



LEEDS
BECKETT
UNIVERSITY

Citation:

Douglas, K (2021) Autobiographical insights into athlete transitions from sport. In: Athlete Transitions into Retirement: Experiences in Elite Sport and Options for Effective Support. Routledge. ISBN 9780367432867

Link to Leeds Beckett Repository record:

<https://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/id/eprint/7175/>

Document Version:

Book Section (Accepted Version)

This is an Accepted Manuscript of a book chapter published by Routledge in Athlete Transitions into Retirement: Experiences in Elite Sport and Options for Effective Support on 13 August 2021, available online: <http://www.routledge.com/9780367432867>

The aim of the Leeds Beckett Repository is to provide open access to our research, as required by funder policies and permitted by publishers and copyright law.

The Leeds Beckett repository holds a wide range of publications, each of which has been checked for copyright and the relevant embargo period has been applied by the Research Services team.

We operate on a standard take-down policy. If you are the author or publisher of an output and you would like it removed from the repository, please [contact us](#) and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.

Each thesis in the repository has been cleared where necessary by the author for third party copyright. If you would like a thesis to be removed from the repository or believe there is an issue with copyright, please contact us on openaccess@leedsbeckett.ac.uk and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.

Chapter 17

Autobiographical insights into athlete transitions from sport

Kitrina Douglas, (August 26)

University of West London

If you want to know me, then you must know my story, for my story defines who I am. And if I want to know myself, to gain insight into the meaning of my own life, then I, too, must come to know my own story. (McAdams 1993, p. 11)

Passing the ball

“Why didn’t you sign for Arsenal or Everton then?” She asked after he paused. He’d been telling her a story about a football game he used to play on the way home from school each day. He’d first pick teams, Liverpool v Ipswich, Man United v Arsenal, Chelsea v Leeds, for example. Then, he’d kick the ball at the first gatepost, and if it hit, it meant it was 1-0 to Chelsea. The next gatepost provided an opportunity for Leeds to equalise. If he hit the post, the game ended 1-1, and on to the next two teams he went, through the entire first division, every day, all the way home from school and all recorded in his notebook. It sounded such fun, so creative and all his own idea. A few years later, scouts invited him to Highbury, home of Arsenal and Goodison park, home of Everton, for trials, after which he was offered a contract to play professionally.

“My father didn’t believe in professional sport,” he replied matter of factly, “so he wouldn’t let me sign, he wanted me to have a ‘safe’ (he raised his eyebrows) job, but I played semi-pro for Hearts on release from the Navy when I was in Edinburgh”.

At six, she was too young perhaps to form an opinion. She just absorbed the story about a little boy making up games and playing football, having fun and being asked to play professionally by two of the country’s top teams.

Practice 1

The sun hadn’t long been up and its orange light made the practice ground appear magical. She loved these mornings, cool air on her skin, hidden pockets of warm air, a musky aroma rising from the grass.

As she squeezed each shot, it fizzed through the stillness but hardly made a sound as it settled near the white post she was aiming at 70 yards away. And it was always exactly 70 yards to start with. Her grouping of hit balls around the white post suggested she was no normal golfer, in fact, if you didn’t know better you would be excused for thinking the balls had been placed by the post as opposed to being hit from the length of a football pitch away.

Her next shot was so accurate it pitched fully onto the 3-inch-wide post and ricocheted off making a loud *crack*, it was the only sound. Further up the field movement that stopped with the noise drew her attention. Three deer had been passing, now, they stood motionless and became statuettes in the sun’s spotlight, as they watched her. She stared back, not moving, aware of slender legs, long bodies, and a dignified presence. The lead deer turned its head from her to draw the morning air through its nostrils, then it bent its neck and swept the dewy grass with its nose. Raising its head again something beckoned it back on its journey. The other deer looked from her to the larger deer, and followed on.

Her body went back to hitting, but her mind was filled with words. They arrived as silently and unexpected as the deer, they filled her head with joy, as had the deer. Like the deer they would not move, so she emptied them out on a piece of paper. The only paper she could find was a page from her yardage book, but the lines came flooding out.

As she wandered up the range to collect the balls she hummed a new tune and allowed the words to drop into her melody and out popped a ditty. She wouldn’t be so grandiose to call it a song, but she sang it just the same, maybe to herself, maybe to the deer, or maybe to remind her of that moment with the deer. (adapted from Douglas, 2016)

Practice 2

After an afternoon exploring the mountains and taking ice creams by the lake they returned to grassy field. The sun hadn't lost its heat but was turning red and creating shapes and shadows across the tightly cropped grass. Nathan pulled out the big tournament bag and balls and with the remains of the baguette wandered over to the empty range. Carefully placing the bag down so that its flat surface formed 'the stumps', he took a club from the bag in readiness to defend his wicket. She wandered 20 yards away.

Adopting a sideways stance, Nathan took a step forward making an imaginary swipe at a ball with a cricket swing, left elbow up, front foot forward, then, in front of the bag he patted down a few uneven patches of grass and awaited delivery. It arrived like a guided missile chipped on target, but he anticipated its flight and before the ball connected with the waiting bag he swung forward and took the rising ball flush on face of the club, THWACK into the distance.

'Nice hit!' she shouted, watching the ball fly overhead.

