



By PALLE ELLEMANN KNUDSEN

## Athletes at Work

Depending on the sport, an athlete's career can be relatively short. Football players typically retire from the field at the age of 35, while a female gymnast's career may be over by her early twenties.

**KEYWORDS** Performance

- Self-awareness
- Recovering energy
- Branding
- Determination
- Result oriented

Some athletes have made enough money during their career to be able to choose whether or not to start a new career. But many athletes face the reality that what has been their sole focus, typically since childhood, cannot continue any longer, and their life must take a different direction. Often these athletes do not have a high school or college education, or even a network outside their sport, and it may feel like starting all over again. Some athletes will seek opportunities within the sport because it is an easy bridge to a new life where they can leverage their previous career. But the need for coaches and managers is limited, and some players are not very successful coaches.

### FEW JOB OPPORTUNITIES IN ROWING

Other sports are less of a business and leave athletes dependent on government subsidies with few career opportunities after an active career. Olympic gold-medalist in the double sculler rowing competition in London 2012, Rasmus Quist, is working part-time as a plumber, while trying to keep up with his rowing training and competition. Another Danish rower, **Eskild Ebbesen**, has participated in the last five Olympics and won three gold and two bronze medals for Denmark in the men's lightweight coxless fours rowing competition. In the beginning of his rowing career, he had to have a parallel career, which began by completing a college degree in sports physiology and later working as an independent consultant. He is using his training and experience in two areas of performance—carrying out health tests to work with health issues and working with team spirit and motivational training in companies and other organizations. “*People often forget to*

*dedicate time to personal development.*” Ebbesen is also stressing physical condition and the importance it has for mental fitness and people's ability to perform at work. In the last ten years, the corporate world has started to realize this, and more companies have health programs in place for employees. “*To bring mind, body, and spirit to peak condition, executives need to learn what world-class athletes already know: recovering energy is as important as spending it.*” Ebbesen is clearly leveraging his experience and successful sports career, bringing it into a different context.

### CHANGING THE GAME

While most athletes prefer to continue in the world where they have earned their success and built a network since childhood, others use the opportunity for starting a completely new and different career. Garry Kasparov has been the highest rated chess player over time, with a number-one rating from 1986 to 2005. At the end of his professional chess career, he became active in Russian politics, in fierce opposition to the current President Putin. In 2007, Kasparov announced his candidacy for the presidential elections, but he later had to withdraw from the race because, he claimed, it was impossible to rent a suitable meeting room for gathering his supporters to endorse his candidacy. Kasparov is still active in the Russian opposition and human rights movement, and was arrested last year in a protest in support of the Pussy Riot members. Kasparov was politically active even during his chess career, supporting Boris Yeltsin's campaign in 1996, among other things. But he has not been able to leverage his popularity

from his chess career to politics for his own candidacy, at least not enough to seriously challenge President Putin. The question is, are the rules of the game in Russian politics so different from those of chess? And even the chess master cannot win with only one pawn against the Putin army of rooks and bishops. Kasparov has not retired completely chess and regularly does show matches and coaches some of the current leading players of the world. Additionally, he writes books about chess and different chess masters.

### FROM SHOT PUT TO POLITICS

Olympic silver medalist in shot put, **Joachim B. Olsen**, made it into the Danish parliament after he had to stop his active athletic career in 2009 due to injuries. Since early retirement, Olsen has leveraged his popularity to participate in a range of TV shows, including winning a season of the Strictly Come Dancing show. A surprise to many people, he announced his candidacy for the Danish parliament in 2011 and was successful. Olsen has achieved significant media coverage not only because of his background as an athlete, but because he has been very vocal in debates and on various occasions has contributed controversial opinions. The press has had their share of fun publishing the spontaneous controversial comments coming from this inexperienced politician, but Olsen is not the kind of guy to give up easily. So he has continued working hard to build a position in the political arena. He will probably earn a second term in parliament, if his party does not lose too much support. Voters like hard-working people with determination to produce results.

