

Working With Elite Athletes

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If applied sport psychology has a particular area of glamour, it likely rests in the realm of providing services to elite athletes. We define *elite athletes* as those whose pursuit of excellence in sport has led to their participation and success in competition at the Olympic or professional level. Unfortunately, among some practitioners there is a tendency to promote themselves on the basis of the number of medals or championship teams

Dr. Ogilvie died in 2003. He was a coauthor on previous editions of this chapter and made innumerable important contributions to sport psychology, often through his work with elite athletes.

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Correspondence concerning this chapter should be addressed to Patrick Baillie, PhD, Alberta Health Services, 3500 26th Avenue N.E., Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T1Y 6J4.

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with which they have been associated. More appropriately, in our view, working with elite athletes should be seen as an opportunity to work with talented and dedicated clients, athletes who have reached the pinnacle of their particular sports.

In this chapter, we address some of the unique issues facing both the sport psychology client and practitioner, including gaining entry and acceptance with Olympic and professional athletes, recognizing differences between work with teams and work with individuals, coping with the distractions and obligations that face athletes and sport psychology consultants at this level of competition, and evaluating the ongoing effectiveness of sport science consultation as related not only to the athlete psychologically but also to the full spectrum of sport performance. Although there is no doubt that there are special pleasures that may come from working with elite athletes, there are also specific perils about which a prepared consultant must be aware.

Work with elite athletes brings into play special challenges for the sport psychology consultant (McCann, 2008; Van Raalte, 1998, Wylleman & Johnson, 2012). It is more than an extension of services offered to amateur sports clubs and other competitors. Travel schedules can disrupt the regularity of involvement; the media may look to the sport psychology consultant for that extra insight or news tip; administrative structures may become increasingly burdensome; substance abuse issues may put the sport psychology consultant in an ethical or even a legal dilemma; and mental health issues may necessitate external psychiatric consultation. The sport psychology consultant at the contemporary elite level usually works within a multidisciplinary sport science team requiring essential, regular, time-consuming, and ethically challenging collaborations between professionals. At times, the consultation process fails, leading to changes in service delivery—changes that may even include abrupt termination of the consultation contract.

The Starting Point: Gaining Entry With Elite Athletes

The image that sport psychology consultants present at their first meeting with elite athletes will often characterize the nature and duration of the professional relationship. Honesty, genuineness, and the ability to earn athletes' trust are frequently mentioned as essential elements on which practitioners build their reputation (Ravizza, 1988). Gardner (2001) noted:

In certain respects, those in professional sports are suspicious and cynical about the value of psychology. Many in the field have

previously oversold the value of their services or have been less than open and honest in describing the limits of their training and education. This has resulted in a situation in which those psychologists seeking to work in professional sports have had to overcome the negative experiences and misconceptions of others before even having the opportunity to demonstrate their skills. (p. 37)

STRATEGIES FOR ACCESS TO AND ACCEPTANCE BY PROFESSIONAL AND OLYMPIC ATHLETES

It is essential for sport psychology consultants to use a variety of methods to gain access to and acceptance by professional and Olympic athletes (see Exhibit 18.1). Many athletes and coaches realize the importance of sport psychology, but their enthusiasm for working with a mental training consultant may not be informed by a full appreciation of the skill-set differences between mental trainers and licensed and registered psychologists who work in sport. Moreover, coaches may feel that sport psychology techniques such as goal setting, focus control, and avoidance of burnout are basic skills that fall under the coach's purview. Athletes, on the other hand, may believe that consultation with a sport psychology consultant is an admission of weakness, although research has indicated that athletes (in this case, football players) do not derogate other athletes who consult sport psychologists (Van Raalte, Brewer, Brewer, & Linder, 1992). Other significant barriers to the involvement of a sport psychology consultant are negative connotations associated with the image of a

EXHIBIT 18.1

Strategies for Gaining Access to and Acceptance by Professional and Olympic Athletes

1. Gain experience working with athletes in a variety of settings, including schools and universities, local sports clubs, development teams, and other amateur organizations.
2. Develop name recognition by volunteering with sports teams, presenting at coaching clinics, working with individual athletes, making cold calls to sports organizations and following up with written materials, and giving public presentations or lectures to other interested audiences.
3. Accurately assess the needs of athletes, rather than imposing any sort of predetermined program developed elsewhere. Assessment includes identification of the athletes' strengths, requirements, experiences with applied sport psychology, and interests in performance enhancement and mental training.
4. Be sensitive to the needs of the athletes, be flexible in scheduling, provide support for the athletes, and provide clear strategies with a positive focus.
5. Use language that is appropriate to the sport setting, emphasizing plain language, direct communication, and simple ideas instead of psychological jargon. Knowledge and use of terms related to player positions, game rules, and sport strategies assists in the development of early rapport.

“shrink” (Linder, Brewer, Van Raalte, & De Lange, 1991), lack of sport-specific knowledge by the practitioner (Porter, 2008; Van Raalte, 1998), a practitioner’s lack of experience in working with mental illness within the sport environment, and general lack of experience with the elite sport environment (Ravizza, 1988). Ravizza (1988) recommended using terms such as *mental training* or *mental toughness* instead of *sport psychology* because athletes are likely to be more comfortable with these alternatives. For athletes referred to a sport psychology consultant, feelings of paranoia are not uncommon (Ogilvie, 1979). These will be managed in most cases if the practitioner demonstrates an on-the-field comfort with working in the elite competitive and training settings. Supervised experience with amateur sports clubs or with college teams provides the practitioner with exposure to the sport and to introductory administrative issues. As the past several years have shown, with huge athlete contracts, constraints on Olympic program funding, and strikes or lock-outs in major professional team sports, elite athletics is business driven, and sport psychology consultants often need to immediately prove to be worth their fees. On-the-job training is almost nonexistent.