There was a harmony between them, a symphony being played without a conductor. Later, Nathan took a putter and walked to the green while she took a pitching wedge and went off to await him throwing the ball over. When he did it came to rest in a divot so she acted out for the imaginary cameras, 'What sort of a lie is that?' looking to the heavens. Putting the ball way back in her stance, she closed the face of the club, put her hands forward and began to commentate, 'Douglas facing an impossible shot'. Then she focussed, became silent, allowed her body to remember the move and hit the ball. Moments later, after the ball came to rest four feet from the pin, she returned to her commentary, 'Ooooh, what a shot! Leaving her foursomes partner a little tester'.

'The pressure's on her partner now', Nathan said, taking up the commentary and lining up the putt from several angles. Then he stood to the ball, and smoothly struck it into the hole.

*

In 1996, as a high performance professional athlete and undergraduate student, I was shocked by the singular way athletes' lives were being represented in the scientific literature presented to me in lectures and seminars. Within golf, the sport that I played for 20 years, the available literature suggested that women were consumed by their profession, physically isolated by travel and insulated from everyday reality of mainstream society (Crosset, 1995). This type of narrative script wasn't restricted to research among female golfers. Across sport research, these types of findings were mirrored by scholars who, at times, went as far as to suggest that the professional athlete 'has, and *must* have', such a narrow focus on winning 'it is *impossible* for him (or her) to be much else' (Werthner and Orlick 1986, p. 337, my italics). Put bluntly, I was being informed that it was impossible (not difficult or challenging even) for me to 'be' anything else! *Not daughter, sister, aunty, friend, counsellor, coach, journalist, storyteller* or any of the other identities important to me. Sitting among the '96 cohort of Sport and Exercise Science students at the University of Exeter, I looked at the lecturer in disbelief and silence, as he talked with authority about a population I was a member of - high performance athletes.

In social science research, we now have a much better idea about how individuals lose their voice and agency, of which the above is an example. I may have been a successful business woman, earning a living in professional sport, yet in this context I was silenced. My life and experience didn't seem to count. At the time, as an undergraduate, I didn't possess the narrative resources to question the literature and ask, '*isn't the very fact I am in the lecture testimony that not all athletes are this way?*' Wasn't I, in Carl Popper's terms, at least one 'Black Swan' that proved their theory wrong? Another explanation was that I was deluded. That winning *really* was everything to me and I was in denial? I mention this now,

at the start of this chapter as a reminder to myself, of a need to really listen to participants, to hear and to identify my own biases and assumption when analysing and making statements about others' lives. What other explanations were there?

Learning how my life can be subsumed in a story that doesn't represent me was an important lesson. I learned that the claims these authors made about their data were less generalisable than they were claiming. The irony of this is not lost on me now, some 20 years later. One of the challenges I am often faced with given my valuing of life history, single case, biographical and autoethnographic research, is that some researchers criticise this research on the basis that it is impossible to learn from these methodologies as they are not generalisable, and – being based on one person's experience and subjectivity, they are not credible. Yet, here was I not fitting the mould of research that was supposed to be generalisable and objective.

There are of course a huge number of researchers who also value the learning, insights and theoretical generalisations that can be made from a single case, and it is on such a basis in this chapter that I use my own sport experience as a vehicle for exploring professional sport and the types of identity work that might make transitions less problematic.

A call to stories

The opening quote to this chapter 'if you want to know me... you must know my story' provided an opening to share three stories about practice – the art of transforming a novice into an expert, and a way we maintain improvements in performance once we attain that level. If we, within the scientific community, want to understand an individual's life, and why he or she might experience difficulty during their transition from sport, then there is much to be learned by exploring 'back' stories. And not just of the individual athlete, but also the stories available in the construction of an identity and sense of what is valued and how values are created and transmitted. In *The Renewal of Generosity*, Arthur Frank (2004) reminds us that:

Stories do not merely narrate events. They convey on action and actor— either one or both—the socially accredited status of being worth notice. To render narratable is to claim relevance for action, and for the life of which that action is part ...[and to] render present what would otherwise be absent (Frank, 2004, p. 62)

My aim here is to 'render narratable' stories that have been silenced and or lost from my experiences in sport and place these alongside stories that others believe are 'worth' noticing. I have a number of reasons for doing this. One is to provide examples of complex identity developments and how the values and stories we are born into (that form our ideological apparatus) play a role in shaping who we become. We can't take the individual athlete out of their context, if we want to understand them and create interventions that reduce distress and trauma leaving sport.

Louis Althusser (1971), coined the term *interpellation*, to describe how an individual, because they have been shaped to act in certain ways by the ideology they are embedded within, responds when he or she is called or 'hailed.' In sport terms, we can see this with the dominant scripts available in professional sport culture. Here, athletes are interpellated to understand that winning brings honour and glory and losing will bring humiliation, embarrassment and shame. If someone questions the amount of hard work, dedication and sacrifice expected, we are thus called to respond, 'no pain no gain'. However, this narrative script aligns with only one available narrative and is a hallmark of the performance narrative

(Carless & Douglas, 2013a,b, 2012; Douglas & Carless, 2006) which dominates in sport and allows little deviation and exploration.

