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Looking to the Future of Sport Psychology: An Introduction

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ABSTRACT

Sport psychology's evolution is reflected in a wide array of research topics spanning levels and disciplines, and the areas of health, activity, and business. Consequently, researchers are rapidly developing an increasing number of methods to remain in step with a growing number of populations touched by the domain. This report introduces Athletic Insight's 2006 special edition regarding forecasts into the future of applied sport psychology. The views provided herein are those of the journal's editor, and suited with the installment's theme, two developing sport psychology graduate students intending to be part of the domain's future, and one academic and practicing consultant.

Introduction

There are few things more intriguing to people than predictions into the future. In 1984, many contrasted George Orwell's predictions from more than 50 years earlier with their present. Since then, terms such as *big brother* have become clichés and for most the 40-hour and 5-day work week is also a thing of the past. It seems that our evolution as a species is closely tied to the computer age, where technological advancement necessitates rapid responses, and improved access to services (including academic services).

Societal advancement is also evident within sport psychology, where rapid growth is visible in both research and practical spheres. In terms of research, when the first author began his graduate training with Dr. John Salmela at Ottawa University in Canada, qualitative methods (all qualitative methods) were regarded as innovative though lacking the rigor of more conventional quantitative research (Martens, 1987). Early qualitative approaches, meaning approaches spanning only the last 20 years, were at first exemplified by semi-structured interviews, sometimes with all data being collected before analysis even began (Schinke & da Costa, 2001). Today, all sport psychology peer-reviewed journals accept quantitative and qualitative methods, and there is convincing evidence that the variety of research methods employed within academe will continue to broaden beyond present day's "conventional methods".

Moving onward to future research, if last year's special edition about cultural sport psychology is any indication, then tomorrow's investigators will be considering previously untapped populations, hopefully with methods that are meaningful and best suited to (and representative of) their targeted population. Perhaps research strategies will reflect all types of focus group research, archival data with hard to reach populations, observational data, increased (and better including more overt) use of journal data, discursive methods, cultural analyses, ethnographies, and throughout, increased community / participant involvement.

The practical aspect of sport psychology is also growing rapidly. Using amateur sport as one example, today, it is common to find national teams accompanied by applied sport psychologists during major-games tournaments. While at the 2003 Pan-American Games, the first author worked with the Canadian National Boxing Team. When one of his clients drew a boxer from Barbados, a team represented by only one boxer, he was astounded to learn that his client's opponent also transported sport psychology services to the tournament venue. Sport psychology services are becoming commonplace and better accepted among national sport governing bodies, and coaches and athletes, worldwide.

The rapid growth in applied sport psychology consulting is also reflected in the increased number of skills employed. Where earlier and well-regarded applied sport psychology manuals identified conventional mental training skills for athletes (goal setting, imagery, relaxation, focusing activation, planning), present resources (starting with peer reviewed sources) are also integrating effective counselling (see Anderson, 2000; Gutkin, 2004), resilience (Mummery, Schofield, & Perry, 2004), athlete adaptation (Schinke, et al., in press), and spirituality (Watson & Nesti, 2005), among other emerging

strategies. In addition, there is indication within applied peer reviewed contributions that the service providers of motivational strategies and the types of strategies regarded as meaningful to the client might eventually in part become a matter of culture and geography (see Kontos & Arguello, 2005; Schinke, et al., 2005).

Despite the inevitable progression of our domain in the coming years, which undoubtedly will also be reflected by the increased integration of technical advancement, it is also speculated that unforeseen challenges will also surface. A sport psychologist known to one of the authors recently shared that he was consulting from an overseas distance with a national team leading up to a high profile international competition. It was indicated that consulting resources would be made available to the team members, including athletes, coaching staff, and administrators through electronic resources. With today's technology, teleconferencing opens up a larger pool of readily available resources to clients, worldwide. As such, competent sport psychologists are undoubtedly benefiting from expansive opportunities from the largest possible pool of clientele. Consequently, potential clients are also becoming increasingly selective of who they choose to resource across regions.

Though such resources are readily available with technological developments, unforeseen challenges are countering our new capabilities. Current technology, despite its capacity to allow improved access among clients and service providers from afar, can also be limited by diminished in-person contact. Physical distance is sometimes a barrier, especially when clients covet a more personalized approach. Perhaps future technology will bridge the communication divide in ways presently unimaginable. Perhaps, on the other hand, the consequence will be a return to and emphasis of in-person consulting, though again, one can only speculate. With forecasts regarding communication, technology, and research, the first author solicited the reflections of two graduate students (below), and an active Canadian sport psychology researcher and practitioner.

