVEY DESIGN**
-  **5 DATA COLLECTION METHODS**
-  **6 ETHICS**
-  **7 RECOMMENDED QUESTIONS**

# 1

## PURPOSE STATEMENT

The first step to conducting any meaningful survey is articulating the objectives in a clear and concise purpose statement.

### **A** *Defining research objectives*

The reasons why player associations have previously undertaken research into retired players include the following:

- To obtain an accurate portrait of the retirees' current health and mental wellbeing
- To gather insights into their post-career employment, the nature of their social relationships and their financial wellbeing
- To gain a better understanding of their transition out of the sport
- To measure the effectiveness of the player development & wellbeing programs the players underwent and track these changes over time
- To assess whether planning for retirement impacts sporting performance.

The clearer the objectives the easier it will be to structure and design the questionnaire.

Anticipating how the survey results will be used and communicated will also help in this preliminary stage. For example, it makes a difference if the data is intended for public advocacy or negotiation purposes or solely to inform practices and policies internally. This might also affect response rates and how forthcoming participants will be volunteering sensitive personal information.

### **B** *Defining the cohort*

The purpose statement should also include a definition of the cohort. One can, of course, opt to survey the entire group of accessible former players. This provides the opportunity to compare and contrast the experiences of different generations of players, e.g. players that were active before and after a leap in professionalization of the particular sport or before and after player development and wellbeing services were implemented. Depending on the research objectives, it might be useful to narrow the cohort to a certain age group (e.g. all players having retired after an important CBA took effect). This could also simplify locating and reaching out to the respondents. When determining sample size, it is also important to consider the cost of sampling, variability of the population, response rate and confidence intervals (margin of error).

The importance of collecting demographic characteristics at the beginning of the survey cannot be underestimated. These characteristics can be used as filters which allow for a narrower focus on different groups of respondents and comparisons among them. The choice of background characteristics depends on the research objectives and the particularities of a given sport. Below is a list of recommended items to include:

- A** **Age**  
Allows for a division in age/generational groups and is useful also to compare with the same age group of the general population.
- B** **Year of retirement**  
Allows to differentiate one cohort from another (e.g. all players retired before or after year xxxx).
- C** **Length of career**  
An important filter to measure the impact of time spent as a professional player on the transition experience and life after sport in general.
- D** **Playing level**  
Whether a player competes on a professional or semi-professional level and whether she or he plays internationally can have significant effects on career planning, networks, and access to support services.
- E** **Voluntariness of retirement decision**  
Refers to the degree of control over the decision to retire. A high degree of control appears to be positively associated with the quality of the transition.
- F** **Marital Status**  
Spouses and immediate family constitute the major source of support during a players' transition. Accordingly, marital status is another variable that can be cross-referenced with quality of the transition experience.
- G** **Education**  
Educational status is positively correlated to the transition experience. It can be cross-referenced with variables such as the ease of finding post career employment or financial wellbeing.

Well-designed surveys are interesting for the participant and easy to complete. They are also as short as possible. It is, therefore, critical to identify those study areas that promise to produce the best results in accordance with one's research objectives. The list of potential areas is long – the “Transition from Sport” study found 16 areas addressed by player associations in their research. As stated above the choice of study areas depends on the overarching objectives.

For a survey designed to provide a comprehensive yet concise look at the status of former players we recommend considering the following areas:

**A** *Physical health*

Chronic pain and injury-related problems are immediate concerns for the quality of post-sport lives. Inquiring about the physical condition of retirees is therefore critical, also with a view to assessing the long-term impact of growing workloads or the increased quality of medical support.

**B** *Mental health*

Transitioning out of sport is often associated with a loss of identity and changes in self-perception which can have a negative influence on a retiree's mental health. This can be compounded by changes in physical appearance through reduced training and a shift of life style. Monitoring the mental wellbeing of former players should therefore be part of any past player survey. This can be combined with inquiries into coping strategies. This might also help to reveal attitudinal shifts between generations on the issue of mental health (and thus the effectiveness of current initiatives to destigmatize mental health in professional sport and society at large).

**C** *Employment*

Employment is associated with social status, social relations, daily structures and working towards goals. Having a job is strongly predictive of greater life satisfaction. The ease or difficulty for retirees to find post-career employment can be an important variable for evaluating the educational/career counselling aspects of a Player Development Program. Learning about the different lines of work former players take up helps inform which sectors seek the competences of professional athletes and it provides a better understanding of a potential network of mentors and internship opportunities for current players.

#### **D** *Finances*

Inquiring about the financial wellbeing of former players provides insight into their quality of life, current salaries and investment experiences. This can be valuable data to present to current players and prospective professionals to clarify for them what to expect in financial terms after their careers are over. It can also help debunk two popular myths: past players going broke and past players never having to work a single day again.

#### **E** *Access to and use of support services*

Measuring access to, and use of support services, during and after the career should be a key element of any retired players survey. The results can be very helpful in determining the effectiveness of a Player Development Program and past player support services. They can also show if players are aware of the services offered and what the potential barriers are for them to take advantage of this support. One might find a rift between what is perceived support (by the union) and received support (by the player).