Mark Freeman and Alistair MacIntyre extended the concept of an individual's actions being shaped by forces outside the individual, suggesting that personal history begins even before birth, "The story of my life" MacIntyre wrote, (1981, p. 205) "is always embedded in those communities from which I derive my identity. I am born with a past; and to try to cut myself off from that past, in the individualist mode, is to deform my present relationship." Sharing stories from my past and the past of my parents therefore, has the capacity to illuminate the process of interpellation. That is, they enable me to see the ways in which I respond according to others' expectations of me and that these that relate to the 'rituals' and 'practices' I learned through my family, community, culture. In 'seeing' anew, the stories provide the means to resist the dominant storylines by providing counterstories.

The opening stories about 'practice' provided three counterstories – that is, they don't follow the expected performance narrative template (Douglas & Carless, 2006) which includes training, hard work and/or dedication. Rather, the narrative plot deviates to reveal a different route to into professional sport and excellence, one of fun and relational entanglements.

For those familiar with my work, it will come as no surprise that here, as I often do, I draw on arts-based and storytelling methodologies. Given I have written extensively about my motives and rationale for doing so, I will not devote space to these methodologies here¹. Rather, in what follows I draw from a collage of published autoethnographic research (written by me) along with news reports (written by journalists), to explore specific moments from my entry, life-in and departure from the professional golf tour with the hope that it expands the narrative possibilities open to athletes and researchers regarding career transition from sport.

Sharing stories told about me has the added lens of showing how myths are created about sport heroes which in turn influence both the general public's understanding about what it takes to excel in sport as well as the expectations of athletes, coaches and others in the performance environment regarding what is valued *in sport*, and what it takes to excel. It is the messiness of these issues that I would like to address in this chapter.

I commenced my academic journey a few weeks after walking off the golf course in what was to be my last professional tournament, though I didn't know this at the time. The following extract, from my PhD thesis, tells the tale.

Walking down the mountain

On the 4th September 1996 I went to the ladies toilet. On the way there I turned my head awkwardly and experienced a sharp pain in my neck which restricted my head from turning. Not a huge problem, you might think. I was, however, on the tenth hole of the Oxfordshire Golf Course, playing in the English Open – a professional golf tournament with a £200,000 prize fund - and I was one of the top players in Europe. In a very humorous thirty minutes, one of my playing partners demonstrated on the other, in the middle of the fairway, how her mother, a physio, would 'unlock' a patient's neck. She then offered to do the same for me. The spectators lining the fairway had no idea why one golfer in our group (Debbie Dowling another top pro) suddenly sat on the grass in compliance to instructions from the other player (a young woman I didn't know that well) who proceeded to place an arm lock round Debbie's head, an act intended to give me confidence to let her do the same to me. *Not on your life* I thought, enjoying the show. By this stage two groups were waiting to tee off behind us, thus my indecision about what to do (play on or withdrawal) was holding up play. Officials were called in. An ambulance was dispatched. In the midst of the comedy of errors, I realised that, although just a minor injury, the St John's Ambulance medics would not be able to fix a muscle or tendon problem with a bandage, and so I declined a lift back in the ambulance and walked off the golf course (and out of professional tournament golf) and went and enjoyed a

traditional afternoon cream tea at a luxury hotel on the river Thames in Marlow with a friend (Douglas 2004, p. 1).

If the theories about professional sports people were to be trusted, I should have experienced some type of fracturing of my athletic identity in what could be termed a ‘career-ending injury’ - an identity which according to the science literature is ‘supposed’ to define me and my sense of self. Surely, after investing so much in my sport career, and not being ‘much else’ what else of my ‘self’ was there?

At this point in the chapter, it might be useful to state that from my own research I recognise many athletes can and do experience a fracture of their sense of self from such departures (see for example, Carless & Douglas, 2013a, 2013b, 2012; Douglas & Carless, 2006, 2009, 2015). The previous chapters also attest to this. Furthermore, I have witnessed participants, colleagues and friends exhibit and/or share stories about self-harming, attempted suicide, substance misuse, or loss of self-worth (Carless & Douglas, 2009; Douglas & Carless, 2009, 2012a, 2012b, 2014, 2015) following deselection, career-ending injury, pregnancy and/or transition out of sport. At the same time, I have witnessed and evidenced, through the actions, behaviour and stories of other participants, colleagues and friends – along with my own subjective experiences and documented behaviours - that there are alternative types of journey (Douglas & Carless, 2015; Douglas, in press,) that show an individual athlete’s sense of self worth isn’t always dependent on their rank and performance – despite there being literature that says it must. There are, if you are able to notice them, alternative types of narrative plots that challenge the hegemony of the performance narrative.

While the descriptions above regarding a focus on winning certainly reflect the experiences and values of some athletes, they failed to recognise diversity - we aren’t all the same. Subsuming us all sends out a dangerous message and makes it more difficult to support athletes who don’t want their athletic identity to dominate. Sport and winning does not mean the same thing to us all, we each have different journeys into sport, *different biographies* and so it follows that leaving sport through natural or forced transitions will also confer different meanings.

My first experience of dissatisfaction with traditional research came through reading Carole Gilligan’s book *In a Different Voice* (Gilligan, 1993). In this hallmark text, Carole Gilligan reveals how women’s voices and stories had been systematically silenced by traditional psychological approaches to identity and development. For Gilligan, ‘The failure to hear the differences in (women’s) voices stems in part from the assumption that there is a single mode of social experience and interpretation’ (Gilligan 1993, p. 173).

