SUCCESSFUL CAREER TRANSITION FROM YOUNG RIDER TO SENIOR IN EQUESTRIAN SPORT

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Sport Psychology, 90-120 hp, VT 2008
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Abstract

This study was made to examine how successful elite Swedish equestrian athletes perceived their transition from junior to senior level. The objectives were a) to examine Young Riders perceived demands, resources and barriers in the transition to elite seniors, and b) to examine the riders’ coping strategies, perceived quality and lessons learned from the transition. The study involved six informants (n = 6), including three females and three males (1 event rider, 2 show jumpers and 3 dressage riders). Participants were between 25-31 years of age (m = 27). A semi-structured interview guide was developed for equestrian sport and based on the Athletic Career Transition Model (Stambulova, 1997, 2003) and the Developmental Model (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). The results show that participants perceived emotional support as an important resource and had the ability to set long term goals. They used problem focused- and approach-cognitive coping strategies in a successful way in order to manage their perceived demands and barriers during their transition to the senior level.

Keywords: Career transition from junior to senior, coping, equestrian sport, resources.

Nyckelord: Coping, karriärövergång från junior till senior, ridsport, resurser.
Introduction

During the past two decades there has been an increase in academic interest of the athletic career. Before 1980 there were only 20 works published in this area, compared to today when there are over 270 works related to athletic careers (Wylleman, Theeboom & Lavalee, 2004). During the 1990s research on youth sport participation and development of talented and expert performers led to a shift to a developmental perspective in career transitions. Research today on the career development of elite athletes has taken a holistic, life span, multilevel approach to understand not only the athletic area but also other areas in athletes’ life (Wylleman et al., 2004). Athletes in all kinds of sports face many different transitions during their career. How long and successful their career will be is determined on how well athletes cope with the transition. The most challenging and critical transition described by athletes is the one from junior to senior (Stambulova, 2000). The transition to senior level can be more complicated for equestrian athletes than for other athletes. Even though a rider is capable, prepared and ready for a transition to a higher level the equipage may not be able to do the transition unless the horse has the capacity for it. The horse is seen as an athlete too and must be skilled and trained for the purpose. One rider describes his transitions from junior to senior like this:

To compete as a Young Rider is like running 30 km compared to the senior level and Grand Prix, it is like running 90 km, that’s the difference. If you never had run 90 km it’s hard to imagine how it is when you practicing only 30 km every day, you just can’t run 90 km and feel how it is because if you are not prepared for it you can hardly make it. You really have to practice your way there, that’s what it’s all about, it’s a huge difference.

The equestrian sport is unique in terms of the partnership between a person and a horse. The rider’s success in competitive equestrian sport demands comprehension of the horse’s behaviour and nature to establish submission, trust and communication. The performance outcomes are dependent on the cooperative interactions of the rider and his/her horse (Pretty & Bridgeman, 2006).

Key terms

Equestrian athletes compete as juniors up to the age of 18, and are aloud to compete with ponies to this age. It is up to the rider to decide when they start to compete with a horse and it usually depends on the riders’ length and weight. Between the ages of 18-21 riders compete as Young Riders with horses. At the age of 21 riders compete as seniors.

An athletic career is defined as a multi year sport activity voluntarily chosen by the person and aimed at achieving his or her individual peak in athletic performance in one or several sport events (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). A Successful athletic career is defined as “the athletic career of an athlete who, in comparison with her or his age group peers, achieves and sustains a consistent level of athletic excellence at the national, continental, and or world levels” (Wylleman, et al., 2004, p. 511).

Career transitions in sport come with different demands related to practice, competition, communication and lifestyle. If the athletes want to have a successful sport career they have to cope with the new demands (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). Athletes go through several normative (expected) transitions during their career (Salmela, 1994; Stambulova, 1994;
Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004) such as from junior to senior, the step to a higher competitive level, which is typically determined by age or the organizational characteristics of the sport (Wylleman, 2002). These expected moments and situations when an athlete goes from one step of the career to another are often predictable and can be anticipated and prepared for in order to facilitate the athletes coping (Stambulova, 1994; Vanden Auweele, De Matelaer, Rzevnicki, De Knop & Wylleman, 2004). There are also non-normative transitions that athletes may face during their career (Wylleman, 2002). These unpredictable and unexpected situations occur as a season-ending injury, the best performing horse are sold by the owner, or loss of a personal coach. There can also be transitions that were expected and prepared for but never occurred (Wylleman, 2002), “non events”. For instance, to fail the qualifications to the Olympic Games after years of preparation, or the goal to take the horse to Grand Prix during the season and it just didn’t happen.

Theoretical frameworks
An athlete is exposed not only to transitions in sport but also in several other areas of life. Athletic (e.g., achievement of athletic goals) and non-athletic (such as educational status) aspects of life interact to affect an athlete's experience of career transitions (Cecić Erpić, Wylleman & Zupančič, 2004). Therefore transitions should be seen in a holistic perspective where sport is only one part of an athlete’s life (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). These transitions are described as psychological /individual-, psychosocial- and academic/vocational levels (Fig.1). These transitions are generally combined and occur parallel with each other (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

The Developmental Model
The Developmental Model (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004) takes a holistic, whole-person approach and encourages sport psychologists to consider how transitions and development in different spheres of an athlete’s life overlap and interact. The model consists of four interrelated levels. (1) The athletic level includes the athletic stages from the beginning in an athletes sport career to discontinuation. During the initial stage young athletes are introduced to organised training and competing. At the development stage athletes become more dedicated to their sport and the amounts of training increase. Transitions into this stage occur approximately at the age of 12-13 years old. Transition into mastery/perfection stage occurs at the average age of 18-19 years. During mastery/perfection stage athletes reach their highest level of athletic proficiency. Transition out of sport, a discontinuation of an athlete’s competitive sport occurs between 28-30 years of age. Although the age of when the transition occur as well as the age range between the transitions may vary between different sports. (2) The second level of the model describes the individual’s development at psychological levels. It begins with childhood followed by adolescent and adulthood. During childhood a developmental aspect is related to athlete’s readiness for structured sport competition. During adolescent years athletes may be confronted with several developmental tasks (e.g., more mature relations with peers of both sexes, emotional independence from parents). During this stage athletes also develop their self-identity. Participation and continued involvement in competitive sport has shown significant influences on the way self-identity develops (Brewer, Van Raalte & Petitpas, 2000). The degree to which an individual will develop an athletic identity can have both positive and negative consequences. An Individuals self-identity may become strongly and exclusively based on athletic performance which can cause problems when athletes determinate their athletic career (Brewer, Van Raalte & Petitpas, 2000). (3) The psychosocial level in the model focuses on how athletes develop their relationships with significant others. For young athletes the most important supportive people are their parents, siblings and friends. During the teenage years, peers and coaches are getting more important
while parents play a less important role. During the adolescent years, partners and coaches play the most important roles in the athlete’s world. And finally throughout the adulthood the athlete’s own family and coach are the most important. (4) The last and forth level describes the athlete’s academic development from primary school/elementary school to secondary education. At the age of 19-20 athletes may experience a transition to higher education (university) or to professional life. To sum up, athletes’ complex existence due to several development dimensions requires parallel attention focus. It is important to remember that all the developmental aspects are significant for the individuals’ development and not only the athletic aspects (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2002).

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Figure 1. The Developmental Model (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004) A developmental perspective on transitions faced by athletes at athletic, individual, psychological and academic/vocational level. A dotted line indicates that the age at which the transition occurs is an approximation.

**Athletic Career Transition Model**

Athletic Career Transition Model (Stambulova, 1997, 2003) explains an athlete’s diverse transitions throughout the athletic career, viewing each transition as a process with demands, resources, barriers, coping, outcomes and long-term consequences (Fig. 2). The sense of this transition process is coping with a set of specific demands (challenges) which creates a developmental conflict between “what the athlete is” and “what the athlete ought or wants to be”. This conflict encourages the athlete to develop or mobilize resources and to find a way to cope. The effectiveness of coping is dependent on the dynamic balance between transition resources and barriers. Resources are factors that facilitate the coping process, and barriers cover factors that interfere with effective coping. Resources can be internal as motivation and personal skills or external as social support, several horses and financial safety. Internal barriers can be low self esteem or interpersonal conflicts, external barriers can be financial difficulties, injuries, problems in combining studies or work with sport, or a lack of social support.

The model shows that athletes either have a successful transition or a crisis transition. A successful transition is when athletes manage to cope effectively with the transition demands and they are able to apply or develop necessary resources to overcome transition barriers. A crisis-transition is when athletes fail to cope effectively by themselves. A crisis-transition can be turned into a successful but delayed transition if athletes get psychological intervention helping them to cope with the specific barriers. But if the intervention is ineffective, athletes have to deal with the negative consequences or “costs” of the failure to cope, which can lead to premature dropouts, injuries and overtraining, etc. (Stambulova, 1997, 2003).
Most adequate for the current study is the effective and successful path in the model. All the participants were selected based on their success in equestrian sport after their transition from junior to senior. Wylleman, Lavallee and Alfermann (1999) indicate that a successful transition between two different steps in an athlete’s career is characterised by a relatively fast and easy adaptation to the demands athlete’s experience in that particular step. The most successful athletes manage to cope with the transition from junior to senior in approximately 1-2 years, but it is more common with 3-4 years (Stambulova, in press).

Figure 2. The Athletic Career Transition Model (Stambulova, 1997, 2003).

Coping
Research (Holt & Dunn, 2004; Nichols & Polman, 2007) show how important for young athletes, with goal to develop a successful career in their sport to learn how to deal with different stressors. If they do not get the experience of coping with different stressors, they may develop ineffective way of dealing with stress which increases the risk for dropouts. Lazarus and Folkman (1984 p. 141) defined coping as “the cognitive and behavioural efforts of an individual to manage the internal and external demands encountered during a specific stressful situation”. Coping includes all attempts to manage stress (both cognitive and behavioural efforts), regardless of the effectiveness of the attempt. Coping is a process rather than simply a reaction to a stressor. There are four main categories of coping, problem focused coping, emotional focused coping, avoidance focused coping and appraisal focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Aldwin, 1994; Lavallee, Thatcher & Jones, 2004).
Problem focused coping

Problem focused coping can be explained as “attempts to cope with failure by targeting the athletes’ weaknesses and strengths to solve the problem and raise the level of performance” (Poczwardowski & Conroy, 2002, p. 321). Problem focused coping refer to cognitive and behavioural efforts to try to alter the source of stress. These strategies may include: learning new skills, learning from previous mistakes and failures, problem solving, analyzing situation, obtaining information and planning in advance (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Poczwardowski & Conroy, 2002). Problem focused coping is stated as the most primary used coping strategy (Crocker & Graham, 1995; Yoo, 2001), and to achieve success and high competitive levels, athletes should use a range of problem focused coping strategies to actively change or manage a demanding environment (Crocker & Graham, 1995).

Emotion focused coping

Emotion focused strategies are aimed at reducing the unwanted physical or emotional arousal that arise in different situations (Poczwardowski & Conroy, 2002; Barker & Berenbaum, 2007). For example seeking support from others was a significantly reported coping strategy in Poczwardowski’s and Conroy’s study (2002), especially seeking support from non athletic others, like family members and friends.

