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Is giving up good for you? Goal adjustment capacities as a mediating link between hope theory, sport enjoyment and life satisfaction

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Aligned with positive psychology, Hope Theory (Snyder, 2002, *Psychological Inquiry*, 13, 249–275) proposes that hopeful individuals achieve their goals because they are able to set goals, derive different pathways to achievement and believe they are the agents of change. Athletes with high levels of hope may therefore be driven to persevere in the pursuit of a target despite such becoming unobtainable or inappropriate and be reluctant to adjust a given objective. Goal adjustment within sport can promote positive wellbeing and failing to give up on goals which are unachievable may result in psychological distress (Nicholls et al., 2016, *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 27, 47–55). However, it may not be easy for a sporting participant to ‘give up’ (Smedema, Chan, & Phillips, 2014, *Rehabilitation Psychology*, 59, 399–406), because of ‘must win’ cultures, where giving up may be seen as weakness (Nicholls et al., 2016, *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 27, 47–55). This study investigated whether hope affected athletes’ ability to disengage from unachievable goals, and relationships between ‘giving-up’, life satisfaction and sport enjoyment. Participants were recruited voluntarily from sports clubs across Yorkshire. Following ethical approval, 233 participants (female: $n = 171$; male: $n = 61$; mean age: 42.5 ± 9.5 years) completed an on-line questionnaire, which was analysed using SPSS 21. Four inventories were used: Goal Disengagement and Reengagement Questionnaire (GDRQ), State Hope Scale (SHS), Physical Activity Enjoyment Scale Questionnaire (PACES) and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). Analysis showed high hope was positively related to low goal disengagement ($r = -.21$, $P < .001$). Furthermore, high goal disengagement correlated negatively with both sport enjoyment ($r = -.21$, $P < .001$) and life satisfaction ($r = -.24$, $P < .001$). However, high levels of hope predicted higher sport enjoyment levels ($r = .36$, $P < .001$). Results suggest that athletes with high hope find goal disengagement challenging, thus helping sports professionals and coaches to understand why some athletes find goal disengagement more difficult than others. Thus, high levels of hope may be beneficial when objectives are achievable, but problematic when goals are unobtainable. Understanding hope theory can help athletes and coaches manage goal disengagement by demonstrating that giving up in sport may not be an admission of defeat, but a facilitator for improved sport enjoyment and life satisfaction.