Gilligan was not alone, Narrative theorists also question the ‘single monolithic culture’, to suggest that ‘many people experience themselves as caught between different cultural systems’ (McLeod 1997, p. 100). When these differing cultural systems are recognised, singular expectations of behaviour and responses become untenable as an individual’s life is understood to be complex, contingent and multi-dimensional.

In the research that David Carless and I have been involved with over the past twenty years, we seem to have a pre-occupation with not cementing and finalising the lives of people we conduct research with, because we know from our own experiences what doing so feels like. Such experiences, (of being misrepresented) have, I hope, led us to be more cautious of the claims we make for our ‘data’, and to look for those dimensions of life that are hidden or taboo. Being misrepresented has also provoked concerns with those things that are omitted from research because they are difficult or impossible to put into words. By this I mean, if asked by a researcher *how did you get to the top* it may be easier (due to the narrative templates or scripts that are available to an athlete) for an athlete to respond by saying he or she took a singular focus, was dedicated and made sacrifices to invest in hours of training.

There are many dangers with drawing on this type of dominant narrative and the most problematic is that it cements and strengthens the ‘myth’ that there is only being *one way* to succeed in sport. It means actions and activities like singing, writing songs, or having spiritual experiences while hitting golf balls, are omitted, thus the actions and values of individuals for whom alternative explanations are important are in danger of having important dimensions of their self concept ridiculed, undermined, trivialised and narrowed – all factors that contribute to problematic transition. If we hope to support healthier transitions, then perhaps, recognising (and listen out for) those dimensions of an athlete’s life that fail to gain recognition, may be more important than researchers and practitioners have realised.

In the remainder of this chapter, I share a small selection of counter stories with the aim of broadening the canvas regarding athletic transitions.

*

I hit my first ever golf ball all at the age of 17 while on holiday in Scotland with my family. The following extract from “Negotiating a relational identity” (2009) focusses on this event and the consequence.

Do You Fancy an Ice Cream?

The lure was the ice cream. He had offered them ice creams on the way back from the golf range. She and her little sister eagerly accepted the invitation to ice cream and even hit a few shots. This offer, two days later, was a little different.

‘Do you fancy leaving school and playing golf for a year?’ her dad asked, as if he was asking about ice creams again. She thought golf was boring, but school was pretty boring too ... and she had no burning desire to do anything in particular. ‘If you don’t like it you can do your A levels’ he reasoned. It all sounded so simple driving along in the car, it wasn’t an intense conversation, it didn’t even seem particularly important, it was just like he was asking *do you fancy chocolate or vanilla?*

‘If you like it’, he continued, eyes not diverting from the road, ‘but aren’t very good, you do your A levels, but you will have a game you can play for the rest of your life. Golf’s played everywhere. If you like it’, he glanced over towards her shrugging his shoulders in the process, ‘and you are good at it, no-one can stop you. You see, you can always finish your education, at any age, but with sport’, there was a moment’s pause, ‘time is an issue, it’s a little different’.

He left his proposal hanging. The ball, so to speak, was in her court. Of course, she didn’t know anything about golf, other than it was boring. She liked the smell of the lamb’s wool sweaters in the golf shop though – she quite fancied having one of those. Three different options, no draw backs, no pressure, only opportunities. She shrugged her shoulders: why not?

While she and her father had been rather under-whelmed regarding the gravity of her decision to leave school at 17, without qualifications and without skills in the activity she was pursuing, her teachers weren’t quite so at ease with the decision and announcement at the beginning of term:

‘You’re doing WHAT?’ enquired her form teacher.

‘I’m leaving school at Christmas to become a professional golfer’ she said.

‘Do you think you have reached the standard then? It’s very difficult to make it in professional sport you know! Do you think you are good enough?’

‘I don’t know’, she replied in all honesty, but enjoying the drama, ‘I haven’t even played yet’.

*

A few months later, while completing my final term at school, I played in my first competition on another family holiday, this time in Portugal. I owned no golf clubs and didn’t have an official handicap.

PAR GOLF MAGAZINE: NET NOTHING!

Ever heard of a two net nothing? It’s a new one of us but Katrina Douglas, 36 handicap member of Long Ashton Golf Club scored one in the Algarve during the recent TAP amateur week. Playing in a

four-ball with her partner, father Jim Douglas, she scored a two at the short 13th, one of the many holes on which she received two strokes start. So it counted as a hole in nought. Needless to say, she and Dad won the competition ... with a net 60! Now 17 year old (Kit for short), who started playing golf only in August, plans to take up golf full-time, playing and practising every day, in the hope of becoming a proette. 'I'm not much good yet,' she says, 'but I've been told I've got some potential and as I'm a great sports lover I'd hate not to give myself the chance of becoming really good at golf.' (Par Golf 1978)

After dropping out of school at Christmas I joined a local golf course, and took weekly lessons from Richard Bradbear at Burnham and Berrow golf club. How, when, where and what I practised was left to me. I watched the better players at the club for inspiration, I read a lot, made up games like my father had and played in the women's events each week. Two years later, I entered my first national competition, the 1980 Scottish Girls Championship. Again, recorded very helpfully by the British media.

THE SCOTSMAN

It took Jane Connachan just six holes to increase her overnight lead of three to double figures, with her playing partner, Kitrina Douglas collapsing under the pressure of poor putting. After four putting the third any lingering chance of a contest vanished when the English girl followed that immediately with a brace of sevens. (Scotsman, 1980)

The following year Gordon Cosh, the friend of my father's from the driving range story, invited me to go on holiday to Florida with his family over Christmas.