Avoidance focused coping

Avoidance focused coping strategies involves pushing away, avoiding or sometimes deny happenings and situations to protect oneself. Decreased effort, not preparing well and giving poor efforts are ways of avoidance focused coping strategies (Poczwardowski & Conroy, 2002). Avoidance focused coping includes avoidance behavioural coping and avoidance-cognitive coping. Avoidance behavioural coping consists of physically removing the stress source, while avoidance cognitive coping consists of psychological distancing, cognitive reappraisal and rationalization (Anshel, Kim, Kim, Chang, & Eom, 2001). For example, athletes can use the ability to ignore, or block irrelevant distractions in order to cope with the stressful situation (Holt and Hogg, 2002) Avoidance focused coping is preferable to use when emotional resources are limited, the situation is not controllable, the source of stress in not clear or if the athlete wants to replace unpleasant, non constructive thoughts with more positive ones (Anshel et al., 2001).

Appraisal- focused coping

Appraisal focused coping consists of evaluating and attempts to re-evaluate situations, this can be in either a cognitive process (appraisal-cognitive coping) like planning ahead and analyzing the situation, or through behavioural process (appraisal-behavioural coping) like asking for advice or make a confrontation (Anshel, et al., 2001; Poczwardowski & Conroy, 2002). Cognitive appraisal is commonly viewed as the first step in the coping process, and Lazarus (2000) asserts that coping is only second in importance to appraisal. Appraisal has to do with how an individual manages or regulates emotions. Participants in Poczwardowski and Conroy’s study (2002) reported attempts to keep things in perspective as a way of coping with failure, negative emotions, criticism and success. Athletes who perceive control over their situation tend to use appraisal-behavioural coping more than athletes who perceive the situation as uncontrollable (Anshel et al., 2001).

Previous research on the transition from junior to senior level

The transition from junior to senior level is generally the most critical transition for athletes, and only a few young athletes manage a successful transition to the senior elite. There is only a small group that succeeds with the transition from junior to senior and has the possibility to
continue to elite sport on a senior level. The biggest group stagnates in their development, quits their sport or continues on an exercise level. This is shown in Vanden Auweele et al., (2004) study of Belgian track and field athletes where only 17 percent of junior elite athletes handled the transition successfully to senior level, 31 percent stagnated in their development, 28 percent performed irregularly and 24 percent dropped out of sport. There are few studies on young seniors’ (20-26 years old) dropouts from elite sport. Many studies focus on dropouts of young athletes at the ages of 12-19. Common reasons for dropouts include: too much pressure, not fun any more, sport requires too much time and engagement, or they want to do other things (Brustad, Babkes & Smith, 2001). Many young athletes who had a successful career during the junior level perceive their transition to senior as particularly difficult due high expectations from parents, coaches, peers and also from themselves. Many athletes experience difficulties in coping with the transition demands by themselves. They perceive the process as a crisis and sometimes therefore end their elite career (Stambulova, 2000). This can be avoided by educating related organizations, athletes, coaches, parents and significant others so they can prepare significant individuals for the challenges associated with transitions at the athletic, psychological/individual level, psychosocial level and academic/vocational level (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Research (Matrindale, Collins & Abraham, 2007) from several different sports shows that practicing and performing at junior level is different compared to the senior sports level. Young athletes should be prepared for senior level during the development stages to manage the transition to the senior level. It is exclusively important to focus on long-term aims during young athlete’s development and also to see the junior period as a pre-condition for senior level instead of “burning them out” during the young years (Matrindale, et al., 2007).

Stambulova’s (1994) research showed that athletes perceived demands during their transition from junior to senior level were e.g., the difficulty to balance sport related goals and goals in other areas of life, to reorganize the lifestyle, to find an individual path in sport, to handle the pressure of selection for important competitions, to cope with possible relationship problems and to win prestige of peers and judges. Research (Vujic, 2004) of an unsuccessful transition from junior to senior of a female swimmer found that major demands and reason for the athletes’ drop out were the difficulties to combine senior sport with a “normal life”, coaches’ demand increased, practicing and competitions at senior level was more demanding compared to junior level and that the athlete didn’t feel like she belonged to the senior level. The athlete didn’t felt prepared for the transition to senior level and would have wished for more information from coaches before she made the transition. Research on elite cross country skiers (Ojala, Gustavsson & Norell, 2006) showed that the transition from junior to senior is demanding competitively, mentally and socially. Many skiers perceived a lack of motivation and felt tedious to participate in practice and competitions as the result of no longer being on the top of the ranking list. There was a difference between goals among the ones who dropped out and the ones who managed to continue their career. External motivation, e.g., to achieve good results, to get medals at big championships and to become famous, were major goals during the junior level for all the participants. Skiers who changed their outcome goals to process goals and focused more on internal motivation had a successful transition compared to those skiers who kept their result achievement goals during their transition. If successful junior athletes value their success only by being better than others, they can easily lose their motivation to compete during the transition to senior level when they meet more experienced competitors (Ojala, et al., 2006).

In Båge och Hormbricks (2005) study of female football player’s transition to elite level were found that participants perceived demands as challenges in a realistic perspective and handle
therefore demands successfully. They believed in their capacity, and were strongly goal oriented and determined to succeed at the highest international elite football level for women. Elite junior athletes must realize that it is important to set long term goals and to reorganize their lifestyle during the transition to senior elite level (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). To have high self-esteem and motivation and the ability to set long- and short-term goals are important factors for elite athletes to maintain the development and persistence on elite performance (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002). Research (Malett & Hanrahan, 2002) on track and field elite athletes indicated three major motivational factors for persistence in elite sport, i.e., strong self-believe, sport was essential in their life and they were driven by personal achievements and goals.

Research on equestrians (Pummell, Harwood & Lavallee, 2008) has found that important resources through event riders’ transition during the development stage from club to regional level are commitment, motivation and interpersonal support. The riders’ motivation in the study was connected to dedicated work ethics, high sport commitment and a desire to continue sport participation. Riders had a strong desire to make the transition through personal investment, sacrifices and effort in the pursuit of transition success. Sources for the dedication and hard work were the love of the sport and the horse. There was a high level of social support for the riders, for example having someone who was “just there” to provide emotional support, or someone to give advice regarding technical issues. The riders received regular coaching support and many riders cited their trainer as a major source of support, due to the trainer's knowledge of the sport and, in some cases, their presence at competitions. The riders also perceived emotional support from parents throughout the transition process. Parents succeeded by not placing pressure on their children, but by being there in times of stress to minimize the sport-related stress experienced by their child. The riders also perceived esteem support from parents and coaches who believed in their ability and encouraged them through the transition period.

Factors that can facilitate the transition are prior knowledge that has been developed during earlier steps in the athlete’s career. Interest in sport science and the ability to learn from others or own mistakes, psychological strategies during competitions and positive attitude to the sport. Other factors can be the athlete’s talent, strong sport motivation, positive attitude to make the transition and responsibility during competition and training (Afermann & Stambulova, 2007). The sport environment is an important factor to facilitate transitions. It can be through positive psychosocial surroundings like support from family and sport Federation, encouraging peers, community in the sports club and experience coaches to trust (Wylleman, Lavallee & Alferman 1999; Afermann & Stambulova, 2007). But one of the most important factors for a successful coping is to have resources matching transition demands (Stambulova, 2000).

**Emotional support**
Athletes need significant others (coaches, family, peers) who are supportive in a positive direction without too much pressure in their proximity (Malett & Hanrahan, 2002; Giacobbi, Lynn, Wetherington, Jenkins, Bodendorf & Langley, 2004; Wuerth, Lee, & Alfermann, 2004). Parents support is primary for children’s success and participation in sport (Wylleman, et al., 2000). Parents often are, or have been, active athletes themselves and are therefore often the source to children’s participation in sport by introducing them to sport at an early age. Many parents invest time, money and emotional support and are highly dedicated to their children’s future career in sports. Social support plays a major role during transitions (Bussman & Alfermann, 1994). Athletes with disinterested parents are more likely to dropout
because of a lack of emotional support at home, Therefore it is very important for these young athletes to get support from others, like coaches and friends (Hallstedt, 1997). Although, young athletes can not rely on their parents and coaches only, they need to learn quite early to take some responsibility for their own training and development (Matrindale et al., 2007). Research indicates that in order to achieve excellence in senior elite sport it appears to be important with a commitment for the sport, self-awareness and hard work (Van Rossum, 2001; Matrindale et al., 2007). Emotional support was an important resource shown in Båge and Hormbricks (2005) study, although athletes tended to be more self independent during their perfection stage and parents only remained supportive during the most demanding periods and when athletes’ were seeking support. Team mates played an important supportive role during transition to perfection stage. The sport environment during the perfection stage was facilitating for athletes’ development. Coaches believed in their capacity and they were in a stimulating sport environment which mobilized their skills (Båge & Hormbricks, 2005). In Vujic’s (2004) study of a swimmers successful transition from junior to senior the most important external resource was social support from family, peers, team mates, coaches and school friends. Important variables were also good internal resources (believing in oneself, motivation, skills) and the positive balance between resources and barriers.

Summary and objectives

It is clear that more research is needed in order to develop good methods to prepare athletes for the transition from junior to senior level (Stambulova, 1994; Vanden Auweele et al., 2004). Little attention has been paid to specific within-career transitions and sport psychologists are therefore provided with little specific understanding of within-career transition experiences (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Lavallee, Wylleman, & Sinclair, 2000). This study is made to shed lights on the athletes in complex equestrian sport during their transition from junior to senior. In difference to other sports, a horse serves as the athlete’s partner, and it is not for sure that the partner is talented enough to make the transition successful. The horse must also have the capacity to meet higher demands. It does not matter how much effort the equestrian athlete puts in her/his training, if the horse does not have the capacity for a higher level it is pointless to proceed with that horse. This adds an extra dimension to equestrian athletic career compared to a vast majority of sports.

The objectives of this study are:

a) To examine how elite Young Riders perceived demands, resources and barriers in the transition to elite seniors.

b) To examine the riders’ coping strategies, perceived quality and lessons learned from the transition.

Method

Participants

The study involved six informants, including 3 female and 3 male athletes. One event rider, two show jumpers and three dressage riders participated. At the time of data collection participants were between 25 and 31 years of age (mean age 27 years). The selection criteria for participants were a) they competed at elite equestrian level in dressage, show jumping or event. b) they have already made the transition from junior elite level to senior elite level c) they were between 25 and 31 years old at the moment of the study.
Instrument
A semi-structured interview guide, *experiences related to the transition from junior to senior level in equestrian sport* was developed based on the Athletic Career Transition Model (Stambulova, 1997, 2003) and the Developmental Model (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). The interview guide was developed in both Swedish and English together with two supervisors. The interview guide aims at exploring the riders’ subjective experiences of the within-career transition process during the years of athletes’ transition. The interview guide was pilot tested with a rider of the same level as the participants, resulting in only minor changes. One question was added to the background questions (nr. 1.8) and some minor revisions were made in the order of the questions. The pilot interview turned out well and was also used in the study. The interview guide (see Appendix 1) consisted of 17 questions with 14 open questions and three questions about the participants age at different occasions. The interview questions were structured in the three parts as follows: (1) *Background in the sport;* eight questions was used primarily to build report, to take participants through to the starting point of interview, and to get an insight in the athletes participation in the sport and how the rider was introduced to the equestrian sport. (2) *The transition process to senior level;* seven questions were asked to find out how the riders life looked like during their transition to senior level. Questions were about different demands riders experience from different areas in life during transitions. Factors that interfere with the transition, perceived help and factors athletes’ have to manage the transition successfully. (3) *Lessons learned from the transition,* three questions, including positive factors with the transition, knowledge and experience to share with others.