Sport psychology positions working with elite athletes are scarce and are rarely advertised. In North America, there are about half a dozen full-time positions working with Olympic athletes, perhaps 25 to 50 practitioners working with professional sports teams, and a slightly higher number consulting part time with Olympic athletes. For a handful of skilled practitioners, years of experience and a track record of proficiency may lead to unsolicited offers of employment. For slightly more, presentations at coaching conferences, publications in popular magazines or books, and involvement with development teams serve to provide name recognition when approaching teams or national governing bodies (NGBs), the organizations that allocate funding and determine policy for Olympic sports. Experience, in short, helps, but cold calls and other sales techniques are required before a novice practitioner is able to get a foot in the door. Among other strategies, experience with a single team member, collegiality with an administrator, or the willingness to start with volunteer services have proven to be useful approaches (Carr, 2007).

Care must be exercised, however, never to violate the principles of responsible caring embodied in the sport psychology consultant’s or mental trainer’s codes of professional conduct. These principles strike at the heart of responsible professionalism, and they are often contradicted when a practitioner uses an athlete to build his or her professional reputation or to gain a contract with a sport organization. The athlete must first fully understand and approve of the requisite limited disclosures and, in addition, must appreciate the consequences, foreseen and unforeseen, for the athlete if the practitioner gains this “foot in the door.”

Understanding athletes' motivation and commitment is an important step in earning their respect and trust. As a result, Ravizza (1988), Orlick (1989), and some of the contributors to special editions of *The Sport Psychologist* (i.e., Botterill, 1990; Ravizza, 1990), *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* (Wylleman & Johnson, 2012), and the *Journal of Sport Psychology in Action* (Fletcher, 2012) have recommended that the consultation process include a focus on mental preparation (Stambulova, Stambulov, & Johnson, 2012) and detailed assessment of athlete and team needs rather than on the imposition of a packaged program and an evaluation of sport psychology consultant effectiveness (Haberl & McCann, 2012). Orlick (1989) stated, "I never begin an individual consultation session with a preconceived notion of what a particular high performance athlete might want or need. Each one has different needs, and these needs differ at various times in his or her career" (pp. 358–359). Orlick described beginning the assessment by discussing athletes' goals, their experiences with mental preparation, and identification of mental tasks that require focused work. This type of assessment can then form the basis of a working relationship between sport psychology consultant and athlete prior to the Olympic Games (Birrer, Wetzel, Schmid, & Morgan, 2012; Pensgaard & Abrahamsen, 2012). Ravizza (1988) added that the practitioner must also determine how to integrate mental skills training into the coach's schedule so as to minimize disruption. Coaches are likely to be more comfortable with a consultant who provides assurances that sport psychology interventions are intended to complement the coach's role and not to impinge on typical coaching domains such as skill acquisition, game strategy, and roster decisions.

In possibly the most comprehensive component analysis of service delivery to date, Poczwardowski and Sherman (2011) used interviews with expert consultants to expand on their earlier work and to outline a revised sport psychology service delivery (SPSD) heuristic. The (perhaps too) simplified understanding of the current expert opinion on the necessary elements of effective delivery may be summarized by two factors: the necessity for consultants to appreciate and evaluate clients' goals, needs, and personality and the importance of consultants' self-awareness and regulation of individual characteristics, capabilities, philosophy, and ethics (Henriksen & Diment, 2011; Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011; Poczwardowski, Sherman, & Ravizza, 2004).

Athletes also may need sport psychology consultants to be sensitive to scheduling issues. Given the pressures and commitments of elite-level athletic competition, several authors (e.g., Botterill, 1990; Halliwell, 1990) have suggested that time with family is important for the athlete and that sport psychology interventions offered on road trips, when downtime is more common, may be better received. Other dimensions of access will likely reflect the practitioner's own values,

such as being in the locker room before games, on the field during practices, or in a conveniently located arena office. Preferences vary.

I have found that I can be most effective by keeping a low profile and being available on planes, buses, or in my hotel room. An open-door policy based upon a genuine interest in each player has proven to be the most effective approach for me. (Ogilvie, 1979, p. 51)

Working to develop a long-term relationship between a sport psychology consultant and a team (or individual athlete) enhances learning for the consultant and may create the opportunity for broader types of psychological interventions to be provided with the team (Shambrook, 2009).