Trust

He didn't look up from the paper, he just asked the question: 'Are you taking a bible with you?' In the excitement of what to pack on her first trip to America, a bible hadn't figured on her list. So she took a moment to consider her options. A simple 'no' might look as if she didn't care, saying yes would be a lie, so she came up with: 'They're all too big, too heavy', hoping it would be an end to the matter. It wasn't.

'I'll buy you a travel one', he said, from behind the broadsheet. Which he did, with the instructions to read a chapter everyday, which she did.

In the dark bedroom she fumbled to find the bathroom door knob, uneasy, ashamed, slightly tense, and at 5am, still half asleep. Pausing to make sure she hadn't disturbed the sleep of her roommates Annie and Tanya she turned the handle in slow motion while holding her breath. Her skin acknowledged the coolness of the sterile room, but it was only once the door was softly closed and locked tight, that she put the light on, the toilet seat down, and commenced reading. She wondered why reading this book was such a problem in front of her two friends. She wondered why she was driven to read even though her father didn't check up on her or ever ask her about it. She began where he suggested, the search for wisdom and understanding, the proverbs of renowned philosopher, Solomon: *He who refreshes others will be refreshed. A kind hearted woman gains respect, but ruthless men gain only wealth.* Her bum went numb on the hard seat, but the reading captured her thoughts. What should her behaviour be towards others? What sort of heart did she have? *A kind answer turns away wrath.* How *should* she respond?

Six months later her father died. She continued reading.

Wouldn't He be Proud Now?

The press corps didn't want to disrupt the polite hand-shakes following the 1982 British Amateur Championship final, but, if *their* stories were to take centre stage in the Sunday papers copy needed to be filed before the football results and it was already 3:50pm and they were in the middle of the 16th hole. This being golf, however, the rush to circle the winner was dignified.

The usual cliché questions surfaced first, about the game and how she came from behind.

Daily Telegraph reporter Marie Clark then slipped in her question. This one, however, came as a shock to the young champion:

‘Wouldn’t your father have been proud of you now?’ Clarke asked, as much as statement or assumption as a question. The journalist’s story had, of course, already been written, about the *21 year old who only started golf four years ago*, and had taken *a year off school, beaten every member of the British team* and that *her father had died a few months earlier*. Clarke simply needed a *yes* from the player to show she actually interviewed the girl.

The reply was as much a shock to the journalists as the question had been to the player: ‘No’.

Faces looked up from note books, pens stopped, earnest expressions and eyes pinned attention on the relative unknown. The words were out, however, before the young player realised she was disagreeing with the world’s top journalists. The words were out before she had thought through the ramifications of annoying this group of men and women. The pause in the furious scribbling provoked a further response, but, in those few moments, she could not find words to bridge the divide, so she once again stepped on thin ice searching for the words.

‘No’, she said firmly shaking her head, ‘my father was proud of *me*, not what I did today, not hitting a ball round the golf course’.

DAILY EXPRESS

How A 50-1 Shot Turned Into A Champion

Last weekend the long legged 5ft 9 Miss Douglas 21 turned the form book of women’s golf into a comic strip. The 50-1 long shot became British Champion after mowing down five internationals in a sensational march to the titleWhen we met one question was: stroke play or match play?

Revealingly she answers “As long as I’m winning, I don’t mind which. I hate losing.” Competitiveness came from her father, Jim, head of a construction firm and a footballer for Edinburgh’s Hearts. Sadly, he did not see his daughter’s triumph. He died last month at 51 with a heart illness. (Heagar 1982)

One of the motives behind me wanting to win that particular British Amateur Championship was because the Curtis Cup (an important bi-annual team event between the USA & UK) was taking place in the USA and I wanted be part of a British team on a USA trip, I didn’t want to play for Great Britain in the UK. Additionally, I didn’t have the finance’s (since my father’s death) to continue playing amateur golf indefinitely, I either needed to find work or to turn professional. Winning this event led to selection for the British team and the chance to travel to Europe and the USA.

Two years later, I was dropped from the British team, and in April the following year (1984) two weeks after signing professional forms, I played in my very first professional tournament. The Ford Classic at Woburn Golf Club.

SUNDAY TELEGRAPH

Douglas in fairy-tale beginning

KITRINA DOUGLAS’S victory in the Ford Classic was ...the stuff of fairy tales. To win your first tournament, only a fortnight after turning professional is enough in itself, but to win it only six years after taking up the game is almost certainly without precedent. Miss Douglas she said she did not try to think about winning, only playing “steady golf” and her stomach turned a summersault when she found, much to her surprise, that she was two shots clear. It left a certain amount of egg on the faces of the selectors but she refused to gloat, “I did this to prove to myself, not to show them.” (Williams 1984).

SCOTSMAIL

Kitrina has the superstar image

... and the talent and personality to transform British golf’s garden party image...She is a tough competitor and that quality comes from hours of competitive practice at her home club where she plays the men off their own tees for money and rarely loses. (McDonnel 1984).