Procedure
Forty prospect riders were selected from the Swedish Equestrian Federations (SvRF, 2008) ranking list where result from several years ago could be found. The three largest sports in equestrian (dressage, show jumping and event) were selected to get a wider spread across gender because there are not as many males competing in equestrian sport as females. Information letter (Appendix 2) was sent by e-mail to the selected riders. The letter was redirected via the Swedish Equestrian Federation (SvRF). The large number of potential participants was chosen after information from the responsible people at the Federation but elite riders were not likely to respond to the researchers e-mail because of their hectic life agenda. The information letter explained shortly the purpose of the project and that all material would be handled confidential and participants were free to terminate their participation at any time without explaining their reason. Participants who were willing to participate returned the e-mail to the author and consent their participation. It was planned for ten participants, five females and five males but there were only six riders who met the criteria and agreed to participate. Contacts by telephone were made to make appointments for the interview. All interviews were made by telephone, because of the participants’ geographic spread and for their convenience. In the beginning of the interviews the participants were informed that the collected information would be handled confidentially. All interviews were taped with mp3 player and lasted between 41 and 60 minutes.

Analyses
A qualitative (i.e., deductive and inductive) analysis was used with quantification of raw data units in each low-, high-order themes and categories. Qualitative data analyses included the following steps. The interviews were transcribed by the author in Swedish and were coded to keep the data confidential. All six interviews were read several times to be familiar with the material. Relevant raw data related to particular questions were marked and raw data not related to a particular question but important to interpretation and understanding for data were
also marked. Unrelated data were deleted. Raw data were then translated from Swedish to English and six individual profiles i.e., compact versions of the interview text were developed (see example in Appendix 3). Individual profiles were used to make five category profiles (Appendix 4) based on the Athletic Career Transition Model (Stambulova, 1997, 2003): (1) Athletes’ perceived demands during transition; (2) Athletes’ perceived barriers during transition; (3) Athletes’ resources during transition; (4) Athletes’ coping strategies during transition; (5) Lessons learned from the transition. All raw data units related to each category profile were collected on a separate sheet of paper, and both inductive and deductive analyses were made to develop high- and low-order themes. All raw data units are quotations from the participants, this in order to strength the validity (Granskär & Höglund-Nielsen, 2008). Only a few of the raw data units are resumes of several participants resembling quotations. Most raw data units are from single participants. Triangulation was made with two supervisors when classifying the raw data units to low- and high-order themes. Some data were not categorized in profiles but described in the results with relevant quotations. All information in the quotations that could put under risk the participants’ confidentiality was removed.

Results

In the results first, the participants background information will be presented followed by athletes’ reflections on the transition process including: perceived demands, perceived barriers, resources, coping strategies, perceived quality and lessons learned from the transition. Finally, other relevant areas will be considered to illustrate the holistic perspective on the athletes’ transition, such as time and energy priority during the transition, length of the transition and the role of the Swedish Equestrian Federation.

Participants’ background information

Reason for starting with equestrian sport
All riders in the study were introduced to equestrian sport in early age that is between three and five years old by their parents who were involved in different equestrian sports or equestrian businesses.

Age for starting compete in their sport
The dressage riders had competed since they were between 7-9 years old, both show jumping and dressage, but at the age of 12-13 they started to compete more serious in dressage. The two show jumpers and the event rider started compete actively a little bit earlier, when they were between eight to ten years old.

Transition from pony to horse
The participants’ transition from pony to horse was made by one dressage and one show jumper at the age of 13, and they ride ponies and horses in parallel for a couple of months. The four other riders made the transition to horse at the age of 16. Three of these were riding ponies and horses in parallel for a year. The participants explained why they made the transition at that particular time. For example they felt it was time to be more serious in the sport by competing with horses, they were mature enough and ready to make the transition.

Several horses, owned by themselves or by others
All participants had several horses during their junior period as well as their senior period (2-6 horses). All participants, except one, had experience of riding and care for horses owned by others.
Athletes perceived demands
Athletes were asked about their perceived demands during the transition to senior level. Table 1 (Appendix 4) present raw data units, low- and high order themes for the category Perceived demands. In total 42 raw data units were found, the raw data were classified into four high order themes, (1) Increased complexity during competitions (15 raw data units), (2) High self demands to improve in their sport (16 raw data units), (3) Demanding to combine the elite career with a business, to finance their sport participation (6 raw data units) and (4) Demands from significant others (6 raw data units).

(1) Increased complexity during competition covers 15 raw data units including two low order themes. First low order theme, Technical demands at competitions (10 raw data units) explain that it’s a big step to senior level, it requires a whole different kind of horse and it is so much more demands on horses at senior elite level. It’s a big difference in show jumping to go from the young rider level height of the jumps at 140 cm to the senior level at 150-160 cm. In event, the step from a two star competition (level of the competition are grade from 1-3 where 3 is the most difficult) to a three star competitions is so much more demanding and different compare to go from a one star competitions to two star. In dressage there is a huge step from doing some movements at the dressage arena at young rider level like half pirouettes to do piaff and passage which are new skills to learn for horse and rider. Second low order theme, To compete against much more experienced riders (5 raw data units) explain the difficulties to be “nr one” as young rider and then suddenly at senior level compete against the best riders in Sweden. Participants explain the difficulties to perform well at an even performance level, at all the competitions they take part in. This is in contrast to the more experienced senior riders who perform with good results at almost all the competitions. Participants in show jumping found it hard to compete against the more experienced riders. The more experienced riders in show jumping ride in much faster speed during the competitions then that they were used to during their young rider years. They felt as it is much harder at senior level to be able to belong in the national team.

(2) High self demands to improve in their sport covers of total 16 raw data units including three low order themes. First low order theme, Self demands to succeed and perform well (7 raw data units) explains the very high self-demand to perform, to want “too much” during a competition and to succeed in what they do. It’s not only to perform good results at competitions it’s about doing a good job with horses so others can see the potential of the rider. A good rider gets sponsored with better horses which in turn can lead to better performances. One participant described it feels demanding to compete with an older experienced horse that have performed before and that she had to live up to that and perform well on a horse that she knew someone else have been very successful with. Second low order themes, High goals for future career (5 raw data units). Major goal is to participate in the Olympic Games. One participant explained how he put up demands on himself from what goals he wanted to achieve: “Everything is related to what goals you are after, my goal is to be one of the best rider in the world, and from that you put on demands on your self” (Participant F). Third low order theme, Self demands to develop skills (3 raw data units), presents very high self demands to develop, to make progress, to be as educated as possible and to perform well.

(3) Demands to combine the elite career with a business to finance sport participation covers in total six raw data units. Participants described their long days of work with horses and everything around it. To have horses is expensive and they need to run a business beside their elite careers to finance their career in riding. Here are illustrative quotations from the
interviews: “As a senior I have to live on my elite career and got paid to ride someone else’s horses, it is a hole other kind of pressure then” (Participant B) and “You have to be your own secretary and run a business beside your elite career” (Participant C)

(4) Demands from significant others covers in total six raw data units including two low order themes. First low order theme, Demands from parents to manage the responsibility to care for the horses (5 raw data units) explains the importance of taking care of the horses by themselves without grooms, to manage the work (civil job) and not let the horses take too much time. One participant described her parents as more irritating at competitions rather than supportive. Another participant’s only demand from his parents was that parents found it important that he had a job that he would enjoy. But also that if he decided to work with horses he had to take the consequences of what it requires. Second low order theme, Friends who did not feel prioritized (1 raw data unit). The participant felt that she didn’t have so much time for her friends (not equestrians) in the way they wanted to spend time with her. She experience that they didn’t understand her participation for the sport and the time it takes to care for the horses.

Athletes’ perceived barriers

Athletes were asked about their perceived barriers during their transition to the senior level. Table 2 (Appendix 3) presents raw data units, low- and high order themes for the category Perceived barriers. In total 36 raw data units were found, the raw data were classified into three high order themes. (1) Failed to participate in important competitions (13 raw data units), (2) Negative feelings and thoughts about their own or horses’ capacity (9 raw data units) and (3) Financial difficulties (5 raw data units).

(1) Failed to participate in important competitions covers in total 13 raw data units including three low order themes. First low order theme, Planning for a competition and failing to participate (5 raw data units) explains the fact that things did not always go as they thought and planned for. One participant planned his Grand Prix debut to the age of 24, but was not able to until he was 26. A promising horse was sold by the owners and the career with that horse was over. Horses didn’t develop as it was planned for and planned competitions were out of the question. Second low order theme is Injury of horses (5 raw data units). Injuries are seen as huge loss, especially when promising horses do not recover. “I did some three star competitions (next highest level in event) and my first World Cup, after three seasons my horse get injured and never came back, that horse could have been my ticket to national team and Hong Kong 2008” (Participant D). Third low order theme, Not ready to compete as planned (3 raw data units) explain the difficulties to attend international competitions, unless you are among the top ten in Sweden, only “the best” are invited to certain competitions, especially in dressage.

(2) Negative feelings and thoughts about their own or their horse’s capacity covers in total 9 raw data units including two low order themes. First low order theme, Negative feelings and thoughts about their horse’s capacity (5 raw data units) including feelings about that the horses capacity is “not enough”, other riders had better horses, or their horses were not yet ready for the senior level. Second low order theme, Negative feelings and thoughts about their own capacity (4 raw data units) involves lack of self esteem, perceived need to learn, feeling not good as a rider, other riders were perceived as so much better and doubts about their performance.
(3) Financial difficulties covers in total 5 raw data units including two low order themes. First low order theme, Not enough money to buy experienced horses (4 raw data units) illustrates the difficulties to buy experienced horses because they are so expensive. The participants had no financial backup from parents to buy such expensive horses. They also felt like they never had “enough” money. Second low order theme, Lost of invested money (1 raw data unit) explains the lost of invested money in a horse. The participant thought the horse he bought would bring him the money back with a good profit when he had educated and competed successfully with the horse. But the horse got limp and did not recover, and he lost all the money.

Athletes perceived resources
Athletes were asked about their resources during their transition to senior level. Table 3 (Appendix 3) present raw data units, low- and high order themes for the category Resources. In total 44 raw data units were found, the raw data were classified into three high order themes. (1) Supportive significant others, (23 raw data units), (2) Opportunity to have several horses (11 raw data units) and (3) Personal motivational resources (6 raw data units).

