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Contents

2 Editorial
Iain Greenlees

4 Editorial
Paul McCarthy

Original Articles

6 Culture change in elite sport performance teams: An important and unique construct
Andrew Cruickshank & Dave Collins

22 The influence of stress and emotions on association football referees' decision-making
Richard Neil, Paul Bayson, Sheldon Hanton & Kylie Wilson

Applied and Pedagogical Reflections

42 Exploring the value of reflective practice interventions within applied sport psychology: Case studies with an individual athlete and a team
Richard Neil, Brendan Cropley, Kylie Wilson & Andrea Faul

57 Group-based reflective practice in sport psychology: Experiences of two trainee sport and exercise scientists
Emma Huntley & Nichola Kentzer

69 Dodging the bullets: A psychologist's perspective in professional rugby league
Keith Earle & Fiona Earle

74 Using feature films in the teaching and assessment of sport psychology
Moira Lafferty

It's good to talk: Sport and Exercise Psychology conversations

83 Introduction
Iain Greenlees

85 Providing support while overseas
Jo Baty, Stewart Cotterill & Rebecca Symes

Miscellaneous

93 One-on-One with...Sandy Wolfson
Sandy Wolfson

Student Members (Editor: Matthew Slater)

95 Preamble
Matthew Slater

95 White coat syndrome: Learning from mistakes in laboratory research
Dr Martin J. Turner

98 Hindsight is a wonderful thing!
A reflection on PhD field research
Andrew Evans

Book Review

103 Mental Toughness: The Mindset Behind Sporting Achievement
By Michael Sheard
Reviewed by Phil Birch

Conference Review

105 4th Annual Meeting of the Expertise and Skill Acquisition Network
Phil Kearney, David Marchant & Paul Ellison

109 Officers and Committee Members
110 Notes for Contributors
Editorial
Iain Greenlees

AND SO, my time in the Editor’s chair is now complete. It has been my pleasure to perform this role for the past three years (six issues) and to oversee the continued growth of the Sport and Exercise Psychology Review. The last three years have seen the Division as a whole continue to mature and to develop its systems and activities and I hope that the SEPR has kept pace with these developments. It has certainly been noticeable to me that the quantity and overall quality of submissions sent to me has increased over the last three years, as has the scope and aims of the articles that are submitted. In my time as Editor, I have tried to find ways in which the SEPR can provide an interesting read and a voice for all members of the Division rather than merely those with an interest in academically-focused articles. My own personal feeling is that there are too few forums and outlets for practitioners, trainees and teachers to disseminate their activities and experiences and too few forums and outlets where people can read about these activities. Whatever developments the SEPR experiences in the coming years I hope that it will always seek to provide as broad a range of opportunities to disseminate as it currently does. We are a broad church and as such we should provide a publication for all rather than pursue one line of development at the expense of others.

In line with this desire, I hope that the current issue showcases some of the ways in which readers can disseminate their work and ideas. As ever, we start with a series of ‘traditional’ research-based articles. In the first, Andrew Cruikshank and Dave Collins explore the concept of change management in sport and sport psychology consulting and outline their ideas and initial research findings concerning this topic. In the second, Rich Neil and colleagues examine the role of stress and emotions in referees’ decision making. These articles are followed by a series of reflective practice articles that demonstrate superbly the range of interests and experiences our readers have. In terms of ‘applied practice’, Rich Neil (again!), Brendan Copley, Kylie Wilson and Andrea Faull provide a reflection on the use of reflection in applied practice, Keith Earle reflects on the lessons he has learnt in his work within professional rugby league clubs and Emma Huntley and Nichola Kentzner reflect on their experiences as trainee sport and exercise scientists under the BASES accreditation scheme participating in group reflective practice. Finally, Moira Lafferty provides a reflection on her use of feature films in the classroom and the effects that this can have on learning and student engagement. I think there is something for everyone in here!

The third section of this issue of the SEPR represents a first attempt at a form of contribution that I hope will lead to a series of similar submissions from our readers. ‘It’s good to talk…’ has been developed in response to suggestions that many elements of what we do as practitioners are not readily amenable to presenting in traditional formats and that, as a result, much of the tacit knowledge that has been developed by practitioners is never shared with others. To this end, we hope that presenting a conversation between practitioners will provide some useful information and reflections to the readers but may also stimulate groups of readers to ‘manufacture’ and share their own conversations with the SEPR. In the next two sections we have a one-on-one with Sandy Wolfson and we have contributions from students. Again, I hope that the reflections provided by the two students stimulate other students to contribute their reflections.
In all, I hope that this issue provides something for everyone. All that remains for me to do before hanging up my Editor’s cap and handing back my phone-hacking equipment is to thank everyone on the Editorial Team for their support (particularly Marc Jones and David Lavallee for their advice throughout and for Matt Slater for co-ordinating the student section so effectively), to thank everyone in the British Psychological Society’s publications team (particularly Martin Reeves for his patience with me), to thank all the contributors for their submissions and reviews, and to wish Paul McCarthy (the new Editor) all the best for the next three years.

Enjoy…

Iain Greenlees
I AM DELIGHTED to begin my tenure as editor of the Sport & Exercise Psychology Review. Since its inception in 2005, the SEPR has remained truthful to its origins promulgating all aspects of sport and exercise psychology. Unlike some of our colleagues working in academia, sport and exercise psychologists constantly straddle the theory to practice continuum. This is praise rather than criticism of our field because it maintains our currency and value in sport and exercise settings. We are in the laboratory but more importantly we are out in the field building a reliable foundation for our profession. And the SEPR offers an image of this endeavour through original research articles, applied and pedagogical reflections and various intriguing snippets from student members and book reviews.

Over the next three years, I wish to continue the excellent work of past editors: David Lavallee, Marc Jones and Iain Greenlees. My intention is to ensure that the SEPR remains a scholarly, educative and attractive journal for authors and readers. I aim to maintain the punctual review process (from submission to the first editorial decision to the author) below eight weeks whilst maintaining a careful and helpful review process. I trust that this short turnaround time will continue to attract more authors to the SEPR. I value geographical diversity and continue to welcome submissions from our colleagues worldwide. Over the past eight years, I have thoroughly enjoyed reading articles from our colleagues overseas and I hope that they will continue to recognise the SEPR as a worthy outlet for their research, teaching and professional practice. The SEPR welcomes different research methods that are relevant to the topic and rigorously employed. Such methods might include experiments, surveys, interviews, meta-analyses, theoretical models, single-case designs and case studies. The SEPR also publishes special issues and suggestions for topics should be sent to the Editor.

I am most grateful to those who nominated me for this role and I shall work diligently to repay their trust in me. I thank Iain Greenlees for his remarkable editorial work over the past three years. He has left his inimitable footprint on the SEPR and the current issue reflects his fine work with an intriguing blend of edifying articles for the reader. He has also offered much reassurance and guidance over the past few months for which I am most grateful. As the formidable task of editorship lies before me, I am reminded of the last lines of Samuel Beckett’s The Unnamable ‘...you must go on, I can’t go on, I’ll go on’.

Paul McCarthy
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Culture change in elite sport performance teams: Outlining an important and unique construct

Andrew Cruickshank & Dave Collins

Reflecting culture’s governance of pan-individual perception, behaviour, and performance (Krane & Baird, 2005), recent work has begun to explore how high performing cultures can be created and sustained in elite sport performance teams (cf. Collins & Cruickshank, 2012; Cruickshank & Collins 2012a; Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b; Cruickshank, Collins & Minten, 2013a; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; Lee, Shaw & Chesterfield, 2009). However, as this culture change process is still establishing itself in academic and professional spheres, there is a need to clarify and underline the construct’s explicit focus, nature, and value. Accordingly, this paper provides a synopsis of elite team culture change’s unique conceptual underpinnings, including its demarcation from current constructs in group dynamics (cf. Beauchamp & Eys, 2008) and organisational sport psychology (cf. Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009), before also summarising the key theoretical and applied implications to emerge from its study to date. Finally, to stimulate the continued and optimal development of research and practice in this bespoke area, some notable future challenges are also identified.

Keywords: Context; dark side leadership; expertise; power; success culture; manager turnover.

As sport psychologists seek to enhance their effectiveness in elite team environments, recent literature has provided impetus for an expansion of knowledge in the optimisation of pan-individual and pan-group performance; that is, in the organisational structures and systems surrounding performers (cf. Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009). As the principal elite team ‘product’ (i.e. sporting performance) is delivered via multi-/inter-disciplinary support systems against wider organisational contexts (e.g. strategic/policy/administrative branches), such a holistic approach is theoretically and practically intriguing. Concomitantly, in recognising that performers and their support staff interact with each other to a far greater extent than with strategic/policy/administrative figures, another line of study has refocused this widened lens to explore pan-individual and pan-group factors but within the specific boundaries of the performance department (i.e. comprising team management, support staff, and performers). Based on the perceptions of elite team managers (cf. Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; League Managers Association, 2012; Lee, Shaw & Chesterfield, 2009) and its pertinence for applied sport psychologists – who more commonly support performance teams rather than off-field organisations – this strand has more specifically moved to examine how the culture of the performance department (or a departmental subculture if adopting the holistic organisation perspective) can be actively optimised (cf. Cruickshank & Collins, 2012a; Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b; Cruickshank,
However, as this culture change process is still a relatively unknown quantity, there is a need to clarify the construct's explicit focus and nature, outline acquired understanding to date, and identify the challenges which face continued academic and professional development in this area; especially if colleagues are to be able to fully exploit the emerging literature. Before engaging in such discussion, however, it is useful to further define the academic and applied contexts in which this article is located. Regarding the former, sport psychology has a (relatively) long and established history of team-performance enquiry, resulting in a significant knowledge base on the process (e.g. leadership, role clarity) and outcome (e.g. cohesion, collective efficacy) markers of peak group performance (cf. Beauchamp & Eys, 2008). However, while providing important insights for researchers and practitioners, Fletcher and Wagstaff (2009) recently proposed that consultants’ potential to optimise pan-individual and pan-group performance remained largely untapped. Specifically, reflecting sport psychology’s historical ‘bottom-up’ progression from individual performer-level study against sport management’s ‘top-down’ development from policy/administration-level study, they suggested that the extensive impact which organisational and cultural issues have on elite team performance had, at the time of their publication, been relatively untouched. After focusing upon the discrete emergence of organisational factors in previous enquiry, Wagstaff and colleagues have since led the generation of literature focused on holistic sports organisation functioning (e.g. Wagstaff, Fletcher & Hanton, 2011; Wagstaff, Fletcher & Hanton, 2012; Wagstaff, Hanton & Fletcher, 2013). Presently, however, minimal inroads have been made into the culture element of the sport psychology-sport management ‘twilight zone’ (Fletcher & Wagstaff, p.428), especially the decisive culture (or subculture) which envelopes the elite sports team performance department. As such, widespread awareness of culture change’s unique conceptual underpinnings at any level of elite sports team study (i.e. holistic organisation- or performance department-level) has still to arrive.

Regarding the applied context, as shaped by pressure from team financiers (e.g. UK Sport in Olympic sport and oligarch owners in professional sport), extreme media scrutiny, and other external stakeholder influence (shareholders, directors, fans, player agents), the pressure on team managers to deliver instant and unfaltering success is increasingly severe. Exemplifying this point, there is now widespread academic (Bruinshoofd & ter Weel, 2003; Mielke, 2007), professional (League Managers Association, 2010) and media (Zinser, 2008) recognition of the fight that some managers face to simply survive beyond the first year of their contract, let alone address the task of building an enduring, success-facilitating culture. Recognising that psychology practitioners are being utilised more often by elite team managers (Timson, 2006), expertise on negotiating this ‘bedding in’ period while delivering changes which will rapidly support consistent high performance is, therefore, a high priority for sport psychology. Indeed, reflecting growing market demand, applied practitioners are now explicitly advertising their skills in culture change. Acknowledging the lack of empirical literature on the topic (as described above) and issues over direct and uncritical knowledge transfer from other

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2 Please note that the term elite team culture change refers here and throughout this article to culture change conducted within the specific boundaries of the performance team department and not the whole elite sport organisation.

3 We write ‘organisational’ although we are unsure of the extent to which some identified factors were organisational in nature. For example, positive coach-athlete relationships, a coach’s ability to deal with crises, and general social support were all used to convey the emergence of ‘organisational’ factors in prior elite team enquiry.
fields, such as organisational change management/culture change (cf., Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b; Cruickshank et al., 2013a), the extent to which this practice is evidence-based is unclear. Nonetheless, for the purposes of our point, the elucidation and refinement of performance team-level culture change expertise is quickly establishing itself as a pursuit of particular conceptual and applied significance (Collins & Cruickshank, 2012; Cruickshank & Collins, 2012a; Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b; Cruickshank et al., 2013a; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; Hansen & Henriksen, 2011; Lee, Shaw & Chesterfield, 2009).

Having outlined the theoretical and practical utility of elite team culture change knowledge, and also the pressing need for its acquisition (as evidenced by the disturbingly short life expectancies of elite team managers: cf. League Managers Association, 2010; Zinser, 2008), we now turn to the explicit purposes of this paper. Acknowledging that detailed introduction to the elite team culture change topic has already taken place (cf. Cruickshank & Collins, 2012a; Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b; Cruickshank et al., 2013a; Cruickshank, Collins & Minten, 2013b), this synopsis consequently aims to: (a) further clarify and reinforce culture change’s unique conceptual foundations (and, therefore, demarcation from current bodies of knowledge); (b) identify some initial lessons for those seeking to support the creation of performance-optimising cultures in elite teams; and (c) highlight some future challenges for research and practice. By further illuminating the precise focus, nature, and application of elite team culture change, we hope to provide extra stimulation for construct-specific study, practice, and open healthy debate.

**Elite team culture change: Clarifying and reinforcing conceptual underpinnings**

In order to clarify and reinforce the distinctive conceptual underpinnings of elite team culture change, two fundamental questions are useful: Precisely what is elite team culture change? And precisely what is it not?

As with any novel construct, elucidating its defining features and key points of demarcation from previous knowledge is a valuable approach for generating a shared understanding of the topic’s referents.

**Elite team culture change: What it is**

To précis the definition offered by Cruickshank and Collins (2012a), elite team culture change is the management-led establishment of shared and group-regulated values, perceptions, and behaviours across the performance department which facilitate enduring high performance. As a crucial addendum, this process is also context-dependent, context-shaped and context-specific (cf. Collins & Cruickshank, 2012). Recognising that the individual elements of the definition (i.e. management-led; shared and group-regulated values, perceptions, and behaviours; performance department, enduring high performance) are not inherently perplexing (at least on face value⁴), we therefore focus on clarifying and reinforcing these critical contextual factors.

**Elite team culture change as a context-dependent process.** As culture change focuses on optimising pan-individual values, perceptions, and behaviours, initial success has been suggested to be dependent upon stakeholders’ perceived need for change (Collins & Cruickshank, 2012). Expressly, as the activity requires people to change, cumulative or key stakeholder agreement (e.g. socially powerful players: Rajo, 1986) will likely be required if the manager is to avoid becoming an instant lone voice (for an excellent, albeit dramatised, applied example of

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⁴ We direct the reader to Cruickshank et al. (2013b) for discussion on the need for a pragmatic treatment of the culture change construct if optimal theoretical and applied advances are to be made in this area.
failing to gain such support, see The Damned United, the film which traces Brian Clough’s infamous 44-day tenure at Leeds United Football Club. A few other, more recent exemplars may occur to the sport cognoscenti reading this paper!). Of course, recognising that more and more managers are being requested to deliver instant high performance and/or results from appointment, such shared expectations with performers and staff may be ‘naturally’ activated by previous mixed/poor results and the manager turnover process itself. Conversely, however, such unspoken understanding does not always prevail: For example, when the previous manager’s stock is still high amongst players and staff (cf. Ritter & Lord, 2007; The Damned United). Nonetheless, the point is: if a dysfunctional or suboptimal culture within the performance department is to be rapidly optimised, change will be dependent upon group members’ acceptance that the old culture (‘the way we do things around here’: Schroeder, 2010) is either no longer engaging and/or functional for goal attainment, or that a new culture is more appealing and/or rewarding. Accordingly, the incoming manager’s successful negotiation of this apparent ‘one-shot’ challenge may be crucial in determining the likelihood of long-term team success and personal job survival.

Elite team culture change as a context-shaped process. As suggested above, even if change is considered necessary by the majority, culture change will rarely be a smooth and uncontested process. Indeed, as many contemporary elite team performers earn more than the manager and support staff, are idolised by fans, and are the focus of significant media attention (sometimes self-generated), careful consideration of how new systems, structures, and processes will be interpreted by these powerful individuals appears vital (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012a). Just ‘playing the power card’ (‘I’m the manager, I say we do it/play/act THIS way’) is unlikely to do much else than set up a self-protecting backlash and surely underperformance. Additionally, reflecting the numerous and wide-ranging disciplines which now aid performance delivery, similar careful engagement with support staffing – who may often hold conflicting opinion on best courses of action (cf. Collins et al., 1999; Reid, Stewart & Thorne, 2004) – is also important. While not directly accountable for performance, the perceptions and influence of key external stakeholders must further be recognised; namely: (a) the Board, for their control of resources and ultimate decision making power; (b) the fans, for their role in generating financial and psycho-social capital; and (c) the media, for their role in mediating (or even sometimes shaping) the perceptions of the Board, fans, public, performers, and staff (cf. Cruickshank & Collins, 2012a). In sum, paired with the weighted significance of performance outcome (i.e. match/event results) by all parties, elite team culture change is undertaken in a socially complex, power-ridden, pressurised, and unpredictable environment. Of course, this does not suggest that the manager should always prioritise and meet the needs of these stakeholder groups: Indeed, reflecting their bespoke agendas, achieving this outcome comprehensively is arguably impossible. However, what is suggested is that awareness of each group’s likely reaction to events within the change process may be critical in generating initial programme momentum and, of equal importance, keeping it continually on course.

Elite team culture change as a context-specific process. As implied above, once culture change has been successfully initiated (i.e. agreement on change achieved and/or resistance not overt), significant skill is required in establishing and sustaining the manager’s programme. Recognising that the team’s history, traditions, financial position, fan-base, and current competitive context will all shape and constrain the manager’s scope for action and impact, effective and efficient culture change, therefore, requires
the ability to not only understand what systems, structures, and processes can optimise performance, but also to decide which ones to apply, modify, or terminate, when to do so and why one option is better than another: In short, context-specific expertise.

Indeed, reflecting the dynamic nature of applied processes in real world and real time scenarios (e.g. coaching: Abraham & Collins, 2011; support science: Martindale & Collins, 2007) culture change is also a test of professional judgement and decision making. Take, for example, a manager faced with initial resistance from socially powerful performers: making the right choice between coaxing them toward adherence, selecting and supporting less experienced performers, or recruiting new performers who epitomise the intended culture (or some permutation of all three) could significantly shape long-term achievement (or a quick-fire sacking). Similarly, if instant success is delivered (i.e. an opening sequence of wins), should the manager’s interaction with the media seek to raise expectations amongst fans and the Board in order to acquire more resources? Or downplay the occurrence to buffer the impact of inevitable future mixed results? In both cases, an array of factors will influence the choice made (e.g. short-term needs, intermediate- and long-term goals, who the decision impacts, when optimal impact can be conferred, etc.). Notably, as the correctness of such decision-making is never instantly accessible, the scale of this challenge is escalated further. As such, elite team culture change cannot be facilitated via generic prescription as choices and their outcomes will rarely, if ever, be black and white.

Elite team culture change: What it’s not
Having clarified the context-related underpinnings of elite team culture change, including the need to manage a variety of power- and politically-governed relationships, we hope that we have further illuminated the construct’s precise nature and focus. As outlined in the introduction, to further reinforce the activity’s conceptual uniqueness, we now turn to consider why current sport psychology knowledge can neither comprehensively account for, nor effectively advise on the process. Reflecting the historical and contemporary pursuits of (elite) team researchers noted earlier, we focus explicitly on the delineation from current constructs in group dynamics and organisational sport psychology.

Demarcating elite team culture change from group dynamics and organisational sport psychology. As highlighted in the introduction, sport psychology has devoted significant resource into understanding the factors and conditions which shape team performance. Historically studied under the umbrella of group or team dynamics, Beauchamp and Eys (2008) provided a valuable overview of the field’s pertinent contemporary constructs, covering the self within groups (e.g. emotion-related abilities; intra-group dynamics and personality processes), leadership (e.g. transformational leadership, coach-athlete relationships), group environment (e.g. role perceptions, cohesion) and motivation (e.g. optimal achievement goals; self-determined motivation; collective efficacy). Reflecting the breadth and depth of work in these four areas, it is beyond the scope of this article to examine the relevance and utility of each for culture change purposes. Importantly, however, some generic limitations of this knowledge base instantly render the applicability of most work for elite team culture change purposes inadequate. Specifically, as research has tended to offer descriptive accounts (normally via outcome-correlation work), focus on non-elite samples, and overlook application to support staff, the ecological validity of most knowledge is, therefore, questionable (cf. Cruickshank & Collins, 2012a).

Nonetheless, to avoid being unfairly flippant, especially in cases where these features have been addressed, we will now convey how even more fundamental issues challenge the utility of current group dynamics under-
standing for assisting with elite team culture change study and practice. Reflecting their reported influence on perception and behaviour (Rowold, 2006; Windsor, Barker & McCarthy, 2011) and face valid alignment with the culture change task, we focus explicitly on transformational leadership and team building. Additionally, as it represents the other major strand of contemporary elite team enquiry, we then consider elite team culture change’s demarcation from organisational sport psychology. Given prior, detailed treatment of these issues (cf. Collins & Cruickshank, 2012; Cruickshank & Collins, 2012a; Cruickshank et al., 2013a), we provide a synopsis of the main limitations.

**Demarcating elite team culture change from transformational leadership.** Supported by inclusion in Beauchamp and Eys (2008) and its establishment in peer-review literature (Arthur et al., 2011; Callow et al., 2009; Gordon, 2007; Rowold, 2006; Vallée & Bloom, 2005), transformational leadership is a ‘hot topic’ in group dynamics. Reflecting culture change’s status as a manager-led activity, this leadership approach also appears at first sight to strike notable accord with the focus and nature of the culture change process. Indeed, reflecting the theory’s tenet that transformational leaders’ support the actualisation of individual potential to the benefit of the team, its value for culture change purposes is certainly face valid. However, while work continues to support the prevalence and value of a transformational behaviour set for team leaders, such knowledge is ultimately limited in its ability to account for the optimisation of culture.

Specifically, beyond the major shortcoming that no research has been conducted in elite adult sports teams and focused on the creation of shared values/beliefs (as far as we are aware), research which centres on leader behaviour alone cannot account for the social construction and negotiation of culture (Shteynberg, 2010). Furthermore, transformational leadership’s elucidation of a general behavioural repertoire for application in general situations with general levels of performers (e.g. elite versus non-elite) would acutely oversimplify the context-dependent, -shaped and -specific nature of elite team culture change described above. Accordingly, studies offering implications such as ‘leader behaviors which emphasise the importance of team work and group goals may not be as effective for narcissists as they are for low narcissists’ (Arthur et al., 2011, p.15) provide little insight for the day-to-day, minute-to-minute regulation of a high performing culture. While recent research has begun to explore moderators of leadership effectiveness (e.g. athlete narcissism: Arthur et al.), it, therefore, is difficult to see how this approach can offer sensitivity to the incessant, ‘to and fro’, complex system nature of social interaction.

Of equal concern, and recognising the vast amount of time which elite sport performance team managers are not overtly present in the support staff/performer group, these leaders’ ability to influence and shape social encounters is, perhaps, significantly lower than many leadership theories assume. Indeed, reflecting the time which team members spend in each others’ company on and off the field, socially powerful individuals such as team captains arguably possess greater scope for social orchestration than the manager. Interestingly, Kellet (1999) previously reported on how professional Australian Football League coaches’ preferred to be portrayed as facilitators and liberators rather than ‘leaders’. Additionally, evidence is also growing that transformational leadership does not encompass the full behavioural range required by the leaders of elite teams, such as the need for ‘dark side’ leadership traits (e.g. dominance, Machiavellianism: Fletcher & Arnold, 2011, Hogan & Hogan, 2001) and micropolitical abilities (e.g. conscious manipulation of others: Jones, Armour & Potrac, 2004; Potrac & Jones, 2009). Simply put, adopting a leadership focus to the study and practice of a socially constructed phenomenon such as culture change is conceptually insufficient for the apparent contexts and complexities.
Demarcating elite team culture change from team building. Arguably the biggest team performance factor to emerge in the sport psychology literature to date has been cohesion. Relating to the ‘tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and/or for the satisfaction of member affective needs’ (Carron, Brawley & Widmeyer, 1998, p. 213), the construct also appears to overlap with the intentions of culture change (i.e. the generation of shared knowledge which aids enduring behavioural and performance patterns). However, crucial conceptual differences between culture and cohesion render the latter’s efficacy as a parallel construct particularly limited. Most significantly, while cohesion is ‘a product of the [group] member’s selective processing and personal integration of group-related information’ (Heuzé et al., 2006, p.203), culture ‘encourage[s] common perceptions within a group . . . so that even new group members can acquire common perspectives without the level of group involvement and history possessed by senior peers’ (Paskevich et al., 1999, p.211). In short, culture facilitates cohesion and can, therefore, not be considered analogous (Hardy & Crace, 1997).

Indeed, awareness that culture is a process located within ‘deeper-level’ processing (i.e. individual values and beliefs) has been implicitly recognised in sport psychology for some time. Expressly, Hardy and Crace reported in 1997 that successful team building (the process by which cohesion is fostered: Bloom, Stevens & Wickwire, 2003) is shaped by activities’ alignment with underlying team culture; a point which has been further reinforced by more recent literature (cf., Holt & Dunn, 2006; Weinberg & McDermott, 2002). Exemplifying this assertion, a coach interviewed by Bloom et al. identified that ‘sometimes you’ve got to… take a detractor… out of the equation in order for the team to become… more cohesive. That sometimes is the key to whether you’re going to have success with it or not’ (p.136). In this instance, effective analogy can be drawn to the principles of performer-level cognitive-behavioural consultancy whereby the most enduring change is often delivered through a reformulation of deeper beliefs (culture equivalent) rather than more surface-level cognitions (cohesion equivalent) (e.g. Neenan & Dryden, 2011). Accordingly, culture and culture change are, therefore, conceptually distinct from cohesion and team building.

Ensuring that our position remains practically relevant, final support for this assertion comes from work which shows that cohesion and performance are positively related (Carron, Bray & Eys, 2002), with performance influencing cohesion to a greater extent than the reverse (Grieve, Whelan & Meyers, 2000). As such, focusing on an outcome (i.e. cohesion) which is so susceptible to results is of limited value to the elite team manager and their quest to deliver enduring high performance. Moreover, while a team may be cohesive, this does not necessarily mean that they engage in performance-optimising behaviour (e.g. when players unite against a manager… unless s/he is a bad manager!).

Demarcating elite team culture change from organisational sport psychology. Having demarcated elite team culture change from the most pertinent constructs in group dynamics, we now turn to distinguish the construct from the recent upsurge of organisational sport psychology literature. Recognising that inception of this latter line of enquiry has provided a watershed moment in elite team research and practice, it is important to reinforce how elite team culture change is both related to, yet conceptually distinct from this field. To facilitate this section, we return to the ‘twilight zone’ discussed in the introduction (cf. Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009).

Based upon their evaluation of organisational psychology’s emergence in earlier sport psychology research, Fletcher and Wagstaff (2009) proposed that organisational service delivery should focus on four distinct yet interdependent levels. Expressly, in order of their cascading influence on
organisational functioning and performance, these are the: organisational level (e.g. overarching policies and strategies; socio-political and economic alignment), inter-group level (e.g. pan-group dynamics and their alignment with organisational goals), intra-group level (e.g. effective and unified sub-groups such as administrative and support teams), and individual level (e.g. individual-level role clarity and support).

Importantly, a key caveat of this perspective is that consultancy is isomorphic in that intervention is aimed at impacting and permeating all levels of the schema. Fletcher and Wagstaff consequently conclude:

To change a sport organisation, consultants will need to target the beliefs and behaviour of individuals who operate at all layers of the organisation. While the role and responsibilities of the chief executive officer will be different to a head coach, which will in turn differ from the team captain, all members of the sport organisation will have an impact on its functioning and effectiveness.

As we hope to have conveyed throughout this article, elite team culture change is not focused on changing a whole sport organisation; to the contrary, elite team culture change is focused on changing a critical and distinct part of the sport organisation; a change which may then impact on the others. To reinforce this point, Figure 1 demonstrates the explicit focus (line arrow) and permeation of elite team culture change (block arrows) according to Fletcher and Wagstaff’s organisational service delivery theory. Nonetheless, accepting that all members of an organisation influence its overall functioning, and optimally coherent systems will be established and sustained through intervention which addresses and pervades all four levels, why do we need performance department-level culture change expertise?5

First, while Fletcher and Wagstaff (2009) rightly point to the co-dependence of all facets of elite sport organisations, the performance department is a discrete and autonomous system in its own right. Indeed, reflecting the interlocked yet distinct goals, roles, and functional relationships of performance and strategic/policy/administrative departments (as governed by a focus on either sports or strategic/policy/administrative performance), there is often a clear structural divide between these two elements in elite sport organisational charts (e.g. Gilmore & Gilson, 2007); this demarcation is particularly apparent in Olympic sports, where there are usually few points of overlap between the World Class elements of the performance system and the NGB itself. Further recognising that the members of the performance department (i.e. team management, support staff, performers) often operate in geographically separate sites (most notably in distributed/non-centralised Olympic sports) and have minimal interaction with strategic/policy/administrative staff (especially performers), the utility of focusing on this specific, bounded group is clear. To further reinforce culture change’s demarcation from organisational service delivery, it is also crucial to recognise that success of the whole organisation is invariably shaped by that of the ‘on-field’ team (Benkraiem, Louhichi & Marques, 2009); even, arguably, in cases of oligarch ownership. Indeed, while the financial resource generated by the business can shape on-field success (Guzmán, 2006; Smith & Stewart, 2010), current elite sport organisations evolved around the elite sports team, rarely the reverse.