David Hancock's Perspective

When Stephen Ames tapped in for par on the 18th hole to win the Cialis Western Open in July 2004, I was delighted. Not for the obvious patriotic reason (myself and Ames both being Canadian), rather, I was a student of sport psychology seeing sport psychology being implemented successfully. As such my chosen career path was supported. Ames' PGA career began with no wins in his first 165 tournaments. To help him surmount this hurdle, Ames began working with a sport psychologist, and the benefits were profound. Not only did Ames achieve his first victory, he did it in style. Ames was so sharp on the final day of the tournament that he had only one bogey in his final 18 holes, a testament to mental toughness. With the help of his sport psychologist, Ames has become a regular contender on the PGA tour today.

Success stories such as Ames' indicate that sport psychology is here to stay, and that sport psychology services will be resourced for years to come. The question is how will sport psychology develop. Two obvious areas will be contextually through paid positions within elite sports, and academically, within learning institutions. In professional team

sport, one applied context, there are several advantages an athlete (or team) may possess over others. These include physical advantages, strategic advantages, and equipment advantages. Currently in professional sport, these advantages are becoming more equalized and greater parity is being achieved across rival teams. As equalization occurs, coaches look for alternate methods to gain an advantage over others, including a mental advantage. Coaches in the National Hockey League (NHL) have increasingly sought the services of sport psychologists. In talking with an employee from one NHL team, I learned that most have one sport psychologist with them for 50-75% of their games. While this is clearly better than not having a sport psychologist at all, it is plausible that we will see increases in resourced practitioners. Presently, sport psychologists in the NHL are used for profiling potential draftees' mental toughness and to conduct team sessions, which consist mostly of group related interventions (team-building, role clarity, leadership). In the future, as sport psychology gains further acceptance, sport psychologists will undoubtedly be hired as full-time employees to enhance rapport among players, coaching, and administrative staff.

Moving to potential clients, sport officials are an oft-overlooked group in regards to sport psychology. I have been an ice hockey official for 13 years in Canada. In the past five years, I have progressed to Junior A, which is where most NHL athletes are drafted. During these years, I also began my university studies in sport psychology. Every game that I have refereed reflects a transfer of skills from what I learned in the classroom. Referees need to have excellent focus, they must manage arousal and anxiety, and they certainly must master coping skills to buffer against instances when things go wrong (and they definitely do go wrong from time to time). Consequently, I have employed and benefited from sport psychology practices during my officiating career. I am only starting to understand the stresses experienced by professional referees, starting with those in my sport. Referees certainly must be mentally focused and mentally tough. Sport psychology is integral to officiating and it is only a matter of time until sport psychologists are hired by every professional sport league to work with their referees in regards to game and life related skills.

Sport psychology will also develop within academia. I graduated with a Bachelors of Arts (Hon.) in sport psychology in 2005 from the only school in Canada to offer such a program. The inaugural graduating class was comprised of seven students. This coming year, the very same program will sift through hundreds of applicants and select 15-25. If what I am observing in regards to enrolment is any indication, the interest in sport psychology studies is growing, and fast. In order for this interest to be met, more sport psychology undergraduate programs must be created from the under-graduate level, onward. This is key because as enrolment increases, it will lead to increased (and enhanced) research in sport psychology as well as providing an increased number of opportunities for students to eventually become sport psychologists, reciprocally.

In short, there are lots of ways in which sport psychology may change. I believe that the changes that I have outlined herein (professional sport, sport officials, and academia) will lead to increased acceptance of sport psychology across sport - professional and amateur, team and individual.

Nicole Dubuc's Perspective

Looking back on the last Winter Olympics in Torino, two things stood out among the Canadian contingent from my perspective; impressive performances and the number of times athletes and broadcasters mentioned the positive influence of sport psychology. Twenty years ago, you would occasionally hear of a particular athlete working with a sport psychologist or a mental trainer (not to be confused). However, this past year at the Olympics, it seemed that regardless of what sport was being featured, the words sport psychology and mental training were mentioned. It is evident that applied sport psychology is no longer restricted to those in the realm of elite sport. Its' presence in both amateur sport and youth sport is growing at an incredible rate and will contribute to the future of both populations. In my opinion, the next hundred years will uncover the vast opportunities sport psychology will provide to coaches, athletes, and teams across levels and disciplines.