Personality may also play a central role in determining the goodness of fit between an athlete or team and a practitioner. Orlick and Partington (1987) surveyed 75 Canadian Olympic athletes and found that sport psychology consultants were given positive evaluations when they were accessible, flexible, seen to have something concrete to offer, willing to provide athlete-specific input, and able to assist athletes in overcoming problems. Gould, Murphy, Tammen, and May (1991) found that effectiveness of consultants was highly correlated with their fitting in with the team, drawing on the athletes' strengths, being trustworthy, having a positive focus, and providing clear strategies—with some of these aspects being emphasized within the revised SPSD heuristic described previously (Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011). Similarly, Anderson, Miles, Robinson, and Mahoney (2004) found that sport psychology consultants who were good communicators, were knowledgeable about sport, provided feedback, and used appropriate service delivery formats were viewed favorably by athletes. Negative evaluations were centered on sport psychology consultants who lacked sensitivity, failed to provide sufficient feedback, had poor application of psychology to sport, and whose interpersonal styles were described among other things as wimpy or domineering. Orlick and Partington concluded, "As a result of this study, . . . we have become acutely aware of the importance of having people with the right kind of personal qualities enter the field" (pp. 16–17).

For many elite athletes, appropriate service delivery includes performance as well as mental health issues. Although the prevalence of depression among intercollegiate athletes may be the same as or lower than that of nonathletes (Proctor & Boan-Lenzo, 2010; Storch, Storch, Killiany, & Roberti, 2005), data collected within a larger study (Davis, Liotti, Ngan, Smith, & Mayberg, 2008) indicated that the prevalence of depression among elite swimmers—defined as those with a reasonable expectation that their expert preparation provides them good odds of doing well at the Olympic Trials—may be higher than reported in studies that have not set a high enough standard for the classification of "elite" (e.g., Yang et al., 2007). Indeed, a study of 50 elite swimmers

confirmed these earlier results, indicating a 34% prevalence of depression diagnosed according to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4th ed., text revision; American Psychiatric Association, 2000) among those who had failed performances in major competition. This is roughly twice what is the widely reported prevalence for university students who are not classed as elite athletes (Hammen, Gialloreto, Kubas, & Davis, in press; Storch et al., 2005).

Sport psychology consultants who are trained to work with elite athletes' concerns with regard to performance, training, and mental health (up to and including postperformance suicidal ideation) may be particularly competent to work with elite performers (Davis & Baillie, 2009). However, those practicing from a clinical perspective should be cautious in the use of diagnostic labels and psychological terms that can be perceived unfavorably by coaches and athletes. Adjusting language to develop rapport and meet the needs of clients is a valuable approach.

NEGOTIATING AND DETAILING THE TERMS OF CONSULTATION

There are three broad categories of services widely offered by team sport psychology consultants: (a) performance enhancement, (b) clinical or counseling services, and (c) psychological testing (Gardner, 2001). Multiple models of service delivery exist within applied sport psychology, which are related to practitioners' self-perceived competencies, coaching philosophies, and team and athlete needs. For example, both Ravizza (1990) and Rotella (1990) presented educational models that consist of information, practice, and support for athletes that is performance-enhancement centered and avoids counseling and player selection. Dorfman (1990) offered a combined clinical and educational approach with personal and family counseling and encouraged referrals for drug rehabilitation, financial advice, and academic assistance. Neff (1990) described a wide-ranging employee assistance program with a professional sports organization, including personal counseling and testing. Gardner (2001) stated that informal discussion among sport psychology consultants "suggests that more teams use psychologists in . . . predraft testing . . . than [in] any other professional function" (p. 37). Ziemainz, Neumann, Rasche, and Stemmler (2006) reported that most sport psychology consultants (87.5% of a German sample) use standardized sport-specific tests in their work with athletes and coaches. Murphy (1988) compared medical, consultation, and educational models in applied sport psychology and recommended a consultation-type model drawn from a base in industrial and organizational psychology.

Service delivery models may be shaped by the needs of the team or NGB. Sport psychology consultants are generally brought in to meet

a particular organizational need, although over time, their roles and responsibilities may grow. Gardner (2001) provided a personal example of being brought into a professional sports organization for the purpose of providing predraft assessments. His work with the team later developed into the provision of performance enhancement services and coach–athlete relationship development.

The issue of philosophy of service delivery should be clarified before a contract between practitioner and client is formalized. Recommendations regarding the content of the contract are presented in Exhibit 18.2. Essential elements include financial terms, clarification of access, clarification of role, and details of the referral process. Specific services to be provided will vary, as will the amount of time to be provided by the practitioner, the term of the contract, and the level of compensation.

When using an employee assistance program as the model of service, the sport psychology consultant should take extra care to clarify referral procedures and payment of costs associated with outside services, (e.g., substance abuse programs, family counseling, financial management professionals). Because confidentiality issues can limit the ability of practitioners to make referrals (e.g., the sport psychology consultant may be put in a position of having to disclose personal information about an athlete before the team or NGB may authorize funds for other treatment), consultants may have to make independent decisions to spend a significant amount of a team’s or an NGB’s money or to affect training and travel schedules should the needs of the athlete include comprehensive treatment alternatives.

EXHIBIT 18.2

Recommendations for the Content of a Contract for Sport Psychology Services With Elite Athletes

1. Financial terms
 - a. Determine an appropriate level of compensation for services rendered.
 - b. Attempt to avoid contracts based on barter, particularly with individual athletes.
 - c. Specify the time period during which the contract is in effect.
 - d. Identify escape clauses through which either side may prematurely terminate services, with associated periods of notification.
2. Contract for sufficient orientation
 - a. Present orientation workshops for the entire coaching staff.
 - b. Schedule individual meetings with each athlete.
3. Professional issues
 - a. Detail professional boundaries (e.g., confidentiality, access to the sport psychology consultant including online methods such as Skype or instant messaging, potential research or testing activities).
 - b. Describe specific competencies.
 - c. Explain the referral process.