Second, although Fletcher and Wagstaff (2009) promote engagement in isomorphic support across all levels of elite sport organisations, presumably based upon an assumption that the principles and content of sport psychology are largely applicable to organisational spheres (cf. Fletcher, 2010), sport psychologists are rarely afforded access or requested to support the upper echelon of elite sport organisations (a point which Fletcher and Wagstaff themselves effectively

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5 For supplementary considerations, please see Cruickshank et al. (2013b).
Figure 1: The focus (line arrow) and permeation (block arrows) of elite team culture change according to Fletcher and Wagstaff’s (2009) organisation service delivery theory: clear block arrows indicate the construct’s cascading impact; shaded block arrows indicate the potential for reverberation throughout the whole organisation (as governed by attainment of consistent high performance and associated objective on-field success).

highlight). As such, pairing these authors’ lack of guidance on how this barrier may be overcome with the performance department’s bespoke contexts it therefore seems prudent for sport psychology to continue to develop knowledge which is practically meaningful to both current recipients (i.e. elite team managers) and providers (i.e. sport psychologists) of sport psychology expertise.

Finally, while Wagstaff, Fletcher and Hanton’s (2012) recent work on organisational functioning during a period of major change has begun to elucidate how peak organisational outcomes may be facilitated, the utility of findings for specific areas of the organisation, such as the performance department, are uncertain. Indeed, perhaps dictated by the size and scale of modern elite sport organisations – and, therefore, the size and scale of the research projects required to investigate them (Wagstaff et al. undertook a nine-month ethnography) – it is difficult to determine where optimal benefit may be delivered.

For instance, from their investigation of staff, volunteers, and performers at all levels, Wagstaff et al. (2012) ‘illustrate the pivotal importance of interpersonal relationships and highlight the emergence of emotion-related abilities as highly influential in successful person-organisation dynamics’ (p.26). Expressly, a summary of the applied implications (p.33) point to the need to: work hard at developing internal and external relationships; consider others’ emotional investment during conflict; deploy attention to and attempt to interpret the meaning of underlying emotions in transactions; develop the ability to communicate with and about emotion; be aware of the expectations, norms, and routines of emotion expression; be aware of how emotional expressions and communication influence others; and develop the ability to reactively or proactively modify others’ emotions. While pointing to the salience of emotion-related abilities during large-scale change, as guidelines are all described in
practitioners are left to assume, rightly or wrongly, that every area and every individual may profit if these features were addressed. This ‘all in’ approach is also highlighted by the fact that this advice could easily apply to almost any organisation in any field of business. However, recognising that many elite team performers possess high egos, multimillion bank balances, and media eminence, efforts to optimise these figures’ emotion-related skills may well be a fruitless pursuit.

In short, elite sport performance teams are rather special, albeit not in a nice way! Moreover, evidence is also emerging which suggests that emotional disregard is often required in elite team manager’s culture change transactions (see What are we learning? section below).

Of course, some readers will note that Wagstaff et al. (2012) did not investigate culture optimisation and consider this critique unjust. As such, we stress that the point we make is not that organisational sport psychology hasn’t, or will be unable to address culture change; rather, our point is that even if it does, the field’s current underpinning orientation toward the holistic, multifaceted organisation inevitably results in a lack of specificity and sensitivity to the idiosyncratic contexts of its constituent departments (in our case the performance department) and thereby diminishes any authority it may hold on elite team-level culture change. Pertinently, a lack of specificity and sensitivity has been identified as a fundamental reason behind the ‘growing oblivion’ of practically meaningful and impactful research in organisational change (du Gay & Vikkelso, 2012). In this light it is also a concern that other organisational-oriented work in sport psychology, such as Arnold and Fletcher’s (2012) taxonomy of ‘organisational’ stressors encountered by competitive sport performers, appears to be adopting a similar (and arguably precarious) mix of absolutism (i.e. all features of sporting performance can be attributed to a wider organisation) and abstraction (i.e. the provision of underspecified results and generic advice) (cf. du Gay & Vikkelso).

In short, and aligning with the context-related underpinnings of elite team culture change (as outlined above), the many and significant peculiarities of the performance team environment must be prioritised rather than controlled for if optimal applied impact is to be conferred.

**Elite team culture change: What are we learning?**

Having clarified and reinforced the unique conceptual underpinnings of elite team culture change, we now turn to offer a synopsis of some initial findings in this area. As the construct has only recently emerged, implications for both theory and practice are preliminary; nonetheless, they provide a useful base against which future knowledge can be developed and refined.

**Shaping environmental contexts and regulating power**

Of first reference are findings from a culture change case study of Leeds Carnegie, a professional rugby union team who achieved notable and rapid success under the guidance of new management (Cruickshank et al., 2013a). Conducted at the end of the 2009–2010 season through the lens of decented theory (Bevir & Richards, 2009), a position which encourages the study of change via multiple stakeholder perceptions and emphasises the contested, ‘to and fro’ nature of social constructions, this research sought to unearth key mechanisms of effective change.

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*Arnold and Fletcher (2012, p.402) defined organisational stressors as ‘any environmental demands… primarily associated with the organisation within which a performer was operating, but often related in some secondary sense with competitive or personal aspects of performers’ lives’ [emphasis added]. By broadening a previous (and we would consider more accurate) definition of organisational stressors (i.e. ‘environmental demands… associated primarily and directly with the organisation within which an individual is operating’: Fletcher, Hanton & Mellalieu, 2006, p.329), some surprising and questionable ‘organisational’ stressors were identified; such as: upsets due to foreign cuisine; unfamiliar weather conditions; and the threat of hitting whales.
culture change, identify systems, processes, and procedures used to control and exploit the transient flow of power between management and ‘subordinates’, and test decentred theory’s utility as an explanatory framework.

Resulting from this work, the effective and efficient optimisation of team culture over a two-season period was found to have been endogenously generated rather than structurally imposed. Specifically, beyond the introduction and refinement of a number of high performing processes (e.g. role clarity, ownership, individual-level support), player/support staff acceptance of and adherence to new performance-optimising perceptions and behaviours was significantly facilitated by a subtle shaping of the physical, structural, and psychosocial contexts in which support staff and performers made performance-impacting choices. Namely, rather than be overtly ‘led’, directed or dictated to, individuals were primarily liberated to make their own decisions on whether to engage in performance-optimising practices (e.g. optimal effort in training; abstinence from alcohol) but, significantly, within contexts which increased the likelihood that these professional behaviours would be nonetheless be selected and self-governed on a day-to-day, moment-to-moment basis. For example, to optimise the players’ effort in daily training, performance data were put on visual display on the training facility’s walls (to generate inter/intra-individual competition), feedback provided on objective performance measures (to provide a scientific justification for deployed training methods), and cultural architects (Railo, 1986) harnessed (to shape behaviour via peer influence).

A second vital feature of the change programme was found in the effective regulation of the ‘to and fro’ of social power. By providing regular opportunities to performers and support staff for formal (e.g. pre-season forums on team goals/direction) and informal (e.g. an ‘open door’ policy) feedback, notable measures were taken to promote an ebb and flow of command. Mirroring Fletcher and Wagstaff’s (2009) assertion of ‘a future whereby psychological knowledge generation in elite sport is a process involving a continuous feedback loop until a problem is resolved’, this incessant information gathering paired with the management team’s commitment to embrace environmental complexity also allowed this particular change programme to remain sensitive to group consensus at all times; thereby allowing the culture to evolve in unison with its dynamic surroundings (the principles of a complexity adaptive system: Cilliers, 2000; Theodoridis & Bennison, 2009). Reflecting its sensitivity to the context-related features of elite team culture change, focus on the political and contingent nature of social construction, and its ability to uncover systems, processes, and procedures by which power could safely flow between group members, decentred theory was also supported as a viable approach to study; most notably in the form of positive and independent expert commentaries (cf. Bevir, 2013; Grix, 2013).

Multidirectional management, dark side practices and context-specific expertise

Inherent within the aforementioned case study, a further critical implication to emerge from initial culture change enquiry is the need to effectively manage the perceptions and expectations of numerous internal (performers and support staff) and external (CEO, Board of Directors, the media, performers’ partners) stakeholders. Notably, recent work has further elucidated the scale of this challenge as faced by Olympic sport performance directors (hereafter PDs) (Collins & Cruickshank, 2012). With an explicit focus on the creation and dissemination of a team’s vision as a critical ‘opening’ culture change component, interviews with PDs employed by British sports in the past two competition cycles (2004–2012) revealed a multidirectional framework for managing social complexity. Specifically, beyond effective management of those ‘below’ (support staff, performers), proac-
tive and political management of those 'above' (NSO Board of Directors, CEO, UK Sport, BOA) and at the 'side' (wider sport membership, external partners, media /public perception) appears to be an often performance-irrelevant but fundamental feature of elite team culture optimisation.

Beyond this vital process, the interviewed PDs also placed notable emphasis on the qualities and skills required to deliver their vision and wider culture change programmes. Interestingly, aligning with the findings of Fletcher and Arnold (2011), PDs pointed toward the use of dark side (i.e. socially undesirable) traits (cf. Hogan & Hogan, 2001; Judge, Piccolo & Kosalka, 2009). Indeed, contrary to tenets of transformational leadership, PDs discussed the utility of a performance-focused ruthlessness whereby any prioritisation of others' emotional investment was sharply overlooked as part of a ‘no compromise’ approach to performance enhancement. Indeed, while the professional team case study highlighted the value of facilitating an ebb and flow of power, this latter work revealed that there is often a point where control and command decisions are mandatory to keep the culture change process continually and optimally focused on performance. Of additional interest, reflections also reinforced the need for context-specific expertise. Explicitly, due to the highly pressurised and dynamic environments in which elite team managers operate, the ability to make impactful and coherent decisions ‘on the go’ emerged as central to long-term success. Accordingly, while description of elite team manager ‘competencies’ are useful (e.g. Fletcher & Arnold, 2011), such accounts provide only a partial picture of the role’s requirements (if one is to be optimally successful). Indeed, as the names suggest, possessing context-specific expertise appears to be the difference between being ‘competent’ and being an ‘expert’ (cf. professional judgment and decision making in Abraham & Collins, 2011; Martindale & Collins, 2010).

**Concluding thoughts and future challenges**

Acknowledging that culture change is still establishing itself in both academic and professional spheres, we hope that the preceding discussion has helped to clarify the topic’s uniqueness and worth to contemporary sport psychology. Upon extending the construct’s demarcation from group dynamics and organisational sport psychology (cf. Cruickshank & Collins, 2012a), we particularly hope that the links between elite team culture change and these fields of knowledge are now better understood, because there are clear links and it is vital that researchers and practitioners are acutely aware of these to prevent the boundaries between all three becoming blurred. Indeed, without an understanding of group dynamics (e.g. role clarity) and organisational factors (e.g. organisational stressors), high performing cultures could not be effectively understood. To this end, both group dynamics and organisational sport psychology have much to offer in terms of what a high performing culture might look like.

Notwithstanding this point, however, elite team culture change is primarily focused on the how, when and why. Accordingly, we also therefore hope that further explanation of the precise focus and nature of elite team culture change, alongside the inability of current theories and constructs to ‘fill in the gaps’, stimulates future enquiry into the phase-specific systems, structures, processes, and mechanisms of successful practice. As summarised above, emerging findings on subtle change-mechanisms take elite team culture change into a promising realm of ‘covert’ behaviour change. Additionally, it also appears that leadership and competency models of elite team manage-

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5 For further reading on the practical and ethical foundations upon which this principle is based, we direct readers to Thaler and Sunstein’s (2003) work on libertarian paternalism (also see *Nudge* by the same authors, 2009).
ment are insufficient in accounting for and prescribing practice. Specifically, an elucidation of ‘dark side practices’ and context-specific expertise is particularly warranted. To avoid reproducing material already available in the literature, however, for more precise guidelines on lines for future enquiry we direct readers to Cruickshank and Collins (2012a).

Finally, taking a wider perspective, we also hope that this article will stimulate further discussion amongst academics, consultants, and training bodies on the continued evolution of sport psychology and reflection on ‘why sport psychology remains generally undervalued and poorly received at the highest levels’ (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009, p. 432). Indeed, serious consideration must be given to whether current accreditation programmes are helping to produce practitioners equipped for the challenges of elite-team consultancy; be it within the specific boundaries of a performance department or the wider sporting organisation. We conclude with two telling quotes from elite sport performance team managers which support this general point (cf. first quote) and offer a final vindication of the need for culture change expertise (cf. second quote):

I believe a sport psychologist is good one to one but the best sport psychologist in sport by a million miles is [former Manchester United Football Club manager] Alex Ferguson, by a million miles… I’ve seen [sport psychologists] crumble… in front of groups, literally crumble, not have a clue. But I don’t know how you become a sport psychologist, I don’t know what the training is to be a psychologist – you need to be out in life to find out. The one for one’s not bad, but as a group, I’m the sport psychologist around the whole [team]… that’s why Ferguson’s the best. Now his ways of doing it you wouldn’t get past the Geneva Convention but it works … the sport psychologist at a [sport] club is the [manager/head coach]. I wasn’t keen to go down the team or… individual psychologist routes… You know the team dynamics thing, I’ve seen teams go on army camps and I have [said] – ‘I don’t want to do it!’ The players know they’ve got to carry this log for five miles and because they’re fit and strong – they just think ah, we’ll get it done… They just get it done for that weekend and then it falls away. I wanted something that would stand the test of time for the individual and set a culture within the group, or set some behaviours in the group that just became the norm for their day in day out working practice, rather than a short burst… I met a psychologist and [what they offered] just didn’t float my boat.

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Hansen, J. & Henriksen, K. (2011, July). Five steps to building a winning culture through an appreciative inquiry intervention: The case of the Danish Female National Handball Team. In J. Meibom (Organiser), Sport psychology service delivery to Danish Olympic athletes: From Professional Philosophy to Successful Cases. Symposium conducted at 13th FEPSAC European Congress of Sport Psychology, Madeira.


Evidence from previous research suggests the existence of home advantage in association football (also known as soccer in North America) (e.g. Brown et al., 2002; Neave & Wolfson, 2003), a phenomenon found when home teams consistently win over 50 per cent of the games played under a balanced home and away schedule (Courneya & Carron, 1992). The presence of home advantage in other sports has also been found, with Balmer, Nevill and Williams (2001) discovering home advantage during subjectively assessed sports at the Winter Olympic Games between 1908–1998. In an attempt to explain the home advantage phenomenon, Courneya and Carron (1992) provided a framework for game location research to highlight factors that could contribute to a home advantage. Research has since supported the notion of home referee bias in football, with more penalties, free kicks and dismissals going in favour of the home side (Boyko, Boyko & Boyko, 2007; Nevill, Balmer & Williams, 1999), and away sides experiencing a higher prevalence of yellow and red cards during a game (Dawson & Dobson, 2009; Dawson et al., 2007). Research has also found that more added time is awarded if the home side is a goal behind, than when the home side is a goal in front (Sutter & Kocher, 2004).

To identify which factors influence referee decision-making, research again leaned on Courneya and Carron’s framework and considered such factors as crowd noise and crowd size as potential influences. Those studies that considered crowd noise used experimental designs to assess referee’s decision-making and showed that a referee’s decision for a contentious incident might be influenced by the intense crowd noise from within their framework, Courneya and Carron (1992) identified referees (i.e. officials) as potential contributors to home advantage. Research has since supported the notion of home referee bias in football, with more penalties, free kicks and dismissals going in favour of the home side (Boyko, Boyko & Boyko, 2007; Nevill, Balmer & Williams, 1999), and away sides experiencing a higher prevalence of yellow and red cards during a game (Dawson & Dobson, 2009; Dawson et al., 2007). Research has also found that more added time is awarded if the home side is a goal behind, than when the home side is a goal in front (Sutter & Kocher, 2004).

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home fans, resulting in the referee giving the decision in favour of the majority (Bokyo et al., 2007; Nevill et al., 1999; Nevill, Balmer & Williams, 2002; Sutter & Kocher, 2004). With regards to crowd size, Bokyo et al. (2007) found a positive correlation between crowd size and decisions awarded in favour of the home side, while Downward and Jones (2007) found significantly more first yellow cards were distributed to away players than home players, with this distribution increasing up until those games played with the largest crowds. An explanation for this was that in those games with larger crowds the size of team support was more balanced. This body of research, therefore, indicates that referee responses to crowd stressors, be it noise or size, can have an influence on their decision-making.

Lane et al. (2006) and Voight (2009) extended this line of research by looking more closely at the factors that may affect referees’ decision-making. Specifically, Lane et al. (2006) adopted a qualitative approach through retrospective interviews and found that crowd size, length of refereeing experience, and player behaviour sometimes influenced referee decision-making. Similarly, Voight (2009) discovered that receiving verbal abuse from players and coaches, the presence of a refereeing assessor (i.e. officials who rate referee performance), and the fear of making a wrong call were all performance demands identified by football referees. Voight (2009) also attempted to provide insight into the coping strategies used by referees. Voight found that problem focused coping strategies, such as seeking information from other referees about what they did in similar situations, were adopted more readily than emotional focused coping strategies. However, this quantitative study failed to explore the effectiveness of such strategies in improving referee decision-making.

Given the presented body of research, football referees seem to be exposed to a number of demands that have some influence on their decision-making. Despite this association, research has not yet considered how demands actually influence referee behaviour. That is, how the experience of certain stressors is perceived to influence the critical decisions that referees have to make during a stressful sporting encounter. For future research to provide better understanding of referee behaviour, the adoption of sound theories would be beneficial. Indeed, contemporary theories could inform a more comprehensive insight into the influence of demands on referee decision-making. One concept that has recently been adopted within sport psychology research to improve knowledge of how people react to demands is Lazarus’ (1999) Cognitive-Motivational-Relational (CMR) Theory of Emotions. From this perspective, Lazarus posits that the emotions that individuals experience are caused by appraisals of the demands encountered within the environment, and that such emotions can give rise to action tendencies that are often difficult to inhibit.

Individuals’ appraisals are critical within Lazarus’ perspective, due to their implications for emotions, coping, and behaviour. Specifically, Lazarus suggested that life events (i.e. stressors) are constantly being evaluated with respect to their significance to well being, with such appraisals being underpinned by the meaning individuals relate to the life events as they unfold. These include harm, threat, benefit, or challenge and are associated with six appraisals judgements of goal relevance, goal congruence, type of ego involvement, blame or credit for an outcome, coping potential, and future expectations (for more detail, see Lazarus, 1999, 2000). To illustrate, a male referee who is about to take charge of a major cup final (stressor) may appraise that this is a major event and important for his career development. Therefore, the situation and outcomes are judged to be relevant (goal relevance). Knowing that his performance may influence his future as a referee, he could also think that by working hard and performing up to his previous standards he
will ensure a good performance. Here, a *type of ego involvement* is evident, one that is linked to the referee’s own goals and ego ideals (i.e. demonstrating a good performance). This desire to perform consistently is associated with a *challenge appraisal* as he has the belief that the goal (i.e. refereeing well) can be achieved through persistence and self-confidence. Simultaneously, he realises that not performing well could jeopardise his career (*type of ego involvement*). This situation is therefore viewed as *threatening* to his future. Due to the possibility of performing as well as he has in the past (*type of ego involvement/challenge appraisal*), the situation is judged to be in favour of the referee reaching his goal of continuing in his current role (*goal congruence*). The referee may, therefore, feel excited (*emotion*). However, due to the possibility that he might not perform well (*type of ego involvement*) and the negative implications of such a performance (*goal congruence, threat appraisal*), he may also feel anxious (*emotion*). While experiencing these emotions, the referee may then think about what he could specifically do to ensure a good performance (*coping potential*), and believe that focusing on these specific behaviours will result in a good performance (*future expectations*). Consequently, excitement still remains due to the situation being appraised as a challenge – as a result of knowing what needs to be done to perform well. Due to the experience of these emotions, and feeling confident, the referee stays focused at the start of the competitive match and performs well. After the performance, the referee reflects and acknowledges the *benefit* of performing well and feels happy (*emotion*). However, if the performance had gone poorly, the referee may have reflected and acknowledged the negative implications of the poor performance – not refereeing a major cup final again (*harm appraisal*). Due to this negative performance being a result of the referee’s mistakes (*blame*), the referee may feel angry (*emotion*) with himself.

What we have tried to illustrate in the example above is how appraisals in relation to what could happen (i.e. threat and challenge) or what has happened (i.e. harm and benefit) are shaped by the six judgements an individual has about the situation they find themselves in. We have also demonstrated that the emotions experienced are shaped by the appraisals generated. As alluded to earlier, Lazarus (1999, 2000) suggested that the emotions experienced can then influence performance behaviour through action tendencies or impulses that are difficult to inhibit. For example, anger is associated with counterattacking behaviours (e.g. retaliation), while anxiety is proposed to affect a referee’s attentional capacity, potentially impairing the ability to process important environmental information (Eysenck & Calvo, 1992). Failure to cope with the anger experienced could result in the referee making decisions that are against the offending individual or team – even if the decision should have been in the offenders favour. Not dealing with the anxiety experienced could cause the referee to miss some of the key environmental information required to make an accurate decision, due to the affect of anxiety on attention resources.

The example provided earlier about the referee officiating a major final also illustrates a coping process, where the referee has thought about how he will cope, which subsequently influenced the way he actually coped during performance. That is, thinking about what he would normally do to ensure a good performance influenced what he focused on while performing, which, subsequently, resulted in good decision-making. Lazarus (1993) referred to such coping as *problem-focused coping*, where an individual acts to manage the demands that are causing stress. Lazarus also suggested that individuals could cope through *emotion-focused coping*, where the individual changes the way they interpret what is happening to reduce the experience of negative emotions. Focusing once more on the referee example above, the referee could have adopted emotion-focused coping to reappraise the importance...
of the situation by thinking that not many people will watch the cup final, and that is not as major a final as one at a higher level. Such appraisals would reduce the level of anxiety that he initially felt and, potentially, have a beneficial impact on decision-making.

As illustrated, Lazarus’ conceptualisation encourages a more detailed account into what individuals are experiencing in stressful situations through considering the stressors, appraisals, emotions, coping, and subsequent behaviour (Neil et al., 2007; Neil, Hanton & Mellalieu, 2009). Recently, Nicholls, Polman and Levy (2012) adopted this perspective and showed that negatively toned appraisals such as threat result in unpleasant emotions, distraction or disengagement orientated coping (i.e. emotion-focused coping), and performance dissatisfaction. More positively toned appraisals such as challenge resulted in the experience of pleasant emotions, task orientated coping (i.e. problem-focused coping), and performance satisfaction. Neil et al. (2011) provided a detailed account of the stress and emotion process and showed that both performance and organisational stressors influenced performers’ appraisals during competition. These appraisals, in turn, were associated with a range of emotional responses, with performance behaviour affected by how the performers interpreted their emotional responses. Here, it was found that when the appraisals and such negative emotions as anger and/or anxiety were interpreted as debilitating for upcoming performance, behaviour was affected due to a lack of control over these thoughts and symptoms. In comparison, when stressors gave rise to negative appraisals and emotions that were interpreted as facilitative for upcoming performance, an associated increase in focus and/or effort was reported.

Despite research now considering the holistic stress-emotion process, no study has considered the implications of this process on referee decision-making. Given the potential for a more in-depth account of individual experiences, the purpose of the present study, therefore, was to explore the stress and emotional experiences of football referees, informed by Lazarus’ (1999) CMR Theory of Emotions. Specifically, to examine the influence of stress and emotions on decision-making through identifying the stressors encountered, the consequent appraisals, emotions felt, and coping strategies used.

**Method**

**Participants**

The participants were one female and three male football referees who refereed at different competitive standards within the UK. To protect the anonymity of the participants, the ages and exact years of experience of the referees will not be disclosed. Two of the participants (one male and one female) refereed at an amateur regional level. The other two male participants were full time professional referees, officiating at a level two (UK Panelist List) and level one (UK National List) standard respectively. Elaborating on the professional levels, the panel list referee can officiate UK Panel Leagues (one below UK Football League Status), but can act as assistant referees in the UK Football Leagues. Level one referees can officiate UK Football League matches (one below the English Premier League). The professional standard referees had at least 11 more years experience than their amateur counterparts.

**Data collection**

To address the purpose of the study, interviews were conducted with the participants. Interviews were selected over other qualitative approaches due to the aim of examining the experiences of stress and emotion on decision-making. That is, the use of other approaches such as diaries over a selected period of time may not have provided as wide a range of experiences as those reported by retrospective interviews that are not constrained by time, while focus groups may have been too sensitive a forum to discuss stressful experiences. To facilitate the
interviews, an interview guide was developed based on an extensive review of the home advantage and competition stress-emotion literature. The resultant interview guide included questions to explore the demands encountered by referees during competitive performance, the subsequent appraisals, emotions, coping strategies utilised and influences on decision-making. To elaborate, the format of the guide would result in the referees being asked to identify what demands they encountered during a competitive performance. The list of demands they identified was then recorded, with each referee asked what they thought about each demand during the competition and why (appraisals), what emotions they felt when thinking that way, how they attempted to cope, and what officiating decision was made. Each referee was then provided with a predetermined list of demands identified from the literature and asked if they had experienced any of those not already identified in the interview. These identified stressors were then discussed in relation to the subsequent appraisals, emotions, coping, and decision-making.

**Pilot study.** Two experienced referees were interviewed using an initial interview guide. The purpose of these pilot interviews was to examine the appropriateness of the devised interview guide, questions, and probes in generating desirably rich and relevant responses (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Following close scrutiny of the first pilot study, minor modifications were made to the interview guide, with some terms being rephrased to increase participant understanding (e.g. replacing ‘stressor’ with ‘demand’). Additional probes were included to develop participant responses towards the reasons why their decision-making may or may not be affected by the demands discussed, such as, ‘why weren’t you able to cope in this situation?’ Following the second pilot, the research team decided that the responses addressed the purpose of the study and were of sufficient depth to gain understanding about why demands did or did not affect decision-making.

**Main interviews.** Referees were contacted via email through their affiliating football counties secretary, informing them as to the nature of the study. Six participants responded (two used in the pilot study). It is important to note here that our main purpose was to explore referees’ experiences of stress and emotion and the influence on decision-making, not to compare the experiences across referee levels. Nevertheless, it became apparent at this stage that the referees who responded were officiating at different performance levels. We contacted those who responded by phone and explained to them that all the information they shared during the interview would remain anonymous. This aimed to create an environment where participants could respond truthfully, openly, and profoundly about underlying emotions and influences on their decision making, without the pressure of social desirability and fear of repercussions from their data (Gillham, 2000). Following an agreement to participate in the study through informed consent, a convenient time and date was arranged to conduct the interview. Each participant was interviewed in a familiar setting (of their choice) with the intention that this comfort and assurance in their surrounding environment would elicit more truthful and meaningful responses (Patton, 2002). The interview guide was emailed to each participant 48 hours prior to their interview along with an information sheet highlighting their freedom to refuse to answer any question and their ability to withdraw from the study at any time. The interviews lasted up to 90 minutes and were recorded to allow the interviewer to focus on participant responses and being actively engaged (Gillham, 2000), rather than being distracted by note taking.

**Data analysis**
Following the transcription of all interviews, the research team read them several times to
become familiar and ‘intimate’ with the raw data generated (Patton, 2002). Given the structure of the interview guide, data was then analysed through a deductive content analysis by each author. Specifically, the identified stressors, subsequent appraisals, emotions, and decision-making responses were matched in relation to each reported situation (Neil et al., 2011). For example, where a referee described a situation where a specific demand was experienced, he or she would then be asked about their thoughts, emotions, coping strategies, and decision-making behaviour in relation to that demand. Consequently, it was simple to follow this process throughout the interview transcripts and match all these components of the stress-emotion process for each situation. Within the content analysis, the actual quotations provided by each participant to elicit these factors were included. These were incorporated to further the understanding of the stress and emotion process. Implementing this method on the diverse sample of refereeing classification levels used in this study allowed for an identification of the varying appraisals to demands encountered whilst officiating, subsequent emotions experienced, and how consequent decision-making may or may not be affected in amateur and professional referees. Furthermore, this chosen method of analysis deepened understanding and explanation (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 2007) of similar and contrasting referee appraisals for certain factors across the cases and the resultant influences on decision-making, as ‘multiple cases not only pin down the specific conditions under which a finding will occur but also help us form the general categories of how those conditions may be related’ (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.173). Due to this deductive process, each author’s interpretation of what encompassed a stressor, appraisal, emotion, coping, and decision-making behaviour for every reported situation was, on most occasions, the same. Where disagreement occurred, we discussed each author’s view in relation to Lazarus’ conceptualisation of stress and emotion until agreement was reached.

To verify our analysis and interpretations, a ‘member checking’ procedure was adopted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), where the interviews, analysis, and interpretations were sent to the participants so that they could judge the accuracy of the accounts (Creswell, 2007). This process resulted in full agreement from the participants. To represent the findings, we have included selective quotations from the participants (Silverman, 2000). We hope that the quotations presented will provide the reader with a detailed understanding of the situation context, how referees responded, and the resultant influence on decision-making.

**Results**

The aim of this study was to examine the influence of stress and emotions on referee decision-making through identifying the stressors encountered, the consequent appraisals, emotions felt, and coping strategies used. During the analysis stage it became apparent that the amateur and professional referees differed in their experiences of stress and emotions and the ability to cope during reported situations. This section will, therefore, present each referee’s experiences while performing through the use of detailed quotations, illuminating the stress-emotion process through which subsequent decision-making was influenced across refereeing levels. For the benefit of the reader, within the referees’ quotations we have italicised each stage of the stress-emotion process within parenthesis.

**Crowd stressors**

Crowd factors identified by the referees to influence their thoughts and emotions and subsequent decision-making were individual spectator abuse and collective crowd noise.