THE GUARDIAN

Captivating Kitrina

Kitrina Douglas’s four-shot victory in her first tournament as a professional was a heart warming sight even for two women from the LGU, which has excluded her from the Curtis Cup match next month. There is no animosity on either side. Penny Taylor, Chairman of the LGU said, “After playing the Vagliano and being rejected, she was the most marvellous entertainer. It was quite admirable.” The

other LGU representative said Miss Douglas had written a wonderful letter of appreciation on turning professional. “We get plenty of criticism and we don’t get many letters like that. It was a marvellous gesture from a lovely girl.” (Khan 1984).

The media capture what they needed to sell newspapers, but alongside ‘performance’, there was plenty going on “off” the course that wasn’t in the papers. The following, from a story called “Confession” (2019) provides just one example of some the important things that are omitted by the media.

The sweltering summer afternoon heat and huge galleries meant it would take ages to leave the course so I settled with a private ‘players only’ lounge where a television in the corner of the room was showing the Pope’s visit. Slumping down, off came my shoes and socks and I ordered a cold drink. A few minutes later, as the waitress placed the food down, Leanne, another player, came and sat down.

I knew Leanne was a catholic, attended mass regularly and believed very different things about access to God, sin and absolution to me. The *troubles* in my father’s country, Ireland, bombs, deaths and blood shed only highlighted the fissure between protestants and Catholics. So, as we sat side by side, there was an invisible chasm existing between us.

I noticed how visibly enthused and moved Leanne was watching the pope.

‘Its so wonderful’ she said little knowing that the player next to her had no time for this religious leader, little respect for what he stood for, and saw him as a bloke dressed in his fancy gear, waving to the crowd. Yet, despite all those misconceptions and biases, as we began talk about aspects of our individual faiths we found similarities in fundamental truths. While watching events unfolding on the television, I can only describe the moment as something spiritually bridging and joyous, and well, I felt a goodness I can’t describe. It brought access to a different perception about those who professed a catholic faith and I was changed.

‘I can’t believe I’ve really enjoyed talking to you about this’ I said, ‘me too’ she returned. ‘We should do it again’ she said. I found myself agreeing.

Soon meetings were regularly taking place and other players of similar, different or no faith joined us. In time I became the Sheppard of this little flock, responsible for organising a time, a place to meet after play in all the different countries we visited. Through our gatherings we supported each other’s spiritual growth, communion and friendship, and anyone was welcome. Yet, I hated the time organising this meeting stole from doing other things, like my practice, site seeing and exploring, or even just getting myself ready for the event. I would have preferred *not* to be the organiser. At the same time, I thought it was the right thing to do, so I always did it. But, I would complain to God, “*look*”, I’d say slightly annoyed, “*I need to practice*”, or “*I’m tired, I need to rest, it’s been a long day*” or “*I’ve an important game tomorrow*”, and then the next day I would confound the record books and win another big event. Then I’d say, ‘*ok God; guess I didn’t need the practice*’. And we’d organise barbeques, gigs and Leanne went with me to buy my first guitar. Then she taught me new chords and to play *Donald Where’s Your Trousers*, which made me laugh, and we would sing together, play together. I used our contacts in the UK to find homes for tour players who weren’t from Europe, who needed a place to stay, showing care, and practical support and because it’s the right thing to do.

‘THE SUNDAY TIMES’

Leading Lady Kitrina’s Winning Act

It has taken the phenomenal Kitrina Douglas only three months of her professional career to become Europe’s leading money winner. The fact is that this leggy West Country girl seemed destined for greater stardom on the stage, and when she carried off the gold medal for acting at the Bath festival Kitrina’s tutor was convinced she had a spectacular future in the theatre. She is one of the most ebullient and irrepressible characters on the European tour and always ready for a giggle. Yet there is a more solemn side to her. She is genial enough, seldom stays in the same places as her fellow professionals. As soon as she finishes her round she leaves the course, eats and returns to the practice ground to work for a couple of hours. It is this relentless drill that has taken her to the top in her first season. (The Sunday Times 1984)

June 2004, Psychology workshop

I hadn’t seen Leanne in quite a few years but any space between us evaporated as we exchanged stories round her kitchen table. Still, there was a lot to catch up with. She was now a head pro, the national golf coach, ran a golf shop and had a same sex partner. Quite a change. I had dropped out of the tour, completed a sport science degree then a PhD, was doing commissioned research as an independent

researcher, still doing commentary for the BBC, and, my reason for visiting her area of the country was delivering workshops to women golfers.

“You know” she said, mid-sentence, “I tell my students about you, that you would be on the practice ground before everyone else and still there at the end of the day, you had such a dedicated work ethic, I tell my students, *that’s how you have to practise, that’s what you have to do to get to the top.*”

Reflections

The media, (like the researchers mentioned earlier) write about what is of concern to them. Their horizon of interest (Althusser, 1971; Bakhtin, 1984) centred on how golf tournaments are won. To do so, they ‘cherry pick’ from the action and events and then draw on war metaphors to create an image and identity of a young woman who is like a soldier, ‘mowing down’ the opposition, ‘marching’ to the title, and being a ‘tough’ competitor who invests herself in ‘relentless drill.’ This last metaphor provides a useful example to consider how athletes’ lives are used to promote one way of becoming successful in sport. An event (hitting balls on a practice ground) is used to create a cultural understanding of what actions are necessary to train a soldier for war. From these narrative building blocks they then link ‘the drill’ with ‘how to get to the top of sport’ and write:

