

For many people leaving elite sport, including footballers, the transition to a new career can be unexpectedly tough. It's common to face what's often called **retirement shock**—a sudden loss of daily structure, purpose, and identity. On top of that, some players might grapple with health issues or disabilities acquired during their playing career. This brings up an important question: *Do I have to tell my employer about my disability if I want reasonable adjustments at work?*



In this post, we'll break down what the law says, what happens in practice, and share [retraining after sport](#) practical advice on disclosure and adjustment requests. We'll also highlight useful resources like the Arsenal alumni network and the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) dedicated to supporting players during and after their careers.

Understanding the Question: Disclosure and Reasonable Adjustments

What the Rule Says

Under the Equality Act 2010, employers have a legal duty to make **reasonable adjustments** for employees who have disabilities. This means modifying workplace policies, environments, or practices to remove barriers that might prevent someone from doing their job. Crucially, your employer's duty is triggered by their knowledge of your disability.

So, from a legal standpoint, an **employer knowledge trigger** exists only if:

- You have disclosed your disability to your employer; or
- Your employer should reasonably be expected to know about it (for example, if the disability is obvious or documented in occupational health records).

If your employer does not know about your disability, they cannot be required to make adjustments for it.

What Happens in Practice

In reality, many employees worry about telling their bosses. Concerns include stigma, reduced job security, or a change in how colleagues and managers view them. For former athletes, this challenge is compounded by a shift in identity—from elite sport to a new career environment.

But without disclosure, reasonable adjustments might not be provided. This can affect your health, job performance, and career progression. Most employers want to support their staff; however, they need information to do so effectively.

Reasonable adjustments can include:

- Flexible working hours;
- Specialized equipment;
- Modifications to physical workspace;
- Changes to work patterns or job duties.

Properly communicated, adjustments often lead to better outcomes for both employee and employer.

Retirement Shock and Losing Structure: The Hidden Disability Risk

The transition out of elite sports typically involves losing daily routines that have been a foundation for years. The **retirement shock** can feel like a form of invisible disability—undermining mental well-being, self-esteem, and sense of identity.

Organisations like the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) recognize this. They offer support for mental health, retraining, and career planning to help manage this challenging transition.

Identity Shift After Elite Sport

Many ex-players describe the adjustment as an identity shock. From being known as 'the athlete' to a new professional identity can feel jarring. This psychological shift sometimes triggers anxiety, depression, or other conditions that qualify as disabilities under the Equality Act.

Career Pathways and Entry Costs

Many ex-players face barriers when entering new careers, including:

- Need for additional qualifications;
- Financial costs for retraining;
- Lack of structured career advice.

Using networks like the Arsenal Alumni Network and the PFA's educational initiatives can reduce these entry costs by offering mentorship, training grants, and career guidance.

When to Consider Disclosure

Deciding whether to disclose a disability at work is a personal choice, but here are some practical guidelines:

1. **Assess the need:** If your disability affects your work or workplace access, disclosure enables reasonable adjustments.
2. **Plan your approach:** Consider requesting a confidential conversation with HR or your line manager to discuss your needs.
3. **Document your needs:** Medical or occupational health assessments can support your request, but are not always required.
4. **Know your rights:** If your employer refuses reasonable adjustments, this may constitute discrimination under the Equality Act.

Retraining Before Retirement: Proactive Planning

One way to reduce retirement shocks and adjustment needs is retraining before career end. Early planning allows gradual skill development and minimizes sudden loss of identity and income.

The PFA offers courses and educational funds precisely for this reason, helping players to transition smoothly while maintaining health and well-being.

Support and Resources

Resource Description Link Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) Player welfare, education, mental health support, and retraining schemes. [thepfa.com](https://www.thepfa.com) Arsenal Alumni Network Networking, mentoring, and career transition support for former players. [arsenal.com/alumni](https://www.arsenal.com/alumni) Equality Advisory and Support Service (EASS) Advice on Equality Act rights, including disclosure and reasonable adjustments. [equalityadvisoryservice.com](https://www.equalityadvisoryservice.com)

Summary Checklist: What You Need to Know

- **You do NOT have to disclose a disability unless you want reasonable adjustments.**
- **Disclosure triggers your employer's duty to consider reasonable adjustments.**
- **Reasonable adjustments must be "reasonable" and practical.** It's a two-way conversation.
- **Use support networks like PFA and Arsenal Alumni for guidance and support.**
- **Plan retraining early to soften the identity and structure shock.**
- **Know your legal rights and seek advice if you feel discriminated against.**

Final Thoughts

Deciding whether to tell your employer about a disability is never just a legal question; it's a personal and sometimes emotional decision. But being informed about the law, the support available, and the practical realities

of workplace adjustments can help you make the choice that's right for you.

For footballers facing retirement, remember it's not just about ending one career—it's about starting another, often with unexpected challenges. Lean on expert advice and structured support systems like the PFA and Arsenal Alumni to create a future that works for you.