**Individual spectator abuse**

All the referees suggested that they were more susceptible to experiencing negative emotions as a result of individual spectator abuse...
directed at them. The potential explanation for this is provided by the Level 2 referee:

A lot of referees would say officiating in front of 100,000 is easier than being in front of five people, because with the smaller crowd you can identify who’s saying what and it becomes very personal… when they get inside the referee’s head, that’s when he or she is in trouble as you’re distracted from the game and start thinking about other things.

Differences in appraisals regarding individual abuse from the crowd and the influences of these thoughts and associated emotions experienced on decision-making were evident between the amateur and professional referees. The amateur referees described situations where they had consciously victimised the team of the individual(s) supplying the abuse through their decision-making. For example, the female amateur referee described an incident in which she was refereeing a male football match. An individual in the crowd shouted, ‘these ******* women should be at home doing the cooking’. The referee described her thought processes, her experiences of anger and the influences on decisions following this incident:

I was fuming [emotion]… when the spectator said it I was livid [emotion]… It made me make decisions that the team he supported wouldn’t like because I thought that they were willing for him to speak to me like that [type of ego involvement/harm appraisal]. Looking back, a few of the decisions did go one way, when they should have gone the other [decision-making]. At the time I didn’t think about it, but after I thought, ‘I gave it that way!’ it was horrendous, I hate that I did it but I did, but I did!

The Level 5 referee also described an encounter with a particular spectator, demonstrating the influence of individual crowd abuse on decision-making through the appraisals caused and emotions felt:

As soon as a decision goes against him [spectator], he’s on your case straight away [stressor], and that goads you on, it does, honestly… I thought, ‘I’m not having that abuse’ [type of ego involvement/harm appraisal]. It annoyed me [emotion]… so the ball went off two players and goes for a throw in and I’m not sure whose throw it is, so I gave it the opposite way [decision-making], just because this guy wound me up.

The responses from the amateur referees illustrate their intentions for retribution and demonstration of counter-attack action tendencies that are associated with experiences of anger (Lazarus, 1991, 1993). This impulse to restore a wounded ego from the harm imposed following their exposure to personal and threatening abuse influenced the referees to favour the opposition side in their decision-making. Similar emotions were experienced in the professional referees as a result of individual crowd abuse. However, the higher qualified referees adopted emotion-focused coping strategies to control emotions, which, as a result, had beneficial influences on subsequent decision-making. For example, the Level 1 referee highlighted a game in which a member of the crowd called him a ‘paedophile’:

I felt sick… getting called something like that for not giving this person’s team an offside is hurtful [type of ego involvement/harm appraisal], and in this case it hurt and angered me [emotion]… however, you hear comments from the crowd in every game, but it’s all part and parcel of the game, I’ve never thought, ‘oh he’s shouted at me so I’m not going to give that decision’… I can’t honestly say I’ve been like that, you just shut it off as if being along the lines of pantomime, you get it every game, so it’s the same old story and I use the expression ‘water off a duck’s back’, that’s what it becomes as you know before the game you’re going to get it so you’re expecting it to come, it’s just part and parcel of the day, you’ve got to switch off [emotion-focused coping]… so it didn’t affect my decision-making.
The Level 2 referee also provided insight into the experience of individual crowd abuse and the subsequent emotion-focused coping strategies he implemented to maintain his ability to execute uninfluenced decisions:

It’s about controlling that upset [emotion] that you get from supporters… I’ve had a few things said to me that makes me think, ‘I’ve done nothing to you, why make this so personal?’ [type of ego involvement/harm appraisal]… However, there are always going to be people who shout stuff at you, trying to provoke a response… I set myself up in a little bubble, I think, ‘I’m going out and I’m going to concentrate solely on the game, that’s what I’m focused on, I can’t affect what people are going to say.’ [emotion-focused coping]… my decisions don’t get affected. These quotations suggest that the ability to cope with the emotions experienced when encountering personal abuse is crucial to ensuring the execution of fair decisions. In contrast to the counter-attack action tendencies exhibited by the amateur referees, the professional referees coped with emotions experienced by detaching themselves from the crowd and increasing their concentration on the game. With an awareness of the expected through previous experiences, understanding of the uncontrollable nature of crowd abuse, and the implementation of appropriate coping strategies, similar emotions experienced by the professional referees were, therefore, inhibited to prevent influences on subsequent decisions.

Collective crowd noise. A difference was observed in the appraisals and emotional and decision-making responses of referees officiating at a higher level compared to those refereeing at a lower level of football. Both the lower level referees explained how their decision-making was affected by an exposure to collective crowd noise. The Level 5 referee commented:

A kiddie [player] came in and fouled another player… I’d normally get away with not booking him, but the fans who saw the challenge went ballistic, and with this reaction I felt I had to caution him, because they put me under pressure to think ‘what happens if I don’t punish this one?’ [future expectations/threat appraisal]… I got anxious [emotion] and booked the player [decision-making].

The following comments from the Level 4 referee illustrate how the thought of a potential reaction from the home team crowd influenced her decision-making:

Without a shadow of a doubt the crowd influenced my decision. I was always going to give the free kick to the away side, but I just stood there thinking, ‘I can’t’. I was worried about the reaction that was going to come from the home crowd [future expectations/threat appraisal]… I was anxious [emotion] and started to panic and get flustered… My mind went blank, I couldn’t feel anything, so I just didn’t give the free kick! [decision-making]

The threatening appraisals and experience of anxiety led to poor decision-making by the amateur referees. The professional referees reported challenging appraisals, which were associated with excitement when hearing crowd noise from the home side and resulted in effective decision-making. The Level 1 referee stated:

It’s interesting, people have this concept that the referee will go with what the crowd says… when you get decisions wrong you get more dissatisfaction in yourself and more abuse from players, just because the crowd thinks they should get decisions their way… I think of it then like a pantomime where you’re the villain [emotion-focused coping]. So, big crowds never bother me as I think of it as a pantomime, which is to my benefit as it doesn’t affect my performance [type of ego involvement/benefit appraisal]… I get excited [emotion] to play in front of these crowds.

The evaluative thoughts from this referee developed a rationalisation of the crowd’s role as similar to that of a ‘pantomime’. 
Thus, he detached any possible perception of threat or harm from the demand faced, eliminating the onset of stress and negative emotions to maintain a desirable mindset that fostered the execution of appropriate decision making. The Level 2 referee also explained his appraisals of collective crowd noise and influences on decision-making:

It’s just a massive noise, everyone shouting ‘no’, it’s just noise and it doesn’t affect you, well it didn’t affect me… personally, my awareness is so much more heightened because of the atmosphere. I would think, ‘I can’t wait to get out there’, because it would be such a good experience [type of ego involvement and benefit appraisal]… it would make me feel happy [emotion] to perform, and I would perform well too [decision-making]… like going to the German clubs, they were very aggressive, male dominated unfortunately, but I always wanted to do well and I used to love going there.

Refereeing in front of a crowd for the first time. Both the Level 5 and Level 1 referee provided an example of exposure to a large crowd for the first time. Within the following quote, the Level 5 referee provides insight into the implications of such a stressor when combined with playing in an important game:

It was a cup final, an important game, a lot of people there, very important people… It was only my third season, I was on the line, only a Level 6 [referee] at that point, but I had just been promoted, it was my first time in front of a crowd this big… I was nervous about the cup final, nervous about the ground [emotion], worried about the crowd, worried about what they’d think about me [threat appraisal]… there was a couple of hundred watching, and worst of all I’m not confident in what I’m doing. In one instance, the ref is coming towards me, ‘yellow or red?’ he said, ‘yellow or red?’ I said ‘I didn’t see it’, he looked at me and said, ‘what?’ I was two yards away… I’m not saying it wasn’t a foul but it just didn’t register as a foul, I was concentrating so much on everything else that I wasn’t thinking about the one thing that’s important. The dug out went mental, I just didn’t recognise it as a foul [decision-making]… someone’s fouled a player whose in a heap on the floor, it was only then I realise he was in pieces on the floor. It was only then I realised ‘oh no, that was a foul!’… I didn’t give a decision for the rest of the half, I would say, even if the ball went out of play I’d look at the ref and just go with him I just didn’t want to give anything, I didn’t want to mess up by pointing the wrong way [decision-making]. Honest to God I think I missed an offside, I say missed, I let it go because I didn’t want to put my flag up. I didn’t want to get shouted by the technical area [threat appraisal], I honestly left the flag down [decision-making]… For some reason I couldn’t bring myself to put the flag up, I didn’t want to get shouted at [threat appraisal]… I didn’t want to be shouted at, and it shot my performance, I couldn’t give anything [decision-making]… I honestly considered jacking it in, it was that bad, I was so nervous [emotion], I felt sick, my concentration had gone and it messed me and my decisions up [decision-making].

Within this example, the referee’s lack of confidence reduced his perception of coping potential to deal with demands such as crowd size and match importance, thus initiating the onset of the negative emotions experienced, which influenced his poor decision-making. In comparison, the Level 1 referee provided an account of refereeing in his first ever football league game, and how preparation improved his confidence and, consequently, ability to make correct decisions:

[My] first ever football league game… I did a lot of preparing for that… Preparing was great because, instead of taking things away from the game, I actually believed I could add to the game
and perform well [goal congruence, benefit appraisal, and coping potential]. I was excited [emotion], up for it, I performed well! [decision-making] Such coping could be in my upbringing, where I was brought up under a lot of stress from my job, so maybe that’s helped me out!

**Previous decision-making mistakes**

Voight (2009) identified that the fear of making mistakes was a major stressor in football referees. Within the present study, the referees identified making a wrong decision within the match as a potential demand that could affect decision-making. There was a noticeable difference in appraisals, emotions experienced and influences on resulting decision-making from the demand of making a perceived incorrect decision between the amateur and professional referees. The amateur referees both recalled incidents where they had made an incorrect decision, and elaborated on how the subsequent thought processes and emotions they experienced had an influence on subsequent decision-making. This is evident through the comments of the Level 5 referee:

I knew I had got something wrong [stressor]... the player reactions, four of them in my face, and one of them has gone ‘you’re a ******* cheating ****’... I gave him a straight red [decision-making]... but I knew I’d cocked up, as I go over I can see the mark on the pitch and the foul is just outside the penalty area, and my heart sank... Later in the game, a player’s gone through against this team, they’re getting hammered now because they are a man down, it [red card] has obviously affected the game... so in this situation the defender of the side who got a player sent off caught the centre forward... so I’ve gone, ‘No, he’s got the ball’, but I know in my heart of hearts it was a foul, he was the last man and he would have had to walk [get sent off] as well... I felt, really, I did it just to appease the side, because of the previous incident where I had made a mistake... as I thought that if my reaction hadn’t occurred, I wouldn’t have sent the player off and they wouldn’t have been losing that heavily [type of ego involvement/blame]... so I did feel guilty [emotion], so I did decide to let that decision go [coping potential and decision-making]... I then felt better, definitely felt relieved [emotion]... I seemed to relax more after that, my decisions certainly got better after that.

The Level 4 referee highlighted a similar incident:

I gave a penalty, and it wasn’t a penalty, it really wasn’t! I thought, ‘Oh no! You’ve well and truly gone and messed that one up’, ‘you are going to get hammered by everyone’ [blame/future expectations/threat appraisals]... I was mortified! [emotion]. I completely let it influence everything that I did after giving that penalty [decision-making]. I was trying my hardest to even it up because I’d messed up so much [blame]... I was still thinking back, I couldn’t believe I had made that decision, it was about 10 minutes gone... then, this girl hammered the ball into the penalty area and the girl who had made a challenge was lying on the floor, the ball hit her hand so I gave handball, penalty... so I evened up the scores, I evened them up [decision-making]... I would have [normally] been more lenient to give the benefit of the doubt to the defender on the floor, but I didn’t, I gave it, there was so much guilt [emotion] in me that I’d initially given the wrong decision [blame]... I didn’t feel as bad about it because I’d already made that one, I was evening it up, it seemed alright... I sort of weirdly went back to refereeing normally again... I changed from looking for stuff to even it up to letting things happen. After the acknowledgement of an incorrect decision during a game, both the amateur referees had a conscious intention to atone for their error by favouring the penalised side through subsequent decisions. Referees without suitably developed coping strategies...
following the execution of a wrong decision may experience similar emotions to that of the amateur referees in this study, and thus feel inclined to alleviate their emotions experienced by creating a balance in their decisions of a similar situation. In comparison, following errors in their decision-making, the professional referees described the use of coping strategies to ensure better decision-making. Indeed, the Level 1 referee identified the importance of ensuring the correct decisions, irrespective of making a previous mistake:

[Team name vs. team name] was a big game... They were both sitting third and fourth bottom in the [League], whoever lost the game went down [got relegated]... For a game like that, with that magnitude, you’re dealing with people’s livelihoods and feelings of spectators. Even if you make a mistake, you need to make sure it doesn’t happen again, as one team is getting relegated, so no making more bad decisions on the night, which costs teams those points.

The Level 1 referee then described a situation where he had made an incorrect decision:

I had an issue in my first championship game up at [team name] involving a player... He made a foul, and I couldn’t remember booking him earlier in the game, but the book told me I had, so I gave him another yellow card and showed him a red, he went mental saying I hadn’t booked him, the assistant said I hadn’t booked him... I felt stupid [type of ego involvement], embarrassed [emotion] and so unprofessional, because you can’t make mistakes like that at this level as it can affect your marks from assessors [goal congruence/harm appraisals]... but I carried on, once you make one bad decision there’s no point making a second one to make it even worse... I consciously think about concentrating with my decisions just making sure I get them all right after the wrong decision [problem-focused coping].

Importantly, the Level 1 referee also stated the importance of learning from previous mistakes, as guided by a referee assessor:

I remember the assessor one time came into the dressing room after a game that I had a nightmare in, and he could see I was distraught... he sat me down and said ’(participant name), every referee has a nightmare game in their career, tonight it was yours, so learn from it and move on’... he was 100 per cent right, it was all part of my learning process, I still remember the mistake I made, and I know never to do that again.

Although professional referees may be frequently exposed to games of such magnitude, the Level 2 referee’s coping strategies when making an incorrect decision may help explain why subsequent decisions remain uninfluenced:

I just didn’t dwell on it [making a mistake], if you do, then you’ll only make another one and that’s unforgivable... so on this occasion, I thought, ‘the decisions gone, forget it’. I was relating it to the top players, if they make a mistake they forget it, they score another goal and they are the hero... so that helped and I didn’t think about it again [emotion-focused coping].

The appreciation of the detrimental consequences from making additional incorrect calls or, even worse, deliberately trying to readdress the injustice caused by a decision by the professional referees highlights the important influence of effective coping on decision-making during the experience of stress and negative emotions.

**Confrontation**

Confrontation was another factor that affected referees during performance. The following section will provide insight into the influence of both player-player confrontation and referee-player or manager confrontation on decision-making.

**Player-player confrontation.** The findings demonstrate a difference in the appraisals of player confrontation between the high and amateur referees, epitomised by the
comments of one professional referee, ‘When you’re coming through the ranks, it [player-player confrontation] worries you, you try to control it, but you can’t.’ The attempt to ‘control’ players was reported by the amateur referees, which was associated with anxiety and influenced their decision-making. For example, the female amateur referee recalled a confrontation during a game that she attempted to control. She described her appraisals of the demand, subsequent emotions, and affect on resulting decision making:

When they all started fighting I started to get anxious \[emotion\], you know, worried… at the end of the day it was 22 fully grown men fighting with little old me going in there, in the middle, to try and stop it. So that kind of scared me, \[the situation\] made me feel really uneasy and threatened \[threat appraisal\]… from that moment it \[decision-making\] started going downhill drastically and I was blowing up for everything… the decisions up to half time were shocking, they were just shocking, I just didn’t know what I was doing, where I was.

In comparison, the professional referees again demonstrated effective coping techniques when encountering this demand, as the level one referee commented:

I might be a bit controversial here, but the mass brawl we talk about is a joke… I’ve had loads of mass confrontations and it’s just all about men trying to look hard, but it doesn’t affect my mindset… You don’t really have control of that part of it. It’s really up to the players how the game will continue, it’s not something I can control, so I just think, ‘let them get on with it, and then take control when it calms down’ \[coping potential\]. All I can control is making correct decisions as I see them, so I do that \[problem-focused coping\] and it doesn’t affect me.

The Level 2 referee also stated:

In my last season I refereed a youth game and it was one of those mass mêlées… I thought ‘stand back, they’ll split up eventually, look at it \[the situation\]… ok, I’ll have that one \[player\], that one, and that one.’ Nice, clear and concise, and I was in control of the situation, giving cards out to the right people.

The professional referees’ transformational coping strategies for when players confronted each other reduced any perceived threat that the demand may have possessed. Indeed, in contrast to the one amateur referee’s efforts to control the confrontation, the professional referees focused on controlling their own behaviour, thinking that the confrontations will inevitably cease and they will regain control of the situation again.

**Referee-player or manager confrontation.**

The responses provided by the amateur referees acknowledged the influence of direct player or manager confrontation on subsequent decisions. That is, decisions made were more likely to go against the side of the manager or player(s) who confronted the referee, as illustrated through the following comments of the male amateur referee:

You do feel that the pressure is put on you so much \[harm appraisal\] that you get to the point where you are so angry \[emotion\] that you say, ‘sod it, I’m going to give everything against you’ \[decision-making\]… you feel sometimes that they go on and on and are so intent on making out you’re wrong, you think, ‘sod it, I don’t care if I’m wrong’… every decision you think, ‘I don’t care, for a 50/50, I’m going against you’ \[type of ego involvement/blame\], even though you then think ‘I actually got that wrong’… I think it’s done just to shut them up, ‘you’re not going to get anything so shut up.’

The female amateur referee also explained how her decisions had been affected following a manager confrontation:

It \[the abuse\] was constant… there were about three others \[players\] as well on me… I was scared \[emotion\] because I was a female being talked at by a group of
males [threat appraisals]. My decisions were influenced, I won’t lie, much more towards the opposite team [decision-making]… I was picking up on little things, yep that’s a foul, whereas for the other team I was saying ‘no, no, no, play on he’s got the ball’… I was that upset [emotion], as far as I was concerned I didn’t care whether I was upsetting him or his team.

Similar to the influence of individual spectator abuse on the amateur referees, both exhibited counter-attack (retribution) action tendencies when exposed to player or manager confrontation. The male amateur referee’s responses suggest that his appraisals had been formulated by the perceived threat of continual player abuse to his ego, thus attempts to restore his ego comprised of victimising the players team through subsequent decision-making that created an unfair bias to the opposition team. In comparison, the professional referees provided examples of how they rationalised situations when players and managers had confronted them, explaining how they controlled emotions and ensured the execution of correct, uninfluenced decisions. The Level 1 referee described an incident involving a high profile manager confronting him:

At half-time, the manager of [team name] was waiting for me in the tunnel with a barrage of abuse [stressor], so yet again I was faced with an ultimatum, do I go with what’s right and think about the negative press I’d get in the papers [type of ego involvement/threat appraisal/future expectations], or leave what’s wrong to go unpunished. I was nervous and angry [emotion], but I made the decision to send him to the stands for the second half [decision-making]… as soon as it happened I thought ‘here we go, my name’s going to hit the papers again’… but it was an occasion where if I didn’t do it then it would have hit the papers for not doing it… It was a tough game to referee, but it goes back to getting the decisions right, if there was a decision to go to [team name]

I’d give it to them, if there was one to go against them, it would go against them. There’s no point getting decisions wrong and deliberately getting them wrong because you’re cheating yourself, you’re cheating the players and you’ll be found out… I definitely thought about this before making the decision [problem-focused coping].

The rationalisation of potential consequences of his decision enabled the Level 1 referee to execute the appropriate punishment and allowed him to continue to make good decisions throughout the rest of the match, which contrasted the counter-attack action tendencies displayed by the amateur referees.

Players with bad reputations
A player with a bad reputation was identified as a potential influence on decisions made by the referees. The female amateur referee explained how her preconceptions due to previous encounters with a player had an influence on decisions involving that individual:

I’ve refereed [team name] three times and sent him off three times… When I saw him again, I thought to myself ‘when will I be sending him off?’ because I knew he’d give me a hard time [threat appraisal]… it literally went through my mind… I went out with the idea I’m going to send him off and I started the game, looked at him, gave him a smirk and thought you’re going to be walking [coping potential/future expectations]… pretty much every tackle he did I gave a foul [decision-making]. Most of them were fouls, but there were two that weren’t… I gave a decision against him, where looking back he won the ball… that one decision caused him to get his first yellow card… I tried to convince him, if you will, that he had made a foul. It’s wrong to think like that… I sort of went in with a preconceived idea that the guy was going to walk earlier than the others.

The male amateur referee also described a
situation where his decisions to administer stricter punishments were influenced by previous behaviours of a player:

I’ve had a run in with him in the past where I gave a penalty to the other side because he fouled someone… since then I’ve cautioned him on numerous occasions shall we say, simply because of the way he speaks to me [type of ego involvement/harm appraisal]… he’s an idiot and he gets me angry [emotion]… During the game, he did his first foul, so I cautioned him [decision-making], I honestly think it was a genuine attempt for the ball but he mistimed it… it was literally the first five minutes of the game, normally I would have spoken to them… but on that occasion I knew who it was, and I thought, ‘great’, I remember thinking, ‘I’ve got him really early, I’ll give him a yellow early, he can’t do anything else, no grief, no chat, I’ve got him in the first five minutes’ [goal congruence/benefit appraisal] and I genuinely remember thinking that and being happy about giving him a yellow [emotion].

The responses to incidents involving specific players previously refereed and influences on decision-making provide further evidence of the amateur referees exhibiting counter-attack action tendencies when threat or harm in the situation is perceived. Interestingly, the Level 2 referee’s responses also suggest previous encounters with a player can influence decision-making in the professional game, offering a referee bias towards the other side:

I’m sure it has an effect on other refs, as it did on myself when I did it… there are some players like [player name], he would always have something to say, I’d try to help him, but there’s no respect… he’s said something to me to wind me up when I was running the line one game [harm appraisal]… so I got annoyed [emotion], and I’ve buzzed, the refs on the intercom, and I’ve said, ‘nail him’ [decision-making]. If it had been another player I probably wouldn’t even have bothered… but every time I’ve run the line when [player name] has been involved, he’s been a problem, so I just knew I was going to have a problem… so I tended to be more severe. Similar to the male amateur referee, the issuing of a yellow card by this referee highlighted the influence of previous encounters with, and preconceptions of, the specific player on decision-making. That is, the preconceptions of specific players caused the referees to be biased in their decision-making to the opposing side. The response of the other professional referee in this sample (i.e. Level 1) demonstrates how previous encounters with players do not have to affect the ability of the referee to execute fair decisions:

I can prepare myself for certain players who might try to test how far they can push me… I can’t say I’ve given someone a card just because of who they are. I’ll take into account that they may be known for having bad discipline, but at the end of the day I see the incident the same as I would involving any other player… If you look at [player name] and [player name] in the history books, every time I seem to referee them, they get booked, but that’s not unusual for those two players. [Player name] who I refereed at [team name] was on nine yellow cards and that was before Christmas… I pulled him to one side saying, ‘Let’s see if we can get through the game without me giving you a yellow card’ [problem-focused coping]. So, I try my best, and I’m not going to go looking out for a yellow card, but if they’re on my back screaming and shouting from the start of the game then I’ve got to take action like I would with any other player.

Within this example, the Level 1 referee demonstrated an ability to rationalise the situation and treat the player like he would any other player, consequently behaving fairly.

Assessors of referee performance
All referees in this study acknowledged that the presence of an assessor influenced their decision-making. Indeed, an increase in the
severity of decisions given and a stricter application of the law was evident when assessors were present, as demonstrated by the male amateur referee’s comments:

- It’s [decision-making] conscious... I think, ‘don’t mess up, I’ve got to do this right’ [type of ego involvement/threat appraisal]... if I know an assessor’s watching me I go by the rule book to ensure I don’t get a bad rating [goal congruence/type of ego involvement/coping potential]... so I’m pretty nervous [emotion] and I start picking up on every little infringement, cautioning people when its appropriate [decision-making]... Looking back at one situation, I would never have given the yellow card, but the player tackled from behind, so I felt I had to give a yellow. Dissent is also a big one, rather than telling them to come here and talk, that bit of dissent would get a caution when you know you’re being assessed.

The Level 1 referee also stated:

- When you do get assessed and don’t get assessed [stressor]... there are some things that are technical that I don’t always agree with that have to be done, such as if a player takes a shirt off and throws it over his head and then puts it back on, I don’t see anything wrong with it, but technically in the law its wrong, you’re not allowed to do it and its punished by a yellow card... if an assessor wasn’t there I wouldn’t give a yellow card, but on this occasion he was, so I didn’t want to score poorly [goal congruence/type of ego involvement/threat appraisal] and gave the yellow card [decision-making]... So there are two different standards of decisions depending on the assessor being there.

Although there is evidence of referees administering certain decisions in an attempt to appease assessors, the amateur referees’ appraisals of assessors were found to initiate the onset of negative emotions and affect concentration and focus levels whilst officiating. The female amateur referee described her experiences of being assessed:

- There was a crowd of a thousand, but I knew there were certain people in the crowd watching me, and I had my eye on that constantly... the fact there was those 10 people in the crowd just for you, that’s scary... there’s one person who turns up to a match when I like seize up a bit. When this one guy turns up I panic like heck [emotion], and that’s the national referees officer... I’d like to say I concentrate more, but I don’t think I do, because I think so much about the fact he’s there, and worry about what he’s doing [threat appraisal]... it was a girls game on a Sunday afternoon, I didn’t know he was coming. I literally turned and saw him and just stopped and the ball went out of play and everyone looked at me and I just went ‘defence’s ball,’ and they were like ‘no it wasn’t,’ so I gave it the other way [decision-making], I didn’t see it, how bad is that!

Similarly, the male amateur referee explained a situation where he was being assessed:

- [I get] very nervous [emotion], unusually nervous because of the people that were watching [type of ego involvement]. After the game it was like, ‘thank god that’s over’, everyone who was there, chief referee officer, assessors, and I was thinking, ‘what are they thinking about my performance?’ [type of ego involvement/threat appraisal] rather than focusing on the game... For the first 15 minutes I wasn’t focusing, the game was passing me by, and I wasn’t on the ball with my decisions [decision-making]... I had a conscious thought in my head, ‘focus, focus, watch the game’, but I couldn’t!

The referees’ appraisals of the assessors watching were constructed by the relevance of performance evaluation and potential implications of a poor performance being observed by this specific assessor. The influence on concentration levels on this amateur referee suggests an inability to cope by focusing on the demand of assessors as opposed to the match, whereas the professional referees simply adhered to the laws.
Discussion

Informed by Lazarus’ (1999) CMR Theory of Emotions, this study examined the influence of stress and emotions on referee decision-making through consideration of the stressors, appraisals, and emotions experienced, and coping strategies used, within competitive situations. Through in-depth interviews, the findings provided insight into what stressors and personal factors (i.e. appraisals, emotions, and coping strategies) influence referee decision-making. Specifically, the responses of the referees suggested that stressors relating to the crowd, previous mistakes, confrontation, players with bad reputations, and assessors watching could cause stress appraisals (i.e. threat or harm). These appraisals, in turn, are associated with negative emotions that, if not dealt with, can influence poor decision-making. This was particularly evident in the amateur referee responses, where they demonstrated an inability to cope with the stress and negative emotions experienced and displayed either counter-attacking behaviours through their decision-making or incorrect decisions due to a lack of focus caused by anxiety. In comparison, the professional referees demonstrated problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies that promoted more accurate perceived decision-making.

Fundamental to appropriate decision-making when experiencing stress and negative emotions was the ability to cope effectively. Looking closely at the strategies used by the professional referees, they described using problem-focused coping strategies to actively deal with the stressors that were appraised as threatening or harmful and emotion-focused coping to reduce the perceived threat of a situation and decrease the intensity of the negative emotions experienced. These findings support those of previous research that has shown high skilled performers to cope effectively with demands (e.g. Nicholls et al., 2007) or emotions (Hanton & Connaughton, 2002). However, the current study also showed how such coping can then positively affect performance. That is, managing demands or reducing the intensity of negative emotions allowed the professional referees to focus on making accurate decisions while performing.

The amateur referees’ failure to cope with the experience of stress and emotions caused perceived incorrect or counter-attacking decision-making. For example, failure to cope meant that threat appraisals and associated anxiety taxed the amateur referees’ attentional capacity, thereby impairing processing efficiency and their decision-making performance (see Eysenck & Calvo, 1992). This was particularly evident when assessors were watching. The counter-attacking decisions were a result of anger caused by harm appraisals. Such findings support Lazarus’ (1999, 2000) proposition that harm appraisals are associated with anger and that such an emotional experience impulses individuals to counter-attack to gain revenge or repair a wounded self-esteem. The lack of effective coping demonstrated by the amateur referees could be due to being less experienced than the professional referees. The professional referees had at least 11 years more practice of refereeing and could, therefore, have had an opportunity to encounter and learn to deal with a variety of stressful experiences. Indeed, previous research has suggested that with experience referees learn to cope more effectively with their emotions (Folkesson et al., 2002). The level two referee provided some insight into how experience could help referees cope more effectively:

I back myself that, 95 times out of 100, I’ll get the decisions right… it’s not arrogant, it’s how those at elite levels survive, if you’re thinking, ‘Oh God I might have got that wrong’, you will get it wrong. It’s confidence in your ability and that’s down to learning.

In the quotation above, the referee has implied that learning with experience improves confidence, which improves the chances of accurate decision-making. Given
the findings of the study, it is possible that this confidence is due to an awareness of the development of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies that help during stressful situations. By knowing that they have the capacity to deal with their stress and emotions during performance, the professional, more experienced, referees enter the competitive environment more confident than the amateur referees.