In addition to service delivery issues, contracts generally list fees for services provided per session or per season. Rates may be similar to those charged for psychological services or, in the case of season-long contracts, business consultation. Some sport psychology consultants use a barter system for payment, for example, accepting season tickets in trade for sport psychology consulting. Sport psychology consultants are advised to review the relevant literature on the impact of remuneration on therapeutic outcome (e.g., Cerney, 1991; Yoken & Berman, 1987) before accepting this type of payment. Barter should be avoided when clinically contraindicated and/or when exploitative.

Even less financially rewarding than barter are *reverse contracts*. Here, in exchange for being allowed to promote association with an especially prominent athlete or team, sport psychology consultants actually compensate the team for the privilege of that association. A cash payment to the team or providing services for no fee may be part of these contracts. We believe that a fee-for-services model is ideal because the value that the team or athlete writes into the practitioner's contract is an early reflection of the importance or relevance that the client is giving to sport psychology consulting.

The contract is also an appropriate place to clarify issues around competencies of the sport psychology consultant. For example, sport psychology consultants might offer services that are in high demand by athletes, such as concentration and attention training, stress management, relaxation, self-talk, competition planning, monitoring and evaluation, imagery, precompetition planning, goal setting, and interpersonal communication (Gould et al, 1991; Partington & Orlick, 1991). Practitioners might also address career transition planning, eating disorders, substance abuse concerns, personal development issues, and crisis management, depending on their training and the needs and interests of the athletes or teams.

Crises are inevitable, and sport psychology consultants can be expected, with little warning, to be called on to aid in the resolution of complex critical problems. For example, McCabe (2010) described the role played by mental training consultant Wayne Halliwell with Joannie Rochette when Ms. Rochette's mother died suddenly, just days before Ms. Rochette was scheduled to compete in the 2010 Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver.

This situation and others like it are most easily handled by sport psychology consultants who have defined their roles and developed relationships with athletes, teams, medical personnel, sport science staff (e.g., exercise physiologists, nutritionists, strength trainers, biomechanists), sport organizations, and NGBs. When meeting with athletes, sport psychology consultants generally describe sport psychology strategies and interventions and detail the nature of privileged communication. The central theme of conversations with teams and athletes may

be that sport psychology services are tailored to match their interests and concerns. Meetings with relevant team personnel such as coaches, athletic trainers, sport scientists, and team physicians can be used to introduce sport psychology services, answer questions, discuss how services can best be provided, explain how referrals are effectively made, and convey the idea that sport psychology practitioners can help team personnel meet their personal goals while respecting their individual expertise and needs. Protocols are often developed to ensure proper support for elite athletes and teams and for the full and appropriate use of sport psychology consultants, medical staff, and sport science practitioners. Specification of professional boundaries relating to test materials, the voluntary nature of athlete involvement, confidentiality, and the referral process should be included in such protocols to ensure that services will be delivered within the ethical framework of the field. Many problems will be prevented through the development of an appropriate contract such as that presented in Exhibit 18.3.

Working Ethically With Elite Athletes

The single most important ethical issue to face a sport psychology consultant working with elite athletes is clarification of exactly who is the client. Is the practitioner's primary allegiance to the athlete, coach, general manager, or NGB? The nature of the relationship to the primary client, subsumed within this issue, is the protection of the privacy of the client. It is an important but manageable challenge to design a collaborative model that balances a respect for privacy with competition goals. The basic framework must be clarified during initial negotiations but is likely to require careful modification throughout the term of the contract.

Haberl and Peterson (2006) summarized the most predictable domains of sport psychology practice in which ethics questions are likely to arise. These include travel and accommodation with teams, together with dual and multiple relationships. For example, at an Olympic Games, a sport psychology consultant might sit at a meal with an athlete who makes negative comments about a teammate who has choked under pressure. "Is it possible for a sport psychology consultant to help teammates who are chokers?" the athlete asks. All eyes turn to the sport psychology consultant, who may be working with the teammate in question and possibly also with the athlete speaking and members of the coaching staff.

Andersen, Van Raalte, and Brewer (2001) noted that the looser boundaries often involved in working with elite athletes can contribute to complicated ethical dilemmas. Vernacchia and Henschen (2008) also