**The Fearless Project** by **Jeff Sheng** began as an independent photography project in 2003, when he started documenting "out" lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender athletes in high school. Between 2003-2006, Jeff photographed about 30 athletes and then began to exhibit and speak about the work at various high schools and colleges as an educational endeavor to decrease homophobia in sports among students. The project has been exhibited in over 50 schools across the US. [W [fearlessproject.org](http://fearlessproject.org) [jeffsheng.com](http://jeffsheng.com)]

### LEVERAGING THE BRAND VALUE

Athletes increasingly become aware of and deliberately manage the brand value of being a well-known person with lots of free media coverage across sports sections, as well in the tabloid gossip arena. At twenty-six years of age, Maria Sharapova, one of the best female tennis players, has already established her own product brand of sweets, Sugarpo-va, which has been launched in several countries. Sharapova tells BBC News that she has been pondering for some time what she would do when her tennis career ends. And then a long period of recovery from an injury actually gave her time to put her thoughts into action and launch a product. Later, she wants to move into fashion and cosmetics. But for now she still has some good years of tennis left, so business has to be taken care of between training and tournaments. Sharapova has probably been inspired by British footballer David Beckham, who has, more than anyone else, made a brand of his sports career. Beckham has just retired from pro football, but it was clear during his last years in football that it was just part of his branding strategy. He even gave the salary he earned in his last club PSG to charity. It is clear that strong media coverage of sports is giving successful athletes an advantage, or even a platform, for a second career after sports. Additionally, athletes often have unique experience in teamwork, discipline for intense practice, and awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses. These are skills that can be very useful in a business context. On the other hand, athletes who have been so focused on their sport that they lack a formal education have a hard time changing career paths, since their entire network is built around their sport. ●

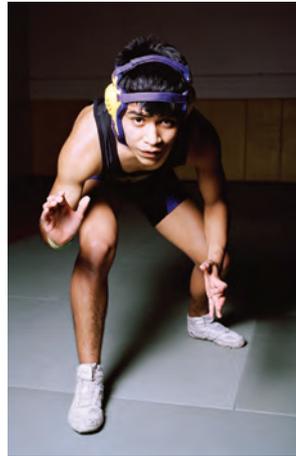
**01** Jamie, Rugby, Track and Field, Volleyball and Tennis, Whitney M. Young High School, IL, 2007, **02** Tanner, Varsity Football, Mt. Pleasant Community High School ('11), IA, 2012, **03** Brayan, Boys Wrestling Team, Harrisburg High School, OR, 2010, **04** Jamal, Track and Field Team, Dartmouth College, 2006, **05** Deb, Fencing Team, Brown University, 2009, **06** Ben, Men's Lacrosse Team, Bowdoin College, 2010, **07** Sam, Men's Swimming, Amherst College, 2011, **08** Keturah, Women's Basketball, Duke University, 2010



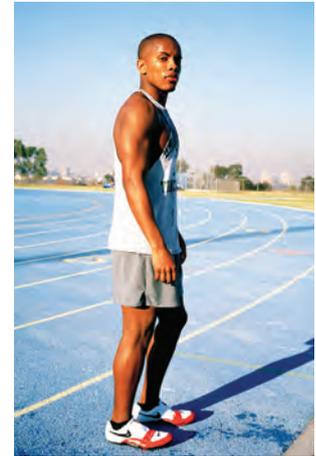
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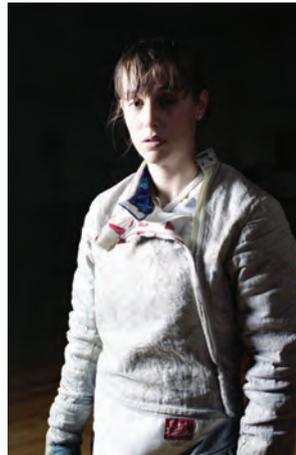
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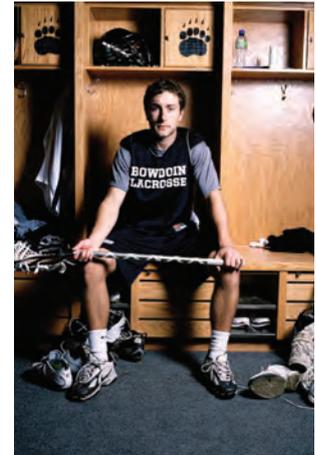
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