ABSTRACT

The term ‘sports’ is an umbrella term that includes different kinds of sports, exercise, and other physically activities. These types of physical activity are also used in other settings such as organized physical education, leisure, and rehabilitation (healing). Psychology is the scientific study of behaviour and experiences of organism in relation to the environment. ‘Sports psychology is concerned with the psychological foundations, processes, and consequences of the psychological regulation of sport-related activities of one or several persons acting as the subject(s) of the activity’ (European Federation of Sport Psychology ”(FEPSAC 1995).

There are two major focuses in sports psychology research, with two corresponding trends in applied work. (i) To understand the psychological factors that affect athletic performance and how athletes realize their potential in sport. Applied aspects here include high-quality practices, optimal performance, and adequate recovery at the level of an individual athlete and team. (ii) To understand how athletes develop in sports and what are the ‘benefits’ and ‘costs’ of their multiyear sport participation. Applied aspects here include the need to help athletes cope successfully with career transitions and find a balance between sports and other spheres of life. In team sports, this also involves dealing with team-building issues and helping individual athletes find a balance between individual and team interests and values.

The major emphasis in sports psychology is on the study and application of psychological factors enhancing athletic performance and on the impact of sports participation on a person’s (or team’s) development.
INTRODUCTION

The term ‘‘sports’’ is an umbrella term that includes different kinds of sports, exercise, and other physically activities. These types of physical activity are also used in other settings such as organized physical education, leisure, and rehabilitation (healing).

Psychology is the scientific study of behaviour and experiences of organisms in relation to the environment.

“Sports psychology is concerned with the psychological foundations, processes, and consequences of the psychological regulation of sports-related activities of one or several persons acting as the subject(s) of the activity’’ (European Federation of Sport Psychology "(FEPSAC 1995).

The definition given above indicates that sports psychology attempts to improve athletic performance and help athletes to concentrate better, deal effectively with competitive stress, and to practice more efficiently. In addition to this sports psychology also attempts to understand the impact of long-term sports participation on development of personal resources of athletes in the setting of organized competitive sports.

There is double nature of sports psychology. On the one hand, it is a part of psychology; on the other hand, its knowledge base is related to sports sciences focused on understanding human activity in this particular context. Thus, in applications, these two sources of knowledge help to better understand a person, the environment, and the key aspects of the sporting activity.

Sports psychology examines mainly the shorts and long-term impact of psychological factors on athletic performance and the potential effects of systematic participation (involvement) in sports.

Applied sports psychology attempts to solve specific practical problems by improving athletic performance and thus helping athletes to develop their potential in the sports setting.

MAJOR FOCUS AND TRENDS IN SPORTS PSYCHOLOGY

There are two major focuses in sports psychology research, with two corresponding trends in applied work.

1. To understand the psychological factors that affect athletic performance and how athletes realize their potential in sports.

   Applied aspects here include high-quality practices, optimal performance, and adequate recovery at the level of an individual athlete and team.

2. To understand how athletes develop in sports and what are the ‘‘benefits’’ and ‘‘costs’’ of their multiyear sports participation.
Applied aspects here include the need to help athletes cope successfully with career transitions and find a balance between sports and other spheres of life. In team sports, this also involves dealing with team-building issues and helping individual athletes find a balance between individual and team interests and values.

These are the two important objectives of sports psychology.

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) called upon applied psychologists to move beyond studying psychological disorders and problems and spend greater efforts studying positive psychology that can be used to facilitate and enhance human functioning.

HOW SPORTS PSYCHOLOGISTS WORK

Applied sports psychologists are usually required to be well versed not only in psychology but also in sports and sports sciences. This helps them to establish and develop working relationships with individual athletes, teams, coaches, parents, managers, etc.

It is well known that the science of coaching focuses on the use of general principles. Per Weinberg and Gould (1999), “the art of coaching is recognizing when and how to individualize these general principles.” As with coaching, the practice of applied sports psychology is both a science and an art. As a science, it is based on various theoretical models and results of empirical studies describing what is typical for athletes in particular sports situations. As an art, sports psychology is grounded in the personality as well as personal and professional experiences of the consultant, and it is expressed in his or her ability to understand the particular athlete within a psychological context and to choose the most effective applied approach or intervention. That is why different consultants may work differently with the same athlete yet be equally successful.

Art and science aspects are sports psychologists’ tools to help athletes and coaches, who often focus mainly on the symptoms or consequences of psychological problems, deal with real causes of the problems (challenges, task demands).

There are certain organizational working models, assessment technologies, and interventions based on specific ethical norms that characterize how sports psychologists work. For instance, sports psychology research and effective delivery of psychological services to elite athletes and coaches usually focuses on two closely related aspects:

1. Performance enhancement in practices and competitions, and
2. Optimization of interpersonal and intragroup communication, creating optimal team climate and effective management.

Sports psychologists use several guidelines or principles to enhance their work, including action and growth-orientation; an emphasis on developing individualized strengths rather than on repairs of deficiencies; empowering athletes, coaches, and teams rather than developing over-dependency on outside experts; and enhancing active participation, partnership, and cooperation between sports psychologists, athletes, and coaches.
Working with an elite athlete or coach usually includes the following action-oriented steps:

1. Listening to the coach and athlete’s account of the current situation and past performance history to identify their concerns that need to be addressed;

2. Providing a general summary of how similar situations are usually handled in sports and suggesting a tentative plan of joint work on the problem at hand;

3. Collecting the data and providing a detailed feedback with the interpretation of results using context-related language clear to the athlete and coach;

4. Preparing an action plan for further analysis, change, and monitoring of the key parameters involved;

5. Evaluating the effectiveness of the initial steps and developing an individualized intervention program with clear criteria to assess the athlete’s progress on a daily, weekly, monthly, or seasonal basis; and.

6. Contacting (by phone, e-mail, or fax) the athlete and coach systematically, which is an important part of their work during the entire season.

Sports psychologists’ main task is to empower athletes and coaches via an individualized approach focusing on their strengths and successful experiences rather than on deficiencies and limitations.

REFERENCES