From an applied perspective, the findings of this study suggest that referees need to develop appropriate problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies that can be used to manage their experiences of stress and emotions and improve the frequency of accurate decision-making. The professional referees suggested that they learnt from practice, developing ways to cope with situations after they had been encountered. This was due to self-learning (Level 2 referee) or through guidance from other referees (Level 1 referee). Consequently, guided reflective practice could be the medium for referees to explore and understand their experience of stress and emotions and the subsequent influences on actions in practice (Anderson, 2004). By increasing their awareness of the consequences of incorrect decisions, referees may learn to control their emotions and possess an effective working capacity that is conducive to maintaining optimal decision-making. The use of trained mentors to guide this practice is also recommended, where the mentors could be coached to question practicing referees about what they did well during stressful experiences – so that they learn what they have done to ensure correct decision making, and what they did not do well and what they could possibly do differently in the future – so to identify appropriate coping strategies for similar situations in the future. Such an approach seemed to help the level one referee after a poor performance and has been recommended in previous research (Cunningham et al., 2012).

A further practical recommendation could be to help referees view their emotional experience as beneficial for performance. A recent intervention study by Neil, Hanton and Mellalieu (in press) adopted a cognitive-behavioural strategy where golf performers were taught the ARC technique, where they were guided to Acknowledge and understand their appraisals and emotions, Rationalise the experience as beneficial to performance, and then Change their focus towards a performance process that is under their control. Referees who do not deal with their emotional experience could, therefore, undergo a similar intervention where they learn to realise that certain emotional experiences can be beneficial for performance by being prompts to focus on what they would normally do to achieve accurate decisions.

This study was the first to provide a detailed insight into how referee decision-making can be influenced by stressors, through insight into appraisals, emotions, and coping. Despite this contribution to knowledge, a number of limitations exist that give rise to directions for future research. For example, this study adopted a retrospective design that may have influenced the accuracy of information gathered. Indeed, despite the referees providing detailed examples of stressful experiences, a prolonged longitudinal design with more stimulated recall procedures (i.e. diaries) could have provided a more truthful insight into the effects of stress and emotion on decision-making. Arguably, if researchers adopt a more prolonged approach similar to that used in recent stress and coping research (e.g. Nicholls et al., 2009), then the amount of significant experiences reported may not be as profound as those identified in the current study, as recent more longitudinal designs have been a maximum of 31 days in length. Considering that with experience referees may learn to cope more effectively with stress and emotion, future longitudinal approaches must be over a greater time span than that adopted in the past, so that changes in behaviour can be better monitored.
A further limitation was that the affect of stress and emotions on referee decision-making was reported subjectively, which again questions the accuracy of information provided. To potentially better understand the influence of stress and emotions on decision-making, a more experimental approach could be adopted – one that still allows for in-depth responses. Jordet and Elferink-Gemser (2012) considered stress, coping and emotions during a football penalty shootout. Here, the football performers watched back a penalty shoot-out and, through interviews, described their experiences at particular stages throughout. Although Jordet and Elferink-Gemser did not consider the influence of such experiences on actual behaviour, the use of recorded video could provide insight into the actual decisions that are made, while interviews around such footage offers participants the opportunity to explain the decisions. In addition, such an approach may allow for a more detailed insight into other facets of decision-making. For example, the accuracy, style, and communication of decisions made (see Mellick et al., 2005). The participants in Jordet and Elferink-Gemser’s study were, however, interviewed between eight and 12 months post penalty shoot-out. Subsequently, future research into referees could record performance, then, within the week post performance, use edited clips to prompt referee recall about their experiences of stress and emotion before critical decisions.

In conclusion, this study has found differences between the professional experienced referees and amateur, less experienced referees in their use of coping during stressful experiences. The implications of not coping were incorrect or counter-attacking referee decision-making. Implications for practice have been suggested that focus on reflective practice to develop appropriate problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies, or use cognitive-behavioural interventions to target the way referees interpret their emotional experiences. Finally, longitudinal and video assisted research designs were recommended, that could provide an unique insight into the influence of stress and emotions on referee decision-making.

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Applied and Pedagogical Reflections

Exploring the value of reflective practice interventions within applied sport psychology: Case studies with an individual athlete and a team

Richard Neil, Brendan Cropley, Kylie Wilson & Andrea Faull

Despite the reported value of reflective learning in the sport literature, the efficacy of reflective practice remains in doubt due to the paucity of applied examples of its value in practice. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to provide case study examples of reflective practice interventions delivered to an individual athlete and a team. The first case presents a reflective practice intervention designed to improve the self-efficacy of an elite, male cricketer. The second case outlines the utility of individual and shared written reflections, conducted by an international age grade rugby squad to construct and evaluate team goals. In both cases emphasis is placed on in-depth social validation procedures used to assess the detail of effectiveness post-intervention. The value of utilising reflective practice as an approach to intervening with athletes is discussed along with the practical implications of making reflection a more integral aspect of applied sport psychology practice.

Keywords: Reflective practice; intervention; athletic performance.
interventions should be prioritised. In support of this, Knowles et al. (2012) suggested that in order to create a case that convinces athletes to engage with and explore reflective processes, there needs to be more accounts from experienced practitioners in sport psychology that focus on the impact of reflective interventions in sport.

In light of the preceding discussion, the current paper presents two ASP case studies in an attempt to improve understanding of the way in which reflective practice might facilitate the development of athletic performance. The specific aims of doing this are twofold. First, the paper aims to present examples of real-life sport psychology in action in an attempt to inform readers of approaches to working with athletes in different contexts. Second, the paper aims to build upon claims in recent literature regarding the value of reflective practice as an innovative approach to athlete learning and development by exploring the efficacy of reflective interventions in elite youth cricket and rugby union. The case studies initially present contextual information to set the scene in which the ASP support took place. Specific interventions are then presented in different phases to elaborate on the service delivery process. During these two phases the authors have attempted to support their analysis of the situations and underpin their actions with insights into their professional judgement and decision making (Martindale & Collins, 2007). In view of the comments of Anderson et al. (2002) that practitioners must take responsibility for evaluating and documenting their effectiveness, insights into the evaluation processes adopted are then presented. These procedures attempt to determine the efficacy of the interventions as well as create links between performance enhancement and the use of reflective practice. Finally, a summative conclusion is offered to explicate the key points emanating from the case study itself.

**Consultant background**

The practitioners (authors 1 and 3) working in the case studies were, at the time of writing, full-time members of academic staff at British universities, British Psychological Society (BPS) Chartered consultants, and British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES) Accredited practitioners. They had been providing ASP services for six and seven years respectively, during which time they had worked with athletes and teams from a variety of sports spanning all levels and ages from grass-roots and university sport (non-elite) to age-grade and senior international (elite). Additionally, (author 3) was an ex-international rugby player who held the position of ‘head coach’ for the team reported in the second case study and therefore fulfilled the dual role of coach and practitioner.

The practitioners had similar professional practice philosophies, approaching their work predominantly from a humanistic perspective centred on the premise that each individual has the ability to achieve what they desire and to control their lives (cf. Rogers, 1974). In this sense, King (2007) suggested that the person and their development are considered holistically through incorporating the idea of self-concept. In both case studies reported in this paper, the practitioners’ values led to behaviours that focused on working ‘with’ the client and developing strength based strategies that emanate from the client themselves (e.g. emphasising strengths, positive emotions, and well-being, cf., Linley & Joseph, 2004). According to Andersen (2009), such approaches support recent views regarding the nature and direction of ASP support suggesting a movement away from traditional approaches and a need to develop more modern, innovative practices that place greater emphasis on humanistic frameworks.

Poczwardowski, Sherman and Ravizza (2004) asserted that an understanding of consulting philosophy is an essential prerequisite to effective consulting practice. Simi-
larly, without clarity on what reflective practice is, and the process of engaging in reflective learning, it is difficult to develop teaching and learning strategies that are likely to be successful in developing reflective skills in individuals (Williamson, 1997). In both cases presented in this paper, the practitioners believed reflective practice to be a process that: (a) engages people in experiential learning; (b) places the ‘whole self’ at the heart of learning; (c) is instigated through questioning; (d) results in change; and (e) requires explicit training. Engaging in the process leads to new understandings of the self, context and environment that can help to improve what individuals and groups do within their daily lives.

**Case Study 1: The use of reflective practice to improve the self-efficacy of an elite male cricketer**

**Contextual information**

During the provision of ASP support to an elite cricket youth academy in the UK, the head coach referred a 19-year-old wicket-keeper/batsman to speak to me (author 1) about his competitive performances. This led to an initial meeting with the cricketer where he highlighted a lack of confidence when batting. This was verified by the cricketer in a second meeting where he was shown edited video clips of his recent performances (N=3), and offered to comment on his experiences when batting. On all three occasions he was bowled out for an individual score of under 20. His batting average for the year to date was at 15 runs per innings. During the discussions about his experiences within each game, the cricketer indicated that when he got to double figures he lost focus and changed his routine. He stated, ‘It (routine) just all goes, I think that I shouldn’t be at this score and that I’ll be bowled out any minute… that’s all I then focus on and I end up getting bowled out!’ In addition to this explanation, the cricketer stated that he could not recall many good performances, and out of those that he did report, he could not identify why they were good performances. Specifically, he did not know what he actually did to bat well, and he also could not recall what he did during the early stages of each performance to score runs.

To help verify his lack of confidence during batting, a self-efficacy rating scale was developed with the guidance of the cricketer and the head coach that focused on the key factors associated with a cricking batsman. Twelve items were identified that were incorporated into the domain specific self-efficacy Likert scale that addressed the levels and strength of batting self-efficacy (Bandura, 2006). The items were phrased as ‘can do’ (a judgement of capability) and included, ‘I can keep track of every ball throughout my batting,’ ‘I can make the right decisions on whether to hit or leave with every ball I face,’ and ‘I can score a 50.’ The response scale assigned to each item ranged from 0 ‘I’m certain I can’t do this,’ to 10 ‘I’m certain I can do this.’ On completion of the scale, it was evident that the cricketer’s confidence when batting was low, with responses ranging from 1 to 8, with an average rating of 3.66.

The low confidence during batting reported by the cricketer and the fact that he could not recall what he actually did when he performed well, resulted in the cricketer and I (author 1) agreeing to the goal of enhancing self-efficacy through reflective practice. Indeed, developing a reflective practice disposition has been reported to improve self-awareness (e.g. Cropley et al., 2007); augment self-efficacy (e.g. Hanton, Cropley & Lee, 2009), and promote athlete autonomy (Faull & Cropley, 2009). Thus, adopting such an approach to intervening appeared to have credence in this case.

**The intervention**

Based on previous work in other domains (e.g. education) that has introduced reflective practice as a means of improving performance, the intervention administered in this case involved five stages (e.g. Gadsby & Cronin, 2012; Griffin, 2003). These stages consisted of a combination of education,
guided and unguided practice and were developed in line with my (author 1) philosophy for developing autonomy and my understanding of the client.

**Phase I: Introduction to reflective practice**

The first phase involved discussing with the cricketer the benefits of reflective practice, emphasising how the ongoing awareness of performance accomplishments and the identification of limitations can be used advantageously to identify ways of developing and, as a result, improve self-confidence (Bandura, 2006; Faull & Cropley, 2009; Feltz, Short & Sullivan, 2008). Consequently, the cricketer was given a diary and asked to respond to the following five questions (based on Gibbs, 1988) after a competitive performance, ‘What went well?’ ‘What did I do to make it go well?’ ‘What didn’t go well?’ ‘What did I do/didn’t I do that resulted in a poor performance?’ and ‘What can I do differently/work on?’

**Phase II: Unguided reflections**

During this phase the cricketer was directed to reflect in his diary following each performance, responding to the questions identified in Phase I. The purpose of this phase was to establish a baseline picture of the cricketer’s ability to reflect. In this sense, the ‘ability to reflect’ refers to the level (e.g. descriptive to critical) that a person is able to reflect at (cf. Knowles et al., 2001). Previous research has highlighted that being able to reflect at more critical levels (e.g. reflection that challenges habitual practices) may be more beneficial to the learning gleaned from reflective practice (see Cropley & Hanton, 2011). In accord with the work of Knowles et al. (2001), assessing the cricketer’s ability to reflect gave insights into the ways in which his level of reflectiveness could be improved. I (author 1) met weekly with the cricketer to monitor the reflections, and after three weeks and five competitive performances it was deemed that enough information was gathered regarding the cricketer’s current reflective ability. At this stage, the cricketer’s batting scores did not change beyond the previous batting average and his reflections post-performance were considered as being relatively superficial (e.g. pragmatic evaluation of events, see Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010). Specifically, all the reflections lacked any in-depth explanation for why he performed well or what he needed to do to improve. For example, after the third match he responded to ‘What went well?’ with, ‘I batted well at the start of my innings.’ He then responded to the follow-up question of ‘What did I do to make it go well?’ with, ‘I was focused’. Consequently, the cricketer did not identify what he specifically did to become focused and how this focused state actually influenced performance.

**Phase III: Guided reflections**

The guided reflections phase was implemented due to the descriptive nature of the cricketer’s initial reflections, which meant that the athlete gained little from the reflective process with the issues regarding low self-awareness and self-efficacy remaining. This phase lasted six weeks. During this phase, I (author 1) again met weekly with the cricketer to discuss the reflections he had completed. The focus here was to guide the cricketer on providing more depth to the reflections so to improve awareness on the factors that made him a good performer and what he needed to work on to improve. The following extract from my personal reflective transcript demonstrates the discussions that took place:

(author): In response to what went well during Saturday’s game, you’ve stated ‘I felt good prior to batting.’ You then stated that this is because you prepared well. What did this preparation include?

Cricketer: What I meant there was my preparation while I walked out to bat seemed to help me... I was conscious that I was looking around at everything except the opposition team.

(author): Why was that important?
Cricketer: It meant I wasn’t thinking about the opposition or worrying about the bowler I was going to face... instead I was picking different things to look at around the ground, like different sponsorship boards on the side of the pitch or people in the crowd.

(author): And this helped?
Cricketer: Yeah it did! I think I worry a lot when I walk out to bat, as it can be a long walk and you have a lot of time to think negatively. So I noticed that by telling myself, ‘Who’s sponsoring us? Who’s in the crowd? Pick a sponsor, pick out someone from each side of the ground,’ allowed me to avoid any performance thoughts – which was good!

(author): How about when you were at the centre (of the pitch) and got ready to bat?
Cricketer: I’m not too sure about that, I just noticed that the walk on routine was good for me.

(author): How did you perform?
Cricketer: I started well, had no pressure because I was comfortable at the start... so I could see the ball well.

(author): Ok, this is the type of depth I’m looking for! Identifying what it is you specifically do to get to a good performance or feeling state. So it sounds like the walk on routine helped you get to a good feeling state which improved your concentration?
Cricketer: Exactly that, I wasn’t worrying about the opposition like I normally do...

(author): Let’s add this detail into your reflections, this is the depth we need to understand more about what you do well and why.

These one-to-one sessions, therefore, attempted to build on the cricketer’s descriptive reflections by making sense of not only what the cricketer actually did well but also how these positive aspects of performance had happened (e.g. conceptualising the cricketer’s role in, and factors impacting, his performance). When identifying the cognitions and behaviours that he could alter or improve (when performances were poor) we also focused on such strategies as transferring behaviour that had worked in previous situations and/or guiding the cricketer to identify alternative solutions.

Phase IV: Unguided reflections
After the six-week period of prompting the reflections in the weekly meetings, the cricketer was asked to go back to reflecting on his own without any further guidance. The idea here was to develop autonomous reflective techniques within the cricketer and thus encourage him to take responsibility for managing the situation. Over a three-week period, weekly meetings were still conducted to listen to the reflections, with the depth of the self-reflections having improved considerably from cricketer’s initial experience of unguided self-reflections (i.e. Phase II). For example, on the second meeting, the cricketer had provided the following reflections in relation to a competitive performance:

Reflection prompt: What went well?
Cricketer’s response: I batted very well for the first five overs of the match

Reflection prompt: What did I do to make it go well?
Cricketer’s response: I played each ball one at a time, but before hand I did what I notice I normally do before a good shot, before each delivery... I’d walk away from the crease (to the side), look at where the fielders are, tap each pad, test the ground (with the bat), walk back to the crease, set my feet up, get my
stance ready, tap the bat twice, and watch the ball in the bowler’s hand.

Reflection prompt: What didn’t go well?
Cricketer’s response: I lost focus in the 6th over, I was fortunate the bowler wasn’t on target as I’d have been out!

Reflection prompt: What did I do / didn’t I do that resulted in a poor performance?
Cricketer’s response: I was playing well, and I realise now that when I do start to play well I get too complacent, I relax too much and start getting cocky instead of focusing on the shot... so I miss the bowler’s hand then because I’m not doing what I normally do to focus!

Phase V: Evaluation
After the unguided self-reflection period, a post-intervention phase was conducted to evaluate the cricketer’s current self-efficacy ratings, batting average, and to conduct a social validation interview to verify the given scores and provide explanations for how the intervention might have helped improve self-efficacy and performance.

Self-efficacy ratings and batting average. The self-efficacy ratings increased to a range of 4 to 9, with an average of 5.45 (and average increase of 1.79). Key changes were observed with the responses to the items ‘I can keep track of every ball throughout my batting’ and ‘I can focus on the seam of every ball I face’ as these increased from 2 to 5 and 1 to 4 respectively. Obviously, the scores were still low, but in a short period of time, utilising reflective practice as an approach to developing self-awareness had seemed to have an effect on the cricketer’s self-efficacy. With regards to batting average, during and post-intervention average increased from 15 to 35 runs per innings. Anderson et al. (2002) have suggested that developments in performance provide some understanding of the success of sport psychology interventions and in this case the large increase in batting average may indicate the potential value of reflective practice as an approach to both personal and professional development.

Social validation interviews. A social validation interview was conducted to explore the underlying mechanisms that assisted in the development of the cricketer’s self-efficacy ratings and performance. During this interview, the cricketer described how the development of more functional reflective thinking (e.g. reflection focused on developing process-related factors of performance) had helped improve confidence, performance, and also his ability to reflect within performance. Focusing on the benefits for self-confidence, the cricketer stated:

I now feel confident to be able to bat for longer periods of time. Because of reflection I know what I have to do to focus on each ball at a time. I know how to watch each ball. The only thing that matters to me is the next ball, and that (reflective technique) allowed me to focus in on that ball coming down as opposed to being wider in my view.

Similarly, the explanation for performance effects related to the cricketer’s better acknowledgement of what he does well to focus effectively on the ball he is facing:

Before (reflective practice), I was telling myself to watch the ball consistently without knowing how to do it, now it’s more about knowing the process that gets me to keep my focus, which helps me watch the seam for longer and allows me to stay in for longer! I narrow my focus to what is happening in front of me at that moment in time.

With regards to the increased ability to reflect within actual performance, the cricketer stated:
I still get a bit too comfortable and that is when I slip off and don’t watch the ball, but because I know I have this (reflective) process in place, I know I can go back to that and that allows me to get back to that place which gets me to watch the seam properly again.

Conclusion
The aim of this case study was to evaluate the use of guided reflective practice on the self-efficacy and performance of a male cricketer. At the end of a systematic approach to consultancy, the cricketer suggested that the use of guided reflective practice enhanced situational specific self-confidence and improved focus of attention during actual performance. It is thought that by establishing more effective reflective techniques the cricketer was able to develop the self-awareness required to understand the aspects of his performance that were limiting, as well as those that facilitated positive performance. Such self-awareness empowered the cricketer to take responsibility for finding his own solutions to the issues he faced, subsequently impacting the way in which he thought about himself and his performance. Despite the promising findings, however, confidence was still relatively low at the end of the intervention (i.e. 5.45 out of a possible 10). This may suggest that the intervention phases needed to be longer, or that more traditional approaches to developing self-efficacy (e.g. positive self-talk; imagery, mindfulness meditation) need to be built into the reflective approach adopted in this case.

Case Study 2: The use of reflective practice to improve the use of team goals

Contextual information
This case study focuses on an international, age grade, female rugby union team that had underperformed (outcome and performance) over a two-year period; with an 11:12 win to loss ratio. At the end of the second season, both management and players carried out a major review in which the goal setting process was highlighted as ‘an area needing improvement’. In particular, players stated that ‘they did not feel they owned team goals’ and ‘not all players bought into team goals when it really counted’.

The head coach, who was also the lead researcher on this project (author 3), examined the literature around team goal setting in an attempt to address these issues before the start of the third season. Research examining goal setting in team contexts (see Kingston & Wilson, 2009, for review) suggested that goals impact upon team performance by influencing team focus (Widmeyer & Ducharme, 1997), inter-group communication, team commitment and satisfaction (Carron, Widmeyer & Brawley, 1985), and team coordination (Eccles & Tenenbaum, 2004). However, much of this research is conceptual in nature or lacks ecological validity, as researchers have tended to use concocted participant groups. Consequently, building on the applied sports coaching work of Richards, Mascarenhas, and Collins (2009) and Richards, Collins, and Mascarenhas (2012), who used reflective practice to develop principles of team play and role clarity in female international hockey and netball teams respectively, it was concluded that an intervention incorporating principles of reflective practice might be used to better develop player ownership and buy-in of team goals. Indeed, Richards et al. reported that reflective practice helped to improve team identity, improved team decision-making and increased the team’s ability to cope in high-pressure international competition. It was thought, therefore, that reflective practice would offer a more innovative and successful approach to dealing with the issues being experienced by the team in this case.

Thirteen out of the 22 players in the squad (Mage = 19 years; M playing experience = 4 years) had been in the team for two seasons with the same coaches and had experienced reflective practice throughout the
two seasons (i.e. informal, formal, written, verbal, unguided, guided, individual, shared, player-player, player-coach). The nine remaining players had no formal experience with reflective practice. The primary purpose of this case study, then, was to examine the use of reflective practice to facilitate the setting of team goals with a national age-grade women’s rugby team. A secondary purpose was to compare inexperienced and no-experience reflectors’ perceptions of the use of reflective practice to inform team goal setting and the impact of this process on performance.

The intervention

Drawing upon the work of Richards et al. (2009), who had successfully integrated reflective practice into team culture, the intervention in this case consisted of four phases. These phases were also crafted out of my (author 3) understanding of the proposed value of individual reflection (Phase I), shared reflection (Phase II), and organisational reflection (Phase III) (cf. Cropley & Hanton, 2011; Ghaye, 2011). The final phase built on the recommendations of Anderson et al. (2002) regarding the need for formal approaches to evaluation in order to sustain the positive aspects and improve any limiting aspects of an intervention. In this case, the evaluation allowed for an understanding of the way forward for the team.

Phase I: Developing individual reflection skills

The players took part in a training game during the first training session of the (third) season and were given 24 hours to engage in formal, written, unguided reflection (i.e. reflect on your individual/unit/team performance without any guidance). These reflections were collected to provide players with feedback focusing on the depth of reflective analysis and quality of action plans. Prior to the second training session players were given their unguided reflections back with feedback, and the main/common issues (i.e. overly descriptive nature of reflections, lack of evaluation and analysis, no clear and implementable action plan) were shared with the group. After the second training session (one week after training game), players were given individual guided reflection sheets, based primarily on Riley-Doucet and Wilson’s (1997) reflective framework. The proforma’s included the guide questions: (a) identification – what happened?; (b) description – what went well and why?; (c) description – what went not so well and why?; (d) significance – what does this experience mean for you and for the team?; (e) options – what could you do differently (identify options)?; and (f) implications – as a result of what you’ve learnt what will you do in the future (action plan)?

In a follow-up to the initial reflective stage, the players were then given the opportunity to review video footage (individual, unit, and team) of the game and add to/amend their individual reflections-on-practice. Once again they handed their guided reflection sheets in to the Head Coach for feedback, which they received prior to training session three.

Phase II: Shared reflections to evaluate performance

After training session three, players completed individual guided reflections. The players were then put into small communities of practice (CoP, Wenger, 1998) consisting of three to four players, mixed in their experience of reflection, to share their individual reflections and identify common themes to feed back to the team. Players again had the opportunity during the process to access game footage to add/amend their reflections. The CoPs then shared their common themes to the team (e.g. missing tackles; not numbering up in defence; over committing in contact areas); these were collated to establish common themes across the whole team.

Phase III: Development of team goals as informed by reflective practice

The common themes that emerged from the shared reflection process were discussed and
translated into team goals for use in the build up to and during the first competitive fixture. For example, an element identified during the shared reflective process was that missed tackles were a key issue so the team set a goal of making 90 per cent of first attempt tackles. The team trained twice more, with training sessions linked to achieving team goals prior to the first competitive fixture. The same process (e.g. individual guided reflection, shared reflection, team goals) was implemented after the first competitive fixture. Team goals were subsequently adapted/addeded to in the build up to and during the second competitive fixture.

**Phase IV: Evaluation**

Two focus group interviews (one with inexperienced reflectors \((N=4)\) and one with reflectors with no experience \((N=4)\)) were conducted to evaluate the reflective practice and team goal setting process and the impact of this process on individual/unit/team performance. Once recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and inductive content analysis was used to identify key themes. The following section will outline the key findings from the two focus group interviews and highlight some coach observations from the lead researcher (author 3) regarding the impact of this intervention upon performance.

**No experience reflectors.** Regarding the reflective practice to team goal setting process, those players in the focus group labelled ‘no experience reflectors’ stated that the reflective process was easier to engage with when the guided reflection sheet was adopted. For example, one player stated, ‘Thank god for the guide questions, as I wouldn’t have known what to think about and write’. Additionally, it was outlined that engaging in a more structured reflective process facilitated the setting of goals to improve performance with one player highlighting, ‘It (reflection) helped me to identify what I needed to work on and how I was going to work on it’. Players with no experience of reflective practice also commented that the team goals emerging from the individual and shared reflective processes adopted in this case increased their perception of ownership and control over goal achievement. Indeed, the nature of the goals changed from the previous outcome focus to more of a performance focus, ‘Team goals have usually been to win, but the ones we set this time were more about how we would win, so I felt more in control’. These players also identified the benefit of being involved in creating their goals and the link between individual goals and team goals, ‘Because I understood the (team) goal and where it came from, I was able to think about and understand my role in achieving it’. In sum, the main impacts identified by no experience reflectors regarding the reflective practice and team goal setting processes were: (a) facilitating personal goal setting; and (b) having performance related team goals increased their perceptions of control. In addition, these participants identified that for new reflectors, having guidance for reflecting was important as it enabled them to engage in the reflective process more explicitly. Further, sharing reflections was reported to facilitate the process and assist the players in thinking beyond the approaches to goal setting traditionally adopted, thus resulting in greater feelings of ownership of team goals.

**Inexperienced reflectors.** The focus group containing players with some experience of reflection (two years maximum) highlighted that the reflective process enabled them to set more ‘meaningful’ individual goals and increased their awareness of their performance strengths and weaknesses and how to improve them. For example, ‘By reflecting I was able to set my personal actions for the next game based on my playing experience rather than some desired factor that may not have been relevant’; and ‘I became more aware of why I was making those mistakes,
which helped me to change what I did.' Inexperienced reflectors also commented that the shared part of the reflective process increased awareness of the importance of individual contribution to collective common understanding (tactical), with one player adding, 'We had an argument about why something went wrong, and I realised (through reflection) I had been doing it wrong the whole time so I can now change that part of my game to help the team.' Players within this focus group also commented that the shared reflections enabled them, as more experienced players, to share knowledge with less experienced players, which in turn increased those players’ confidence. For example, ‘You could tell the young ones were quiet, so it was a chance to share our knowledge with them and make them more confident by encouraging their opinions and interaction.’

Finally, inexperienced reflectors identified that having team goals, developed through the adopted reflective process, increased collective tactical understanding within the team. It was suggested, ‘One of our big problems was players doing what they wanted, I think having agreed goals has stopped that from happening.’ The captain of the team was involved in the ‘inexperienced reflectors’ focus group and she identified that she used the team goals within her role as captain to keep the team and herself focused on the goals during the game. She stated, ‘It (reflective goal setting process) helped me as captain because I used the goals in team talks to help guide players if we were struggling, and to help me keep focused on us.’ In summary, the main influence of reflective practice identified by the ‘inexperienced reflectors’ on the team goal setting process were: (a) facilitation of personal goal setting; (b) increased collective tactical understanding; and (c) providing information to assist leader communication.

**Head Coach observations.** In attempts to provide a more holistic evaluation of the utility of the reflective intervention the head coach’s (third author) observations of both the process and the impact of the process were also considered. Practically, in order for the squad to fully engage with reflective practice and the goal setting process, three hours of training time was sacrificed per training day (four in total) for the intervention to be undertaken. While this sacrifice reduced physical, technical and tactical development opportunities, both players and coaches identified during their review after the second season that psychological factors were the main areas needing development, therefore justifying the approach adopted. Such activities were also considered, by the head coach to improve the training performance of the players thus making better and more efficient use of the time spent ‘on the pitch’ or ‘in the gym’, which again outweighs some of the issues arising over the time taken to integrate the intervention. Specifically, the head coach outlined that the players increased collective tactical understanding (as identified by players in the group reflections), and this reduced the occurrence of ‘on-pitch’ discussion around tactical decisions, allowing a greater coach focus on technical, physical and mental aspects of performance both in training and during games. Whilst it is acknowledged that many other factors may have influenced performance outcomes, the squad won the second competitive fixture against an opponent they had failed to beat during seven previous attempts over three years. The coach identified: (a) player commitment to the game plan; (b) improved collective tactical understanding; and (c) improved leadership as three reasons for the successful outcome. These were also three areas the players identified as being influenced by the reflective practice and team goal setting process.

**Conclusion**

The aim of this case study was to outline a process of utilising reflective practice in the process of developing and using team goals in an international, age grade, female rugby team. The impact of this process was evalu-
ated through focus group interviews with players as well as observations from the head coach. Results indicated that the reflective practice and team goal setting process impacted upon facilitating personal goal setting and increased collective tactical understanding, which was reported to have an impact on overall team performance.