(1) Supportive significant others covers in total 23 raw data units including five low order themes. First low order theme, Supportive family financially and emotionally (7 raw data units) explains as parents were calm and supportive during competitions but never pushed riders to perform. Parents supported financially with horses and also emotionally through failures and success. Participant F mentioned that “Without the parents it would never had worked”. Second low order theme, Professional, inspirational equestrian surroundings (7 raw data units) explains the importance of good equestrian facilities with coaches available at the stable and the environment with experienced riders and professional equestrians as inspiration for their future career. Third low order theme is Supportive coach, mentally and instructive (5 raw data units). Coaches were important both instructively to educate riders and horses and also mentally to help riders become more patient and relaxed in their thinking. One coach supported the rider with horses, so his was able to have several horses to ride and compete with. Fourth low order theme, Supportive friends, emotional and helping out with horses (3 raw data units). Equestrian friends were helping out with participants’ horses. Friends supported emotionally, exchanged ideas and gave inspiration. Fifth low order theme, Supportive federation (1 raw data units). One participant felt that the federation supported him while he participated in team meetings and a sport psychologist educated him on how to think optimally.

(2) Opportunity to have several horses covers in total 12 raw data units including four low order themes. First low order team, Vulnerable without several horses (7 raw data units) explains the importance of having several horses to be able to continue practicing and competing if a horse for some reason is sold or injured. “I had other horses to ride otherwise I couldn’t had done any 150 cm competitions for that whole year” (Participant E). One participant explained that she would probably have not continued with the sport if she only should have one difficult horse. Second low order theme, Opportunity to prepare for the future career with several horses at different level and age (2 raw data units), explains the importance of having several horses at different age and educational levels, because of the time it takes to develop a horse for the higher level. “Good to have some horses for all the categories to be prepared for future competitions” (Participant F). Third low order theme, Other horses to ride to keep motivation (2 raw data units) is about the importance to have several horses to ride and focusing on their education to not loose the motivation if the “nr one horse” is injured. Or if a horse didn’t develop as planned and was hard to handle, other
“fun” horses could motivate to keep on riding. Fourth low order theme, \textit{Feel safe to be a part-owner of the horses}’ (2 raw data units). Several horses are a resource, but if the riders’ do not own the horses by themselves it could become a barrier if the horses are sold. To be a part-owner of a horse are one way to have more influences over the horses’ future. It can also be a strategy to be able to have several horses to compete with. One participant describes it like this: “It is better to have three horses and own 50 % of them, than have one horse 100%” (Participant B).

All participants had several horses during their junior period as well as their senior period (2-6 horses). All participants, except one, had experience of riding and care for horses owned by others.

(3) \textit{Personal motivational resources} covers a total of ten raw data units including two low order themes. First low order theme, \textit{Joy to work with horses} (6 raw data units) describes fun to work with horses, ability to see the joy in the daily work and fun to see how the young horses develop. Participants feel lucky to have their hobby as their work. They are used to the lifestyle with hard and long hours of work while care for the horses, but they still do not perceive the work as hard. The second low order theme, \textit{Positive way of thinking} (4 raw data units) shows their positive attitude towards barriers and demands. If a good horse is sold by the owners, the participant will at least get some money to invest in something else. One participant believed that if she worked hard and persistent, some day she would be rewarded for that. Participants said: “Barriers happens to anybody, not just me”, “What does not kill you make you stronger”.

\textit{Coping strategies}

Athletes were asked about how they handled demands and barriers during their transition to senior level. Table 4 (Appendix 3) present raw data units, low- and high order themes for the category Coping strategies. In total 48 raw data units were found, the raw data were classified into three high order themes, (1) \textit{Ability to see the transition in a longer perspective} (35 raw data units), (2) \textit{Ability to see alternative solutions to problems} (8 raw data units) and (3) \textit{Strong belief in their own capacity} (5 raw data units).

(1) \textit{Ability to see the transition in a longer perspective} covers 35 raw data units including three low order themes. First low order theme, \textit{to set long-term goals to keep motivation and persistence} (17 raw data units). Participant’s explains that it is important to realize it will take some time, 3-4 years in the transition. Riders must realize it will take time to be able to fit in the national team. Participants explain there is no point to try to be number one at all the competitions. As a senior there is no time pressure to perform good results as it is during the few years when competing as young rider. Competitions must be seen as a small part of the whole thing, it is more like a receipt that the practice is working. It is important to work towards a big goal, like the Olympic Games or to have an equestrian business. The second low order theme, \textit{Invest time in young horses with quality and see their potential in a longer perspective} (11 raw data units) explains the importance to invest time and money in a horse that has the qualities for Grand prix, rather than having an “easy” horse that never can manage the demands required. It is important to care for the horses health and not “burn them out” with too many competitions. At senior level the competitions and the training are much harder and demanding for the horses. They will not last for several years if the riders do not care for them properly. It is important to have the knowledge that it takes time, persistence and patience to develop a horse. All horses are different, for some horses it takes a little bit longer to improve then for others. Third low order theme, \textit{Changed competition focus and planning}
for the future career with educating young horses (7 raw data units) explains the participants’ way of dealing with the fact that they did not have horses with the capacity to move directly to senior level competitions. Three of the participants did not compete at all during that first years in the transition, they educated young horses instead. The participants’ strategy when they no longer had a horse to compete with at the senior level was to focus on the future career. Some sold the horses not good enough for senior level and start from the beginning with young horses with quality and capacity for Grand Prix level. One participant had an opportunity to compete internationally with young horses. Participant E, felt like the demands were less if you compete on a young horse that no one else had performed with before. With the young horse she felt like it was her accomplishments that made the success and no one else’s.

(2) Ability to see alternative solutions to problems covers 8 raw data units and no low order themes. The participants had the ability to see changes as challenges, face problems, evaluate them and then try to solve them. They also had the ability to change focus and make everyday as a goal itself, to take one day at the time and see how horses differ from one day to another. Participants learned from barriers and saw how that knowledge could be useful in the future. One participant described his solution to financial problems with “just speed up and make an effort” he arranged more clinics and got more students for example to make more money. But the most important he tried to see what other solutions there was to find, that he hadn’t thought about before.

(3) Strong belief in their own capacity covers of total 5 raw data units and no low order themes. Participants describe their strong belief to succeed, their will-power to move forward and that they always are trying to do their best. Examples from the interviews: “Always believe that I can do it”, “I believe in my self and what I do”.

Perceived quality of the transition
Athletes were asked about the quality of their transition and if they would have done their transition differently with the knowledge they have today. All participants felt satisfied with their transition and did not regret anything they had done. Participants thoughts of factors that could have been done differently are described below:

Not really, would have been nice with better horses, but also maybe I hadn’t got the experience I have today then? Still have to do the Olympic Games and maybe then I’m “hungry” to continue (Participant C).

No I don not think so, I’m very satisfied with how it went, I couldn’t have done it in another way. I handled the transition very well, because I realized I wanted to work with this and I saw the transition in a longer perspective (Participant F).

I would have had the opportunity to have another horse parallel with my YR horse to prepare for senior level. Things that felt so self-evident during YR become difficult again as a senior because you were “gone” for a while from the big competitions. Coaches could have given me that advice. But still, maybe I wouldn’t have afforded to buy such horse then anyway. (Participant D).

No I don’t think so, maybe I could have got an extra coach to get further experience but that’s just small details (Participant B).
I do not think that, I think it was good to ride young horses during that period and not only have an experienced horse to compete with. I think it is important to learn how to educate horses, to learn and help others with their horses (Participant E).

Maybe I should have stayed and worked some more at the professional stable but at the same time it costs money to be a working student and I had no money to finance that. You have to have parents to back you up financially it does not matter how talented you are it cost to be a working student (Participant A).

Lessons learned from the transition
Athletes were asked about experiences from the transition they could share with others. Table 5 (Appendix 3) present raw data units, low- and high order themes for the category lessons learned. In total 26 raw data units were found, the raw data were classified into 10 high order themes.

(1) Importance of riding many and different kind of horses (8 raw data units) includes three low order themes. First low order theme, To develop the feeling and get routine (4 raw data units) illustrates the importance of riding many, and different kinds of horses with different temperament to understand how horses work and think.
Second low order theme, To learn how to educate young horses (2 raw data units) The importance of riding young horses during the first year of transition. This is important to learn how to work from the basics with young horses and educate them for the future competitions. This is a good experience because it is not the same to ride young horses as it is to only have an experienced horse to compete with. Third low order theme, To have a horse to develop for senior level (2 raw data unit). It would be a good idea if coaches or other people could inform juniors and young riders of the benefits of having a future senior horse to educating parallel with the horse for young rider level (if it is possible). The senior horse requires different capacity, and it is important to have a good horse to develop during these years to be more prepared for the senior level.

(2) Be in a development environment (4 raw data units), explains the importance of working for a professional rider as part of the development and also the importance to learn how it works with horses in a professional way to finance an elite career. Participant C, describe the importance of being a working student for a professional rider “It is priceless to have that opportunity, to see how it works and to get practice everyday. Because if you only practice for a coach once every second week, it will never develop the rider”

(3) Have patience for future results (4 raw data units) explains that it is important not to stress with the career and think of being a member of the national team straight away. In equestrian sport it is possible to compete for a long time. It requires hard work to succeed, and the most important is to develop the riding skills as much as possible to be able to continue the career for a long time.

(4) Good experience to ride horses owned by others (2 raw data units) explains as it is a good experience to be trusted and to have the responsibility to take care of horses owned by others. (5) Set long term goals (2 raw data unit) it is important to see the transition in a longer perspective and always keep the long term goals in mind, for example, “it has been a long process to work myself up and be independent and no longer have my parents to buy me the horses, my goal has always been to be where I’m today” (Participant D).

(6) Learn to take responsibility for yourself (1 raw data unit). Something that is good for the future development is if juniors and Young Riders learn to take more responsibility for themselves and their horses during competitions, and not always let parents do everything.
(7) Early transition from pony to horse (1 raw data unit). It takes time to learn how to ride a horse compared to a pony. It is important to make the transition from pony to horse as soon as it is possible.

(8) Provide good relations to people around you (1 raw data unit). It is important to be positive and extrovert to people in all kind of surroundings, care of relationships and significant people. Those people are, or might be, the ones you have to relay on as a senior.

(9) Make sure you have a horse that fits you (1 raw data unit), it is important that the horse has a good size proportional for the rider, a good temperament and isn’t too difficult to handle. (10) Have the right attitude towards the transition (1 raw data unit). The attitude towards the transition is more important than talent, it is important to understand that it will take a few years to manage the transition and it requires a lot of hard work.

Time and energy priority during the transition
Athletes were asked how they prioritized their time and energy among different things in life during their transition. For three of the participants horses were the most important priority. They estimated their time spent on horses between 85-100 percent of their time. They also worked with equestrian related business in addition to their competition career. They never felt that they had to sacrifice anything in their life for the cost of the horses and their career, they describe it as a lifestyle they were use to: “Not much time for other things, not everyone understand how much time this takes, 365 days per year, seven days a week, it feels naturally, that’s how it is when you work with horses” (Participant B).

For the other three participants the horses were prioritized from what their work or school required. They estimated their time invested in school and/or work as 60 percent and horses covered 40 percent. In addition to school/work and horses they had not much time over for friends and other things. “Did not have much time to go out, it’s a choice you make, I rather wake up fresh and alert in the morning and be early in the stable” (Participant A).

Holidays for the participants were always planned in relation to competitions or during the off season during the winter when the competition seasons were not in the same intensity. Weekend holidays were the most common while longer holidays for several weeks were hard to manage because of the participants business or horses that have to be taken care of.