... as soon as Kitrina finishes her round she leaves the course, eats and returns to the practice ground to work for a couple of hours. It is this relentless drill that has taken her to the top in her first season. (The Sunday Times, 1984)

Yet, the above story omits other important events and explanations which equally contribute to optimal performance and I believe, to mental health and sustaining a multidimensional identity. Namely, that I left the golf course to have fun, go sight-seeing and explore, to arrange meetings with peers where spiritual growth was central, to learn about a new town, new language, new food, to learn to play the guitar and sing and so on (see Douglas, in press, 2014, 2009). In contrast, the news media, their descriptions, and how they define my practice as ‘relentless drill,’ shapes how my identity is seen by others, and when I win, the ‘relentless drill’ becomes a map for others. Over time, as this identity becomes cemented and narrowed by others, it becomes a vehicle to shape and police other athletes’ lives. It also informs what the public know and expect from young sport people. While undoubtedly I spent hours on the practice range, it wasn’t experienced as relentless drill. Ironically, it is equally possible that not valuing winning (to the extent that it was everything), learning to play a musical instrument, taking on responsibilities for the well-being of others, and doing ‘non-performance’ related activities, played a part in me winning. More importantly, their story could not be more different to how I describe hitting balls or how I self identify.

Over time, it can be difficult to sustain and value dimensions of our ‘self’ and identity if the only thing people are presented with, and ask is about, and the only thing valued in our culture, is related to how you win/won (see Carless & Douglas, 2013a). The power of the performance narrative is difficult to usurp and whether an individual athlete self-identifies with the stories created about them or not, we can become entrapped in a story not our own. For Alec Grant, narrative entrapment means ‘you get this narrative biography superimposed on you and then people react towards you as if you are this label’ (Grant 2020, 2017). Like many of the soldiers I have carried out research with (Carless & Douglas, 2016a, 2016b; Douglas & Carless, 2016, 2015), high performance athletes often aren’t as tough as their public image portrays, many are vulnerable and insecure and have difficulty living up to what others expect of them. The problem we face (the research community) isn’t so much with the individual as it is with challenging dominant narratives that portray soldiers only as tough, powerful and strong and athletes as healthy, mentally strong and empowered.

Without my father showing me a different way to harness sporting potential, without him suggesting I read a particular book and value wisdom, humility and caring for others, without being trusted to feel like I could take my own route, without playful events created with both my parents and friends - and their valuing and showing an interest in what went on off-course – I may not have written songs, had sustaining relationships, been creative on and off the golf course, and I may have experienced that time as relentless drill and sacrifice.

Life is too rich and complex to reveal it all, so researchers, news media, coaches as well as professional athletes all, to some degree, filter, sift and sort information. Consequently, it is the systematic amplification of some stories over others that can, over time, begin to narrow how athletes narrate their lives and experiences. An individual's ability to sustain an alternative story -an integral part of a multidimensional identity which we know is life and mental health sustaining - is largely due to alternatives types of stories and actions being available and valued (McLeod, 2007). Counterstories, like those shared here, about life in sport, that aren't about winning, keep the past alive for the storyteller, yet I am not the sole beneficiary. Sharing alternative representations about life in sport and the journey to the top also keep future possibilities alive for others by challenging the monologue the performance narrative and adding to the pool of alternative narrative resources.

References:

- Althusser, L. (1971). *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses. Lenin and Philosophy, And Other Essays*. Translation, Ben Brewster. London: New Left Books.
- Bakhtin, M. (1984). *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Carless, D., & Douglas, K. (2016). When two worlds collide: A story about collaboration, witnessing and life story research with soldiers returning from war, 23(5), 375-383. *Qualitative Inquiry*.
- Carless, D. & Douglas, K. (2016). Narrating Embodied Experience: Sharing Stories of Trauma and Recovery. *Sport, Education & Society*. 21(1), 47–61.
- Carless, D. & Douglas, K. (2013a). Living, resisting, and playing the part of athlete: Narrative tensions in elite sport. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 14(5), 701-708.
- Carless, D., & Douglas, K. (2013b). “In the boat” but “selling myself short”: Stories, narratives, and identity development in elite sport. *The Sport Psychologist*. 27, 27-39.
- Carless, D. & Douglas, K. (2012). Stories of success: Cultural narratives and personal stories of elite and professional athletes. *Reflective Practice*, 13(3), 387-398.
- Crosset, T.W., 1995. *Outsiders in the clubhouse: the world of women's professional golf*. New York: Suny.
- Douglas, K. (in press). “And I dedicate this win to...”: Performing grief in high performance sport. *Autoethnography*.