#### **F** *Life satisfaction*

Individual factors such as health, employment and financial income are correlated to the quality of a player's transition. Yet, none of these factors can by themselves or even in aggregation determine the holistic wellbeing of a retiree. Therefore, we recommend using a measure called life satisfaction. Life satisfaction is a concept of well-being assessed in terms of mood, satisfaction with relationships, achieved goals, self-concepts, and self-perceived ability to cope with one's daily life. It involves a favorable attitude towards one's life rather than an assessment of current feelings. The common tool to measure life satisfaction is the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS).<sup>2</sup> It was developed to assess satisfaction with the respondent's life as a whole. The scale does not assess satisfaction with life domains such as health or finances but allows subjects to integrate and weigh these domains in whatever way they choose.

#### **G** *Involvement in the sport*

For any player association, league and governing body it is useful to know if, and how, former players stay connected to their sport, e.g. through coaching, refereeing, volunteering or in an administrative role. Unfortunately, the expertise of former players remains often untapped for lack of adequate structures to include them. Understanding who remains involved, in which capacity, and who feels left out, can help devise a strategy to secure sustained involvement of retirees in their respective sports.

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<sup>2</sup> More information on the SWLS is available [here](#)

## **H** **Performance**

Recent research<sup>3</sup> has shown that engagement in sport career transition planning enhances performance. The findings demonstrated that higher levels of engagement in preretirement planning were positively associated with team selection, team tenure, and career tenure. This is a new, important key study area that is likely to be related to objectives of player associations.

# 4

## **SURVEY DESIGN**

Below are guidelines for the creation of questions which are adapted from “*Guidelines for Conducting Surveys*”<sup>4</sup> by Jay Klagge.

- A** Avoid the “measurement error” by devising survey questions in such a manner that they capture the concept of interest as accurately as possible.
- B** Questions should be relevant.
- C** Questions should be answerable by the respondents (knowledgeable & competent to answer the questions). Technical terms and jargon should be avoided.
- D** Questions should be clear (simplest language possible) and concise (as short as possible).
- E** Questions should not have double negatives like in this example: “Do you agree with the following statement: “Access to a PDP was not unhelpful to my career transition?”
- F** Question should not have biased or leading phraseology. For example: “The PA offers world class player development services. How would you rate our excellent program?”
- G** Questions should not have double-barreled questions. Each question should refer to one point only. An example of a double-barreled question to be avoided: “Do you frequently experience pain in your back and your joints?”
- H** Response categories must be mutually exclusive. This means response options should not overlap. Consider the following response options to the question “How old are you?”:

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<sup>3</sup> More information is available [here](#)

<sup>4</sup> Retrievable [here](#)

a) Between 30 years and 40 years; b) Between 40 years and 50 years; and c) Older than 50 years. In this case, a 40 year old retiree could choose either option a) or b).

**I** Response categories must be collective exhaustive meaning they must include all possible answers. If not sure about all available options it helps to include an “Other – Specify” category.

**J** Response categories must be properly scaled for the level of data required. A few tips for rating scales for attitude questions:<sup>5</sup>

- Usually between five and seven points is best
- Generally, providing a middle category provides better data
- Points on the scale should be labeled with clear, unambiguous words
- Questions which use agree/disagree scales can be biased towards the “agree” side, so it’s usually best to avoid this wording
- Try to write questions so that both positive and negative items are scored “high” and “low on a scale.

**K** Whenever appropriate and possible, questions should be modelled after those on nationally recognised surveys (i.e. – Census, National Health Surveys, etc.). This includes measurement tools such as the

- Satisfaction with Life Scale
- Patient Health Questionnaire
- National Mental Health Screening tools
- Wellbeing 5 (Gallup)

**L** Open-ended questions should be considered whenever appropriate. These questions allow participants to respond to a question in their own terms instead of in pre-described response categories. When pondering whether to

**Comment to Item 11:**

Modelling questions after those on nationally recognized surveys has multiple benefits. For instance, questions on these surveys have already been tested so that reliability and validity are ensured. Using identical question also allows for comparisons between retired players and the general population of the same age group and gender. One can then point to differences in educational and income levels or health-related items such as chronic pain, osteo-arthritis, and functional limitations. These comparisons can become powerful advocacy tools with regard to the importance of player development & wellbeing in general, or - keeping with the example of health measures - reduction of player workload in particular.

<sup>5</sup> Borrowed from “Tip Sheet for Question Wording” by Harvard University retrievable [here](#)

use an open- or close-ended question the following points are worth considering:<sup>6</sup>

- Open-ended questions allow the greatest variety of responses, but are time consuming to ask and require a lot of work to analyze
- Closed ended questions, when well designed, ensure that respondents interpret questions the same way
- Respondents are more likely to skip an open-ended than closed-ended question

**M** Surveys should be conducted in regular intervals and with a consistent template of questions and metrics. Taking a longitudinal approach allows for identifying trends and reliably measuring the impact of programs and services over extended periods of time.