Length of the transition
- Participant C, (age 31, dressage) 3-4 years
- Participant A, (age 27, dressage) 4 years
- Participant D, (age 27, event) 4-5 years
- Participant B, (age 26, dressage) at least 2-3 years before he felt a little bit more “warm in his clothes” as a senior, but felt like he was still in the transition at the time of the interview (5 years in transition).
- Participant F, (age 25, show jumping), at the time of the interview (4 years in transition) he felt established with his own business to educate horses which he means is one part of the transition, but not fully established at senior level competitions.
- Participant E, (age 26, show jumping) still feels like she is not “quite there” yet (5 years in transition).

The role of the Swedish Equestrian Federation
Participants perceived that the Federation seemed interested and was supportive during their junior and Young Rider years if they were good and performed good results. When they become seniors the Federation lost their interest in them. Participant C, explain his
experience, “They are there when you are good, they were supportive during Young Rider period and as senior no one is interested anymore unless you suddenly get very high score and are current for the national team”. Participant E, didn’t experience any interest from the Federation at all, during the Young Rider years, even though she got a ribbon and performed well during all the important competitions. Participant D, experienced that the federation didn’t support her strategy to develop herself in another country. She felt like they wanted her to be in Sweden to compete as a Young Rider. When she became senior no one cared about her anymore. Participant F, feel he have support from the federation as a senior but he explain it’s because he knows the people who work there and he meet them at competitions: “They are more like friends who support”.

Discussion

Summary

Participants perceived demands were increased complexity in senior level competitions including technical demands and to compete against much more experienced riders. Participants had high self-demands to improve in their sport, perform well, develop skills and high goals for the future career. Participants also had demands to combine their elite career with a business to finance their sport participation. Demands from parents were to manage the responsibility to care for their horses. Perceives barriers were to fail to participate in important competitions as a result of an injury or not be ready to compete as planned. Negative feelings about their own or/and the horse capacity and financial difficulties was also detected as perceived barriers. Although all participants in the study were satisfied with how their transition from Young Rider to senior level had proceeded. This can be explained by the fact that the participants had good resources and coping strategies matching their demands. Resources that helped the participants’ to cope with demands and barriers were the supportive surroundings with parents, coaches, equestrian friends and sport facilities. The opportunity to have several horses helped the participants in several ways. If a horse was injured they were less vulnerable and could still practice and compete which kept motivation to continue. Participants in the study were very dedicated to their sport, had strong intrinsic demands on themselves to improve and develop to be better riders. Participants’ saw their transition in a longer perspective and used approach-cognitive coping by evaluating and analyzing the situation to find solutions. Process goal were important for them to make progress and do a good job with horses and not only to succeed in competitions. Participants described that the attitude towards the transition is more important than talent. It requires a lot of hard work and knowledge about the time it takes and therefore a strong sport motivation and positive attitude is important to make the transition. Participants’ perceived the duration of the transition from three years up to five years. It normally takes one to three years for a successful transition. The length of participants’ transition can be dependent on the horse, which also need to be ready for the senior level. It takes several years to develop a horse for the demands and technical skills senior elite level requires. Length of transition might be less if riders would have the opportunity to ride and develop horses with qualities for senior level parallel during their young rider period.

From Young Rider to senior in a holistic perspective

The purposes of this study were: a) To examine how elite Young Riders perceived demands, resources and barriers in the transition to elite seniors and b) To examine the riders’ coping strategies, perceived quality and lessons learned from the transition. The interview guide was developed from the Athletic Career Transition Model (Stambulova, 1997, 2003) and the Developmental Model (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Although Wylleman and Lavallee’s model (2004) seems to general and it was therefore adjusted to equestrian sport based on the
results of the study. For example, at the athletic level female gymnast normally ends their athletic career at the age of 19, while equestrians not compete at senior level until they are 21 years old. Equestrians have no particular time termination of their sport career based on riders’ age: many of the best riders are between 35-60 years old.

Parents play a more important role in equestrian sport during a longer period compared to the original model. Therefore the model is modified at the psychosocial level where parents have an important role not only at initiation- and development stage but also during the perfection/ mastery stage. Parents and equestrian friends are of major importance during rider’s whole career which was found in this study. The academic level was also modified to Swedish academic context.

<table>
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<th>Age</th>
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Figure 3. The Developmental Model (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004) adjusted to equestrian and Swedish context. A developmental perspective on transitions faced by equestrian athletes at athletic, individual, psychological and academic/vocational level. A dotted line indicates that the age at which the transition occurs is an approximation.

**Initial stage**
During the initial stage, the results show that the participants were introduced to equestrian sport in early age (2-5 years old) by their parents who were involved in different equestrian sports or equestrian businesses. Parents were clearly the source to their children’s participation in sport (Bussman & Alfermann, 1994). Participants in dressage started to compete more serious around 12-13 years old. The two show jumpers and the event rider started compete actively a little bit earlier, between eight to ten years old. The fact that it differs from dressage to show jumping and event can be explained by that competing in dressage requires a little bit more maturity and technical skills than from show jumping. The participants described pony show jumping as make the pony run fast and steer against the jumps.

**Developmental stage**
The transition to developmental stage occurs around 12-13 years old according to Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) when athletes become more dedicated to their sport and also that sport turn to be more essential in athlete’s lives. During the developmental stage equestrian athletes experience several transitions. First, at 16 years old riders are no longer able to compete with ponies international. They have to do their transition to horses at that time or earlier. At the age of 18 riders make the transition from junior level to Young Rider level. Participants in the study had made or were planning to make the transition from ponies to horses at this age. This transition was described in the results as a quite demanding transition according to the big
difference to ride a horse compared to a pony. Participants’ transition to horses was although successful. This was probably because it was a prepared and an expected situation (Stambulova, 1994; Vanden Auweele, et al., 2004). Participants perceived the transition to horse as a further step in their career and were able to set new goals to their future career. It seems as a good strategy to make the transition to horse as soon as possible to be able to learn how to ride horses.

Mastery / perfection stage
The transition to mastery/perfection stage is clearly the most demanding and challenging step in the participants’ sport career. At this stage athletes should reach their highest level of athletic proficiency. According to Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) the transition into this stage occurs at the age of 18-19 years old. Although this study shows that the participants’ transition into mastery/perfection stage occurs when they become seniors at the age of 21. As a senior, riders compete at the highest competition (Grand Prix) level there is to reach. Results from the study also show that it takes approximately 3-5 years in transition to establish at senior level. During the first years of mastery/perfection stage participants started to be more independent. All of them except one moved away from home to work for professional riders or to study in another city. Friends who also are in the equestrian sport are a very important support for equestrian athletes. They inspired participants’ with ideas, helped out in the stable and they went to competitions together. A rider normally does not attend at competitions without help, and therefore equestrian friends replace parent’s previous role during competitions when athletes are getting more independent.

Successful transition process from Young Rider to senior level
According to The Athletic Career Transition model (Stambulova, 1997, 2003) a successful transition is when athletes manage to cope effectively with the transition demands and they are able to apply or develop necessary resources to overcome transition barriers.

Participants’ transition demands
Participants perceived an increased complexity in sport and felt the transition to senior level as a big step. First years at senior level, none of the participants were competing at elite level. When they started to compete again they experienced the difficulty of much more experienced and better competitiveness. The fact that senior level is more demanding then junior level goes in line with previous research (Matrindale, et al., 2007; Ojala, Gustavsson & Norell, 2006; Vujic, 2004). New technical skills is required for both horse and rider at senior level and it is much more demands on a horse at senior level. Participants were aware of the demands that’s requires for horses at senior elite level, but the problem for them were that they did not have horses with the capacity to meet these demands. They had good horses with qualities for the young rider level but did not have other horses ready for the senior level at the time they became seniors. Participants thought it was demanding to combine an elite career with work to finance the horses, competitions and life besides that. The athletic career and work career often interfere with each other (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Equestrian sport is special compared to other sports though the horse is an animal that needs care seven days a week, 365 days per year, even though they are not able to compete. An elite equestrian athlete must book their flights, hotel room and make a schedule for the competition season. For example, an elite football player doesn’t have to think of details like that and has only him/her self to think about. Equestrian athletes must develop a business (selling horses, breeding, having students, etc.) and deal with sponsors to finance their elite career because of the expenses of the sport. Although, participants did not perceive any demands from their parents to perform during their career. The only demands were that the participants should
take responsibility to care for the horses’ well being. An important factor for young athletes success is that parent’s give their children support but without too much pressure to perform (Wylleman, et al., 2000; Pummell, et al., 2008).

Participants transition barriers
Participants’ experienced barriers in form of “non events”, transitions that were prepared and expected for but never occurred (Wylleman, 2002). Participants failed to participate in important competitions, delayed Grand Prix premiere, promising horses were sold by the owners and a horse didn’t developed as it was planned. Many hopes can be build on a young promising horse but it takes many years to develop a competition horse and many things can go wrong during these years. Participants also experienced the difficulties to attend to international competitions (especially in dressage). Only the top ten of the best dressage riders were invited to international competitions at Grand Prix level. It should be important that not only the best are able to practice competing against other nationalities. The equestrian sport could be improved as it is in Germany, where Grand Prix competitions are arranged for young seniors up to 26 years old. To improve routine and practice for the skills that requires at Grand Prix level. Injury of horses was another barrier and means a huge loss for the rider, especially when promising horses do not recover.

Participants sometimes had negative feelings and thoughts about their own or their horse’s capacity. They compared themselves with other riders and thought others ride better than them and had doubts about their own performance. Athletes who value their success only by being better than others can lose their motivation to compete during the transition to senior level when they meet more experienced competitors (Ojala, et al., 2006). It could also be feelings that the horses were not good enough or that others had so much better horses. The fact that the athletes were successful during the young rider years and had much more experienced competitors as a senior may create a developmental conflict between “what the athlete is” and “what the athlete ought or wants to be” (Stambulova, 1997, 2003).

Financial difficulties were a barrier for all participants’ in the study. They always struggled and felt it was never enough money. None of the participants have had enough money to buy really good and experienced horses that were ready for the elite competitions. An experienced and older horse that has the capacity for the elite senior level can cost up to a half a million Swedish crowns or more. They had to buy young horses and work their way to the top. It is in the end about money in equestrian sport and without financial backup from parents or others it is very hard to be successful. All the money a rider invests in a young horse can also be lost, if the horse gets injured or do not live up to expectations. Participants explain the importance of experienced people (coach, veterinary, professionals) who can support the young rider in order to develop the horse correct.

Resources
The major resource was participants’ great supportive surroundings helping them through demands and barriers. This in line with previous research were social support plays a major role during transitions (Bussman & Alfermann, 1994; Pummell et al., 2008; Malett et al., 2004). The most important are positive support and encouragement without too much pressure to perform (Wylleman, et al., 2000; Pummell, et al., 2008) which the participants perceived their parents did. Coaches were a major support both instructively to educate riders and horse and also mentally to help riders how to handle competitive stressors. To be in a development environment with a positive psychosocial surrounding (Alferman, Lavallee and Wylleman, 1999) and work for a professional rider seems to be an important factor to facilitate the
transition. It is a resource for a future career if athletes learn how to work with horses in a professional way, how to finance an elite career and learn what to look for in a typical dressage, show jumping or event horse. A stimulating sport environment has shown mobilizing athletes skills (Båge & Hormbrick, 2005).