- Douglas, K. (2020). Singing in troubled times. ‘This Country’ reflections on song writing and singing qualitative research (pp. 55-75). In Norman Denzin and James Salvo (Eds.), *New Directions for Theorizing in Qualitative Research: The Arts*, Myers Educational Press.
- Douglas, K. (2019). Responding to Brexit through a Song: “This Country”. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, Volume 12(1) Spring 2019.
- Douglas, K. (2018). Confession. In Lydia Turner, Nigel P. Short, Alec Grant, and Tony E. Adams. (Eds.) *International Perspectives on Autoethnographic Research and Practice*, (pp.96-104) Oxen, UK: Routledge.
- Douglas, K., & Carless, D. (2016) My eyes got a bit watery there: Using stories to explore emotions in coaching research and practice at a golf programme for injured, sick and wounded military personnel. *Sports Coaching Review*. 197-215.
- Douglas, K., & Carless, C. (2015). Finding a Counter Story at an Inclusive, Adapted, Sport and Adventurous Training Course for Injured, Sick, and Wounded Soldiers: Drawn In–Drawn Out. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 454-456.
- Douglas, K. (2014a). Challenging interpretive privilege in elite and professional sport: One [athlete’s] story, revised, reshaped, reclaimed. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*. 6(2). 220-243.
- Douglas, K. (2014b) A truth waiting for a telling, In N. Short, L. Turner & A. Grant (eds.) *Contemporary British Autoethnography: a handbook for postgraduate qualitative researchers* (79-95). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Douglas, K. (2009). Storying my self: Negotiating a relational identity in professional sport. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise & Health*. 1(2), 176–190.
- Douglas, K. and Carless, D., 2006. Performance, discovery, and relational narratives among women professional tournament golfers. *Women in sport and physical activity journal*, 15 (2), 14–27.
- Douglas, K. and Carless, D., 2009. Abandoning the performance narrative: two women’s stories of transition from professional golf. *Journal of applied sport psychology*, 21 (2), 213–230.
- Douglas, K. & Carless, D. (2015). *Life story research in sport: A narrative approach to understanding the experiences of elite and professional athletes*. London: Routledge.
- Frank, A. (2010). *Letting Stories Breathe*. University of Chicago Press.
- Frank, A. (2000a). The standpoint of the storyteller. *Qualitative health research*, 10 (3), 354–365.
- Frank, A. (2000b). Illness and autobiographical work: Dialogue as narrative destabilization. *Qualitative Sociology*. 23(1), 135-156.

- Frank, A. (1995). *The wounded storyteller*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Freeman, M. (2010). *Hindsight*. Oxford University Press. New York.
- Gilligan, C., 1993. *In a different voice: psychological theory and women's development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Grant, A. (2020). Autoethnography. In Kay Aranda (Ed.) *Critical Qualitative Health Research*, (pp. 159-177), Routledge, New York/London.
- Grant, A (2017). Qualitative Conversations, YouTube, [video file]
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a38pB97glok>
- Khan, Elizabeth. (1984). Why ignore Douglas? *The Guardian*, May.
- Lindemann, H., 2009. Holding one another (well, wrongly, clumsily) in a time of dementia. *Metaphilosophy*, 40 (3–4), 416–424. Lindemann, N.H., 2001. *Damaged identities, narrative repair*. New York, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Mair, L., 1983. Douglas answers critics. *Daily Telegraph* 15 June
- Mair, L., 1984. Long enough for the top? *Golf Monthly*, June.
- MacIntyre, A. (1984). *After virtue: A study in moral theory (2nd ed.)*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- McAdams, D. (1993). *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myth and the Making of the Self*. New York & London, Guilford Press.
- McLeod, J. (1997). *Narrative and psychotherapy*. London: Sage.
- McDonnell, Michael (1984). Kitrina has the superstar image *Scotsmail*.
- Par Golf Magazine. 1978. Net nothing! *Par golf magazine*, January.
- Werthner, P. and Orlick, T., 1986. Retirement experiences of successful Olympic athletes. *International journal of sport psychology*, 17, 337–363.
- Wilson, M., (1984). Douglas in fairy-tale beginning. *Sunday Telegraph*, May.
- Williams, Michael. (1984). Leading lady Kitrina's winning act. *The Sunday Times*, July.
- Williams, M., (1984). Douglas' breach costs dearly. *Western Daily Press*. June

The stories included here are adapted from a number of previous published stories including:
 Douglas, K. (2009). Storying my self: Negotiating a relational identity in professional sport. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise & Health*. 1(2), 176–190.
 Douglas, K. (2014). Challenging interpretive privilege in elite and professional sport: One [athlete's] story, revised, reshaped, reclaimed. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*. 6(2). 220-243.

Douglas, K. (2018). Confession. In Lydia Turner, Nigel P. Short, Alec Grant, and Tony E. Adams. (Eds.) *International Perspectives on Autoethnographic Research and Practice*, (pp.96-104) Oxen, UK: Routledge.

ⁱ In the following publications David Carless and I provide methodological insights to the use of stories, storytelling:

Douglas, K., & Carless, D. (2016) My eyes got a bit watery there: Using stories to explore emotions in coaching research and practice at a golf programme for injured, sick and wounded military personnel. *Sports Coaching Review*. 197-215.

Carless, D. & Douglas, K. (2016). Narrating Embodied Experience: Sharing Stories of Trauma and Recovery. *Sport, Education & Society*. 21(1), 47–61.

Douglas, K., & Carless, C. (2015). Finding a Counter Story at an Inclusive, Adapted, Sport and Adventurous Training Course for Injured, Sick, and Wounded Soldiers: Drawn In–Drawn Out. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 454-456.

Douglas, K., & Carless, D. (2010). Restoring Connections in Physical Activity and Mental Health Research and Practice: A Confessional Tale. *Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise*. 2/3, 336–353.

Douglas, K., & Carless, D. (2009). Exploring taboo issues in high performance sport through a fictional approach. *Reflective Practice*. 10, 3, 311-323.

Douglas, K., & Carless, D. (2008). Using stories in coach education. *International Journal of Sports Science and Coaching*, 3(1), 33-49.