The positive influence that the reflective practice and team goal setting process had on collective tactical understanding supports the work of Widmeyer and Ducharme (1997) in that team goals impact performance by giving the team a common focus. However, the current finding takes this further by identifying a more specific ‘common focus’ (i.e. tactical understanding), which in complex interdependent sports such as rugby union, is critical for successful performance and outcome (Wilson & Mellalieu, 2007). The inclusion of shared reflections within the reflective practice process seemed to be an effective way to target the sharing (and coherency) of mental models (Eccles & Tenenbaum, 2004) to improve collective understanding and, therefore, applied practitioners should consider utilising shared reflection in teams to improve coordination.

Discussion: Effective learning through reflective practice

The case studies presented in this paper have outlined how practitioners have adopted reflective practices as an approach to intervening with both an individual athlete and a team. Emanating from these real-life experiences of ASP in action are a multitude of benefits regarding the utility of reflective practice for promoting effective behaviours in sport. These findings support those of Holland et al. (2010) who found that reflective practice, employed by youth athletes, resulted in the development of mental qualities associated with elite performance (e.g. self-awareness, determination, confidence). This discussion will not, however, focus on outlining the key benefits emanating from each case study (this has been done previously) but instead explore how reflective practice may have facilitated the achievement of the positive outcomes reported. The idea here is to present recommendations, based on practice, for those working in ASP, as well as developing understanding of the way in which reflection may be more successfully integrated into practice.

In both case studies the value of working to develop the skills (e.g. problem solving; critical thinking) and the attributes (e.g. open-mindedness; mindfulness) required for reflective practice is highlighted. This represents a view that merely asking individuals to adopt reflective practice is unlikely to help them engage in an effective experiential learning process. Instead, the power of reflective practice is influenced by not only the aforementioned skills and attributes but also by an individual’s knowledge and understanding of how to engage in the process (Cropley et al., 2010). The value of training programmes designed to enhance these reflective skills has been reported in recent research by Cropley et al. (2011) who reported the significance of a multi-modal training programme designed to increase the likelihood that reflective practice would have a positive effect on the practice of sports coaching participants. Despite this, there is little evidence of such reflective training programmes being utilised within the domains of sport psychology and athletic development. Additionally, where reflective practice has been used little insight is provided into the ability of the ‘educators’ to deliver training programmes and the impact this has had on the participants’ reflective abilities. Norrie et al. (2012) have warned that implementing reflective teaching poorly may result in reflective practices not being effectively incorporated into professional practice. Further, research by Epp (2008) has highlighted the need for educators to be able to facilitate and support the reflective practices of those they are working with.

With respect to the case studies reported in this paper, both practitioners had received formal training in reflective practice and
been mentored, with regards to their reflective practices, through the early parts of their professional careers (by author 2). It is thought that as a result of this they were in an informed position to design and implement context specific training programmes that led to more effective reflective techniques.

Throughout the reflective practice literature, across a range of domains, considerable debate has focused on the potential value of structured approaches to engaging in the reflective process. For example, some authors highlight concerns that structured reflective models constrain the artistry of reflection (e.g. Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998), whereas others suggest that structured reflective writing promotes the qualities, skills, and motivation required for effective reflective practices (Telfer & Knowles, 2010).

Both cases reported in this paper built upon the methods successfully employed in previous research (e.g. Cropley et al., 2007; Gadsby & Cronin, 2012; Knowles et al., 2012) by adopting different structured approaches to reflection that were driven by a process of questioning. The rationale for this being that a structured, written process provides a powerful pedagogical resource that supports the development of critically reflective practitioners (cf., Gadsby & Cronin, 2012). Consequently, although reflection is complex and relational, structuring the process scaffolds learning of the reflective process, nurtures critical thinking, and promotes reflective insight. Whilst it is recognised that individuals should be given the opportunity to adopt an approach to reflection that allows them to explore their experiences naturally to permit creative thinking, in the beginning stages of introducing reflective practice structuring the process encourages more systematic reflection and reduces the likelihood of individuals simply pondering over their experiences (Knowles et al., 2001). Due to the variety of structured approaches available, practitioners must consider which one might be best suited to the client they are working with. Indeed, different situations are best supported by different reflective practices and, therefore, the practitioner must consider the purpose of their clients’ reflections in order to ensure the efficacy of the process (Cropley & Hanton, 2011).

One factor, reported in both cases here, which influenced the success of the reflective interventions, was the development towards a reflective disposition. In the first case, the cricketer reflected both on their own and with the ASP practitioner. In facilitating reflective practice in this way the cricketer was able to consider his approach to reflection as well as begin to understand the types of information he needed to attend to. This approach has previously been considered as key to encouraging greater immersion in reflective approaches to practice (Griffin, 2003). Additionally, in the second case study, the team were not only supported by the coach but also by their peers through the integration of a shared reflective process and the use of feedback. In both cases, this support was ongoing and not isolated in nature, which researchers have acknowledged as being fundamental to encouraging sustained reflective learning and thus developing a culture where reflection is seen as a vital part of professional practice (Anderson, Knowles & Gilbourne, 2004; Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998). Practitioners utilising reflective practice as a mode of intervention with athletes must consider, therefore, how reflection becomes part of an athlete’s disposition rather than being viewed as a tool to be used when the athlete feels it necessary (Ghaye, 2011).

Although the cases presented here do not represent the diverse landscape of applied sport psychology consultancy, they do provide specific insights into both applied practice and the utility of reflective practice as an approach to enhancing athletic performance. Whilst it is difficult to identify the potential cause and effect relationship between improved reflective skills and performance, the social validation procedures adopted in both cases provide strong evidence of the efficacy of the inter-
ventions. Indeed, Kendall et al. (1990) have outlined the importance of social validation as a way of verifying the results of an intervention. It is believed that the findings from both case studies, therefore, offer unique insights into the value of reflective practice for athlete populations. Due to the scope of these cases there is still a need for future research to develop the evidence base supporting reflective practice in sport and upon which effective reflective interventions can be developed. Indeed, despite the perceived benefits associated with reflective practice, its use within the different domains of sport appear inadequate and this may be because practitioners are still questioning these perceptions and its value (Cropley & Hanton, 2011). Nevertheless, given the findings presented in this paper, coupled with the extensive support from both inside and outside of the sporting domain, it is recommended that ASP practitioners carefully consider the potential that reflective practice interventions can have for the holistic (e.g. performance, health, well-being) development of their clients. In doing so, practitioners must also consider the way in which they help their clients to develop the skills to reflect and facilitate the reflective process rather than taking for granted that the benefits associated with reflective practice can be gleaned simply through engagement.

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References


Applied and Pedagogical Reflections

Group-based reflective practice in sport psychology: Experiences of two trainee sport and exercise scientists

Emma Huntley & Nichola Kentzer

Reflective practice is becoming increasingly recognised as a tool used to enhance the development and effectiveness of sport psychology practitioners. It has recently become an established feature within UK-based training and accreditation programmes for sport psychology practitioners and it was the personal benefit found by the authors of group-based reflections within their own training experiences that stimulated this reflection. This exploratory paper provides the personal accounts of two trainee sport and exercise scientists. The narratives outline the perceived importance of using group-based reflective practice to develop applied practitioner skills. These, in concert with literature from other fields, resulted in the development of a model for successful group-based reflective practice that outlines the conditions and skills that are proposed to be important for such practice as a tool for learning.

Keywords: Group-based reflections; reflective practice.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE is being increasingly recognised as an important process within the broader canvas of applied sport psychology (Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010). Indeed, recent changes to the training routes of the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES) and of the British Psychological Society (BPS) emphasise the role of reflective practice throughout the training process and within supervision (Knowles, Katz & Gilbourne, 2012). Literature supports the use of reflective practice (e.g. Anderson, Knowles & Gilbourne, 2004; Cropley et al., 2010) as part of practitioner development in applied sport psychology as it can allow practitioners the opportunity to examine their own practice taking into consideration their thoughts, feelings and actions (Cropley et al., 2007). Telfer and Knowles (2009) suggest journals, reflective conversations with a critical friend, taped narrative, and discussion forums in groups as formats for capturing reflection, and these techniques can often be found within training activities for the trainee sport and exercise scientist or sport psychologist. Currently, much of the reflective practice in sport psychology literature focuses on individual reflections (e.g. Cropley et al., 2007; Woodcock, Richards & Mugford, 2008), with benefits to the practitioner suggested to include being able to make sense of, and learn from, practice, helping to explore and inform decision-making, helping to increase understanding, ensuring accountability, self-management and, ultimately, improving effectiveness (Anderson et al., 2004). Furthermore, it has been suggested that reflecting on practice can empower individuals to implement change, become more self-aware (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998) and generate practice-based knowledge (Cropley et al., 2010). Indeed, in Cropley et al. (2007) the lead author examined his own practice through the use of self-reflection, concluding that it increased self-awareness, self-confidence, creativity and helped to bridge the gap between knowledge and practice. However, he also found that reflection often created more questions than answers which, for an individual trainee, could actually cause more problems.
than solutions. Although supervision could be considered the main support mechanism to reduce the likelihood of such problems occurring it is also possible that group-based reflections may also offer further support.

**Group-based reflective practice**

Group-based reflective practice appears to be more commonly used in other practitioner domains and training environments, including health and education, than in sport psychology. For example, Branch et al. (1991) and Branch (2010) provide accounts of the experiences of a group of trainees engaged in group-based reflective practice within the education of trainee doctors. In these accounts compulsory small-group learning activities (including topics such as listening to patients, interviewing skills and reflection on interviews) were instigated within a first-year patient-doctor course (Branch et al., 1991). Specific effects included students learning to be more supportive, to give more honest and specific feedback to each other and to resolve disagreements and learn from each other’s experiences. Reflection on collective experiences allowed individuals to become more compassionate towards patients and students became more self-aware, with experiential learning (e.g. role playing) leading to closer working relationships. Furthermore, students reported interviewing exercises and tutorial discussions as effective learning experiences, yet it was suggested that the small-group process was the major vehicle for learning in this context.

As a result of these groups, and due to the success of the programme, a third-year patient-doctor course was created, where students were brought back into their original groups and focused on their clinical experiences (specifically around communication, medical mistakes, ethical issues and critical incident narratives; Branch, 2010). Small groups using semi-structured sessions (e.g. suggested format, educational goals, case examples and associated reading to discuss) ensured experiential and self-directed learning. Critical group reflection was a central element within both courses, which was longitudinally allied with transformative effects on learners, ‘promoting the emotional, moral and professional growth of the medical students’ (Branch, 2010, p.329). Additionally, critical reflection increased cohesion, supportiveness and provided an opportunity to reflect on disturbing events within the peer support groups.

Within nursing education, action learning groups (ALGs), have been used as a mechanism for facilitating reflections through the sharing of experiences, peer experiential learning and group support. Haddock (1997) reflected on her experiences in an ALG from an undergraduate perspective, specifically focusing on her involvement in a group of 10 to 12 student nurses, which was facilitated by a lecturer. The author reported that the ALG provided a sense of commonality and unity, challenged personal values, and improved self-awareness. However, when reflecting upon her experiences two interdependent issues were highlighted; anxiety and safety. As anxiety levels increased, it was reported that the author felt increasingly unsafe to self-disclose and participate. The structure of the group, the facilitator style and group development were identified as factors that could affect the level of anxiety experienced. More specifically, anxiety was apparent when the group did not have any structure, the facilitator (supervisor) took a ‘back seat’ and there was a lack of cohesiveness or supportiveness between members. However, when the group had more structure, the facilitator was more of a role model, and the group was more supportive and reflective, anxieties decreased and safety and loyalty increased. This reflective account highlights the need for careful consideration and a clear structure when offering opportunities to share views and experiences.

Reflective practice has also been found to be important within the education of trainee teachers (Griffiths, 2000). De Ville (2010) interviewed 17 teachers and 11 lecturers...
regarding their reflective practice experiences during training, and the impact of these experiences on their current professional practice. This research found that connectedness and supportive collaboration, as evidenced through high levels of pastoral care, strong congruence of worldviews and subject interests, and engagement in meaningful dialogue, were important factors in the development of reflective practitioners. De Ville (2010) reported that having something in common (e.g. subject discipline or experience) increased connectedness between members, which resulted in increased reflective practice development. This is further supported by Wilson, Rozelle and Mikeska (2011) who reported that teachers who collaborated over time were better placed to gain support from colleagues experiencing the same issues.

Based on the evidence from medical education, nursing and teaching, it could be suggested that group-based reflective practice might also benefit trainees within sport psychology. For example, a more formalised approach within the current development routes could provide support between trainees, more opportunity for feedback and communication with others. In turn, this could provide increased learning experiences, and an opportunity to constructively challenge values and beliefs within a safe environment, thus enhancing individual self-awareness. Additionally, with the provision of guidance (e.g. Knowles & Saxton, 2010) further professional development could be achieved. However, aside from the ‘suggestion’ of such benefit (Knowles et al., 2007), no research currently exists that actually demonstrates the benefits of group-based reflective practice within sport psychology-training, nor the development of such groups. The closest example of such guidance implemented in practice can be observed in Poczwardowski and Lauer’s (2006) account of the Redondo Beach Think Tank. For this, a group of experienced veteran and young trainee sport psychology consultants met collaboratively over two days to discuss and learn from each other’s experiences in order to ‘share important lessons’ from the field. Ground rules were established to ensure the environment was conducive, effective and beneficial for all. Several anecdotal reflections by way of autoethnography described the entire event and associated processes, in the hope that similar events and networks would be established elsewhere. Although it was not explicitly termed as such, the sharing of experiences and the consequent lessons learned actually demonstrated how reflective practice could take place in a group-based setting, and how formal networks could be implemented into existing pre-award curricula for the benefit of trainee/future practitioners. Several years on, this is a practice that has seemingly not yet emerged within the applied sport psychology as perhaps it was hoped following the publication of the paper. Therefore, the aim of the present paper was to: (a) provide an overview of the activities of a group set up to support and develop trainee practitioners specifically using group-based reflective practice; and (b) provide a reflection on the group activities and environment from two of the group’s members.

Our group

The group in question originally formed as a result of our supervisor taking on trainees for BASES Supervised Experience, with a focus on sport psychology. At the beginning, the group consisted of the two authors (trainees) and our supervisor, creating a firm foundation for two other group members to join within the following six months. The meetings were held monthly at the university at which our supervisor was based. Typically the ‘day’ would start with lunch involving all group members which allowed an informal catch up and additional group bonding. This set the scene for the afternoon’s more formal training sessions. The content of the sessions was organised and semi-structured by our supervisor and each session started with shared reflections of current applied
work, research and/or any issues experienced. In each session we were encouraged to share learning experiences through the use of case study examples, providing brief summaries of events attended and share articles that had been found to be of particular interest. Although one of the trainees had been working in an applied role for a number of years on an ad hoc, voluntary basis, overall the trainees came to the process on an equal footing. This made the development of group ‘rules’ straightforward and this itself was a shared venture. Early in the group formation, the (BASES) Code of Conduct was frequently discussed, along with ethical considerations, which naturally resulted in their application to the group environment we found ourselves in. Confidentiality was something that was paramount to the group, and was discussed in detail. Additionally, within our initial meeting, we discussed other group expectations, including honesty, positivity, provision of feedback to others, and the sharing of ideas and resources. Our supervisor requested that anything shared within the group remained this way (unless consent from respective individuals was granted).

Of the group activities, it was the concept of ‘shared’ or ‘group-based’ reflections that has had a more significant impact on the two authors than their individual input alone. Central to the reflective process has been the dynamic of the working alliance that developed between the authors, and how this became influential to the support mechanisms that have aided subsequent individual practitioner development. Although created with the common purpose of successfully completing the two to six year SE process, it took some time for the group to become a true learning community (cf. Wenger, 1998). We had the benefit of individuals with backgrounds in education (teacher training), sport and exercise science (lecturing and applied practice) and counselling (solution-focused approach), who shared common experiences as trainee practitioners. In this sense the group was homogenous and shared the same characteristics that a researcher would seek in ‘focus group’ participants to create an open, directed environment, but one that embraces diversity to improve the depth and richness of discussion.

Each group member came to the process with different levels of experience of reflective practice. For two members it was an already established practice but for others it was a newer experience. Although this could be viewed as a limiting factor, it was perceived that the smaller, more intimate group that formed allowed us to ‘understand and accept the importance of being able to reflect in safety knowing others respect the confidentiality of the process’ (Telfer & Knowles, 2009, p.44). In addition, deeper relationships formed and members felt safe early in the process. The cohesive nature of the small group provided the opportunity and time for quality relationships to develop and a depth to group-based reflections to emerge that we feel would not have been achieved if the quantity or number of shared experiences increased. Although it could be argued that quality was more important than quantity in this situation, it is important to be mindful of individuals who might feel some anxiety about sharing within a more intimate setting, and the support mechanisms that might be required to facilitate their development.

Cropley et al. (2010) raised concerns that development programmes where there is ‘little guidance or instruction’ might result in the ‘likelihood that reflective practice becomes something to ‘be done’ to fulfil accreditation requirements rather than a mechanism of practice’ (pp.523–524). In contrast, we experienced an environment that promoted support for peers and an opportunity to learn from the experiences of others. There was active encouragement from our supervisor to reflect on our recent experiences. Our supervisor shared her own reflections with us and we started every SE meeting with a group-based reflection on a current client and we were encouraged to give feed-
back to one another. It was important for our group that the reflective practice that was encouraged within our meetings became not only thinking about what we do (Ghaye, 2009) but an important part of our learning journey that needed to be clearly structured. As such, in addition to applied practice, there were often reflections on other areas. This has included the process of SE (for example, SE Annual Report requirements and journal articles of interest), work-life balance (cf. Waumsley, Hemmings & Payne, 2010) and the future directions of both sport psychology applied practice and sport psychology in further/higher education.

**Reflections of lead author (Emma)**

When embarking on supervised experience, I initially shared the view that reflective practice was a ‘tick box’ exercise and did not fully understand the importance of the process to my future development as a practitioner. Within my first year of training, I also felt episodes of anxiety leading up to and during supervisory group meetings, which stemmed around my perceived lack of knowledge, having no experience of working with clients, fear of participating in role play activities and feeling incompetent in front of both my peers and supervisor. After several meetings, the group members began to form close relationships and realised we had more in common than we may have first realised. Experiences could be shared with one another within what became a safe environment through the implementation of ground rules (e.g. ensuring confidentiality, respect, constructive criticism, tolerance of mistakes; Ghaye, 2005; Poczwardowski & Lauer, 2006) and reflective practice was used as a tool to learn from these experiences. It was only then that I was able to see the value of reflective practice for my development, and learn from the anxieties felt initially about practice. Additionally, action plans in moving forward were devised, both as the member sharing the experience first hand and those reflecting on secondary experiences.

One particular experience that was shared with our group was an ethical dilemma I was faced with whilst working with a team at an international competition. The situation related to a 15-year-old female athlete who was discovered one evening, after a report from another female squad member, in the hotel room of an adult male coach from another international squad. The situation raised several ethical issues that, as a trainee, I believed I was unable to cope with, including safeguarding and child protection. However, reflecting on the situation post-event which took place immediately after in a solitary environment and again when writing an official report for the international governing body, I concluded that I did all I could have done upon hearing about the incident and the actions that followed. The main reflections were centred around future actions and how I could have prevented the situation happening in the first place. Questions arose such as ‘Was it my fault as the person providing sport psychology support?’ ‘Should we have provided tighter boundaries?’ ‘Was this a coaching issue?’ ‘Should the athlete’s parents have been there?’

On my return from the competition, I reflected on the situation once again with my supervisor, who confirmed my actions as being appropriate, and we further discussed how a similar situation could be avoided in future, through critical reflection and seeking future change. Additionally, it was agreed that, as with many situations faced in applied sport psychology practice, it was unlike any ‘typical’ situation in an academic textbook or professional practice article and therefore would be beneficial to share and reflect upon this with my peers so that further learning could be achieved. The sharing of this experience and group reflection not only allowed me to provide the group with real-life material with which to learn from, but I also felt a sense of relief and satisfaction in sharing the experience with them, as the astonishment they displayed (and verbalised) demonstrated
that they too would not have expected to face that situation at an international event as a trainee.

**Reflections of second author (Nichola)**

Knowles and Telfer (2009) stated that reflection is the engagement in an active learning process. Reflective practice doesn’t just happen, we have to participate and invest time in reflection in order to benefit from its true value. From my recent experiences of lecturing in teacher education, it has become apparent that ‘learning’ reflective practice (developing an individual model) begins with a trainee teacher needing to be disciplined and allocating time to reflect. This might be to complete a required assignment, for example. Over time, trainees have reflected on their practice within my taught sessions and they now work through their developed structure automatically as they leave the classroom. One trainee shared that she no longer ‘carries’ the experiences she had in lesson one into lesson two, where previously she would have still had the emotions and often negativity (from poor behaviour for example) at the start of the next lesson.

Seeing others develop their reflective practice strategies has been an incredibly interesting learning experience for me. Coming to the SE process after 10 years of teaching rather than immediately after my MSc, as originally planned, has allowed me to reflect on my own development very differently. Although an experienced reflector on my own teaching practice (even during my own PGCE I kept a reflective diary and was encouraged to write full reflections on observed lessons), I was surprised that although my individual ‘framework’ for reflective practice was established, it was a strangely uncomfortable feeling being a trainee once again.

The SE group environment almost mirrored my own PGCE class group and the staffroom environment where I would ‘shelter’ after my lessons as a trainee teacher. Second time around, in my supervised experience, I was able to see that my reflections became less raw, emotionally, when reflecting in the shared setting. Having firstly individually reflected I would then almost re-reflect prior to the SE meetings (or speaking to my supervisor) in order to add clarity and meaning to my thoughts and explanations.

In addition to this second layer of reflection, I gained a considerable amount from seeing and hearing others respond to my dialogue. The reflections within this current group compared to my PGCE colleagues were mature and grounded in life experience. Each group member would offer suggestions and share their own experiences with the support and critical eye of our supervisor cementing the process. Of particular importance to my development was hearing the reflections of Emma (co-author). Not only did I benefit from my own ‘show and tell’ but I found I learnt a significant amount from listening to and understanding her experiences and how she reflected on them. This related strongly to the findings of Poczwardowski and Lauer (2006) who noted that the ‘young group’ in the Redondo Beach think tank reported excitement, enthusiasm and a rejuvenation of spirits from working with the other young professionals. When working together and reflecting, I would feel invigorated and motivated to improve my own practice and initiate self-challenge.

One of our SE activities, led by Emma, was completing the Johari Window exercise (see Shambrook, 2009). The group was led through this exercise to develop our levels of self-awareness as individuals (and practitioners) and to allow us to see how we were perceived within our group. This self-practice was beneficial on three levels. The first was a clear increase in my own self-awareness; the gaining of feedback from the SE peers enabled me to be more aware of myself as a trainee practitioner as well as a person. The second was the impact this activity had on my ability to reflect. I was significantly more honest with myself and reflected far more deeply about my input and approach.
in addition to the decision making and challenges I set myself. The third benefit was that this was an activity that I would use with athletes, in particular a current team I was working with. By experiencing the activities and their benefits myself as an individual, as a practitioner I had a more thorough understanding of the tools and as a consequence I was able to administer them with more confidence.

A model for successful group-based reflection

At present, there are notably few systems in place to support the neophyte practitioner develop their ability to reflect (Cropley, 2009). Moreover, there is currently no guidance or framework on how group-based reflection should be utilised within practitioner development of trainee or established applied sport psychologists. Following discussions within our group it was decided that we would like to share our experiences, in particular the reflective practice structure that had developed, with a view to gaining feedback on our ideas and also to hear the experiences of others. It became apparent early on in the process that there were a number of components, from both an individual and a group perspective that needed to be placed in definable areas, and so a model started to take shape. In short, the model (Figure 1) is designed to elaborate on the required attributes (individual) and conditions (group) for a successful group-based reflective practice process with a hope to start the ball rolling to formalise what we experienced as an essential part of our professional development.

We have received some valuable feedback to date on the proposed model. One suggestion pertaining specifically to the individual skills aspect was that ‘critical thinking’ (the questioning of assumptions and seeking errors), should replace ‘lateral thinking’ (more associated with the movement value of statements and ideas). This supports the work of Knowles and Gilbourne (2010), who talk about a concept of critical reflection as referring to the type of reflection that promotes the possibility of change. Critical reflection, associated with critical thinking

Figure 1: Group-based reflective practice model.
and problem solving (Cropley & Hanton, 2011), is suggested to promote individual practitioner development within the supportive framework of peers.

Holt and Strean (2001) acknowledged that reflection requires highly developed skills of analysis, evaluation and appropriate time set aside to complete it comprehensively. Self-awareness of one’s own skills is therefore crucial to fulfill this process. Additionally, although ‘supervision offers an appropriate space for reflection’ (Katz & Hemmings, 2009, p.21), it is recognised that the presence of ‘others’ could influence the dynamic and, therefore, nature of reflective practice within a group, therefore, making the individual skill of self-awareness important. Therefore, ‘active listening’ within a group environment is also paramount, to ensure that individuals hear the reflections of others whilst simultaneously understanding, which allows individuals to empathise (‘empathy’) with one another when sharing (‘communication’) reflections. Finally, each individual continued to develop and demonstrate increased self-confidence (and more specifically self-efficacy; Bandura, 1997) through vicarious experiences (akin to stages and levels of reflection; Knowles & Gilbourne, 2010), verbal persuasion (through supervisor/peer encouragement) and modelling (through seeing/hearing about peer successes and learning from their mistakes).

Considerations were also made to the criteria by which we would structure our reflections, as observed in Martindale and Collins (2005), who called for a ‘criteria against which we are to reflect’ (p.311). From a reflection perspective, both authors of the current paper had initially been drawn to Gibbs (1988) model of reflection as the ‘feelings’ aspect had been of significance during the reflective process. However, when considering a professional practice ‘structure’ or ‘criteria’, it was felt that the framework presented by the BASES guidelines were deemed sufficient at this point of our development. For example, for the BASES SE a trainee will submit an annual report that evidences how they are working towards a number of competencies (e.g. communication). This framework provided a structure, each competency, to reflect on. Nevertheless, we do believe that this could be an area for further investigation, with input from more established and seasoned practitioners.

The group conditions proposed are based solely on our own experiences and it should be noted here that ‘ground rules’ (e.g. see Ghaye, 2005) were established from the outset that addressed potential concerns that we would produce more socially desirable reflections (Cropley et al., 2010) when reflecting in the group setting. Furthermore, we were encouraged to be ‘open’ and ‘non-judgmental’ in the knowledge that the environment was ‘confidential’ (adhering to the BASES Code of Conduct) and that we had ‘trust’ among the group. As Tod (2011) states, ‘trainees may be comforted to learn most practitioners experience anxiety when first helping athletes’ and that they may ‘benefit from exploring their anxieties rather than trying to reduce them’ (p.17). Sharing our concerns and fears within the group, accompanied by our supervisor reflecting on her own practice, allowed us all to feel equal (‘equality’) within the group, with no one person having all the answers. Our supervisor emphasised that all practitioners can make mistakes or indeed be unsure of how to move forward with an issue and that these ‘hurdles’ can often provide a useful learning opportunity and thus should not be taken as a setback (Holt & Strean, 2001). This strengthened the purpose of the shared reflections which were at times accompanied with feelings of discomfort and vulnerability. The small size of the group allowed for cohesion and also allowed us to feel that we could contribute equally and, more importantly, feel heard and valued.

Of greatest importance to the group was the idea of ‘utilise individual strengths’. Coming from different backgrounds we not only felt that our contributions were valued...
but that we all felt we could add something unique to the discussions. We were encouraged to present to the group on the areas that we felt we could bring new knowledge to and this allowed for learning and further deepening of respect among members. When examining our professional development it was crucial that we were mindful that by working under one supervisor it was essential for us each to establish ourselves as individuals. Referring to education literature and the use of the ‘mentor’, Bailey and Schoch (2010) discuss the trainee teacher developing independence as a result of the mentor relationship highlighting the need for autonomy within practice. In sport related support, while the supervisor can facilitate growth and offer insight into practice (Watson, Lubker & Van Raalte, 2011), it is important that trainee practitioners develop their own ways of working and don’t become a ‘mini-me’ of their supervisor (Woodcock et al., 2008). Thus, there is potentially a need to have access to a number of practitioners of differing levels of experience for successful group reflection.

Our supervisory group, however, only had access to one expert (our supervisor), which could be viewed as limiting our opportunity to develop as practitioners. This was in contrast to Branch (2010), who ensured several ‘experts’ facilitated each of the group sessions outlined within their research. This is supported by Knowles et al. (2007) who advocate the use of group sessions with supervisors and peers and implies that access to more than one supervisor could be advantageous in the reflective process. A more collaborative approach therefore, could provide a potential opportunity for supervisors working in isolation to allow their trainees access to additional learning opportunities.

Concluding thoughts…
In this paper, we acknowledge the need for a structure for reflection, in particular, within a group-based setting, which addresses the concerns of Cropley et al. (2011) who stated, ‘reflecting alone can be limited by our own knowledge’ (p.17). At present there are opportunities for a supervisor (or supervisors) and/or colleagues to offer guidance through shared reflection thus providing a second opinion, shared knowledge, or confirmation, which helps to develop effective practice. However, this process is not currently formalised within the existing framework for training and continuing professional development of applied practitioners in sport. Therefore, in concluding this paper, we feel that there is scope to explore group-based reflective practice in more depth, in order to establish implications for future practice.

We have continued to offer support to each other within our professional practice and are both now BASES Accredited following a successful three-year SE period. Additionally, we are also committed to continue group-based reflective practice as we develop further as practitioners as what was started during our training and SE will be continued via peer support within our careers. Although it is acknowledged that supervision usually requires there to be a more experienced practitioner, the concept of peer supervision/mentoring cannot be without its merits as an alternative support network. The lack of guidance and framework reported by Cropley (2009) provides an opportunity for future research to examine suitable structures to be applied to the neophyte practitioner and beyond.
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Knowing the culture (bullet one)

As a practitioner in sport psychology for nearly 20 years, I was acutely aware of the necessity to quickly develop an understanding of the unique culture of the club. Examining the organisational chart of a club provides some degree of insight into the intended structure of the club, but it does not provide information about the informal structure or highlight the array of potential political and personal issues that surround this structure (Woodman & Hardy, 2001).

