

# THE PLIGHT OF ELITE ATHLETES

BY

M. Boit, Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya

## ABSTRACT

According to the latest statistics from the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF), elite athletes have a turnover rate of 40% annually. When one considers a country like Kenya, with large proportion of elite athletes, the turnover rates is even higher. The purpose of this paper is to take a critical look at the factors which account for early retirement among top African athletes. Many athletes that rise to fame overnight soon find themselves in the centre stage of public and media attention, a role in which the majority of them are ill-prepared to undertake. Consequently, the new superstar is exposed to a culture shock which often manifests itself in drug dependency, especially alcohol, a situation which generally leads to premature retirement from competition. Upon retirement, some of the elite athletes, especially the less educated, may experience another form of culture shock, in the process of readjustment, as a result of dramatic changes from being a super star back to a lay person. Suggestions are provided on how to contain the high turnover rates among the African elite athletes and how to assist them to achieve successful readjustment upon retirement after an illustrious athletic career.

**Key words:** Elite athletes, turnover, premature retirement, adjustment problems.

*Handwritten notes in pink ink:*  
The concept of elite athletes is defined as those athletes who are highly skilled and have achieved a high level of performance in their sport. This concept is based on the idea of excellence and is used to describe those athletes who are at the top of their sport. The concept of elite athletes is also used to describe those athletes who are highly skilled and have achieved a high level of performance in their sport. This concept is based on the idea of excellence and is used to describe those athletes who are at the top of their sport.