EXHIBIT 18.3

Sample Contract for the Provision of Sport Psychology Services

1. This agreement is between [the sport psychologist(s)] and [the client(s)] for the provision of sport psychology services by [the sport psychologist(s)] with [the client(s)].
2. The agreement covers the period between [the present date or the first day of the season] and [1 year less a day from the present date or the last possible day of competition]. Either party may terminate services at any time on written notice [1 month] prior to the termination.
3. Areas in which [the sport psychologist] is competent to provide service include (add or delete as applicable) goal setting, stress management, substance abuse counseling, focus control, psychometric assessment, marital or couples counseling, imagery, precompetition and competition planning, crisis management, interpersonal communication, self-talk strategies, and regulation of arousal. Data collection for research by the sport psychologist, assessments of draft prospects, and other services will be negotiated separately.
4. Required services outside of these areas of competence will be accessed through referrals at the discretion of [the sport psychologist], wherever possible in consultation with [the client] and with the chief physician. Costs associated with additional treatment resources will be paid by [the client]. Such services may include substance abuse treatment, family or marital counseling, or career transition programs.
5. Fees for the provision of sport psychology services by [the sport psychologist] will be in the amount of \$[], to be paid in [] equal installments, on [date(s)] by [the client].
6. The nature and content of all services provided by [the sport psychologist] to an individual athlete are privileged and will not be disclosed by [the sport psychologist] to anyone without the written consent of the athlete. The nature and content of services provided to the team as a whole are also privileged and will not be disclosed outside of the team by [the sport psychologist] without the written consent of [the head coach].
7. (When working with a team or national governing body) [The sport psychologist] will consult [every 2 weeks] with [the head coach] to discuss issues of team cohesion, communication, mental focus, and other topics determined by mutual concern.
8. At a time agreed on by the parties, [the sport psychologist] will hold an introductory meeting with [the athlete(s)] to outline expectations for the provision of sport psychology services. This meeting will outline the training and background of [the sport psychologist], services to be offered, relevant readings, ethical standards, and scheduling and will include time to answer questions from [the athlete(s)]. Meetings with each individual athlete will be arranged at times of mutual convenience.
9. At a time agreed on by the parties, [the sport psychologist] will meet separately with the coaching staff, the medical staff, and any other team personnel as may be appropriate, to outline the training and background of [the sport psychologist], services to be offered, procedures for interdisciplinary consultation, relevant readings, ethical standards, and scheduling, and to answer questions from each of these groups.
10. Any modifications to this agreement must be made by mutual consent of the parties.
Dated [date] at [city]
Signed [the sport psychologist] [name of the sport psychologist printed]
[the athlete or head coach] [name of the signatory/client printed]

Note. Fees may cover all or part of the services to be provided. When the fees cover preseason training and regular contact during the season but not crisis management issues or other circumstances such as attendance at nonlocal competitions, additional fees should be specified in the contract. An informal survey by Patrick H. F. Baillie and Henry Davis IV suggests that fees for a season of service to a professional team range from barter for a pair of season tickets to over \$50,000. Fees for a year of service with college and university teams range from \$0 for pro bono work covered by primary employment in the counseling center to over \$200,000 for private sport psychology consultants.

identified myriad consulting challenges that can contribute to ethical challenges at an Olympic Games, such as staff stress, “physical bankruptcy,” drug testing, and injury. More specifically, Vernacchia and Henschen recounted the experience of working with an athlete who was in need of an immediate X-ray before being cleared to compete in the Olympic Games. As a result of bureaucratic issues, the test would not be paid for by the team, and therefore the athlete would not be cleared and would have to withdraw from the Games. Although the sport psychologist could have afforded to pay for the test, he instead was able to help facilitate treatment with the physician, thus avoiding a dual relationship (i.e., sport psychology consultant and financial supporter).

RESPECTING BOUNDARIES BETWEEN ADMINISTRATORS, COACHES, AND ATHLETES

In working with teams, the sport psychology consultant may find varying levels of acceptance among the athletes. Issues such as history with other consultants, overall trust, cultural background, and personal motivation influence the comfort of athletes in seeking mental skills training. Ravizza (1988) suggested that three groups may arise: “In general, I find that about one third of the athletes on a team are very receptive to the program in the beginning, one third will seek it out when they are struggling, and one third are not receptive” (p. 249). Put simply, not all members of a team will feel comfortable in accessing sport psychology services. Practitioners must identify whether they need to address this reluctance or allow for a more gradual building of acceptance by the team. Goodness of fit applies to the whole team and the sport psychology consultant, not necessarily each team member.

Working with individual athletes may result in a reduction of the number of extraneous factors that can disrupt the sport psychology consultant–athlete relationship. For example, when golf or tennis professionals seek service, responsibility is usually restricted to the clients and their agents. Clarification of the role of the sport psychology consultant is relatively straightforward. There are notable occasions, however, when sponsors or parents have, by the nature of their relationship to the athlete, influenced the implementation of mental skills training programs. When service is extended to an entire team or NGB, functioning within established ethical guidelines can be an ongoing challenge. Confidentiality issues often arise as coaches and administrators, understandably seeking accountability from the sport psychology consultant, may ask for information pertaining to services provided to a given athlete, including the content or frequency of sessions. Coaches who use the sport psychology consultant as a sounding board may disclose pending personnel decisions that affect individual athletes but that the sport

psychology consultant may not disclose to athletes. As noted, when the trade or cut then comes, athletes may raise hard questions about the allegiances of the sport psychology consultant.

Work with teams generally proceeds only with the approval of the coach. As a result, some practitioners view allegiance to the coach as being a prerequisite to work with sports teams (Ogilvie, 1979; Ravizza, 1990). However, sport psychology consultants who are seen as agents of the coaching staff and who focus primarily on issues raised by coaches are unlikely to be effective. On the other hand, sport psychology consultants who emphasize athlete needs at the expense of the team are not particularly successful. When working with teams and athletes, maintaining a balance between various constituencies and professional ethics can be challenging. Ongoing supervision and a network of professional mentors and colleagues are essential for sport psychology practitioners attempting to manage these myriad challenges and to provide optimal services.