Typical problems that can present from deeper investigation into the real structure include communication breakdowns, role ambiguity and inequitable workloads. An understanding of how these factors interact and impact on the club is fundamental to the effectiveness of the psychologist (Relvas et al., 2010). The earlier the psychologist is able to ‘read’ the culture and the personnel involved, the more likely it is that the interaction will lead to a mutually satisfying experience. As the lifespan of a sport psychologist at any professional club is (arguably) at best medium-term and at worst barely short-term, it is imperative to ‘hit the ground running’. The organisation culture may be very complex indeed and, for any reader who has yet to experience the dizzy heights of professional sport, they may be surprised to find that the term ‘professional’ extends only to the fact that the players are paid.

Proving your worth (bullet two)

Due to the fact that the utility of psychology is an on-going debate outside the ‘psychologists’ union’, it is paramount that the psychologist can convince the players and decision makers at the club that there is value in their work (Anderson, Knowles & Gilbourne, 2004; Poczwardowski, Sherman & Henschen, 1998). Sceptics may point to a lack of tangible evidence to support the claims of the psychologist, however, even the most hardened ‘non-believer’ must acknowledge that a percentage of performance (no matter how small) is accounted for by the psychological factors within the game. This necessary process of persuasion can be undertaken in one of two ways, first, to educate the client as to the nature of the work that can be done and the subsequent benefits resulting from psychological input generally (Pain & Harwood, 2004); secondly,
if the task of ‘selling’ psychology is mission-impossible then an alternative approach is more personal and requires the club to buy-in to the actual psychologist.

In common with many others types of consultancy work, the client is sometimes more convinced by the consultant rather than their field of work. At this stage, it cannot be over-emphasised that the client-psychologist relationship is key, whether it is implementing interventions with specific players or engaging with the key decision makers in the organisation. In particular, the coach may see himself as a part-time psychologist and indeed the work of a good coach should incorporate many psychological skills/techniques. However, the pathway that the coach is likely to have taken to get to that point has been quite different to the formal training and experience of a qualified psychologist. This may lead the coach to believe that the psychologist has nothing to add. Indeed there is typically a degree of scepticism with regards to the value of academic work and talk of the difference between ‘ivory towers’ and ‘real world’ is commonplace. This view is certainly prominent in sport (none more so than rugby league), whereas in the business world the fact that you are an academic can be one of the main reasons why your client has requested your help and advice.

**Meeting the team (bullet three)**

**Potential issues**

The issues highlighted so far may not have quite struck fear and intrepidation in the battle hardened psychologist, and in general terms, the issues can be likened to most consultancy experiences. However, the first meeting with the players can make any psychologist experience self-doubts. Having personally faced this situation many times I still tremble when faced with a new team and the possibilities that may lie ahead. In most cases, the players will have been told something rather vague regarding who is running the session and what this might include.

The mental checklist of things to cover is sometimes put to one side as the session takes its’ own direction. Upon entering the room I am reliably disappointed as to the general lack of interest. I have frequently felt like just another ‘expert’ on the conveyor belt of rugby life – other experts may include dentist, chaplain, welfare officer, financial advisor etc. To differentiate one from this collective there has to be immediate impact, whether that is in respect of rapport, credibility or sometimes even sheer entertainment (Poczwardowski et al., 1998). This initial contact and ‘getting them on side’ may be the most important bullet to dodge in the work of a sport psychologist.

**First session approach**

Having lectured in academia for many years and received varying levels of feedback during that time, this ‘on side’ approach is one that I have found to pay dividends. The approach I tend to use incorporates a mixture of demystification of sport psychology alongside a practical task highlighting the importance of the ‘mental’ side of the game. The demystification process can take many forms but in the environs of rugby league, I suggest, should include honesty, credibility, brevity, humour and a dollop of humility.

From my most recent encounter I recall that at the end of this first session one of the more ‘intimidating’ players made a concerted effort to meet me, as he was walking over I remember thinking of all the possible options that may ensue – ranging from mild appreciation through to the extremes of physical harm. However, when the player stopped within inches of me, he told me in a typical no-nonsense West Yorkshire accent that he was expecting the session to be ‘fxxxing shit’ but was pleasantly surprised to find himself enjoying the session (thankfully!).

The session itself involved a quick overview of what sport psychology is and also provided the players with evidence of previous experience specifically with rugby
league teams. I find that during sessions like these it is important to promote interaction at a very early stage as this is useful for both information gathering (e.g. finding out about previous psychology experience) as well as allowing the players to be actively involved. This interaction may be seen as an ‘ice-breaker’; however, the information gathered here may impact on and/or refine the rest of that session or indeed future sessions.

I distinctly remember that a couple of players stated they had previously worked with a psychologist, although little detail of their experiences was discussed at the time. It was only later when I discussed the session with the coach that I was told that one of the players mentioned above had been, in the coach’s words ‘destroyed’ by the psychologist. In hindsight this is maybe something that the coach should have mentioned to me before the session.

Previous experience has also taught me that some players may not be at their best (behaviourally) if they have to sit still and listen for any extended period of time. During the session the players are invited to air views regarding optimum psychological states during games – the players seem at ease discussing this important area, although at times the ensuing debate sometimes wanders off target. However, in terms of establishing both credibility and rapport I feel that this is a sacrifice well worth paying (Petitpas, 2000). I often end the initial session with a practical exercise involving biofeedback – the exercise itself can be used to demonstrate the relationship between focus and performance. However, as each player takes his turn with the biofeedback equipment the environment will usually become more competitive and raucous. Although these sessions may descend into a degree of farce, the practical exercise is often convincing enough for a good proportion of players to be willing to continue with their psychological education.

**Follow-up sessions**

From this point, regular team sessions can be held covering a number of areas relating to the impact of psychological preparation. These sessions include the following psychological skills:

*Relaxation* – covering generic pre-match techniques such as autogenic training (Schultz and Luthe, 1969) and progressive muscular relaxation (Jacobson, 1930) as well as ‘on the spot’ techniques to used specifically during game situations.

*Visualisation* – a basic introduction to the benefits of visualisation (Weinberg, 2008), running through basic imagery scripts to highlight the progressive nature of developing the necessary skills. From these initial sessions, players interested in using such techniques for specific issues are offered individualised appointments.

*Performance profiling* – this session focuses on the identification of the psychological skills required for each individual player (Butler, Smith and Irwin, 1993). The team splits into positional groups and each player’s profile discussed and agreed with the whole group. This session works well on a number of levels, as well as identifying psychological skills gaps it also helped to break down barriers between the senior and junior players within the team.

*Dealing with difficult players*

As always with these types of sessions they are often a bit ‘hit and miss’. Some players clearly buy in to the techniques and indeed some request further information regarding the use of such techniques. Other players may feel that the sessions were a waste of time and the content was not relevant or indeed useful to them. When this occurs, as in most ‘classroom’ situations, it can be disruptive for the more interested and the unofficial feedback that finds its way back to the management may negatively impact on the perception of the psychologist’s value. After one such session, I had a heated discussion with one of the players who felt as though the sessions were not ‘stretching him
enough’. During the discussion I did say that I was open to any suggestions regarding topic areas that he thought were more appropriate – unsurprisingly I never received a reply!

**Future sessions**

As the season progresses the content and timing of the sessions are highly variable. Usually dependent on the discretion of the coach, the sessions are either postponed, usually due to extra training, or targeted at certain issues highlighted by the coach e.g. communication, confidence or concentration (see Earle, 2012).

On reflection, the package of psychological skills training allied with targeted sessions may have not always be the most effective use of time and resources, however, it is only in the following season/s that these sessions become important in relation to credibility, trust and relationship development that at the early stages of sport psychology consultancy are considerable barriers to success. Whether this is due to proving your worth as a psychologist by the interactions with the players or just a case of being around the club for a protracted period of time makes the players feel more comfortable with the psychologist.

**Role ambiguity**

With regard to my most recent club involvement, it was approximately three months into the first season that my role suddenly changed from that of sports psychologist into more of an organisational psychologist – this particular metamorphosis is not uncommon in professional sport. The catalyst for this change stemmed from a number of issues that were raised by the players about their relationship with the club. These issues ranged from logistical matters, such as equipment and facilities, all the way through to financial problems. These were apparently on-going issues that the players felt had not been dealt with effectively. This general swell of opinion also coincided with a particularly poor run of results. Whether this position was cause and effect or purely coincidence is open to debate. Irrespective of this, these issues were being given by the players as ‘reasons’ for poor performance.

**Feeding back to the club (bullet four)**

Feeding back to the club brings its own perils (Ravizza, 1988). In my previous experiences working with professional teams it has often been difficult to find out the ‘power’ holder at the club, and then obtain appropriate access to this individual. However, with the particular club mentioned above, the Chairman of the club was the key power holder and fortunately reasonably accessible and open to discussion. A written report was produced highlighting the main issues at the club and detailing potential solutions and way forward. A meeting was held with the Chairman to discuss the contents of the report. The issues identified can clearly not be discussed here in any great detail, however, they fell into the broad headings of financial support, management structure and organisational vision. This may seem to be a very broad scope of issues for a sport psychologist; however, it is these factors that had been identified as impacting negatively on the wider experience of players.

The importance of understanding the culture of the club cannot be over-estimated at this point (Wilson, 2001). Knowing the relationship between all affected parties is paramount to allow some of the suggested solutions to have any chance of being implemented. Irrespective of whether the management have previous knowledge of the issues, it can still be sensitive discussing them.

There are, of course, many unknown factors in the ‘back-drop’ of any organisation and so the psychologist must tread carefully in feedback situations. Fortunately, in this particular setting, the outcome of the feedback meeting was relatively positive. In respect of player issues, these were successfully resolved and this appeared to positively impact on the general morale of the club – it also coincided with a good run of form. This certainly helped the management to see
some tangible rewards for their, and indeed my, input. Organisationally, the phrase ‘Rome wasn’t built in a day’ springs to mind – however, at least an awareness of the problems that matter to the players is a step in the right direction.

**Getting out alive and fighting another day (bullet five)**

As my first season came to a close at this particular club, I felt that there were a number of positives to be taken. First, I felt as though I was becoming more integrated into the club, although in hindsight this could have been done better and with slightly fewer sleepless nights (I’ll save those for my memoirs!). Secondly, there was a definite development of relationships with a number of players. After initial (and understandable) trust issues some the players were now seeing me as a resource that could be both useful and trusted. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the club wanted me to continue and develop my role at the club – yes I’d managed to dodge the bullets and was looking forward to the next season – ready to face the reloaded revolver!

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Applied and Pedagogical Reflections

Using feature films in the teaching and assessment of sport psychology

Moira Lafferty

Whilst the use of feature films in teaching has received wide attention and is used successfully as a pedagogical tool in a variety of disciplines (e.g. psychiatry, social work, mainstream psychology and medicine) there are no examples of how it may be used by lecturers as a tool or medium for teaching applied sport psychology. The present paper explores the benefits of using feature films in teaching and describes a personal journey of how film clips were integrated into the curricula of a Level 6 applied sport psychology module.

Introduction

Background to using films in teaching – a personal journey

Nearly every department within the country offering either a BSc Sports Science, or a Sport Psychology degree has at least one Level 6 module that explores critical factors relating to applied practice and the work of the sport psychology practitioner. Whilst titles are wide ranging and varied (e.g. Applied Sport Psychology, Conceptual and Applied Issues in Sport Psychology) common to most is the word ‘applied’, which for many students has connotations with practical and field work, suggesting the application of psychological training and working with athletes. However, when teaching applied sport psychology it is often difficult, due to numerous professional, practical, and ethical reasons, to expose students to real world applied experiences. This is in comparison to other sports sciences disciplines where laboratory and fieldwork (such as force platform experiments, gait analysis, VO2 max testing) is engaged with early on and can facilitate understanding, and contextualise theoretical principles. For us, as sport psychology lecturers, it is often harder to create for students the theory in action, and real world experience. How we can do this has been an intriguing question for me since first being introduced to the concept of ethnodrama (Gilbourne, Triggs & Merkin, 2006), which formed the catalyst for exploring innovative and different ways of developing practice experience.

At present, the majority of sport psychology lecturers (myself included) have tended to use; scenarios from text books, students self-disclosure, and the use of personal experiences (described in a manner which protects the privacy and confidentiality of the client) to illustrate key points. Whilst all of these methods provide vignettes and narratives of real world events and can enhance understanding; I have always felt that they fall short of creating for the student the actual physical, social, and emotional climate as observed at the critical moment. This may be because they provide a ‘uni-dimensional’ source of information (Higgins & Dermer, 2001) through the medium of the spoken/written word, and are therefore reliant on students’ auditory and comprehension skills. Students miss out on; observing body language, facial expressions, participant interactions, and the influence of the social environment. This lack of ‘visual stimuli’ leaves them dependent on their own experiences to construct and create the whole picture with limited scaffolding. Mindful of trying to move away from vignettes I began to review how other fields akin to our own engage students and use differing media to enhance, encourage, and develop the learning experience.
Reviewing pedagogical practice through journal articles and internet searches on teaching sites such as CROW – Course Resources on the Web (http://jfmuelle.faculty.noctrl.edu/crow/) lead to a recurring theme, the use and integration of popular culture, or in real terms the use of films in the learning environment, a concept in medical teaching known as 'cinemeducation' (Blumer, 2010). First introduced by Alexander, Hall and Pettice (1994) the term cinemeducation describes a method of using movie clips and/or, whole movies to educate learners about the differing psychological aspects of health care.

**Using films in learning and teaching – a review of literature**

From an initial review of literature, examples of using film in teaching and learning began to emerge from diverse fields including; counselling psychology (Higgins & Derm, 2001), psychiatry (Akram et al., 2009; Bhugra, 2003), psychotherapy (Edwards, 2010), cognitive psychology (Conner, 1996) and hypothesis testing (Gardner & Davidson, 2010). It became apparent that films were being used in numerous ways to enhance the learning experience and increase students’ active participation, with positive responses.

Paddock, Terranova and Giles (2001) described how films were used to teach personality theories to undergraduate psychology students. Over the course of two classes, students watched movie clips depicting different aspects of behaviour and personalities. They then participated in group discussions and individual work analysing the film scene and characters portrayed. Results of a short post-activity questionnaire indicated that students found the movie clips interesting, believed them to illustrate the theoretical concepts, and increased their understanding of the theory. Paddock et al. argued that this teaching method provided a theoretically rich and intellectually challenging approach, and the use of movies had benefits compared to films obtained through naturalistic observation, although no reasons were offered for this conclusion.

Examples also began to emerge of consistent film use during teaching. Ventura and Onsman (2009) discussed how movie clips were used throughout a lecture series with pharmacology undergraduate students to introduce concepts or drug treatment. Clips were embedded in the PowerPoint lecture slides and lasted on average between one to three minutes. Student course evaluation indicated that students found the clips interesting, enjoyable, and an appropriate form of learning influencing concentration, motivation, and attendance.

Edwards (2010) offered a different approach to using film when she described how it could be used to teach non-clinical students about countertransference in psychotherapy. During a seminar, scenes from the film Morvern Caller were shown and used as a means to enhance students understanding and as a catalyst for discussion. Edwards suggested that using film in this way offered students some ‘proto-experience of the individual work in the consulting room’ (p.97).

These examples all identified ways in which film could be used and integrated, through a tutor lead approach, as part of a lecture or seminar. Datta (2009) suggested an alternative method of using film where, as well as being part of the actual lecture, they also formed part of the post-lecture work for medical students enrolled on an undergraduate psychiatry module. Each week had a specific theme which was exemplified in the designated film and watched by all students. As well as completing assigned reading students were also expected to watch at least one further movie from a prescribed list. They then participated in a seminar or lecture which focused on critically reviewing the issues depicted in the film, applying empirical evidence to explain or suggest treatments.

Throughout the initial literature search several papers came to light that reviewed...
using film as a form of assessment. Blumer (2010) discussed how postgraduate students, enrolled on a marriage and family therapy course, completed a film review as part of their assessment. Furthermore Conner (1996) described how students in an introductory cognitive psychology module had to; identify a topic of interest, read a journal article, select and view a feature film, present and then complete an individual report, a format replicated by Akram et al. (2009) with medical students studying psychiatry.

Examples also emerged of how films were being used in tandem with other pedagogical techniques to enhance student performance. Hemenover, Castor and Mizumoto (1999) discussed how film viewing and analysis were combined with progressive writing instructions in an assignment for undergraduate students on an introductory psychology course. Student feedback from end of module evaluations indicated that students enjoyed the assessment and perceived the progressive writing technique to be beneficial to their development. It therefore became clear that feature films could be used in a variety of ways in both teaching and learning. Critically though from a pedagogical stance there was a need to review and explore what possible benefits there could be to adopting feature film use.

**The benefits of using films**
Numerous authors have suggested that there are benefits to using film as a pedagogical tool. Anderson (1992) reported that students felt more comfortable talking in class using film as a medium for discussion of theoretical topics, and Conner (1996) suggested that students viewed film tasks as fun and that it allowed them to bridge the real world theory chasm. Scherer and Baker (1999) proposed that this may be because films provide the visual medium to engage students and encourage retention of information. Whilst Ventura and Onsman (2009) argued that the integration of films can provide cognitive reinforcement and a change in the learning modus operandi can increase both concentration and learning. In turn, this could lead students to an ‘Aha’ moment where they suddenly understand, grasp, or, make sense of a concept or idea (Wrobbel, 2003). Akram et al. (2009) further supported the use of movies and films, describing them as a ‘directly positive tool for educating and generating lively debate’ (p. 267).

As well as these generic benefits a number of papers highlighted positive aspects that would be relevant, useful, and transferable to applied sport psychology teaching. In a review of film use in marriage counsellor education Higgins and Dermer (2001) stated that film analysis provided a safe distance from the action and allowed under-represented populations to be observed. These authors also suggested that film use can help explain and explore difficult to teach concepts, provide the option of multiple viewings, and is an entertaining medium which people engage with cognitively, emotionally, and behaviourally. Both Armstrong and Berg (2005), and Blumer (2010) reiterated these positive ideas and highlighted several pedagogical benefits. For example, they believe that integrating film clips can allow complex information to be presented in a simple and engaging manner. They also suggested that film viewing and analysis used in tandem with group activities can provide a social and fun experience for students.

Whilst many articles highlighted the positive aspects of film integration there are obvious caveats to its use and those who oppose the approach. Bhugra (2003) argued that film can both stigmatise and distort the truth, whilst Akram et al. (2009) cautioned practitioners to be mindful of artistic licence, given that feature films are, by their very nature, stories and not facts. Casper et al. (2003) cautioned those using film to be aware of offending content and the emotional impact that films can have on their audience. They also suggested that the introduction of film into teaching will involve an ‘up front’ workload in terms of
reviewing appropriate films, deciding upon key scenes and developing critical questions if the intention is to run a guided discussion. All of these points are reiterated by Dave and Tandon (2011) though they also suggested that in real terms the time factor is no longer than preparing any new material.

Perhaps the most vehemently opposed to the use of films is Greenberger (2009) who likened the use of film within teaching to ‘Tinseltown’ teaching. In a damming review of film use in psychiatry, he argued that students learn nothing from movies, and can acquire a false understanding of disease complexity and treatment options. He argued that ‘the practice of celluloid psychopharmacology, if found at all, imparts a morass of misinformation’ (p.243). In actual fact the majority of arguments presented by Greenberger have been highlighted as caveats to film use by a number of authors who, when stressing the benefits, also presented a list of the possible pitfalls (Armstrong & Berg, 2005; Blumer, 2010; Dave & Tandon, 2011). For example Datta (2009) stated that ‘films do not pretend to present an accurate portrayal’ (p.265) but argued that this is not really a problem if both students and tutors are aware of this. Jayawickreme and Forgeard (2011) suggested that using non-empirical sources (i.e. in this case feature films) can serve as a catalyst for further empirical exploration and thus deepen knowledge and understanding by analysing the misconceptions portrayed. Ventura and Onsman (2009) suggested that integrating film clips into lectures retained interest, engaged, and motivated students, and broke the lecture up into manageable chunks. Therefore, although there are obviously concerns with using film there also seem to be numerous potential benefits.

**Stage 1: Using films in teaching and learning**

**Rationale, background and purpose**

Enthused by the possibilities, and mindful of the caveats of using films, I began to explore how we could integrate films into one of our Level 6 modules. A secondary review of the literature drew me back to the work of Anderson (1992) who described how she used films as a catalyst for group discussion in a law and psychology class. Prior to watching the film students were required to prepare for two types of discussion, one which centred around the application of course knowledge and the second designed to elicit a more critical approach through analysis of the issues portrayed and stance taken. Anderson conducted this task towards the end of the course to ensure that all material relevant to the film had been covered and argued that the discussion acted as a form of revision for the final examination, and allowed students a break from the usual assigned readings.

Our Level 6 Applied Sport Psychology module is arranged around four discrete topic areas with the final week devoted to a summary and review of the information and areas covered. This presented an ideal opportunity to explore the efficacy of using films in sport psychology and gain information as to whether students enjoyed and engaged with the activity and importantly whether both students and course tutors perceived there to be any benefits.

**Instigating and running the seminar**

Two weeks prior to the final session of the Leadership and Cohesion topic students were informed that the summary session would not be based around a vignette, narrative, or research paper, but instead film clips would be used as a catalyst to explore and discuss key concepts.

Students were told that they had to choose an area covered in the topic, register the area with the module leader, and find a three-minute film clip which showed, identified, or explored their chosen issue. During the summary seminar they would each present their clip, briefly highlight the key concepts and research and state how a sport psychologist could use the clip. Mindful of the fact that novel approaches, which differ
from the established norm, can evoke increased anxiety (Norton, 2007) students were given a worksheet that provided scaffolding for the exercise and allowed them to frame their discussion points (Appendix A).

Prior to the seminar the order of presentations was posted on the module virtual learning space. This was based around the students’ chosen topic areas (cohesion, leadership, coaches and coaching) to ensure that the session had some structure in terms of material presentation and review. Examples of area and film chosen are shown in Table 1. During the seminar students introduced their clip, played the clip for the group and then described what they perceived to be the key theoretical issues linking to relevant research. We encouraged students to challenge the views presented and to suggest alternative interpretations during the open floor discussion toward the end of the seminar. During the final 15 minutes the two module tutors summarised all the information relating the film clips and areas to the topic and module aims.

Reflections on using films in a sport psychology seminar

At the end of the seminar session, we asked students to complete a short feedback form about the exercise, which resulted in numerous positive comments. In line with the research reviewed previously, our students supported the use of film commenting that it ‘helps see how theory can be related to real life. Gives you a practical way of thinking about theory rather than being told…’ and ‘…you begin to see the theory through the film and understand its position within the applied context.’ As well as commentating about what they had learnt the group also made some perceptive comments about student contributions, ‘…those who do not find the clips/do the work should not have the benefit of taking part’. The notion of group work, ‘…work in pairs to share knowledge and understanding and feedback to the class’ and interestingly, actual assessment, ‘can this become summative assessment as we did a lot of work for it’.

Reviewing the informal feedback it became obvious that the seminar task had engaged the students, focused their attention, and created the theory – practice link thereby meeting my original goal for the task. However, as we discussed the exercise and task as a teaching team we began to wonder whether we could make more of this exercise and use it as a form of assessment as suggested by the students’ themselves.

Stage 2: Using films for assessment purposes

Rationale

Returning to the literature I once again reviewed the work of those authors who reported using films for assessment purposes. Conner (1996) described an assessment strategy for an undergraduate cognitive psychology course where students worked in pairs reviewing a journal article, and then selected a film which identified and linked to the critical points in the article. Students then wrote an individual report and presented, as a pair, their findings to the group. This mixed method assessment of group and individual work presented a promising approach for our

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<th>Area</th>
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<td>Coaches and Coaching</td>
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<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Miracle; Facing the Giants</td>
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<td>Cohesion</td>
<td>Varsity Blues; Remember the Titans, Coach Carter</td>
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assessments. Combining a group oral presentation with an individual written report would allow us to redress one of the key concerns that many students have when faced with group summative assessment. Namely, the equity of marks awarded and parity of actual members work and contribution (Sharp, 2006).

Blumer (2010) discussed and reflected upon a course where postgraduate students self-selected into groups, reviewed a film from a set list and produced a written review. After the report had been graded it was worked on further by the student group to prepare it for submission to a professional publication. For the initial graded assessment, Blumer reported that the students found the activity enhanced their learning and ability to analyse core concepts, and was enjoyable. With respect to developing our own assessment this paper raised some interesting questions, do we select a list of films or, should we give students the freedom to select their own? Do we select the groups or, let the students formulate their own? Reflecting on the feedback from the original task several students stated that they ‘enjoyed finding the clip’ and perhaps inadvertently this created a subliminal learning opportunity in its own right. With respect to group formation we decided in the first instance to assign group membership as students taking the module were from both combined and single honour courses (Davies, 2009).

Higgins and Dermer (2001) also highlighted how film can be used as part of an assessment for postgraduate students in marriage and family counsellor education. They presented examples that included; using film as an exam replacement or supplemental, and, of direct relevance to our situation, as examples of using film for summative written assessment. Interestingly, these authors described how after the individual papers were submitted class and group based discussion took place. This allowed students to share their interpretations and learn from each other. Keen to provide a stimulating environment and allow students to actively participate whilst observing the group presentations, we developed a crib sheet so that students could mark each other’s presentations and reflect on alternative explanations.

**Feature films in assessment: An example**

Guided by the literature and based on our previous exercise we formulated a summative assessment comprised of two components, a group presentation and individual written report constituting 50 per cent of the module mark. For the presentation students were informed that they must work in their group and identify a short clip (three minutes) from a feature film which depicted one of the key areas covered in the first three topics of the module. The first three topics explored psychological skills including working as a practitioner, working with young and developing athletes, and coaches and team situations. They then had to produce a 10-minute PowerPoint presentation highlighting the psychological theory which could be used to explain what was happening in the film and how the applied sport psychologist may work with the athlete, team or individuals (e.g. coaches, parents, and friends). For the individual written report (part B) students had to discuss how sports psychology research can be used to explain the actions and reactions of the individuals in their scenario.

Conscious of the need to support the students through this novel assessment and aware that new, or innovative, methods can sometimes be viewed with a certain amount of trepidation and fear (Cartney, 2010) several key stages were built into the assessment process. Once the groups had been organised they had three weeks to choose and register their movie clip. This ensured that no two groups could use the same clip and gave me an access point early in the process to work with each group. This allowed me to ensure they fully understood the task and had analysed the clip correctly (for examples of movies chosen and areas see Table 2).
During the weeks leading up to the presentation, student groups could book tutorials with any of the module teaching team. Support information was made available through the University intranet module learning space including an online example of a film clip and PowerPoint presentation. At the end of each lecture five minutes were devoted to answering any assessment related questions, including the structure of the presentation. Presentations took place midway through the winter term and were formally assessed by three members of staff and by the students themselves using the pre-designed mark sheet.

**Reflections on the assessment task**

It would be easy to say that the students enjoyed the task, the mean module mark increased, and there seemed to be engagement with the process, all of which could support the assumption that the integration of feature film into the assessment process was a success. In essence, this is all true, I believe the journey from initially searching for ways of bringing sport psychology alive through film to developing a summative assessment task has been logical, systematic, and informed by a wealth of research. More critically, do we have it right and can it be improved are perhaps more pertinent points to consider, and harder to answer.

The students enjoyed the task and observing each other’s presentations offered a further learning opportunity (Cartney, 2010), reinforcing for them different areas of the topics covered in an engaging manner. However, whether we really made the most of this is open for debate. Teater (2011) suggested that students need to actively engage in their own learning to maximise their potential whilst Cartney (2010) called for the active participation of students in their assessments. Although all students did complete mark/crib sheets on each presentation upon reflection we could have used these more. It would have been interesting to spend time engaged in some form of post assessment discussion, informed by these reviews. Alternatively, building on the work of Cartney we could perhaps have paired up groups so that one group became part of the assessment panel for another, completing a form of peer assessment (Orr, 2010). However, peer assessment within summative work is itself not without problems and caveats, perhaps an interim stage would be to pair groups up for formative assessment on the task from which feedback could feed-forward (Carless, 2006) to the summative work.

I believe that there are still ways we can develop this assessment to maximise the potential learning experiences for the students. Finding ways to increase interaction and engagement with other presentations will allow us to maximise the benefits of group work including the fact that it can promote deep and active learning (Davies, 2009) and place assessment as a central component of learning and not just as task to be completed (Cartney, 2010).

**Summary**

Incorporating feature films into the teaching and assessment of sport psychology presents lecturers with a new dimension for engaging students’ interest, stimulating discussion,
and fostering knowledge development. At the beginning of this paper I highlighted one reason for exploring and examining the use of film was to find ways and methods for creating more theory in action experiences and to move away from the more traditional ‘uni-dimensional’ sources of information often used in exemplars (e.g. narratives, vignettes and case studies). The use of film clips provides students with a multi-sensory experience which helps them think in terms of actions and reactions, emotions, behaviours, and social relationships. The examples presented in this paper introduce two ways of using feature films in sport psychology. 

Whilst there are caveats to using films, not least always being aware of the fiction-theory divide, evidence so far suggests that students enjoyed using films in this manner and the clips served as capstones and anchor points for the development of critical analysis skills.

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References


Appendix A

Worksheet questions and guide

1. Brief Overview of Chosen Clip (Describe what is going on, contextualise in respect of the story)

2. What links to theoretical ideas/positions are shown? (Be specific, remember to check through topic notes)

3. Which key research (recent journal articles) could you use to explain what you are seeing or link this clip to?

4. How might you use this clip as a sports psychologist?


It's good to talk

It's good to talk: Sport and Exercise Psychology conversations – introduction

Iain Greenlees

‘There is more to sports psychology than the theoretical and scientific underpinnings and I believe that increasing the number of open conversations about what it actually takes to deliver sports psychology within high-pressure, high-expectation performance contexts is an essential element in pushing applied sport psychology to the next level.’