During a sport psychology conference this past spring, I had the opportunity to take part in a workshop hosted by Bruno Ouellette (2006), a sport psychology consultant with Canada's national short track speed skating team. The said team has been incredibly successful and he linked this success to their commitment to physical and mental training. Bruno is only one of numerous consultants that have recently been hired on by Canadian sport organizations to work with amateur athletes. As another example, Peter Jensen was hired on by Hockey Canada to work with their women's hockey team at the last Olympics. From my own vantage as an amateur athlete, funding can be extremely limited. Thus, in the past, very few amateurs could afford to hire a sport psychology consultant. This trend is currently changing and national sport governing bodies are hiring sport psychologists to work with their teams. Looking forward, this will create many more secure job opportunities for upcoming sport psychologists while also supporting athletes and those who help them during crucial moments in their career.

Not only do I project that sport psychology will, in time, grow in amateur sport. I also believe that its' influence in youth sport will increase, in part because many young athletes reach their peak performances at very early ages. For example, when Tara Lapinski won the gold medal at the 1998 Olympics, she was only 14 years old; two years later, Sarah Hughes was 16. For a young adolescent, and an emerging star, competing at such high levels and coping with some of the associated adversities can be quite difficult. Though many amateur sport organizations are now hiring sport psychology professionals, I believe that in the future, more sport psychologists will be trained to specialize in working with elite youth. This will allow young athletes to learn the fundamental skills in mental training (and general motivation) in order to maximize their future performances, while enabling them to cope with the adversities associated with high-performance sport.

In my opinion, the development of sport psychology, in both amateur and youth sport, will trickle down to coaches. In the past, many coaches were confused or intimidated by the role of the sport psychologist. However, more coaches are beginning to see the positive influence that results from providing their athletes with such support (see Mallett & Coté, 2006; Werthner & Trudel, 2006). These coaches seem to want to

either learn more about some mental training skills in order to help their athletes or to hire on a sport psychology consultant. A second way in which coaches might be influenced by sport psychology is by having specialized sport psychologists working with them (and through them). In many cases, as already noted by Botterill (1996) coaches experience many of the same emotions as athletes. For example, they also may become highly stressed or anxious before a competition or they might have some difficulty staying motivated. These situations, if neglected or poorly managed could indirectly hinder the athlete's performance and have very negative effects on the coach's mental health. Currently, researchers at Ottawa University are exploring and developing the concept of having a sport psychologist for coaches, which, I believe will lead to many new possibilities.

The future advancement of sport psychology will be enhanced by a rapid surge in technology. First, new tools are being designed to provide athletes and coaches with incredibly precise biofeedback (e.g., Bloom, Senecal, & Shapcott, 2006). This will allow athletes to experience more objective results with some of the mental skills they are implementing, thus, increasing their willingness to take part in some different mental training techniques. Second, Internet, more specifically emails and web-cameras, will increase sport psychology consultation with athletes from different areas of the world. Electronic resources are crucial for the amateur athletes who seldom have funding to pay traveling fees for their sport psychologist. Finally, online databases and resources will eventually bridge the gap between research and application. Online journals invite access to some of the latest research and are great tools for athletes, coaches, and other sport psychologists. It seems that, to this point, we have only skimmed the surface of some of the most interesting research findings.

Kim Dorsch's Perspective

As I read through the perspectives of the two graduate students presented above, I returned to my days as a graduate student (not so long ago) when I was equally as enthusiastic about the future of sport psychology. While I remain committed to the belief that this is one of the most exciting professions in which I could have chosen to spend my career, my experiences in both the empirical and applied avenues of the field have shown me that we still have a long way to go. Despite the fact that this may sound negative, I believe the challenges that we face will strengthen the discipline remarkably.

My opinion that we have a long way to go in the empirical avenue is a positive in that there are concepts and populations that are wide open for future research. As David mentioned previously, the official on the playing field is often overlooked in terms of sport psychology research. Similarly, Nicole suggests that youth athletes and coaches may also benefit from knowledge gained in our discipline. To further this knowledge base on one front at least, the Coaching Association of Canada has recently developed a consultation group that will enhance coaching research, development, participation, and performance. Sport officiating should take note of these developments and follow similar avenues.

My optimism regarding the empirical avenue is somewhat dampened because it appears to me that recent years have seen the focus of conference presentations and journals shift (perhaps too much) from sport psychology to a health and/or exercise slant. Funding opportunities for research may be somewhat responsible for this shift. Until very recently, in Canada in particular, it did not appear that sport-specific research was given a very high priority by the major funding bodies. I am heartened by recent Sport Canada initiatives to partner with at least two national funding agencies. Their intent, I believe, is to enhance research exploring the participation and performance of individuals within a sporting context. My enthusiasm is also enhanced by journals such as *Athletic Insight* whose focus is on linking the empirical to the practical.