## 5 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Choosing a data collection method is heavily dependent on resources. In-person interviewing is probably the most effective way to get quality results but also the most resource and time intensive. Telephone interviews are a good alternative, but they also require personnel, training and logistical effort to make them work. Paper surveys can be distributed at past player functions but the most cost-effective solution is online surveys. They also have the benefit of being easy to evaluate and to report on. In addition, online surveys allow you to build in a skip-logic whereby participants may skip certain questions depending on the particular answer they gave. To add further depth to your inquiries we recommend using focus groups and triangulating data with information from family, friends, clubs, and player associations.

Creating, conducting and evaluating a past player survey can become very resource intensive. Partnering with a university or an external company can alleviate this workload. Collaborating with experts can help to ensure the scientific validity of your data and potentially enhance its credibility through the expertise and independence a third-party provides. Having a third party collect the data means, however, that player association staff lose the opportunity to directly interact with the former players. The benefit of strengthening ties with them is thereby eliminated. A second potential drawback to using a third party is the possibility that former players might be less responsive to a stranger than to a familiar face from the player association. Mixed approaches are, of course, possible whereby the player association organizes the data collection and the analysis is conducted by an expert partner.

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<sup>6</sup> Borrowed from same source (see previous footnote)

Surveying past players involves asking for very personal and sensitive information. It is therefore critical to adhere to the following ethical considerations:

**A** ***Informed consent***

Informed consent means that past players should understand that (a) they are taking part in research and (b) what the research requires of them e.g., purpose of the research, the methods being used, the possible outcomes of the research, as well as any associated demands, discomforts, inconveniences and risks. Also, the players should be volunteers, taking part without having been coerced and deceived.

**B** ***Anonymity and Confidentiality***

Protecting the anonymity and confidentiality of research participants needs to be considered, especially for private or sensitive information – this includes storage of the data, its analysis, or dissemination. Past players should be explicitly told how their information is being used and who will be storing and analysing it. They will also need to be informed if information will be used in research publications or in the media.

Protecting anonymity may also need to be considered in formulating questions and how those questions will be analysed. If you are surveying a group of past players from a particular country, who played the national game, retired in a certain year and earned a certain amount of money, is divorced and has two kids – he or she may be easily identifiable! It is, therefore, equally important that anonymity is protected when reporting results.

**C** ***The right to withdraw***

Past players should always have the right to withdraw from the research process.

# 7

## PROPOSED QUESTIONS

Among the recommendations of the literature review conducted by the World Player Development Steering Committee was to promote closer alignment among player associations with regard to language, concepts, and questions used. This would enhance comparability and facilitate the aggregation of survey results across sport and regions. We recommend the following set of core questions and measurement tools to be included in any retired players survey conducted or commissioned by World Players' members. We are convinced that such a harmonization will aide World Players to more powerfully advocate for player development and wellbeing policies and initiatives on the global level. It would also give player associations the opportunity to learn about current trends and compare the situations of former players across sport. We thank you for considering these questions and concepts when designing your survey.

### **1** *What is your current employment status?*

- I am in permanent employment
- I am self employed
- I am retired
- I am working but my job is temporary or insecure
- I am working intermittently i.e. when I can find work
- I am unemployed

### **2** *How long did it take you to find a new satisfying career path?*

- I started a new satisfying career immediately after I retired from sport
- A few weeks
- A few months
- More than a year
- I haven't identified a new satisfying career path

### **3** *What is your current financial situation?*

- I am financially secure with a sufficient income from reliable sources for the foreseeable future.
- I am financially secure because of my playing career
- I am financially secure from my current career
- I am financially secure providing I keep in work

- I am concerned about my finances
- I am financially insecure
- I am suffering significant financial hardship

**4** *Which statement best describes any sports related injuries and their impact on your quality of life?*

- I have no significant negative consequences as a result of playing sport
- I continue to receive regular medical treatment for an injury
- A playing injury has somewhat impacted on my quality of life
- A playing injury has significantly impacted on my quality of life and restricted my livelihood.

**5** *Please rate your overall satisfaction with your preparations for life after sport.*

- The quality of support I received to help my transition was far better than I expected
- The quality of support for my transition was what I expected
- The quality of support for my transition was less than I expected
- The quality of support I received to help my transition was poor
- I did not receive any support

**6** *If you engaged in pre-retirement planning, which statement best describes the impact it had on your sporting performance.*

- Pre-retirement planning had a positive impact on my sporting performance
- Pre-retirement planning had no impact on my sporting performance
- Pre-retirement planning had a negative impact on my sporting performance
- I did not engage in pre-retirement planning

In addition, we recommend using a mental health screening commonly used in national health surveys in your country and *The Satisfaction with Life Scale*.

O U R V A L U E S

Inheritance

Leadership

Support

Legacy