(Shambrook, 2009, pp.134-135)

I was recently made aware of this quote at a sport psychology training event and it struck a chord with me immediately. Don’t get me wrong, I embrace theory and research and am a strident advocate of the need to produce sport and exercise psychologists who are well-educated in a range of behaviour change models and can justify and evaluate the work that they do with considered reference to appropriate theory and research. My personal belief is that this will produce sport and exercise psychologists equipped with the skills and knowledge to further develop our field. However, it is clear that the practice of sport (and exercise) psychology is much more than just this and whilst much of the literature is, arguably, dedicated to considering and contributing to increasing our knowledge of what is ‘best research evidence’, we have possibly neglected consideration of what could be termed the ‘art’ of sport psychology (I guess this is, at least in part, what Martens (1987) meant by the term ‘tacit knowledge’, Andersen (2006) meant by the term ‘territory’ and Sackett et al. (1996) refer to when they discuss the need to incorporate ‘clinical expertise’ into evidence-based practice).

Chris’ quote not only re-awoke in me a view of the sport psychology literature, it also provided the germ of an idea. What better way to increase the number of conversations about what it actually takes to deliver sport psychology than to publish those very conversations (that way, we don’t just increase them but we permit those in the conversation to share their clinical expertise/tacit knowledge/knowledge of the territory with any who care to read it). Thus, this feature is just that – the publication of conversations. The vision is that small groups of sport and/or exercise psychologists set themselves the task of having a conversation (email is probably the easiest way of having and recording the conversation and also affords some opportunity to reflect on the conversation and add to, or revise, previous points) focused on a very specific issue (this list is by no means exhaustive but could include such issues as: dealing with providing support at a first international competition; being a female practitioner in a male dominated sport; being a male practitioner in a female dominated sport; content of first meetings; tips for workshopping anxiety control; dealing with testing coaches). The conversation may start with one question that all participants answer and then divert to subsidiary questions posed by the conversationalists to explore a particular response or to consider an alternative scenario. The idea is that the process is as ‘organic’ as possible given the somewhat artificial nature of the conversation. Reference to supporting evidence is not required, and
extensive descriptions of theory and research is not encouraged, but authors may wish to suggest readings that interested readers may want to look at for further information. There may be further guidelines to emerge about the nature and presentation of these conversations but, at least at this stage, I would prefer that they do emerge as examples of good conversations are submitted rather than being constrained by my views.

I am indebted to the person who introduced me to Chris’ quote, Jo Batey, not just for providing the quote but also giving me a title for the feature and volunteering to initiate the first conversation. I hope that she doesn’t regret the one conversation with me that led to her putting together this conversation.

Iain Greenlees

References
It's good to talk

Providing support while overseas

Jo Batey, Stewart Cotterill & Rebecca Symes

About the Conversationalists

Jo Batey

Jo is a senior lecturer in Sport and Exercise Psychology at the University of Winchester. Jo gained a BSc (Hons) from the University of Surrey, before undertaking an MSc at Exeter University. She is currently undertaking her PhD at the University of Winchester. Jo is accredited by the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES) and has worked at both professional and amateur levels in football, rugby union, fencing, archery, hockey, swimming, diving, mountaineering, netball, tennis and rowing. She has also worked extensively with the British Armed Forces.

Dr Stewart Cotterill

Stewart is a registered practitioner sport psychologist with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) and is a chartered member of the British Psychological Society (BPS). He is also a professional member of the Association of Applied Sport Psychology (AASP). Stewart gained a BSc (Hons) from Loughborough University, before going on to complete an MSc at the University of Chichester and a PhD in Sport Psychology at the University of Edinburgh. He currently runs his own Performance Psychology Consultancy business (Performance mind) as well as working at the University of Winchester. Stewart has worked at both professional and amateur levels in cricket, football, rugby, golf, track and field athletics, tennis and basketball and currently works as a performance psychologist with the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) Performance Programme.

Rebecca Symes

Rebecca is a registered practitioner psychologist with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) as a sport psychologist and is a chartered member of the British Psychological Society (BPS). She is also accredited by the British Association of Sport and Exercises Sciences (BASES). Rebecca completed a BSc (Hons) in Psychology from Southampton University before achieving her MSc in Sport and Exercise Psychology at the University of Chichester. She has been running her own consultancy, Sporting Success, for the past six years and currently works within professional cricket and Paralympic archery as well as mixed martial arts and athletics. Experiences of working in other sports in a professional and/or amateur level have included swimming, football, darts, hockey, rugby, golf, triathlon and laser sailing. Rebecca also does a small amount of work in the corporate sector applying the principles of elite sport to business.
About the issue: Providing support while overseas

Many sport psychology consultants (SPC) spend time providing support to individuals from the confines of an office or a spare room at a training venue. Sometimes we might be brought into a club environment to deliver a series of workshops. Either way, we are often operating in a very formal, rigid domain, detached from the reality of the competitive environment within which our clients perform. Instead, they are bought into our comfort zone; a place where we know the territory and explore their world at a distance, ensconced in our own safety net and confident in our abilities to deliver interventions that will enable them to perform at their potential. The shift for the SPC from operating in this way to travelling and working in a high-level competition environment can therefore be wrought with challenges; not least your own anxieties about how to operate differently in what can be unfamiliar territory. What follows is a dialogue between three applied SPCs who have varied levels of experience at operating at International competitions within the sports of archery and cricket.

Jo: The primary lesson I learned upon returning from my first overseas archery competition as an SPC was that I had to operate differently in that environment. I remember my overwhelming impression was that I had not done much applied sport psychology whilst I had been away. Upon relaying this to two more experienced SPCs who I meet with regularly they first asked me to tell them what I had done. Upon hearing my explanation they nodded and smiled knowingly, telling me that in fact I had done plenty of applied sport psychology, it was just different to what I would usually do. They then relayed some of their experiences of operating overseas and at major games, and I could see that whilst there were differences in our experiences, there were also lots of parallels. This shared reflection helped me to become more confident in my professional practice in the face of uncertainty (Ghaye & Lillymann, 2000).

Don’t get me wrong, I had certainly worked long hours whilst away with the squad, but my day lacked the structure that I associated with being a SPC with these athletes. Traditionally I would attend training camps at a National Sports Centre where working with athletes in one-to-one sessions, implementing things on the field and delivering workshops for coaches or athletes meant there simply were not enough hours in the day. Suddenly I had a lot of ‘down time’ to fill. This might have been okay if we had been staying at a luxurious hotel in a fantastic location, but archery is not an affluent sport and thus this was not the case. Indeed, much of my time was spent standing on an archery field in the middle of nowhere. One of the things I was aware of was the danger of overcompensating for my feelings of idleness and doing too much – thus potentially interrupting athletes and coaches preparation and performance. Hodge’s (2010) chapter on working at the Olympics in the Routledge Handbook of Applied Sport Psychology was helpful in providing some guidance on this issue. The key piece of advice cited in this chapter for how SPCs should operate in a competitive environment was to ‘master the art of being available and accessible, but not getting in the way’ (p.410).

Of course, managing this downtime was not only a challenge for me as I was soon made aware. Two athletes approached me during this competition and requested that I speak to their coach and ask the coach to ‘back-off’. Whilst it was not the right time to explore this with the athletes in great detail I did manage to ascertain that they perceived their coaches to be shadowing them throughout the day and communicating in an unhelpful way whilst they were shooting. Given that those same coaches had previously communicated to me that they felt underused during competition it seemed likely that they could have fallen victim to ‘getting in the way’. It is perhaps noteworthy...
that many of the coach–athlete relationships operational at this competition were in their infancy as a result of a recent organisational restructure. Thus, coaches and athlete alike may have struggled to achieve the level of understanding characteristic of the best coach-athlete relationships. Additionally, the age of the athletes is a consideration here. At between 15- to 20-years-old the assertion of independence and identity is highly valued. Support and social networks are said to become more peer-focused at this age, though there is some debate as to whether this remains true for junior archers whose social networks have been shown to be characterised with relationships with adults, specifically parents and National Coaches as opposed to non-athletes or peers (Bond & Lowry, 2010).

Finally, managing downtime was also a challenge for those athletes who exited the competition early. In Olympic competition, Hodge has claimed that the challenges facing athletes who have to live inside the claustrophobic Games environment for a week or more prior to competing lead to many experiencing the ‘second week blues’ (2010, p.408). He advocates athletes create a pre-emptive coping plan detailing how they will spend their waiting-time productively. A similar approach would have been useful for me to have used with these younger athletes who became bored and distracted once their competition was over. Without having yet established the coping skills that we might expect of Olympic-level athletes, the potential for their behaviour to become a distraction for team mates who remained in the competition was a real possibility.

**Stewart:** I agree with what you are saying about the culture shock of being away Jo. The first time I got to go overseas for a training camp with cricket came as a bit of a shock to the system. Before boarding the plane I thought that I had a good understanding of my role and how it would pan out but this was definitely not the case. Specifically, I found trying to come to terms with making myself look busy while the ‘training’ was going on in the day particularly difficult. Also trying to develop a strategy to ‘pick off’ players in and around the other things they were doing was difficult to start with. This ‘picking off’ relates to the skill of knowing when and how you can pull players away from other aspects of their training day to discuss psychological issues. This in itself is difficult as there are always other things going on and the opportunity for players to do extra training relating to their skills is limited. This is particularly important when there is no formal structured slot for the psychologist to use. I think the way that the environment was structured almost forced me to operate away from the performance environment, meeting with players in slots back at the hotel either during breakfast or after training (I was always conscious that I was eating into the players’ down time away from training).

I think that first overseas training camp was difficult as I did not really know what to expect. So while I was involved in planning meetings beforehand I was not really negotiating the part that I was going to play from a position of strength (knowing what the environment was like). I think it is crucial for the SPC to have a clear vision of how they can function most effectively, then look to get this built into the overall programme. All too often I listen to fellow sport psychologists talking about how they do the majority of work away from the performance environment, meeting with players in slots back at the hotel or elsewhere over a coffee. I think that while there are times when a neutral environment and privacy are important, in my experience these are less frequent than the performance issues that are best dealt with in the performance environment. So sometimes I feel that colleagues who do the majority of work away from the performance environment do so because they have either chosen to, or have not been able to engage in the planning of the programme and the development of the performance and training environments.
For me ‘performance psychology’ where possible should take place in the performance environment, this includes being part of the formal ‘training programme’. If it is important, and the athletes should be engaging with the sport psychologist, why not build the support and development work into what the athletes see as the core of the programme rather than around the periphery? The greatest challenge (and greatest success) that I have encountered has been getting the coaches that I work with to invite me into their practice sessions to work with their athletes. It has taken some time to achieve but I am now far more effective, and I believe impactful, than I was before. I also find that more athletes approach me to work on performance-related issues when they see me working with other athletes on performance rather than the ‘behind closed doors stuff’, it also helps to build relationships with the athletes which can’t be bad. This in turn has also helped to develop relationships further so athletes are also more comfortable talking about their wider mental health and well being.

Rebecca: Reading through both of your thoughts and ideas has resonated a lot with me. I am actually writing this from South Africa, where I am on my sixth overseas cricket tour. Now I have reached a stage where I am comfortable in the role that I play on these types of tours and am clear on how to be most effective in these settings (although always still learning). However, thinking back to the first ever tour I did, it is a very different picture. Jo, you make a good point about how athletes can at times be in our ‘comfort zone’ and I don’t know about you two but, for me, I am certainly at my best in a setting and environment where I feel comfortable and confident (which of course can also apply to athletes). So to find yourself thousands of miles away from home, in a different county, questioning your effectiveness and impact can be a lonely place, especially when in some ways you’re ‘supposed’ to be the one to help everyone else deal with this environment. I definitely experienced that notion of ‘what to do’, ‘shall I try and look busy?’ ‘what exactly should I be doing?’ feeling and for the first few days of training I volunteered to go with the tour host to get the lunches organised for the players. This then meant that I felt I had been useful to the players and coaches. However, it did mean that I wasn’t present for all of the training sessions and whilst I’m not saying you need to necessarily be there all the time, when you’re working in a performance environment being able to observe what is going on is actually very important.

It might be worth saying that at this point, I had been working with the cricket squad for the winter months of October to March prior to the pre-season tour and pretty much all of my work had happened away from the nets in one to one settings so I wasn’t yet comfortable with how to adapt my approach to be of use in a practical setting. I do think this is a different type of skill which I think links closely to your point Stewart about the psychological element needing to be an integrated part of the formal training programme. Certainly now, this is what I strive for and much more of my work is in the nets working alongside coaches. That said, there is of course still a place for conversations away from that environment and I discovered over my first tour that what seemed to work was short and frequent check-ins with players – this might be arranging to have breakfast with a particular player or sitting with them on the coach to the ground. I also decided about five days into the trip to have a conversation with the head coach about my role and how I was feeling (i.e. wasn’t sure of the impact I was having; wasn’t sure if he was expecting me to be doing things I wasn’t, etc.). Being able to do this depends a lot on the relationship you have with that coach, but luckily I felt able to bring this up and this was really important for feeling more confident and comfortable for the rest of tour since I came out of it with a much clearer understanding of my role. Stewart, I would also like to add that I totally

88
concur about players being more comfortable talking about wider issues if there is an existing relationship there from the performance environment since that trust and rapport has been built in a ‘safe’ environment; their environment.

Jo, you make an interesting comment about how coaches can potentially get in the way and I’d be interested to know how you dealt with this away from the competition field? Archery presents an interesting opportunity for coaches and other staff to potentially enhance or hinder an archer’s performance, since during competition a designated person (could be any of the staff set up) stands behind the archer in an ‘agenting’ role and can interact with them during shooting. I also hear your comments about those archers who have been knocked out of competition. From a slightly different angle, one of the elements I have personally found hard about this, in both World Championships and the recent Paralympics Games, is that when archers get knocked out of competition as a psychologist you almost don’t have the resource to support them, since you have to focus your attention on those who are still in with medal hopes. This is the cold reality of elite sport.

Jo: You both make good points about the integration of the SPC within the performance environment. Stewart’s comment about being involved in the planning of the programme and the integration of psychology support sounds like the ideal situation. Unfortunately my experience was slightly different. When I left for my first overseas competition with the squad the junior programme was in a state of organisational change, and my contract with the governing body was on a short-term basis which included limited contact time. Consequently, I perceived that my ability to contribute to the planning of sport psychology within the future provision was limited (the constraining nature of short-term contracts on the delivery and impact of our work is perhaps something for another conversation!). On reflection, I think this situation was further compounded by my employment being mid-Olympic cycle, because since London 2012 the opportunity to integrate psychology provision into the programme ahead of the next Olympics has been evident.

Rebecca, your conversation with what sounds like an experienced coach clearly also helped you to get clarity on how you might operate in the performance environment. However, once again I was in a somewhat different situation to you. For the athletes and coaches I was working with, having an SPC at all was a luxury, let alone having one travel with them to overseas competition! Therefore, trying to manage expectations (theirs and mine), or gain some role clarity based on their previous experience with an SPC would have been futile. In a sense, we were all finding our way together. Whilst this afforded me some freedom, since there was an air of, ‘you do what you think is best’, this lack of clarity also provoked some uncertainty for me. Fortunately, I was able to speak to another (more experienced) sport psychologist within the same sport. She shared with me how she had operated in overseas competition environments and illustrated the types of conversations with coaches and athletes that had been useful for her. Much of this revolved around keeping lines of communication open and revisiting this throughout the competition. For example, to the head coach; has the way I have been operating been okay with you? Are there things you expected me to be doing that I am not currently doing? To the athletes; have you been able to get access to me when you have needed to? Where am I most/least useful to you (at the hotel, at the practice field, on the competition field, etc.)?

Perhaps in this instance the differences in our abilities to feel embedded into the programme structure and performance environment, combined with having clarity in our role as SPCs demonstrates the importance and potential impact of: (a) the organ-
isational structure; (b) the experience of the people we are working alongside, and (c) our own experience as practitioners who travel with squads.

Rebecca, the way I dealt with the coaches being perceived as overbearing and communicating in an unhelpful way comprised of two stages: firstly managing it ‘in the moment’, by seeking athletes permission to speak with the coach on their behalf. Usually I would speak to the athletes about the importance of open communication between them and their coach and place the responsibility on their shoulders to have the necessary conversation. I might help them to phrase things appropriately so they felt prepared to have such a conversation, but the onus would be on them to have it and then feedback to me. However, since the coaches’ behaviour and communication was perceived to be having an immediate and detrimental effect on the athletes performance at what was an important competition, I felt it appropriate to respond immediately.

Ideally I would have spoken to the head coach about this, but since they were one of the coaches involved this was not possible. I then observed the coaches behaviour for the remainder of the competition and checked with the athletes involved that the coaches had given them the space they needed and ceased communicating in an unhelpful way. The second stage was that upon returning to the UK I ensured that I spoke to the athletes about this in post-competition one-to-one’s. We discussed how they might have conversations with their coaches about what they find useful/not useful in competition environments. A workshop was also designed for the coaches around the principles of effective communication during competition.

I was interested in what you said, Rebecca, about your inability to provide immediate support for athletes who exited competition early, due to the emphasis being on supporting those still involved. I can imagine this is particularly difficult in such high profile competitions. I would be interested to hear at what stage you provided support for those who got knocked out and what that consisted of. I am also interested in how you managed your own emotions in response to your archers’ success and failure in such a unique environment. But perhaps that’s for another conversation!

Stewart: Rebecca, I found your comment about your experiences whilst away on your first cricket tour very interesting. Particularly in the fact that you sat down with the head coach on the tour to get some feedback on how effective you were, and probably more importantly how effective you were perceived to be in your role. On reflection I think that this is probably something that I could get better at. I think sometimes I can possibly become overly immersed in my work with the athletes and forget to manage the expectations and perceptions of other key stakeholders such as the head coach and other relevant coaches. While I obviously talk to these stakeholders much of the time, it is usually about the athletes and the integrated intervention strategies we are delivering rather than to get feedback on my role, perceived impact and overall effectiveness. This is definitely something that I will look to change in the future.

Returning to the original discussion topic about providing overseas support, I do think there is a workload issue sometimes for sport psychologists. In my experience we still end up doing a ‘full days work’ at training, but do significant hours outside of this. Rebecca alluded to the fact that breakfast meetings are pretty much a norm, as is grabbing a coffee after training, and catching up in the evening. All of which can significantly impact upon any ‘down time’ or ‘preparation time’ available to the sport psychologist. This is important as, recognising that keeping accurate and up-to-date notes and records is a requirement of our job, I often find that my time gets very tight in fulfilling my role. So, while most players and coaches get to switch off in the evening it is difficult to do the same as usually after the management review/planning meetings each day.
I then have athletes to see, notes to write and action/development plans to update. This is, in one sense, just an occupational hazard for sport psychologists but does relate to the previous point about discussions with the head coach or performance director. So, while part of the discussions might be about getting feedback, another important function has got to be to update the head coach on the volume of work that is taking place out of sight.

Jo, related to the points you were making about coaches being perceived as overbearing I have found that helping athletes and coaches to build effective working relationships has been another aspect of the role which has become increasingly important, particularly while overseas. This has predominantly been driven by a group of very committed coaches who are always looking to enhance the quality of the service they offer through understanding their athletes better. There is also an interesting challenge here in that the ‘work’ and ‘social’ aspects of both the player and the coach are much closer in proximity than would normally be the case. This is important as the coaches are usually more consciously aware of how athletes are outside of training, and this in turn can potentially impact on, and possibly prejudice the way they work with the player in practice. As a result I have found an increasing part of my job while away has been to help manage and sometimes help to repair, the damage that might occur in these relationships whilst overseas.

While overseas I find that there is a tendency for players, coaches, and support staff to become overly intense in their usually singular sport focus. The environment makes it difficult to ‘get away’ from the sport in down time. This, in turn can increase the feelings and responses for both athletes and coaches that might otherwise be kept more in perspective. While this is a result of the desired training focus it is important for this to be considered as part of the preparation for the tour. I have found that the tours where these issues have been successfully broached beforehand have proven to be the most successful. This has usually been based upon specific planning for athletes (and sometimes coaches) around how they will manage being in the environment full-time. This preparation appears to be a crucial part in preparing to be overseas.

Rebecca: Yes I do believe that speaking with key stakeholders, specifically about our role as SPCs and the impact we are having, is crucial. You’re absolutely right, Stewart, in that it is very easy to get immersed in the work with athletes, yet in my experience to date I have found it’s easier to do the work with athletes when I am clear on expectations and have conversations about my effectiveness with stakeholders – especially when ultimately they are the ones paying my wages!

Stewart, you also make very sound comments about the work that takes place out of sight and Jo you equally commented on the long working hours. I certainly find this is the case as well, and particularly found it challenging to get my own down time at the Paralympic Games when in essence your work is never done (or at least that was how I felt). I think this is compounded by having to share rooms so being able to get your own space and opportunity to stop, think and reflect is tough. Having my own room is a luxury I really value on a cricket tour, but this doesn’t stop the need for note making and report writing as Stewart discussed. I’m not sure I have a solution for this as I agree with you that in many ways it is simply an occupational hazard but I think you are right that having conversations about this is definitely worth considering. I have to say that on the recent five-week tour I have returned from, as a staff unit we were very good at encouraging one another to make sure we were taking enough down time – and not feeling guilty about it – another thing that I can find happens and then ends up with the situations you originally described Jo of people doing things just to look busy (and then actually getting in the way!).
Jo, it sounds like you dealt with the overbearing coaches well, and I think there is an interesting point in here about having to make decisions quickly about how best to deal with situations that occur whilst away. If this had been a situation that had occurred whilst at a training camp, then naturally you would have had time to think about how best to approach it. However, on an overseas tour you often have to be able to respond quickly and I think the key to this is being confident in your own decision-making. As SPCs we no doubt talk about confidence a lot but how often do we take the time to invest in our own confidence? I was speaking with a clinical psychologist colleague last weekend and he was saying that there is not a psychologist anywhere who doesn’t doubt themselves at times. Psychology is such a broad topic area that we can never be expected to know everything but we should trust what we do know.

I also liked your two-stage approach Jo – dealing with the issue in the moment but also ensuring it was dealt with in a constructive and educational way back at training camps.

Jo, in response to your question about support to those getting knocked out of competition early I worked with those archers once the competition was over. For us this was four days prior to the closing ceremony, so in that time those archers became my priority. In terms of what I actually did, the biggest element was just listening and providing them with the space (psychological) to try and begin to make sense of what happened. The reality is you can’t make it any better for them, you can’t change their feelings and you certainly can’t change the result but what you can do is listen and encourage them not to make any major decisions at that point in time (often talk of giving up or quitting when later they realise that is not what they want at all). As for managing my own emotions this was indeed challenging but to give the short answer (!), keeping a reflective journal and speaking with other sport psychologists working at the games really helped.

From our communication I think there are some top tips we can draw upon for working overseas:

1. Try to be involved in as much of the planning of the trip as possible to ensure your role is integrated into the programme.
2. Be clear about your role – liaise with the performance director/head coach about their expectations of you and how your impact is being measured.
3. Stick to your role – ‘being available and accessible but not in the way’ – it’s ok to do nothing when there is nothing to do (I will caveat this with saying that there are times when it’s good to help out, for example, helping out with scoring, lifting and shifting of kit, etc.).
4. Protect your downtime and also that of other’s (burnout is a real risk in sport and this doesn’t just apply to athletes but coaches and support staff too – in some ways I think they are at greater risk).
5. Establish a way of offloading – keep a journal; arrange to speak with a ‘trusted friend’ outside of the environment or whatever works for you.

References

If you want to offer a ‘conversation’ for publication in the Sport and Exercise Psychology Review then please contact the Editor to discuss requirements and ideas.
One moment that changed the course of your career…
In the late 1980s I was contacted by the manager of Sheffield Wednesday, who had heard through a colleague about my work as a sport psychologist in table tennis. I’d never even been to a football match and would have declined, but my husband was a Wednesday fan and keen for me to be involved! My time at the club was fascinating. I gradually grew to love the beautiful game, and nearly all of my subsequent consultancies and research have taken place in football contexts.

One inspiration…
Not a person, but a place: the northeast of England. I’d graduated in Psychology from Ohio State University and set off to do a one-year Master’s degree at Durham University. The castle, cathedral, river and winding streets were like another world for a Cincin-nati gal, and discovering the big city of Newcastle nearby pretty much clinched my decision to stay in the region and reside by the coast in Whitley Bay. Some 40 years later I still retain my stubborn accent but can’t imagine living anywhere else.

One book all sport/exercise psychologists should read…
It’s an oldie but shows how the impact of the experimenter cannot be ignored in interpreting research findings. Whether unconsciously or not, we give cues to research participants as to our hypotheses, and they in turn are motivated to help us to get the results we expect. This can even occur with psychometric testing, where such processes are exacerbated among sports competitors who want to protect their preferred self-image and project a flattering portrayal of themselves to others. We thus need to be extremely careful about taking our findings at face value.


One thing that you would change about sport/exercise psychologists…
I’m not keen on following a prescriptive ‘toolkit’ approach where regardless of the team or individual, a routine of ploughing through techniques such as relaxation training, imagery, self talk and goal setting is rigidly followed. This can be boring, irrelevant or even counterproductive.

One challenge that you think sport/exercise psychology faces…
Sport organisations wouldn’t dream of employing unqualified physiotherapists or dietitians, yet they are often impressed by ‘mental coaches’ and ‘performance enhancers’ who claim to have facilitated major transformations in outcomes and well-being. Promotion of the importance of educational pathways leading to HCPC registration is important for the credibility of our profession and protection of the public.

One regret…
I wish I’d been drawn into football earlier in life. I’ve always loved most sports, but ‘soccer’ was a total unknown when I was growing up in America. I didn’t know anyone who played or watched it.

One nugget of advice for aspiring sport/exercise psychologists…
The sport psychology community is quite small, so networking can be very important,
not to mention fun. Maximise your opportunities by being an active member of the BPS, attending conferences, joining committees and giving papers or presenting posters.

**One alternative career path you may have chosen…**
I might have stayed in my PhD area, the social psychology of altruism and helping behaviour, if my interest in competition hadn’t taken over.

**One sportsperson/team (or alternative) you would pay to watch…**
I’d happily give my life savings to watch Newcastle United beat Real Madrid in the Champions League final!

**One hero/heroine past or present…**
Alan Shearer – what a fantastic player and role model. My favourite memory is Newcastle vs. Leicester City, 1997. With 13 minutes to go, and Newcastle down 1–3, a depressing result seemed a foregone conclusion. Then Shearer scored in the 77th minute… then the 83rd… then the 90th to give a 4–3 victory. Some 10 years later I was over the moon to give him an honorary degree at Northumbria University.

**One hope for the future of sport/exercise psychology…**
I’d like to see sport psychologists integrated into individual and team sports and be seen as proactive rather than mainly called on to address problems and emergencies.

**One proud moment…**
The BPS Sport and Exercise Psychology Section worked long and hard to become a Division in time for transfer of members to the HCPC register. I felt honoured and privileged to become the first Chair of the DSEP, and I’m delighted with the progress and innovative contributions other chairs and committee members have made since then.

**One paper I have published that encapsulates me best…**
It’s not really the paper, but I took great pleasure in pursuing an idea that came from out of the blue. My colleague Nick Neave and I were lamenting some poor football results away from home and then moved on to discuss studies where non-human animals have been shown to fight harder and beat stronger rivals when defending their territory, possibly due to evolutionary hormone-mediated processes. We pondered whether the same effects might occur in footballers, and our subsequent studies were the first to find evidence for a physiological explanation for the home advantage. We were intrigued to discover in our own research that footballers experienced a surge of testosterone before home matches, whereas levels away from home were no different from baseline measures.

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THE AIM OF THIS ISSUE of the Student Members section of the Sport and Exercise Psychology Review is to present two postgraduate students’ reflections on their experiences of conducting research in sport and exercise psychology. A variety of methodological approaches and designs exist to study psychological aspects of sport and exercise. In this issue we focus on two methods with Martin Turner reflecting on the challenges faced when conducting laboratory-based research, followed by an article by Andrew Evans on the importance of acquiring allies to successfully complete field research. We hope you enjoy the issue and that the insights offered will help students to make informed decisions about their research.

In the Student Members section of the Sport and Exercise Psychology Review we enjoy hearing about your experiences in research, consultancy, and teaching. If you have any ideas for an article then please get in touch (email: m.slater@staffs.ac.uk).

Matthew Slater
Staffordshire University.

White coat syndrome: Learning from mistakes in laboratory research

Dr Martin J. Turner

Much stress and anxiety research is underpinned by laboratory protocols that involve the strict control of extraneous variables, effective manipulations, and carefully developed experimental procedures. For interesting examples, see Ax’s (1953) classic research in which fear was induced by connecting participants to a ‘dangerous’ (p.435) polygraph which would send sparks across the room during the course of the experiment (get that through ethical approval!) Or Lazarus and Erikson’s (1952) stress research, where the experimenter was required to criticise participants’ task performance ‘in the most severe manner’ (p. 101) to create a threatening subsequent performance situation. The perceived genuineness of these manipulations rests on the experimenter’s ability to adopt a certain role and modify their behaviour convincingly and consistently.

With a raft of stress research to inspire me, I attempted to develop laboratory protocols with effective experimental manipulations for my PhD research. This short account reflects on critical incidents (Hannigan, 2001) that have occurred when collecting laboratory data. Through the critical incidents I have identified both helpful and unhelpful behaviours responsible for the effectiveness of my data collection endeavours. It is hoped that by reading this
piece, the reader might avoid some of the mistakes I made. To be clear, my reflections are far from a how to guide for collecting data, but detail circumstances not often written about that are nonetheless pertinent areas for consideration.