MAINTAINING CONFIDENTIALITY

As stated, potentially one of the most difficult issues facing the sport psychology consultant relates to information gained through work with an individual athlete and about which the coach, other sport science or medical consultants, or team administrators may seek disclosure. Porter (2008) surveyed experienced sport psychology consultants and concluded that maintaining confidentiality was a core ethical challenge in sport psychology service delivery. Similarly, Stapleton, Hanks, Hays, and Parham (2010) noted that maintaining competence, confidentiality, and boundary issues are among the more commonly faced ethical issues in applied sport psychology.

Explicating and reiterating the limits of disclosure in person and in writing as part of a contractual agreement is a good way to start work as a sport psychology consultant. For some athletes, complete confidentiality within legal limits is preferred. For other athletes, such as an athlete with an eating disorder who meets with a physiologist, physician, strength trainer, nutritionist, and sport psychology consultant, limited disclosure among experts to enhance treatment may be preferred. Many athletes choose informed disclosure when the potential benefits are explained, but care must be taken to assure that no athlete feels pressured into giving consent.

Overall, athletes' right to complete privacy is sabotaged by membership on elite teams that receive public attention and, at an Olympic level, public financial support. Even behind the training room door, at this level, athletes are discussed and treated by multidisciplinary teams—not simply by coaches and doctors—and many consider the athletes to be accepting of the open sharing of their personal information. This is not the context described by family practice doctors who practice traditional medical ethics and usually see patients on a 1:1 basis (Bewley, 1997), and

it is not the context defined by medical ethicists who delineate patient confidentiality protections that are required by the common practice of sharing patient information electronically (Goldstein, 2010). Rules governing what is known as *autonomous authorization*—wherein a patient deliberates without bias or pressure over whether to accept a medical intervention—are usually not practicable. Elite athletes are expected to consent to as extensive a level of sport science collaboration deemed necessary to maximize the chances to win. This expectation undermines the fundamental principles inherent in informed consent, and this expectation itself must be addressed when the sport psychology consultant and athletes meet to discuss confidentiality. Patrick H. F. Baillie worked in a professional sport with a substance abuse policy that provided for fines “of any team official knowing of a player’s drug use and not reporting such use.” To respect confidentiality, the contract stated that the team would pay any fines levied against the consultant. This policy was agreed to after extensive discussion and collaboration with administrators. It is advisable that sport psychology consultants repeatedly engage athletes in dialogue over confidentiality so that athletes are afforded an issue-by-issue opportunity to consent to the scope and the way in which their confidential information will be shared.

Distractions and Obligations: Factors That May Impair Peak Performance for Elite Athletes

Competition at the Olympic or professional level may offer athletes the ultimate showcase for their talents. It is also likely to bring into play new time demands; new sources of competitive stress; and other challenges, such as dealing with the media, life on the road, and heightened pressure, either self-imposed or external, for consistent excellence. For the sport psychology consultant, these issues must be addressed to assist athletes in maintaining focus during training and competitions. However, the disturbances also interfere with athletes’ time and may, therefore, impinge on access to and the availability of suitable consultation sessions.

COPING WITH TRAVEL, OUTSIDE EMPLOYMENT, AND OTHER DISTRACTIONS

At multisport competitions such as the Olympic Games, the Pan American Games, or the World University Games, athletes are often faced with personal, situational, and an interaction of personal and situational factors

(Gould & Maynard, 2009), such as significant disruptions to training schedules; crowded accommodations; time spent travelling to and from practice venues; and hours spent waiting, eating, making travel arrangements, and trying to e-mail or connect by Skype to home. Greenleaf (1999) found that Olympic athletes responded best to these negative distractions when a plan had been prepared, addressing, for example, how to access friends and family and how and when to interact with media. In short, when the athlete had a sense of control amid changes that sometimes included working with different coaches, such preparation seemed to help. As Canadian diver Eryn Bulmer stated, “Whoever can ignore the distractions the best is going to perform the best. I’ve learned how to compete under pressure and how to block those things out” (Jones, 2000, p. 8). Giges and Petitpas (2000) offered a framework for brief-contact sport psychology interventions in the field, describing them as time limited, action oriented, and present focused. The advent of convenient and inexpensive communication via texting, e-mail, cell phones, and Skype may assist sport psychology consultants in maintaining contact with clients when they are away for competitions, but the cautious user must consider issues of confidentiality and of interstate (or international) service delivery that are inherent in these technologies.

Most professional sports teams spend half of their season on the road. For golfers, bowlers, and tennis players, among others, the entire season may be spent traveling. Unless well sponsored, Olympic and semiprofessional athletes may need to balance training and competition with the demands of earning a living outside of sport. These and other factors not only conspire against the best performances of the athletes but also affect the delivery of sport psychology services.

Michelle Mullen, a professional bowler interviewed by Gould and Finch (1990), described life on tour as being extremely stressful as a result of struggling to make a living and to maintain a healthy perspective on the role of sport:

You must be able to keep your bowling in the right regard and not let it become your total life. Sometimes the tour can become so all consuming, and in many ways it has to be. However, you must remember that it’s just part of your life and not necessarily the total essence of it (p. 422).

Discussing possible research areas for sport psychology, Mullen noted:

Interesting things to study have to do with lifestyle and getting an understanding for the stressful lifestyle. It’s different in every sport for different reasons. Finances have a lot to do with it, depending on what you’re competing for. Understanding what kind of roller coaster it is as a professional athlete, especially the uncertainty . . . dealing with different issues like that, the stress levels are underestimated by far. (Gould & Finch, 1990, p. 426)

Gould and Finch also noted that the stresses related to competing on television in front of audiences of millions, more prevalent in the professional rather than the amateur ranks, can also affect elite athletes' performance.

