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INITIAL CAREER TRANSITION RESEARCH FINDINGS

The Professional Players Federation (PPF) is encouraging more players to make use of the help that is available from their respective Player Associations to prepare themselves for life after sport. The need for transition support has never been greater, with interim results from PPF-commissioned research showing that a significant number of players struggle both financially and mentally in the first few years after retiring from professional sport.

The past player survey was commissioned by the PPF in partnership with the Rugby Players Association, the Professional Cricketers Association and the Professional Footballers Association. The research covered 800 former professional players ranging from 17 to 79 years old. The initial findings from the responses are detailed below.

Financial Health:

Whilst 84% of past players are in employment, self-employed or retired from a second career, most had to accept a drop in salary once they stop playing. Just over half (52%) of respondents reported financial difficulties in the five years immediately after stopping playing.

The research found that 6% of retired players have taken formal protection from bankruptcy.

With 90% of players surveyed needing to work full time after their playing career, it is vital that more players make use of the support that is available through their Player Association and seek advice about managing their finances whilst playing.

The link between financial worries and mental health was found to be significant. When asked about a range of factors which impact negatively on their mental health, the largest single driver was financial worries affecting 21% of the past players.

Physical and Mental Health:

Whilst the majority of players (74%) described themselves satisfied or more than satisfied with their current physical and mental health there are a number of issues highlighted by the research.

- 54% of past players have, at some time since retiring, had concerns about their mental and emotional wellbeing.

- Only 4 in 10 of those who felt they had an issue with their mental and emotional wellbeing had sought help.
- 7% of past players had sought help for drug, alcohol or gambling problems.

Career Transition

Whilst 94% were proud or extremely proud of having been a professional athlete, the research did highlight some of the key issues facing players when they retire from professional sport:

- Only 29% of players were able to choose when they stopped playing professional sport. For the rest, retirement was due to injuries, general wear and tear or being unable to get a contract.
- Only 50% of the players surveyed felt in control of their lives within two years of finishing their playing careers.
- 78% of those surveyed wished they had taken more financial advice when they were playing sport in order to help with their transition.

Encouragingly, around two thirds (64%) of the retired players surveyed had received support from their Player Association. Associations provide a wide range of support and help to their members (both current and retired players). This includes one-to-one welfare support (including 24-hour helplines, confidential counselling and access to financial advice), education, personal development and career transition support and workshops to help raise awareness, advise and signpost players to the support available. They also provide hardship grants from the Player Associations' benevolent funds.

Richard Bryan, Rugby Director at the Rugby Players Association said, "All the Player Associations are committed to providing the very best service for their members. In addition to the wide-ranging welfare, education and dual career support we offer, the Rugby Players Association has in recent years launched a number of bespoke initiatives focused on transition to help our members thrive after leaving the game. The RPA, PCA and PFA commissioned this survey to provide a deeper insight into players needs and the findings will help focus our activities going forward. In the meantime, we encourage players, past and present, to make use of the support we offer in terms of career transition and player welfare."

Simon Barker, Assistant Chief Executive at the PFA said, "We know from experience, that making the transition away from elite level sport is one of the most challenging areas for players. At the PFA we are proud to offer a second-to-none service including wellbeing support, financial advice, life enrichment programmes, transition workshops, educational grants and bursaries. We encourage all sports men and women to take full advantage of the benefits offered by their union."

Brendon Batson OBE, Chairman of the PPF said, "Player Associations play an increasingly important part in the lives of players offering a range of support across a number of professional and personal aspects of players' lives. This support has improved hugely over time and is continuing to develop. We would encourage all players to plan for their retirement and make the most of the support that is available from their associations."