INTRODUCTION

On the basis of The Analytic Model of Sports Career (Stambulova 1994) the following transitions of the elite Sports Career (SC) are identified: the beginning of sports specialization; the transition to intensive training in the chosen kind of sport; the transition to high-achievement sports and adult sports; the transition from amateur sports to professional sports; the transition from the culmination to the end of SC; the termination of SC. Contemporary studies (Baillie & Danish 1992; Sinclair & Orlick 1993; Taylor & Ogilvie 1994) show as "positive SC transitions" as "crisis-transitions". This study is aimed at psychological description of SC transitions on the example of Russian athletes.

METHODS

The study has been conducted in 1992-96. The following methods were used: a) content-analysis (ladov 1987) of students-athletes written essays "My SC"; b) the interview form "SC- Analytic Model" (Stambulova 1994); c) the questionnaire form "SC transitions" (Stambulova 1995). In total 636 Russian athletes representing different sport events took part in this study.

RESULTS

1. Positive transitions and crisis-transitions were confirmed in both content-analysis of essays "My SC" and interviews. Positive transitions took place when the athlete made a relatively quick and easy adjustment to the demands of a new SC stage. It usually happened in cases when the necessary preconditions (e.g. qualities, knowledge, skills, attitudes, etc.) had been created during the previous SC stage. Crisis-transitions took place when the athlete had to mobilize special resources and a certain effort in self-improvement needed for his/her successful adaptation to the new requirements. Inability to successful adjustment created the following symptoms of crisis-transition: lowering of athlete's self-esteem; various forms of emotional discomfort; increase of sensitivity to failures and appearance of "psychological barriers"; disorientation in decision making and behavior. Besides, these symptoms were usually coordinated with stagnation/decrease in sport results.

2. Psychological content of every SC transition, including "troubles" and "supportive features" was described "by athletes' words" on the basis of the questionnaire form "SC transitions". (A) The beginning of sport specialization is characterized by: "interest to sport in general"; "misconceptional ideas about chosen sport"; "routine character of training"; "emphasis on physical and technical preparation"; "fear of the first competitions"; "appreciation of a coach"; "many friends in sport group"; "parental support". (B) The transition to a special intensive training: "set on training for results"; "imitating sport idols"; "very hard physical loads"; "possibility of first serious injuries"; "absence of reliability in competitions"; "importance of psychological preparation to competitions"; "satisfaction with relations inside a team"; "difficulties in combining sports and studies"; "first self-restrictions". (C) The transition to high-achievement and
adult sports: "great sport goals and plans"; "life subordinated to sports"; "searching for individual path in sport"; "new interest to sport theory"; "pressure of selection to main competitions"; "great importance of social recognition"; "deterioration in relations with a coach and mates". (D) The transition from amateur sports to professional sports: "need for new knowledge"; "difficulty of independent training"; "difficulty of being out of home for a long time"; "importance of social recognition". (E) The transition from the culmination to the end of SC: "anxiety about future"; "thoughts about SC termination"; "planning a new professional career"; "searching for reserves to maintain sport results at a high enough level"; "individualization of all sides of sports preparation". (F) The SC termination: "psychological fatigue"; "starting a new professional career"; "new social communications"; "family problems"; "gratitude to sports".

DISCUSSION

A Conceptual Model of SC Transition (Fig.1) is suggested for discussion.

Contradiction between demands of a new SC stage and actual level of athletes' development

Transitional Problems (= developmental tasks)

Athletes cope with problems = Athletes can not cope with problems = Crisis-transition
Positive transition (with certain symptoms)

Effects:
- growing up of sport results;
- developmental effects

Psychological assistance

way out of the crisis staying in the crisis
"payment" for not coping with the crisis

Fig. 1. A Conceptual Model of Sports Career Transition.

It demonstrates significance of preliminary preparation to SC transitions and importance of proper psychological assistance to athletes in crises-transitions.

REFERENCES