From an applied perspective, I agree with the viewpoints of my co-authors that sport psychologists are increasingly making their presence known at major games in terms of numbers and through the media's acknowledgement of their contributions. These pathways not only highlight the importance of sport psychology techniques and of individuals trained to provide instruction in this area, but will in future undoubtedly insure the growth of the field as word spreads. Indeed as a board member of the Sport Medicine and Science Council of Saskatchewan, I have seen requests from all levels of sport for mental training consultations increase to equal those for exercise physiology/exercise prescription consultations.

Consequently, there is no doubt in my mind that athletes and coaches see the value in learning performance enhancing skills and techniques. I still feel to some degree though that we are combating the "band-aid" approach. A lot of coaches and athletes may not perceive mental training skills as another tool to use, but see it as a skill to learn only when all other physiological and technological skills have been exhausted; only when something is wrong. Despite the advances made in the sport psychology literature and its clear empirical link to performance, this author has witnessed first hand the lack of support by provincial and national sporting organizations for sport psychology consultations.

One other, and definitely not the only other, applied challenge that I see our discipline will have to face in the future is the age-old discussion of the regulation of who should provide these services and what knowledge they need to have. In other words, the ever present Kinesiology (or related faculties) versus Psychology debate. I am not convinced that we have made many strides toward defining these qualifications and identifying standards for practice. It would be an interesting exercise to compare the academic backgrounds of individuals who publish sport psychology related research with the backgrounds of individuals who practice in sport psychology related fields. Just where do we glean the knowledge for our professional practice - the sport psychology literature, the clinical psychology literature, a mixture of both, or even from other related fields? As stated earlier, we are beginning to see papers published that discuss interventions and best practices. I hope this trend continues.

Overall, while I feel there are challenges and frustrations to be faced in the future of sport psychology, the extent of the possibilities far outweighs the obstacles. I look forward to being along for the ride.

Concluding Remarks

The present report reflects the views of four authors, two sport psychology professors, who are also active practitioners, and two graduate students. It seems that common across their perspectives, there is a belief in the increased viability of sport psychology practice, especially among elite sport populations. That said, the scope of sport psychology practice transcends sport entirely, and its influence can be found within the domains of medicine, business, and exercise, among other fields. None of these additional aspects are addressed within the present manuscript. The ongoing (and what seems to be boundless) unfolding trajectories of applied sport psychology practice provide much reason for optimism. Informing future practical developments, the authors all predict an ever-widening horizon of potential investigations with previously untouched populations. To forecast the future of our domain in its entirety will provide the reader with only a small glimpse of what is to come.

This Installment

Within this installment, the editor invited five groups of authors and their colleagues to contribute manuscripts. Each manuscript reflects the interests of its author, and so, another series of perspectives regarding other populations or specific skills. The first submission by Jean Cote (Queens University) and Jessica Fraser-Thomas (York University) outline practical implications, and discusses future studies in youth sport research. Within, they consider three potential benefits of youth sport participation (a) physical health, (b) psycho-social development, and (c) motor skills acquisition within a holistic approach. Daniel Gould (University of Michigan) and his colleagues have also contributed an article about youth sport, though from the vantage of community coaches. Through a survey, they report high school coaches' opinions about life skill issues in youth and their development. Next, Len Zaichkowsky (Boston University) shares the challenges currently facing the field, and offers his thoughts on how to deal with current problems in the years to come. Following, Sandra E. Short (University of North Dakota) and Eva V. Monsma (University of South Carolina) present evidence supporting the need for the evolution of imagery research. Their focus is on the sport imagery research that has been grounded in Paivio's (1985) framework and Martin, Moritz, and Hall's (1999) applied model of imagery use. The invited contributions culminate with Urban Johnson (Halmstad University), who analyzed answers from Swedish sport psychology students from two different time intervals (1995, 2005) regarding how they described the current and future (10 year ahead) development of sport psychology. Johnson's study is timely, and indicates where the future of sport psychology is moving, from most importantly, the vibrant aspiring professionals who will take it there.

The reader will also find two additional contributions within the present special edition. *Athletic Insight* encourages academic discourse regarding applied sport

psychology research and practice among solution oriented contributors. Earlier this year, Andrew Lane and Shaun Galloway (Wolverhampton University) asked whether *Athletic Insight* would accept (for the first time) responses to a previously posted article. These contributions were welcomed with one stipulation: that they be framed in a manner that invites and encourages additional ongoing dialogue among our authors and readers. As you will see, their views are informative and profound regarding consultation within combative sport.

In closing, as you will see, the 2006 special edition of *Athletic Insight* integrates the views of exemplary applied sport psychology authors. Their views epitomize future-mindedness, and they are intended to provide the reader with only a glimpse of our domain's promising future.

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