Another important recourse was that participants had several horses (two to six horses) during their junior period as well as during the transition period. A rider is very vulnerability without several horses. If horses for some reason are sold or injured, is it important to be able to continue practice and compete with another horse to ride to keep their motivation. A difficult horse or a horse that does not make the results you plan for can be devastating for the motivation. To ride other horses makes it easier, keep the joyfulness and facilitating continued development. With several horses the rider also develops flexibility because all horses are different. For many riders the only alternative to have quality horses with capacity was to ride horses owned by others. The participants described it as a good opportunity to be able to have several horses because of the expenses to buy horses. Participants explain one way to feel more safe and that is to own part of the horse (at least 50%) which can be a good method to have more influence over the horses future.

Another factor for participants’ successful transition in this study was the opportunity they had to combine their athletic career with their professional career. Demands from work and horses did not interfere with each other in a negative way. Their work was related to horses which probably facilitated the transition. Research (Vujic, 2004) has shown that difficulties to combine senior sport with a “normal life” can be a reason for crisis transition. Three of the participants worked with the parents’ riding-school, family equestrian business (breeding and selling horses) and at a school that educate riders and horses. These three participants had their riding as priority number one and from what their riding, practicing and competitions required they planned their other duties of work. For the other three participants were horses prioritized from what was required from their work or school during their transition. They perceived their life with work or school and their horses as important and did not felt it was too much to handle. For example one participant did not compete at all during her first year. It was a priority she made in order to manage having her horses in good condition and to develop them for the future. If she had to compete at the same time maybe she would have experienced too much pressure and ended up in a crisis transition.

Participants in the study were very dedicated to their sport and research show that sport must be an essential part of the athletes’ life as an important motivational factor for persistence (Malett & Hanrahan, 2002). Even though it is a hard work with horses the participants did not explain it as difficult or hard. In order to achieve excellence in senior elite sport commitment for the sport and hard work are important (Van Rossum, 2001; Matrindale et al., 2007). They were used to the lifestyle since there were young and they felt lucky to have their hobby as a work. They loved working with horses. This goes in line with previous research of equestrians where sources for the dedication and hard work were the love of the sport and the horse (Pummell, et al., 2008). Participants also had a great positive way of thinking when faced with barriers and demands, which is an important recourse during the transition (Wylleman, et al., 1999).

*Coping strategies*

Participants had strong intrinsic demands on themselves to improve and develop to be better riders. Process goal were important for them to make progress with horses and do a good job and not only succeed in competitions. Therefore participants were more likely to manage a
successful transition when process goals and internal motivation were used (Ojala, et al., 2006). Participants had put demands on themselves for the future career, like participate in the Olympic Games or to run their own business to educate, compete and sell horses. A desire to continue sport participation has been showed to facilitate the transition (Pummell, Harwood & Lavalle, 2008). It is also important to focus on long-term goals (Matrindale, et al., 2007) it can be easier to handle the transition if athletes have the ability to see transitions in a longer perspective. All participants in the study had goals to proceed and success in the future.

One major determinant coping strategy for the successful transition was that participants’ saw their transition in a longer perspective. They had the ability to set long-term goals to keep motivation and persistence (Ojala, et al., 2006; Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). Participants had goals for the future to be successful senior riders and they knew it would take some time to get there. Instead of being depressed over the fact that they no longer could compete at the same level as they did as young riders they made long term goals for their young horses. Participants put up new goals for the future and were able to reorganize their life which is an important strategy according to previous research (Stambulova, 2007; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002). Participants’ used approach-cognitive coping (Anshel, et al., 2001; Poczwardowski & Conroy, 2002) by evaluating and analyzing the situation and find solutions. For some participants the strategies were to sell all the horses that were not good enough for senior level, move to work and learn at a professional stable. They focused on to educate and develop themselves and to invest the time to educate young horses with qualities for the senior elite level. They worked towards goals for the future, like to participate in the Olympic Games or to run their own equestrian business. Personal achievements and long term goals are important for persistence and motivation in elite sport (Malett & Hanrahan, 2002). The participants used several different problem focused coping strategies (Lazarus & Folkman 1984; Poczwardowski and Conroy, 2002). Participants’ had the ability to see changes as challenges, face problems in a realistic perspective and handle therefore demands successfully, this in line with Båge and Hormbricks (2005) study. They were able to change focus and make everyday as a goal itself, to take one day at the time and see how horses differs from one day to another. They used problem focused coping and learn from barriers and saw how that knowledge could be useful in the future (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Poczwardowski & Conroy, 2002).

Results show that the participants had a strong belief in their own capacity which is shown important for persistence in elite sport (Malett & Hanrahan, 2002). Some participants described their internal resources, strong belief to succeed, their will-power to move forward and that they always trying to do their best, which has been important factors also in Vujic’s, (2004) study. They used there strong self-believe to motivate themselves to keep on going and perceive during hard time. High self-esteem and high motivation are important factors for elite athletes to maintain their development and persistence in their elite performance career (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002).

Lessons learned from the transition
Participants’ stated that it is very important to ride many and different kinds of horses in order to learn how to educate young horses. In equestrian sport it is very important to develop the feeling for riding a horse, and the best way of doing that is to ride a well educated, experienced older horse. This was something that all participants did during junior and young rider years. To be able to continue in the sport without a lot of money it is clear that riders need to be able to develop young horses by themselves. It seems like a good strategy to start the senior years to get routine of riding young horses. All horses are different in regards of
mood and temperament. Therefore it is understandable that it is important to ride different kind of horses. The performance outcomes are dependent on the cooperative interactions of the rider and his/her horse (Pretty & Bridgeman, 2006). Participants also felt it was a good experience to be trusted and to have the responsibility to compete with horses owned by others. This was also a motivational factor, to be asked to ride someone’s horse, which means that the owner approves the rider as competent. To have a horse that’s fits the rider is also important. The horse should have a good temperament and not be too difficult to handle. There can be unnecessary troubles and barriers if the horse is too big or too strong for the rider. It is a big step to make the transition to horse so it is important to make it as easy as possible. If riders have a long perspective on their career, participants’ describe that is a good idea to make the transition from pony to horse as soon as it is possible. It takes some time to learn how to ride a horse compared to a pony. The transition to horse is a predictable transition and can so be prepared for in order to facilitate the athletes’ coping

Participants’ think it can be more information about how the next step in riders’ development will look like and how they could prepare for it. Research (Vujic, 2004) show that athletes who made an unsuccessful transition perceived lack of information about the transition and therefore felt unprepared for senior level. Coaches or federation could inform juniors and young riders, that a future senior horse would be good to educate parallel with their horse for young rider level (if it is possible). Senior horse’s requires a different capacity and it can be important to have a good horse to develop during these years to be more prepared for senior level. It could facilitate the transitions if the young riders also could practice some of the skills that’s required on senior level, practicing and performing at junior level often is different compared to the senior sports level (Matrindale, et al., 2007).

Learn to take responsibility for yourself, it is very important for the future development for juniors and Young Riders if they learn to take more responsibility during competition and training (Alferman, et al., 1999). Many riders have the family members to organize the competition schedule, pay fees and bring all the required papers, and so on. On the senior level the parents might not be able to be there to do all these things, and it can be a transition itself to take more responsibility over training and competitions. One participant described the importance of being positive and extrovert to people in all kind of difference surroundings, and care of relationships with significant people. Those people are, or might be, the once the athlete need to relay on as a senior.

Limitations of the study
The fact that participants described feelings and thoughts they had for several years ago could affected their answers. In all qualitative studies there is a risk that participants answer in a way that makes them appear in a better way. People tend to remember either the good or the bad memories and they may not want to open up in front of a unknown person. All interviews were made via telephone and it can be more difficult for the interviewer to make a trustful relation to the participants. Although, all participants were very busy and had not much time over to make the interview. In several cases the booked interview was suddenly changed. Participants were also located in a wide geographical spread, so it was difficult to make the interviews face to face because of their tight schedules. The fact that there were only six riders participating can be a weakness for the study. Four more participants could have given the study more strength and maybe a different result. Another concern can be translation of the transcribed individual profiles from Swedish into English. This step was done by the researcher alone. Although, a triangulation was done with the category profiles to minimize researcher’s bias.
**Future directions**

To continue research on the career transitions from junior to senior on equestrian athletes a more extended study should be made with further more participants. A longitudinal design with Young Riders during their last years competing as Young Riders, and to investigate them during their transition to senior level. And also to look further for factors who make Young Riders to determinate their elite career. A transition is a developmental process and should therefore be investigated with advantages of a longitudinal design (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). Interesting should also be to examine a comparison between different groups. For example, would it differ between juniors/Young Riders participating in the equestrian junior national team and sub elite groups and their perception of transition demands? Further research during the developmental stage could also be interesting, riders go trough the transition from junior to Young Rider level and also the step from junior international pony elite to junior international horse elite at the age of 16. This transition can probably be a challenge for the rider when he/she is one day competing with a pony and the next day at the same level need to compete with a horse. Equestrian athletes are shown in this study to be very dedicated to their sport and spend many hours correlated with their sport, equestrian sport are so called “a life style” and not “only” a sport. An individual will develop different degrees of an athletic identity which can have both positive and negative consequences (Brewer, Van Raalte & Petitpas, 2000) Interesting would be to examine equestrians athletic identity and is there a particular risk for equestrian athletes to develop an identity foreclosure, based on their strong participation on their sport?

**Related applied issues**

This is the first study of the transition from Young Rider to senior in equestrian sport in Sweden. The Swedish Equestrian Federation and the Swedish Olympic Committee (SOK) should be interested of the results. It will be important to educate coaches, parents and athletes in the holistic perspective of transitions to prepare junior and Young Riders for the demands at the senior level. It seems important to prepare athletes with knowledge before they are entering the transition while knowledge has been shown facilitating the transition (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Poczwardowski & Conroy, 2002; Vujic, 2004). To increase the knowledge about career transitions the author plan to have lectures at sport clubs or seminars to educate coaches as well as parents and athletes. This study might be published so the information will reach several people in the equestrian sport. A facilitating surrounding has been shown as important in this study for increasing skills, learn to ride different horses and how to manage a life as a professional rider. Maybe there is a way to finance Young Riders education as a working student (paying to work and ride for a professional rider). A scholar ship from the federation could sponsor promising Young Riders and juniors so they could finance and be able to work and practice their skills with a professional rider. Swedish Olympic Committee (SOK) or the Swedish Federation could sponsor Young Riders to be educated of successful riders. Promising young riders must also get the opportunity to ride quality horses for senior level. The Federation has started a new cooperation between breeders and promising young riders. Hopefully it will give young talented riders opportunity to compete with quality horses for senior level. The results can also be useful to imply at equestrian sports high schools or any kind of sports high schools. Many students deal with the fact that they move away for the first time, perceive more pressure from school, perceive more demands from coaches and that the sport requires more effort.
Acknowledgement

I’m grateful to several people that supported and helped me to complete this study. First I would like to thank my supervisor Natalia Stambulova who has guided me through the whole process with her expert knowledge. Fredrik Weibull deserves great thanks for being a great emotional support and his dedicated interest and great discussions. Thanks to Gisela Lövstrand, Viktoria Varga and Anna Nyström at the Swedish Equestrian Federation who made it possible for me to contact the participants. I also would like to thank my beloved, Peter Alkeryd for his support and patience with me during this “not always easy period” and through the whole process of making this essay.
References


Internet references


Interview guide in Swedish

Erfarenheter relaterade till övergången från Young Rider till senior nivå inom ridsporten

1. Bakgrund inom ridsporten
1.1. Hur gammal är du?
1.2. Kan du berätta vad som gjorde att du började med ridsport?
1.3. Hur gammal var du när du började tävla aktivt inom din gren?
1.4. Hur kommer det sig att du specialiserade dig inom dressyr/hoppning/fälttävlan?
1.5. Hur gammal var du när du gick över från ponny till stor häst?
1.6. Har du ridit på egna eller andras hästar som YR och vid övergången till senior?
1.7. Vilken betydelse har det haft för dig, att tävla med en egen eller hästar ägda av andra?
1.8. Hur många hästar har du haft under dina år som Young rider och under övergången?