Botterill (1990) described the importance of spouses, families, and friends in the life of the professional athlete, and therefore, when serving as a sport psychology consultant, he offers his services to these people. Botterill also noted the difficulty of scheduling interventions:

Road trips often contain unique challenges to work through and players can be more receptive to spending additional time on things on the road. Professional players spend so much time away from home they are often well advised to maximize time with their families when at home. (p. 366)

A broader analysis of the scheduling of interventions suggests that team meetings or coach referrals after a home practice are likely to be met with annoyance and disinterest from team members. Athletes, as noted earlier, like a consultant to be available but flexible. When a program is truly supported by the coaching staff, mental training exercises may replace some or all of the allotted practice time or may be integrated into on-the-field or on-the-court training. Other times for less intrusive interventions include travel times (e.g., at airports or bus stations, en route, at hotels) and during meals. Sport psychology consultants should discuss the issue of scheduling as part of the introductory stage of the consultation. Sensitivity to scheduling so as to avoid adding to the demands on the athlete is likely to be favorably received.

DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

Just as professional sport is a business, so is the media's function in covering it. For this reason, athletes and sport psychology consultants should learn to interact effectively with writers and reporter. Exposure on television, in print, or online (e.g., Facebook, *TMZ Sports*, Twitter, YouTube) may improve the marketability of athletes and consultants, but an ongoing relationship with the media also increases the risk of making a potentially damaging off-the-cuff comment (never off the record—reporters are always researching, even if not actually quoting). The simple fact that an athlete is seeing the shrink or commented about a fellow athlete's or coach's situation may become a story.

In most elite sport organizations, there are public relations staff members who provide excellent counsel regarding media contacts. Reporters gain access to athletes only at limited times, although they may freely editorialize about issues that, when read or seen by athletes, can interfere with their training and competitive focus. Among the worst mistakes that an athlete might make are comments that suggest dissension among team

members or that insult opponents, thereby offering a grudge motivation to others. Athletes are, therefore, well-advised to make only comments that describe personal disappointment (e.g., “I felt that I didn’t play up to my potential this evening”) or that offer positive reflections on team members (e.g., “Mike played hard today and we capitalized on the opportunities he created”) or the competition (e.g., “Our opponents played well, so we had to beat a good team”). Generally, athletes should remember that members of the media are dependent on the quotes they receive from their subjects. Athletes who have nothing to say will not be quoted. However, reporters ultimately must find and file a story and will do the best they can with the information offered. Complete avoidance of the media has worked only for rare athletes and is likely to hamper athletes in developing community involvement and potential revenues from endorsements. Careful management of media interactions, then, becomes an asset.

The same concerns that affect athletes with regard to the media may be raised for sport psychology consultants. Directing media to the press officer is often the safest way to avoid an errant comment. When the practitioner becomes the focus of a story, extreme caution must be exercised by the team and by the consultant. Although the original story may be a favorable account of the sport psychology consultant’s activities, competing media sources are likely to reframe the idea to boost their own sales. Sport psychology consultants who answer media questions by serving in a broad educational role, for example, describing the purpose and techniques of applied sport psychology in performance enhancement, may serve both their athletes and the field well. Discussing team dynamics, coaching styles, and athlete preparedness may lead to a quick end to the consultant relationship with the sports organization.

Win or Lose, the Season Ends: Reflecting on the Consultation and Planning for the Future

After each involvement with elite athletes, it is important that practitioners undertake an evaluation of the consultation process, including self-assessment and the eliciting of feedback from athletes and/or coaches and administrators. Such a procedure is likely to provide valuable insights that can prepare consultants for future opportunities or for marketing themselves in another setting. The Consultant Evaluation Form developed by Partington and Orlick (1987) and the Characteristics of Effective Sport Psychology Consultants Inventory developed by Lubker, Visek, Geer, and Watson (2008) may be useful tools for this evaluation process.

ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CONSULTATION

In a study of consultants, administrators, coaches, and athletes, Gould et al. (1991) used the Consultant Evaluation Form to assess the characteristics of effective services provided to 25 NGBs. A similar process was used by Orlick and Partington (1987), with both studies providing a practical basis for comparing the results of self-evaluation. The Characteristics of Effective Sport Psychology Consultants Inventory (Lubker et al., 2008) consists of five factors of effective consultants: (a) positive interpersonal skills (e.g., friendly, approachable, trustworthy), (b) physical characteristics (e.g., looks physically fit, dresses similar to coaching staff, of same gender as the sport team), (c) athletic background (e.g., background as competitive athlete, has competed in that sport), (d) professional status (e.g., possesses advanced degree in performance enhancement, is certified), and (e) sport culture (e.g., intelligent, has knowledge of mental skills, able to fit into sport environment).