**Showing my cards too soon**

After developing a protocol to examine how different instructions (positive and negative) could influence psychophysiological stress responses to motor performance (throwing bean bags at a target), I embarked upon data collection with a student population. I sent a lot of emails, stuck numerous posters up, and appeared in my colleagues’ lectures to recruit participants. When recruiting, I ensured the secrecy of my manipulation by using very general words to describe the study, such as ‘you will hear some audio instructions while at rest, as we collect psychophysiological data’, avoiding any mention of there being two different instructions or the psychophysiological aspects I was interested in (see Jones et al., 2009). When participants arrived at the laboratory, a curtain concealed the bean bags and target used for the task. On one occasion, a participant asked the confederate, whose job it was to attach an array of cardiovascular recording equipment to participants, what the study was about. The assistant proceeded to explain, in impressive detail, the aims of the research, the manipulation (different instructional sets), and expected outcomes. This rendered the manipulation ineffective and confounded all psychophysiological data. The data could not be used. I realised that I had spent so much time making sure that the recruitment information and laboratory environment concealed the nature of the research, I had not given my confederate any specific instructions about the importance of concealing the manipulation at all times. I also realised that just because I value the importance of strict laboratory protocol, not to assume that everyone else does. This is my research, after all.

**Deceiving the deceiver.**

In another study, participants watched a video showing a climbing wall that they would be asked to ascend while being filmed (refer to QR code). The study hinged on the unknown nature of the video’s contents. After a successful data collection session with one participant (A), I awaited my next one (B). While I waited, I overheard A explaining to B the exact nature of the task even though participants are given specific instructions not to reveal anything to others. Though frustrated, I decided against a confrontation, and instead asked B on entry to the lab if he knew what the experiment was about. He said no. At this point I made a decision based on ethics. I took his word (even though I knew it to be false), collected data, and discarded it as the manipulation was compromised. Through this incident, I realised it is my responsibility to explain to participants why it is important not to reveal study details to others. My delivery of this information was via a debrief sheet, which let’s face it, participants glance at briefly. I have subsequently developed two strategies to avoid such pitfalls. One is to encourage participants to buy-in to the methodology (e.g. if you keep it to yourself we can see how your friends respond to the video), and another is to verbally emphasise how important it is that they do not reveal the study details to others by asking for a ‘very important favour’. In addition, I now ask participants on entry to the laboratory, in a very informal manner, what they know about the research study.

**A series of unfortunate events**

There are times when seemingly unpredictable occurrences engender panic, mainly because every data point is important and anything that might influence the quality of that data is threatening. Some occurrences are controllable, some are not. For example, on one occasion after I had played a participant ego-threatening audio instructions regarding an upcoming penalty shoot-out competition, Ronan Keating’s
When You Say Nothing At All starting to blare inexplicably from the speakers. This was not part of the protocol. On two occasions, the university fire alarm sounded during data collection, requiring me to escort a participant, wearing various pieces of cardiovascular recording equipment, as quickly as possible to the nearest exit (both were set off by overdone Panini’s from the university café). In both situations the data had been rendered useless and I accepted that those events were uncontrollable. However, some events I could have controlled. For example, with better participant screening techniques, I could have avoided being in a situation where an athlete fell asleep continuously during data collection, only waking up when blood pressure was being taken (automatically, once a minute). After encouraging him to stay awake once or twice, I realised the manipulation was useless, as he slept through the ego-threatening instructions. Afterwards I found out that the participant was narcoleptic, a condition which I did not screen for. Following this experience, I now enquire about neurological conditions in addition to my usual cardiovascular health questionnaire. It is better to glean all information that could potentially hinder data collection as early as possible so as not to waste time and resources.

Concluding remarks
This reflection illustrates my naivety in undertaking laboratory research when I started my PhD. It also shows that despite all efforts to create a ‘perfect’ laboratory protocol, pitfalls occur in aspects that are often uncontrollable. However, the controllable pitfalls usually only happen once. In other words, it is quite easy to learn from mistakes when conducting laboratory research because most hiccups can be resolved with simple experimental constraints. For example, to fully brief confederates on protocols, to say something different to participants when they enter the laboratory, to add a question to the consent form; are all simple resolutions, but make the difference between losing and retaining precious data.

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Hindsight is a wonderful thing!
A reflection on PhD field research
Andrew Evans

My PhD research consisted of two experimental studies and two field research studies that explore the role and importance of social identities and the content of social identities in sport. On the one hand, I felt comfortable and relaxed before I started my experimental research because I had conducted experiments during my MSc and BSc. On the other hand, I felt short on confidence and full of self-doubt before I carried out my field research because I had not previously completed any field research in my academic career. In an attempt to boost my confidence and put my mind at ease I consulted a number of research methods texts that educated me about the process of field research. At first I thought this process of field research would be straightforward because each text I read stated that participants who decide to take part in field research are freely available. The fact is I found my own field research to be an arduous and daunting experience.

My first PhD field research study asked athletes who competed in a north-west rugby league organisation to complete a questionnaire. My second PhD field research study asked athletes who competed in the same North West rugby league organisation to complete a questionnaire on three separate occasions during their respective season.

I figured out that if I was ever going to achieve appropriate statistical power in my two field research studies I would need people within the organisation to promote me and my research. I called these people my allies.

Allies 1: The committee members of the organisation
My first set of allies were the committee members of the organisation. It was important to secure the backing of the committee members because I required consent from the committee before I could approach my potential sample. I also realised that the committee could facilitate communication between the coaches of each team within the organisation and me. In order to get committee members on my side I decided to fully immerse myself within the organisation. The benefits of using the immersion approach as a sport psychologist have been widely documented in applied practice literature. For instance, the immersion approach has been shown to encourage greater acceptance because when a sport psychologist is recognised as a member of a team their role and service is valued and respected (Bull, 1997). I arrived at the conclusion that if the immersion approach could work for a sport psychologist it could

References
work for me as a sport psychology researcher in the field. I immersed myself within the organisation by attending monthly meetings to build rapport and learn more about the structure of each division to assist me with the logistics of my project. I found that committee members were willing to reciprocate the interest I had shown in their organisation by giving me their time to discuss my research. During meetings I ensured the committee bought in to my research by emphasising that my research could generate interest from external sporting governing bodies and the media that could endorse the organisation as a whole. I also highlighted that no other organisation would immediately benefit from the implications of my research which suggested I could help to find a competitive edge for the organisation. However, I quickly learnt to approach meetings with the committee with caution. I often felt frustrated when I could not gain access to committee members given their hectic schedules. For me, it was crucial to remain patient, be flexible, and select my questions carefully to make sure I acquired the most pertinent information that would be useful for my project.

Allies 2: The coaches of teams within the organisation

My second set of allies were the coaches of each team within the organisation. Each coach within the organisation had a full-time job and coached on a voluntary basis. Therefore, the biggest challenge I faced was organising meetings with coaches that all coaches could attend. My contingency plan was to ensure that if a coach could not attend a meeting a club representative could provide me with the contact details of their club coach and pass on information that was relevant to my research. Another challenge I encountered was being able to promote the value of sport psychology research to a group of coaches who generally struggled to see the importance of sport psychology in rugby league. This was despite being endorsed by the chair of the committee. I met resistance from the coaches by explaining that as a probationary BASES sport and exercise scientist I shared the same interest as them: athlete development. I also stressed to coaches that my research would increase their own understanding of how social identities and the content of social identities influence the cognition and behaviour of their athletes. Overall, I found it beneficial to be persistent, proactive, and reiterate that I am passionate about the well-being and performance of athletes (just like the coaches themselves).

Allies 3: The athletes of teams within the organisation

After gaining the support of the committee members and coaches I was now in a strong position to acquire my final set of allies: the athletes who would form my sample. The athletes I used in my PhD field research were extroverted which I felt could be related to the nature of rugby league (i.e. to demonstrate physical dominance over an opponent). I therefore found initial encounters with athletes intimidating as well as emotionally draining because I was unsure as to how they would perceive me. I found that selling myself not only as a researcher but as a probationary BASES sport and exercise scientist helped me come across as credible and helped athletes buy in to my research. I also made reference to the fact that sport psychology was used by professional rugby league athletes and discussed that coaches and athletes at the top end of the sport had advocated that sport psychology was an integral part of an athlete and team’s development. For example, I presented athletes with an article that contained an interview with a Super League coach who praised the work of his team’s sport psychologist. I believe this approach was useful because many amateur athletes aspire to become professional so they model themselves on the routine of an elite counterpart. I decided it would be useful to reinforce the value of sport psychology by providing sport psychology
support at various stages of my research whilst being mindful that none of the information I delivered would impact my research findings. For example, at the start of my second PhD field research study I delivered an education session that provided athletes with an introduction to sport psychology. I used these sessions to address misconceptions (e.g. sport psychology is magic), eradicate negative stigma (e.g. athletes who receive psychological support are mentally weak; see Barker & Jones, 2008), and promote the benefits of sport psychology for well-being and performance. Throughout my second field research study I taught athletes how to use mental skills (i.e. imagery, self-talk, and focused breathing) and afforded athletes the opportunity to receive one-to-one psychological support at the end of the project if they were interested. These sessions showed athletes that I was dedicated to helping them improve their mindset. As a result, athletes were willing to invest their own time and effort in my research because they understood the importance of sport psychology research. Upon reflection, it was vital I was enthusiastic and I was able to give something useful back to each athlete to compensate them for their own time.

While I was collecting data I found it valuable to devote myself to team processes. On numerous occasions I set-up and collected equipment, took part in session activities, and even held tackle bags while 15-stone rugby league athletes tackled me to the ground! Although sounding bizarre, as well as painful, I found the immersion approach with each team of athletes reaped huge rewards. Working for each team allowed me to get to know each athlete, maintain rapport, and gain respect from my participants. Athletes then seemed keen to give me the same effort and attention that I had given them by taking part in my research in an open and honest manner which I feel increased the reliability and validity of my data and minimised attrition in my second field research study. The response of athletes made sense to me because social identity literature suggests that when we perceive ourselves to be similar to others we are more likely to trust, respect, and help one another (Levine et al., 2005). An overall summary of the challenges I encountered in my two PhD field research studies together with the action plans that enabled me to gain my allies are presented in Figure 1.

Looking forward to the future
Immediately after completing data collection for my second field research study I felt a huge burden lift from my shoulders. Although I felt relieved I realised that I had invested a tremendous amount of time and effort in both my field research studies which I wanted to ensure did not go to waste. In the end all the hard work seemed to have paid off. The committee members wanted me to conduct more research with athletes who competed in another division. The coaches expressed a desire for me to visit their team the following season. The athletes informed me that if I needed any further information all I had to do was ask. And a fellow PhD student was granted approval to conduct their own research within the same rugby league organisation a year later. The chair of the organisational committee explained that I received positive feedback from athletes and coaches because I was professional and provided a useful educational service. This confirmed to me the credence of the immersion approach I adopted during my field research. Although I was excited at being invited to do more research within the organisation I felt very much under pressure. This was because I had not developed any follow-up research which made me anxious that I would lose access to a high quality sample. After a few days I began to realise that research takes time to develop and I had other more immediate research commitments. I found that it was OK to be honest with committee members, coaches, and athletes in regard to my research schedule. I also continued to attend monthly meetings that showed I was still interested in
the organisation and enabled me to maintain the good relationships I had developed. Overall, I have learned a valuable lesson—the opportunity to conduct field research in the future will always be there, as will an athletic sample.

**Final thoughts**
I am aware that other challenges will exist when conducting field research. However, this reflection has provided an open and honest account of the obstacles I faced and the ways I attempted to overcome these barriers during my PhD field research. I feel I thrived as a field researcher mainly because

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**Figure 1:** The challenges I faced in my PhD field research and the action plans I developed that allowed me to acquire my allies.
I immersed myself in the activities of committee members, coaches, and athletes in order to recruit a group of allies that would increase the likelihood of my research being successful. I am certainly more confident and relaxed about field research now than I was when I began my journey into the field.

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Book Review

*Mental Toughness: The Mindset Behind Sporting Achievement* (2nd edition)
Michael Sheard
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Reviewed by Phil Birch

Michael Sheard’s recent book, *Mental Toughness: The Mindset Behind Sporting Achievement*, offers a timely review of the mental toughness literature. Aimed primarily at undergraduate and postgraduate students, this text aims to build upon the first edition by continuing to help clarify our understanding of mental toughness. The most notable additions include more contemporary sporting examples, the presentation of more detailed analyses relating to the development of mental toughness measurement instruments, and the inclusion of additional information surrounding the development and maintenance of mental toughness.

Like its predecessor, the second edition provides a comprehensive overview of six key areas within the mental toughness literature. Each chapter provides a summary of the key points covered to allow the reader to read the chapters independently if they so wish. Chapter 1 introduces the area of mental toughness and uses a diverse range of sporting examples to highlight the extent to which it is perceived to be an important factor in determining success by athletes, coaches and the media. The examples used provide clear accounts of the perceived ingredients thought to make up mental toughness which enables the reader to understand the value of empirically examining mental toughness. Finally, this chapter concludes by providing further sporting examples to illustrate the importance of mental toughness.

Chapter 2 provides an insight into the empirical research which has examined the characteristics of mental toughness. The chapter clearly articulates the vast number of characteristics that have been identified to make-up mental toughness and the definitions of mental toughness which have been offered. In this section, Sheard provides some critical evaluation of the research by suggesting that much of the contemporary research shares similarities to the anecdotal work of Loehr (1986). Despite the vast number of attributes detailed here, the chapter provides the reader with a succinct summary of the key attributes thought to make-up mental toughness.

Chapter 3 offers an overview of some selected models which have conceptualised mental toughness as a moderator of stress. Specifically, Sheard discusses Fletcher’s (2005) facet model of mental toughness and human performance, and Maddi’s (2006) hardiness model for performance and health enhancement which has been used to underpin Clough, Earle and Sewell’s (2002)
4C’s model of mental toughness. Although these discussions are comprehensive, a reader new to the area of mental toughness does not get a true appreciation of the alternative models presented in the literature given that little attention is given to Gucciardi, Gordon and Dimmock’s (2008) model of mental toughness in Australian football, and Jones, Hanton and Connaughton’s (2007) mental toughness framework. In concluding this chapter, Sheard provides some commentary regarding his own views of mental toughness and further advocates the value of Loehr’s (1986) early anecdotal work when conceptualising mental toughness.

Chapter 4 considers the importance of developing psychometrically robust measures to assess mental toughness and provides a coherent overview of existing mental toughness questionnaires. Sheard re-emphasises the value of Loehr’s (1986) work as a valid conceptualisation of mental toughness and uses this as a foundation to present his work which developed the Psychological Performance Inventory (PPI). Sheard then offers some critiques of the PPI and presents his recent work (including an appendix) which supplements the current knowledge base regarding the theoretical underpinning and psychometric properties of his Sport Mental Toughness Questionnaire (SMTQ). Although the conclusion of this chapter offers some critical insight into the measurement of mental toughness, more information relating to current issues surrounding the rigor underpinning the development of mental toughness instruments (e.g. the use of sound scale development and validation procedures) would have provided the reader (especially postgraduates) with a clearer insight as to where we currently stand with regards to measuring mental toughness.

Chapter 5 details the literature which has examined how mental toughness is developed and maintained. The integration of sub-headings and sporting examples is a strength of this section and enables Sheard to communicate his points in a digestible and coherent manner. Chapter 5 concludes by integrating sporting examples to illustrate how mental toughness is thought to be developed.

Finally, Chapter 6 provides some concluding commentary regarding the proposition that mental toughness can be genetically inherited. Although this commentary provides the reader with some interesting propositions, this section would have been strengthened by providing the reader with some insights regarding the ongoing debates in the literature as to whether mental toughness is a developmental like construct or whether it is underpinned by personality traits. This in turn would have enabled the reader to position their own views of mental toughness relative to the research literature. The conclusion to this text then considers the research which is needed to further our understanding of mental toughness and provides some final remarks as to the importance of mental toughness in sport.

The main strength of this book is the manner in which sporting examples are intertwined with empirical evidence to communicate current understanding of mental toughness. Although a heavier emphasis on the current debates and criticisms of the literature would have made the text more useful to postgraduate students, the second edition of this book provides a succinct overview of the key areas related to the understanding of mental toughness which will be positively received by undergraduate students.

Phil Birch
University of Chichester.
Conference Review

4th Annual Meeting of the Expertise and Skill Acquisition Network

Phil Kearney, David Marchant & Paul Ellison

THE 4th Annual Meeting of the Expertise and Skill Acquisition Network (ESAN) took place on 17–18 April 2013, hosted by the English Institute of Sport at their Bisham Abbey National Sports Centre. The venue provided an excellent backdrop to the meeting’s presentations and discussions, and attendees were able to tour the facilities, providing further opportunity for discussion and networking. ESAN is a non-profit special interest group affiliated to the British Psychological Society. The group aims to increase the profile and impact of research into expertise and skill acquisition by providing a forum for UK and European based academics and applied practitioners. Each annual meeting has seen a growth in attendance, and this year’s event saw ESAN Chair Dr. Nick Smeeton (University of Brighton) welcome more than 60 attendees to review findings from recent research programmes and applied interventions.

The meeting is notionally split into a day focused on academic research, and a day led by presentations from applied practitioners. The academic day was characterised by the inter-disciplinary nature of many projects, and the prominent role of technology such as eye trackers, motion analysis systems, and measurements of cardiac output. The opening talk came from Dr Lee Moore of the University of Exeter’s prominent research group, who presented research investigating the biopsychsocial model’s predictions relating to challenge and threat states within a sporting task. Challenge and threat states were induced through instructions to participants. Threat states resulted in inferior performance, in addition to negative changes in a number of process variables such as putter kinematics and quiet eye duration. The extension of research on challenge and threat states into the sporting domain is a very interesting development with numerous practical implications; not least a greater consideration of the effect of the language used by coaches in their interactions with athletes during competition.

A second talk from the research group at the University of Exeter also utilised gaze behaviour, this time examining whether quiet eye training might benefit children with developmental co-ordination disorder (DCD). In one of the highlights of last year’s poster presentations, Charlotte Miles presented pilot work discriminating children with DCD from children with a normal co-ordination profile based on their gaze behaviour. This year, Charlotte returned with an oral presentation to update on her subsequent, very promising, intervention work. This programme of research on DCD illustrates the breadth of topics covered at ESAN, and how many of the tools and methods used in the research of elite sport may have profound implications for other populations. The interest in the acquisition and expert performance of skill in a wide range of populations, including sport, law enforcement and medicine, has been a recurring theme at ESAN meetings. The final talk in the first session consisted of a reflection by Dr Sam Vine, University of Exeter, on quiet eye: the finding that a prolonged final fixation of gaze prior to the onset of movement characterises elite relative to sub-elite performers, and successful relative to unsuccessful trials. Sam initially outlined the
extensive body of research on this well-established characteristic of expert performers, and then emphasised the need to challenge some basic assumptions of how quiet eye influences performance. Sam finished by presenting some preliminary results on the timing and location of the final fixation which support his call for a rethink on the mechanisms responsible for quiet eye.

The prominent role of technology in the first day’s talks was a suitable prelude to the first keynote speaker: Professor Stephen Turnock, Director of the Performance Sports Engineering Laboratory at the University of Southampton. Professor Turnock provided a stimulating overview of his team’s work in supporting a range of high performance sports, and an outline of the cutting edge technology utilised to measure the fine details of athletic performance. For example, Professor Turnock discussed GPS technology in terms of its relative expense and the disadvantages inherent in its being an ‘off the shelf solution’ rather than specific to the actual movement in question. The advances in technology have been such that an enormous quantity of data is now available to the coach and athlete. A considerable challenge remains in terms of delivering the resultant data to the athlete in the most effective way to enhance long term retention of skills, and optimal performance in the competition arena. Skill acquisition specialists were encouraged to be proactive in collaborating with sports engineering specialists to ensure the effective communication of data.

With the goal of bridging the gap between the science and application, the second day focused on applied practitioners with speakers from the English and Scottish Institutes of Sport, the England and Wales Cricket Board, GB Skeleton, and others. These talks presented case studies from a range of sports and skill levels. The speakers provided an insight into the role that skill acquisition plays within their various bodies. Among our highlights of the first session was Malcolm Fair-weather’s overview of his work with Scotland Rugby 7’s on converting line breaks into tries. Malcolm’s case study emphasised how a knowledge of skill acquisition, and in this instance decision making, forms an integral element of an interdisciplinary approach to performance enhancement. Interestingly, Malcolm explained how he had been brought in as a speed coach, rather than as a skill acquisition specialist, which raised considerable debate regarding the perception of the skill acquisition specialist in high performance sport. A talk by EIS Talent ID Co-ordinator Ian Yates brought back memories of Cool Runnings, as he provided an overview of GB Skeleton’s attempts, in the absence of any UK-based tracks, to prepare athletes to take maximum advantage of their limited time on foreign training camps. Continuing the emphasis on the emerging role of technology in research and application in skill acquisition, Ian described the development of an interactive app (containing information such as course videos, photos and detailed written descriptions, in addition to knowledge tests) aimed at increasing the athletes’ track-specific knowledge in advance of training, and thereby accelerating the learning process. While preliminary results were mixed, the innovative web based approach from this extreme sport prompted a lively discussion on the value of knowledge enhancement in more mainstream sports. The previous case studies described isolated instances in which skill acquisition was applied to enhance an individual or team’s performance. In contrast, Michael Bourne of the ECB provided an overview of his strategic approach to incorporating skill acquisition into performance development in elite cricket. We were particularly struck by Michael’s emphasis on ‘low hanging fruit’ – identifying and making the relatively small changes to enhance practice quality at every session. The applied talks illustrated how skill acquisition practitioners engage with and add value to other disciplines, but also stressed the need to clearly define skill acquisition to increase users’ awareness of its potential role.
A new feature of this year’s meetings was an ‘Ask the expert’ forum following the presentations from the applied practitioners. The discussion focused on two topics: the potential of conditioned or scenario-based games to develop perceptual motor skill, and methods to improve the dissemination of knowledge. This discussion was greatly enhanced by input from applied practitioners, such as Danny Kerry of England Hockey, who provided some interesting feedback on England women’s use of conditioned games, and the need to manage player expectations when using this approach. The emphasis on better means to disseminate knowledge led to praise for the ESAN meeting as an opportunity for those in attendance to form contacts, but also raised the need for greater reflection by ESAN members on this important objective. While the scope for themed workshops was discussed in depth at the meeting, a more fruitful approach may lie in longer term partnerships between academics and relevant sporting bodies.

The keynotes on the second day were delivered by Biz Price, Performance Director GB Synchronized Swimming, and Paul Ratcliffe, GB Canoe Slalom Podium Head Coach. Both speakers provided a fascinating insight into their coaching philosophies, and the role played by skill acquisition. In particular, both speakers emphasised the careful balance of success and failure in training, whether focused on ensuring adequate preparation for the demands of competition in the case of the swimmers, or creating an environment to explore technical development in the case of the canoeists. In both speakers’ reflections, a willingness to go out of one’s comfort zone was repeatedly emphasised as a critical factor in the attainment of success. For example, in her engaging talk, Biz Price stressed the importance of athletes practicing failure to cover all eventualities. In particular, Biz talked of making practice more challenging than competition through the use of situational or environmental constraints to generate pressure. This open talk, littered with examples from real-world coaching, provided some excellent examples of innovative coaching utilising skill acquisition principles.

Other highlights from the final day included EIS Skill Acquisition lead Oliver Logan’s discussion of changes in movement variability during the development of skill; Luke Wilson’s (University of Birmingham) presentation on utilising the Useful Field of View test to assess characteristics of performance and selective attention; and Chris McLeod’s (Strength and Conditioning Coach from the EIS) discussion of movement variability and attentional focus when making technical adjustments in a S&C setting.

Professor Mark Williams of Brunel University offered a closing statement, in which he praised the growing critical mass of researchers and applied practitioners in the fields of skill acquisition and expertise. Professor Williams also welcomed the big investment in technology by researchers, but cautioned that quality experimental design remains the prerogative. Echoing the keynote of Professor Turnock, he emphasised that understanding the process of feeding information back to the coach and athlete must not be underestimated in the excitement of the wealth of data which can now be generated. Picking up on a theme from last year’s meeting, Professor Williams again emphasised the need for realism: the study of the truly elite, attempts at studying real world tasks under real world conditions wherever possible, and the use of meaningful intervention periods. To facilitate this real world focus, Professor Williams suggested closer links between researchers and applied practitioners, through internships or similar partnerships, and increased use of non-traditional methods such as qualitative research and case studies exploring the impact of specific interventions on athlete performance.

The organisers of the meeting should certainly be commended for another successful and stimulating meeting of ESAN.
The topics and issues covered provided a contemporary perspective on skill acquisition research, application and professionalization in the UK and Europe.

The 5th Annual Meeting of the Expertise and Skill Acquisition Network (ESAN) will take place in Spring 2014. If you are interested in learning more about ESAN and associated areas of interest, please contact Dr Nick Smeeton (N.J.Smeeton@brighton.ac.uk).

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David Marchant
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Officers</strong></th>
<th><strong>Role</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Richard Mullen</td>
<td>Acting Chair until AGM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian Maynard</td>
<td>Past Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Uphill</td>
<td>Hon. Secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy Wolfson</td>
<td>Hon. Treasurer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Committee Members</strong></th>
<th><strong>Role</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gavin Breslin</td>
<td>Exercise Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pete Coffee</td>
<td>Web Lead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stewart Cotterill</td>
<td>Communications Lead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew Manley</td>
<td>Conference Lead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul McCarthy</td>
<td>SEPR Editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny Page</td>
<td>ESAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ross Roberts</td>
<td>eletter Editor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Representatives</strong></th>
<th><strong>Role</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan Graydon</td>
<td>Ethics Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamish Cox</td>
<td>PsyPAG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophia Jowett</td>
<td>Research Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Thelwell</td>
<td>DSEP Training Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jo Hudson</td>
<td>Qualifications Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>or other representative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Sport and Exercise Psychology Review

Sport and Exercise Psychology Review (SEPR) is an international publication designed to provide a forum for the dissemination of information to the Division of Sport and Exercise Psychology (DSEP) membership and other interested parties. It contains articles, research notes, case-studies, commentaries, student member items, book reviews and conference reports, and the Editorial Board would also like to encourage submissions for a Conference Diary, along with News of Members. Authors who are in doubt as to whether their work falls within the remit of SEPR are invited to send brief preliminary details to members of the Editorial Board for advice. SEPR is published by the British Psychological Society Division of Sport and Exercise Psychology.

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2. Contributions
Articles: Individual articles are published on all aspects of sport and exercise psychology. Articles may provide a broad overview of a particular area or issue, or add a critical commentary on recent articles in SEPR. Articles concerned with the training of sport and exercise psychologists and the application and practice of sport and exercise psychology are particularly welcome, as are articles focusing on teaching sport and exercise psychology. Articles should not exceed 30 sides of A4 and should include an abstract with designated key words.

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including personal acknowledgements and institutional affiliations should be confined to the title page (and the text should be free of such clues as identifiable self-citations, e.g. ‘In our earlier work…’).

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5. Manuscript requirements

- Contributions must be typed in double spacing with 1 in. margins. All sheets must be numbered.
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- Overall, the presentation of papers should conform to the British Psychological Society’s Style Guide (available at: www.bps.org.uk/publications/publications_home.cfm in PDF format). This is based on the Publication Manual (6th ed.) of the American Psychological Association.
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All submissions should be sent to:
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## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Authors/Reviewers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Editorial</td>
<td>Iain Greenlees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Editorial</td>
<td>Paul McCarthy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Original Articles</td>
<td>Culture change in elite sport performance teams: An important and unique construct</td>
<td>Andrew Cruickshank &amp; Dave Collins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Original Articles</td>
<td>The influence of stress and emotions on association football referees' decision-making</td>
<td>Richard Neil, Paul Bayson, Sheldon Hanton &amp; Kylie Wilson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Applied and Pedagogical Reflections</td>
<td>Exploring the value of reflective practice interventions within applied sport psychology: Case studies with an individual athlete and a team</td>
<td>Richard Neil, Brendan Cropley, Kylie Wilson &amp; Andrea Faull</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>Applied and Pedagogical Reflections</td>
<td>Group-based reflective practice in sport psychology: Experiences of two trainee sport and exercise scientists</td>
<td>Emma Huntley &amp; Nichola Kentzer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Applied and Pedagogical Reflections</td>
<td>Dodging the bullets: A psychologist’s perspective in professional rugby league</td>
<td>Keith Earle &amp; Fiona Earle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>Applied and Pedagogical Reflections</td>
<td>Using feature films in the teaching and assessment of sport psychology</td>
<td>Moira Lafferty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83</td>
<td>It’s good to talk: Sport and Exercise Psychology conversations</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Iain Greenlees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>It’s good to talk: Sport and Exercise Psychology conversations</td>
<td>Providing support while overseas</td>
<td>Jo Batey, Stewart Cotterill &amp; Rebecca Symes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93</td>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>One-on-One with...Sandy Wolfson</td>
<td>Sandy Wolfson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95</td>
<td>Student Members (Editor: Matthew Slater)</td>
<td>Preamble</td>
<td>Matthew Slater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95</td>
<td>Student Members (Editor: Matthew Slater)</td>
<td>White coat syndrome: Learning from mistakes in laboratory research</td>
<td>Dr Martin J. Turner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98</td>
<td>Student Members (Editor: Matthew Slater)</td>
<td>Hindsight is a wonderful thing! A reflection on PhD field research</td>
<td>Andrew Evans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>Book Review</td>
<td>Mental Toughness: The Mindset Behind Sporting Achievement</td>
<td>By Michael Sheard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Book Review</td>
<td>Reviewed by Phil Birch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105</td>
<td>Conference Review</td>
<td>4th Annual Meeting of the Expertise and Skill Acquisition Network</td>
<td>Phil Kearney, David Marchant &amp; Paul Ellison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>109</td>
<td>Officers and Committee Members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110</td>
<td>Notes for Contributors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>