2. Övergångsprocessen från Young rider till senior
2.1. Kan du tänka dig tillbaka till tiden när du skulle gå över från YR till att tävla som senior och beskriva hur länge denna övergång varade?
2.1. På vilket sätt har det förändrats för dig att tävla som senior till skillnad mot YR?
2.2. Beskriv hur du prioriterade och investerade din energi till olika saker i livet under denna period.
2.3. Under denna övergångsperiod, berätta om vilka olika krav du upplevde i ditt liv.
2.4. Vad hade du för sorts resurser för att hantera dessa krav?
2.5. Kan du beskriva eventuella motgångar som du upplevde under övergångsperioden?
2.6. Hur gjorde du för att komma vidare och hantera dessa hinder?

3. Erfarenheter från övergången
3.1. Kan du beskriva vad som har varit positivt för dig med övergången till senior?
3.2. Med den erfarenhet du har idag, skulle du ha gjort på ett annat sätt vid din övergång från YR till senior?
3.3. Vilka erfarenheter har du fått med dig efter din övergång från YR till senior, som du skulle vilja dela med dig till andra?
Interview guide in English

Experiences related to the transition from Young Rider to senior level in equestrian sport

1. Background in equestrian sport
1.1. How old are you?

1.2. Can you describe your reasons to why you started with equestrian sport?

1.3. How old were you when you start to compete in dressage/show jumping/eventing?

1.4. How come you specialised on dressage/show jumping/eventing?

1.5. How old were you when you vent from pony to horse.

1.6. Have you been riding on your own, or other persons horses as Young rider and during the transition to senior?

1.7. What has it mean to you to compete on your own horse or with horse’s owned by others?

1.8. How many horses have you had during the young rider years and transition to senior?

2. The transition process from Yong Rider to senior
2.1. Can you imagine back to the days during your transition from YR to senior, and describe how long this period was?

2.1. In what way has it differ for you to compete as a senior compared with YR?

2.2. Describe how you invested and priority your energy to different things in your life during this period.

2.3. During this transition period, describe what demands you perceived in your life?

2.4. What resources did you have to cope with these demands?

2.5. Describe if you perceived any barriers during the transition period?

2.6. How did you cope with these barriers?

3. Lessons learned from the transition
3.1. What lessons have you learned during your transition that you would like to share to others?

3.2. With your experience that you have today, would you have done something in a different way in your transition from YR to senior?

3.1. Can you describe what you think are the most positive things for you in the transition?
Informationsbrev till informant

Hej!

Mitt namn är Erika Alge och jag studerar idrottspyskologi vid Högskolan i Halmstad. Inom ramen för magisterkursen i idrottspyskologi ska jag skriva min magisteruppsats om övergången från att vara Young Rider på elitnivå till att övergå till senior på elitnivå. Min handledare, professor Natalia Stambulova och jag samarbetar med beteendevetare Olle Anfelt medarbetare i Sveriges Olympiska Kommitté. Forskning visar att många lovande unga ryttere inte lyckas med övergången till senior och därmed försvinner från sporten. Genom denna studie hoppas vi kunna klargöra viktiga faktorer som kan leda till ökad förståelse för hur övergången kan hanteras på ett effektivt sätt.

Ni som får detta brev har valts ut på grund av hur ni är rankade på Ridsportsförbundets hemsida samt att ni gick över från att vara Young Rider ryttare till att bli senior ryttare för mindre än fem år sedan.

Om ni väljer att delta i studien vänligen meddela mig Erika Alge erikaalge@hotmail.com direkt eller Ridsportförbundet genom att svara på detta e-mail till Anna Nyström, anna.nystrom@ridsport.se, vilket i sin tur endast innebär att ni godkänner att jag Erika Alge kan kontakta er via telefon eller e-post. Jag kommer därefter vidare göra en förfrågan om en intervju på en plats lämplig för er och enligt er bekvämlighet. Intervjuerna kommer att pågå cirka en timme och genomföras någon gång mellan februari och april. Deltagandet är frivilligt och ni kan när som helst avbryta er medverkan utan att ge någon som helst orsak till detta. Allt material kommer att behandlas konfidentiellt.

Med vänlig hälsning

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Example of the individual profile

*Gender:* male

*Age:* 25

**Reason for starting with equestrian sport:**
- Parents had riding school, dad had been competing in show jumping always horses in family grown up with them

**Age when participants start compete actively:**
- 9-10 years old

**Reasons for type of sport: (dressage, show jumping, event)**
- Naturally didn’t thought about anything else, show jumping was in the family

**Age for transition from pony to horse:**
- 13 years old, to tall for the pony, got opportunity to loan and ride an experienced horse, SM as 14 years old on that horse. Ride parallel pony and horse for a couple of months.

**One ore several horses:**
- Several horses, both others and own horses

**Importance of several horses:**
- Good mix and experience to ride different horses

**Importance of others or own horses:**
- Good experience to ride others horses, responsibility, some pressure to make good results. Safety to have own horses,

**The transition from Young Rider to senior:**
- Moved to Germany to work for an elite show jumper at age 20, stayed two years.
- Sold all horses and felt like starting from the beginning again.
- Learned a lot how they worked with horses.
- Work now with one of Sweden’s top riders in show jumping.

**Time for transition:**
- Feels like I’m not fully established yet related to sport, feels more established with my own business, one part is that to educate horses and riders.

**The difference between competing as a Young Rider and senior:**
- Better horses now, between 16-21 I was part of the national team, much more demands now during competitions, both for horse and rider,
- such a big difference from 1.40 to 1.50-1.60.
- More heedful now when looking for horses, they need more quality as senior horses than they needed as Young Rider horses.
- It is so much harder to fit in the national team as senior even though you are ambitious and have a great interest for the sport and it was easy as a Young Rider it is not enough to succeed as a senior. Many Young Riders are dropping out because of that
Time and energy priority during transition:
- 100% on horses, worked with horses as much as I could. Not much time for other
  thing feels naturally, that’s how it is when you work with horses. Most of friends are
  in horse business.

Perceived demands during transition:
- Everything is related to what goals you are after, my goal is to be one of the best riders
  in the world, from that you put up demands on your self.
- Some demands from the one I worked for, when competing with his horses, but it is
  not just results it’s about to do a good job.
- Family demands were more like have you get your self into this game you also have to
  take the consequences.
- During competitions you want to much

Coping with demands:
- Think long term goals, to work with horses with good quality and potential to be a
  good senior horse in the future.
- Parents support they were calm, never pushed me at competitions as many other
  parents can do.
- Always look forward, to next competition.
- Knowledge that this transition would take time and be a big step in the development.

Goal setting:
- Long term goals, to be one of the best riders in sweden

Perceived barriers during transition:
- Not possible to buy experienced horses financial, very hard time in Germany, so much
  to learn, lack of self esteem, felt not so good as a rider, negative influences.
- Injury just a week before a big championship.

Resources:
- To realize that I was in the perfect environment to learn rather than stay home and
  “think” you’re good.
- Support from family, financial, driving to competitions, support at competitions.
  Without my parents it would never have worked.
- Long term goals,
- interest in sport make me keep on going, just have to learn to focus on the future and
  next competition.
- Supportive friends who’s helping out with horses.

Role of the federation
- No demands form the federation they select the ones they think is good. I felt a good
  engagement and support from the Federation during the young rider years when they
  selected me to international competitions. I still feel a support from the federation but
  that is because you know the people who work there and you meet them at
  competitions, it is more like friends who support.
Positive factors to become senior compare to be Young Rider:

- Handled the transition were well, because I realized I wanted to work with this and I saw the process in I long-term.

- Never been a problem to see how it works.
- During YR you want to perform for the moment and do not focus on long-term goals because of the many competitions you need to do with just some weeks between them. The energy you put on them you now they not going to last as a senior horse anyway.
- Now you need to work with young horses and set goals for several years ahead that might lead to a place at the national team.

Would they have done the transition different:

- No, I don’t think so I’m very satisfied how it went I couldn’t have done it in a another way.

Experiences from the transition to share with others:

- Importance to keep calm, keep focus on your own education in riding, not to eager for competition results, if you would like to do this during a long time you must be as good as possible.
- Do not think you would get directly in the national team as a senior.
### Table 1. Equestrian athletes’ perceived demands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Raw data units</th>
<th>Low-order themes</th>
<th>High order themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is a big step from YR to senior it’s a huge different. You need a whole different kind of horse, it’s much more demands on senior horses. (6)</td>
<td>Technical demands at competition (10)</td>
<td>Increased complexity during competition (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Such a difference from 1.40 to 1.50-1.60 (show jumping) (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The step from 2* to 3* competition are so much bigger than from 1<em>to 2</em> (event) (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s a huge step, from doing half pirouettes as YR to Grand Prix with passage and piaff (dressage) (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very big step from be “nr 1” as Young Rider and then become senior, they ride so much faster and perform even results all the time (1)</td>
<td>To compete against much more experienced riders (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suddenly you compete against the best in Sweden(2)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Compared my self with the best riders in Sweden “Such a long road until I’m there” (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>It is so much harder to fit in the national team as a senior, even though you have the ambition and great interest things that you do as YR are just not enough. (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>You want to much during competition (1)</td>
<td>Self demands to succeed and perform well (8)</td>
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<tr>
<td>To succeed in what I do (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Very high demands on my self to perform, no one can tell me that you could never do that (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have to “fight for” the best horses with other successful riders, the better horses you have the better you can perform (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not just results on competitions, its about to do a good job with the horses(1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Want other people to see me as competent in what I do (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feels demanding to compete with an experienced horse that has made good results before, then you have to live up to that (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goal to ride the Olympic games (3)</td>
<td>High goal setting for future career (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal to be one of the best riders in the world, from that goal you put up demands on your self. (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demands on myself, to develop myself and make progress (1)</td>
<td>Self demands to develop skills (3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Very high demands on myself to educate as much as possible and perform as much as possible so I could be able to do the best I can during competition (1)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Must work to finance the horses (2)  
| Have to be your own secretary and run a business beside your elite career (1)  
| Very long days of hard work with horses, ride 12 horses and still have work to do (1)  
| I have to perform results otherwise I can loose my job, the horse must be developed and perform so they gain in value. (1)  
| As a senior I have this to live on my elite career and got paid to ride someone else’s horses it is a hole other kind of pressure then (1) |  
| Demands to combine the elite career with a business to finance their sport participation. (6) |  
| Parents thought it was very important to manage the work even though I had 2 horses (1)  
| Had to take care of the horse by my self, no groom (1)  
| If you get your self into this sport you have to take the consequences (1)  
| Parents only demands that I would like what I do for living (1)  
| Demanding parent at competitions, more irritating then supportive (1) |  
| Friends who did not understood the participation in my sport (1) |  
| Demands from parents to manage the responsibility to care for the horses (5) |  
| Demands from significant others (6) |  
| Friends who didn’t felt prioritised (1) |
Table 2. Equestrian athletes’ perceived barriers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Raw data units</th>
<th>Low order theme</th>
<th>High order theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Things does not go as well as I thought, thought I would do my debut in grand prix when I was 24, but did it at 26 (1) I hoped to ride Breeders with my horse who had the capacity but he was unmanageable (1) Some promising horses that I would have liked to keep was sold by the owners a couple of times (1) Bad performance in the beginning of the season, 4 errors here and 4 errors there (1) Difficult horse to handle and ride, did not develop as planned, hoped to ride breeders with him but he was unmanageable (1)</td>
<td>Planning for a competition and failed to participate (5)</td>
<td>Failed to participate in important competitions (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did some 3* competitions and my first WC (event), horse get injured after 3 seasons and never come back, that horse could have been my ticket to the national team and Hong Kong 2008 (1) Injury of my horse before important competitions and trail competitions (2) Injury of one horse, gone for 8th months (1) After my debut in Grand Prix my horse got sick and never come back, it was like “striking my leg out” (1)</td>
<td>Injury of horses (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard to participate on the competitions, only the best were invited, as top 40 your “no one” (dressage) (1) I didn’t get the chance to compete international(1) You are not aloud to attend to all the international competition unless you’re among the top 10 in Sweden (dressage) (1)</td>
<td>Not ready to compete as planned/low readiness (3)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Others has better horses (3) Doubts about my horses capacity (1) felt so far, far away to be part of the national team again (1)</td>
<td>Negative feelings and thoughts about their horses capacity (5)</td>
<td>Negative feelings and thoughts about their own or horses’ capacity (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very hard time my first year working in Germany in a professional stable, lack of self-esteem, so much to learn, felt no good as a rider, negative influences (1) Doubts about my performance (1) Other ride so much better than me (2)</td>
<td>Negative feelings and thoughts about their own capacity (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invested money in a horse and plan to sell it, got limp and I lost all the money (1)</td>
<td>Lost of invested money (1)</td>
<td>Financial difficulties (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No financial backup from my parents (1) Not possible to buy expensive and experienced horses (1) You have to have parents to back you up financially it does not matter how talented you are (1) Always felt like not enough money (1)</td>
<td>Not money enough to by experienced horses (4)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. Equestrian athletes’ perceived resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Raw data units</th>
<th>Low order theme</th>
<th>High order theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support from family financially, driving to- support at competitions, without my parents it would never have worked (1)</td>
<td>Supportive Family financial and emotional (7)</td>
<td>Supportive significant others (23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents were calm and supportive during competitions never pushed me to perform (5)</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can trust every one in my surroundings (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The environment (coach, other equestrians) was full of inspiration and helped me focus on the future and forward in my career to Grand prix (1)</td>
<td>Professional, inspirational equestrian surroundings (7)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moved to work for a professional rider first years as senior (5)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moved to study in another city, felt natural to focus on school, much better coach and equestrian facilities (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support from my new coach with my difficult horse (1)</td>
<td>Supportive coach mentally and instructive (5)</td>
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<tr>
<td>My coach support me with horses to ride (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coach supports me (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>My coach helped me to be more patient and relaxed in my way of thinking (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Many people around me to support, to exchange ideas with, give me inspiration, no one make it by them selves (1)</td>
<td>Supportive Friends Emotional and helping out with horses (3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supportive friends who helped me out with my horses(2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>National team meetings and sport psychologist, not regular but good tools how to think (1)</td>
<td>Supportive federation (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Had other horses to ride, otherwise I couldn’t have done any 1.50 competitions for that whole year (1)</td>
<td>Vulnerable without several horses (6)</td>
<td>Opportunity to have several horses (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have other horses that makes me less vulnerably (3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Always another horse to ride to be able to keep on practicing (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Would probably not had consisted if I only had one difficult horse (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>I had a good senior horse to develop during my YR years (1)</td>
<td>Opportunity to prepare for the future career with several horses at different level and age (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good to have some horses for all the categories to be prepared for the future competitions (show jumping) (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other horse that was fun to ride, he could do “anything” (dressage) (1)</td>
<td>Other horses to ride to keep motivation (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>I had many other nice horses I had started to work with (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feels more safe to own your horses but without other owners I could not have all my horses that I have (1)</td>
<td>Feel safe to be a part-owner of horses’ (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Better to have 3 horses and own 50% of them than have one horse 100% (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>It is so much fun with horses, the few times its really working it is so fun to see how the young horses develops (1)</td>
<td>Joy to work with horses (6)</td>
<td>Personal motivational recourses (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in the sport make me keep on going, love working with horses (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>It does not feel hard to make an effort and work hard with the horses (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Important to se the joyfulness in the daily work (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did not have much time to go out, it is a choice you do, I rather wake up fresh and alert in the morning and be early in the stable (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>To be able to work with my hobby is the best I can imagine (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barriers happens to everybody, not just me (1)</td>
<td>Positive way of thinking (4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>If horses are sold, I think at least I get some money and that’s positive (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>What does not kill you make you stronger (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>If I work hard and persistence I believe I will be rewarded for that some day (1)</td>
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</table>
Table 4. Equestrian athletes’ coping strategies during transition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Raw data units</th>
<th>Low order themes</th>
<th>High order themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You do not have to hurry and be number one all the time, it has to take some time (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Competitions are such small part of the thing, more like a receive of that the practice is working (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>In this sport you can compete such a long time I’m still quite young (31 years old) (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The time pressure to perform during the YR years are gone, now it can take the time it takes (4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>I learned to focus on the future and next competition after a bad performance (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Didn’t thought I could be in the national team directly (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>YR years are not a goal itself, you need to see it in a longer perspective (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>To realize it would take 3-4 years to get there (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>My goal has always been to ride grand prix one day (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work to one day participate in the Olympic Games (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goal to have my own equestrian business (2)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Invest time in young horses with quality and see their potential in a longer perspective (11)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to see the transition in a longer perspective (35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with horses with good quality and potential to be good in the future (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>I had to understand it would take some time with my difficult horse and see the potential he had for the future, better to invest time in a horse that actually can do grand prix one day, rather than an easy horse that never can be able to do that (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Just be happy for small progress you and your horse does and not just want to see results right away (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>For some horses it takes just a little bit longer to improve (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>You need to set different demands on different horses (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>In dressage Grand Prix it takes several months before you get any results (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Must care for the horses health and not “burn them out” with to many competitions (3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>When it doesn’t go well, I just think that as long as the young horses try there still hope (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sold the horses (not good for senior level) started from the beginning again and set new goals for the young horses (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did not compete anything during the first years in transition, educated young horses instead (3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did not compete in the “spot lights” anymore but had opportunity to compete international with young horses (Breeders, Falsterbo) (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feels better to ride a young horse than an older horse because I know that only I have accomplished this with this horse (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Changed competition focus and planning for future career with educating young horses (7)</td>
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</table>
Just speed up and make an effort, make more money, more clinics more students, to see what opportunities there is to find (financial problems) (1)  
To be able to change focus (1)  
Every day becomes a goal then and to see how the horse differ from one day to another, take one day at a time (1)  
To realize I was in a perfect environment to learn, rather than stay home and just “believe that I’m good” (1)  
I learned from the barriers and tried to see how I could use that knowledge in the future (1)  
Always see changes as challenges, I’m not afraid of a challenge (1)  
Define the problem and just keep on working and practice some more (after bad performance) (2)  

| I believe in myself and what I do (1)  
Always believe that I can do it (2)  
Enormous will power and force to move forward (1)  
Always trying to do my best (1)  | Ability to see alternative solutions to problems (8)  
|---|---|
Table 5. Athletes lessons learned from the transition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Raw data unit</th>
<th>Low order themes</th>
<th>High order themes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You learn how to understand how the horses work and think, you develop a certain feeling for the horse, your riding becomes more all-round if you have the opportunity to ride extremely several different kinds of horses (1) Good experience to ride different kind of horses, my horse was not so easy and from that I learned a lot (1) It is a major importance with several horses especially when you are young, must ride different horses to develop and get routine (1) Good experience to ride different type of horses with different temperaments (1)</td>
<td>To develop the feeling and get routine (4)</td>
<td>Importance of riding many and different kinds of horses (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You learn so much when you have to work from the ground with young horses (1) Good experience to ride young horses during that period and learn how to educate horses and not only have an experienced horse to compete with (1)</td>
<td>To learn how to educate young horses (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would have had another horse parallel with my horse during YR time with the capacity for senior level, to be more prepared for senior level. My coach could have given me that advice (1) It has to do with the horse material also, to have good people around you, to make sure you choose the right horses to the future career (1)</td>
<td>To have a horse to develop for senior level (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When you work for a professional you learn how to work with horses professional (1) It is so developing to work for someone professional and be a working student and get practice every day (1) Work for a successful rider to develop your own riding (1) Good experience to see how professionals works (1)</td>
<td>Be in a development environment (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have patient and do not quit because of hard work (1) Do not think you will get directly to the national team as senior (1) Do not stress you will be a senior for the rest of your life (1) Importance to keep calm, focus on your own education in riding, be not to eager for competition results if you want to do this for a long time you must be as good as possible (1) Good experience to ride others horses, it is a responsibility and that make some pressure to get good results (1) Good experience to be trusted to take care of horses owned by others (1)</td>
<td>Have patient for the future career (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good experience to ride others horses, it is a responsibility and that make some pressure to get good results (1) Good experience to be trusted to take care of horses owned by others (1)</td>
<td>Good experience to ride horses owed by others (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To see the transition in a longer perspective (1) It has been a long process to work my self up and be independence and no longer have my parents to buy me the horses, my goal has always been to be were I am today (1)</td>
<td>Set long-term goals (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is good to learn early as a junior and Young Rider to take responsibility by them self during competitions and not let parents do everything for them (1)</td>
<td>Learn to take responsibility for your self (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start the transition from pony to horse as soon as possible, it take time to learn how to ride a horse (1)</td>
<td>Early transition from pony to horse (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be positive and extrovert to people you meet. Take care of relationships and people around you those people are the once you have to relay on as a senior (1)</td>
<td>Make good relations to people around you (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not have a horse that’s to difficult, must be a horse that fits you, a good size (1)</td>
<td>Make sure you have a horse that’s right for you (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The attitude is more important then the talent, many has talent but it is so important to have the attitude that it will take 3-4 years after YR (1)</td>
<td>Have the right attitude towards the transition (1)</td>
<td></td>
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