Ultimately, the goodness of fit with the organization and the use of the sport psychology consultant by the athlete are the measures of overall effect. Shortcomings, however, may be the result of various elements that are beyond the control of the practitioner. Athletes, for example, may fear their coach and, hence, fear the sport psychology consultant whose allegiance has been demanded by the coach. Beginning a consultation in a crisis management mode is also likely to influence its positive utility. The length of the relationship with an athlete or team may affect effectiveness. "Establishing initial rapport with coaches takes time. Yet the pressure on coaches of elite teams is for quick results," wrote Ravizza (1988, p. 247). In contrast, Orlick (1989) stated,

In my best or most effective consulting situations I have enough time to make a difference, which means multiple contacts at the individual level. . . . Usually it takes about 3 years of ongoing work before things really come together mentally for highly committed athletes. (p. 363)

The evaluation process should include comprehensive assessment of the sport psychology services. This might include assessment of the sport psychology consultant, athletes, coaches, families, and administrators. The information gleaned can help identify program strengths and determine what changes might enhance the implementation of consulting services in the future, even if these are with other athletes, teams, and coaches. For example, the following questions could be posed: Were adequate facilities made available to the consultant? What support did the coach provide for learning and practice of mental skills strategies? Could the issue of confidentiality and privilege have been better introduced or explained? Was enough time made available for consultations? Were team meetings (if any) appropriately scheduled

and attended? Were the athletes receptive to sport psychology services? Did athletes and coaches benefit from having a sport psychology consultant on board? If so, how? What were the sport psychology consultant's strengths? What could be done to strengthen the program and delivery of sport psychology services? It should be noted that evaluation of service delivery can occur during as well as after the season.

CONTENDING WITH THE END OF A RELATIONSHIP AND MARKETING ONESELF AGAIN

Athletes retire or are traded; coaches resign or are fired; teams shift priorities or look for scapegoats in seasons of underachievement. For these and other reasons, the job of sport psychology consultant may come to an abrupt end. On occasion, consultants may make decisions to fire themselves.

Whether the practitioner's relationship continues with a team or NGB after significant personnel changes depends on the consultant's ability to market services to the new power brokers. When possible and appropriate, an introduction to the new coach, for example, is best made by the general manager or other team official and done privately, with discussion about the effectiveness of the previous consultation. Sometimes, of course, the departure of a coach or general manager spells the beginning of a major housecleaning that is likely to include the sport psychology consultant. "The sign that you should take your Rorschach cards and run will be when you go to the box office for your free tickets to the game and find that the attendant has forgotten your name" (Ogilvie, 1979, p. 55).

The end of a consulting relationship also offers an appropriate opportunity for self-evaluation. Before heading in search of a new contract, the consultant may find it helpful to reflect on his or her success (or failure) in achieving the objectives of the previous consultation. Even if won-lost ratios and excellence in competition have not changed, more internal variables may be analyzed. These variables include the athletes' knowledge of sport psychology strategies, effective use of the techniques, rapport between the athlete(s) and the sport psychology consultant, utilization of sport psychology services, team cohesion, and athletic skill development, among others. Between contracts is also a good time to consult and connect with colleagues; to attend professional meetings; to catch up with the most recent literature; and to consider necessary changes in service delivery, such as accessibility and availability of the consultant, communication with coaches, team versus individual sessions, and the model of consultation.

Letters of introduction or reference may be a suitable way to mark the end of a positive consultation process while laying the foundation for the next contract. Testimonials, although sometimes acceptable under the American Psychological Association's *Ethical Principles*

of *Psychologists and Code of Conduct* (American Psychological Association, 2010), draw a range of responses from practitioners. Loehr (1990), for example, described negotiating endorsements by athlete-clients in lieu of financial remuneration. Because of the issues of confidentiality and barter raised by this approach, it is widely discouraged. Written evaluations by coaches and NGBs, instead of from athletes themselves, may be a more acceptable method for presenting documentation of previous experiences and accomplishments to potential clients. Cold calls, submission of proposals, networking, updating of websites and blogs, and other procedures used previously may be needed to search for another position.

No doubt, the end of a consultation may begin a trying time for the sport psychology consultant. There may be financial implications and feelings of loss. Trying to find the next job can be just as difficult as trying to find the first. Even a positive reputation as a sport psychology consultant will not necessarily create a new elite- or professional-level position. As a result, the process of marketing, gaining access, and establishing the trust and respect of athletes and coaches begins again.

Summary

In this chapter, we have provided a perspective on the role of the sport psychology consultant working with Olympic and professional athletes. Although this level of competition offers athletes the pinnacle of sport excellence, it introduces challenges for the provision of mental training and interventions. Intervening for performance-enhancement reasons is a routine aspect of working with elite athletes and teams. Less frequent, but often more challenging, is the management of mental health issues, including eating disorders, depression, and on occasion, suicidal gestures. Practitioners intending to work at this level usually must first gain experience in other sport settings to clarify for themselves issues such as the model of service delivery, negotiation of contracts, guarantees regarding confidentiality, and the scope of skills and programs they are competent to offer.

The difficulties of gaining access, earning the trust of athletes and coaches, providing effective service, and evaluating the usefulness of the consultation may make the provision of sport psychology with elite athletes a demanding and, at times, perilous process. As Ravizza (1990) wrote, "In every situation there is an ideal way to do your job, and then there is reality" (p. 331). In their profiles of 10 leading sport psychology consultants, Straub and Hinman (1992) cited the opinion of Tara Scanlan that

sport psychology is not for the faint hearted. She advises prospective sport psychologists to seriously assess the strength of their “pioneering spirit.” Sport psychologists, Scanlan continues, often have to travel uncharted routes, and they should make sure they can handle the challenges. (p. 307)

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