

# Journal of Excellence

The Journal of Excellence  
is devoted to nurturing  
excellence in  
all human endeavors  
and all worthy pursuits.



Issue No. 5

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## Mission of the Journal of Excellence

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**Terry Orlick** - University of Ottawa

My mission in initiating the birth of The Journal of Excellence was to fill some important gaps in our knowledge and in our lives that are essential to the successful pursuit of excellence. The Journal of Excellence is devoted to nurturing excellence in all human endeavors and all worthy pursuits. It is centered on the pursuit of excellence in the working or performing parts of our lives, as well as the non-working parts of our lives. Our aim is to inspire excellence, to present a forum to discuss the positive pursuit of excellence and to provide practical strategies and perspectives for pursuing high-level goals.

The Journal of Excellence is the communication vehicle for the International Society for Mental Training and Excellence (ISMTE), a not for profit organization with the vision of education and training for better people, better performers and a better world.

There is much discussion about the quest for, and value of excellence, for example in education, sport, health, the performing arts, parenting, teaching, coaching, leadership, health care, business and the workplace. There is also much talk about the importance of quality living, quality relationships and the development of a higher level of humanity. This is the first journal, which has **EXCELLENCE** as its sole focus. Providing people with insights and strategies to be successful in their pursuit of performance excellence and excellence in living is the ultimate mission of the Journal of Excellence.

My vision is a journal that is applied in orientation, relevant in content and wide ranging in application. We are committed to:

- 1) Learning from and sharing the experiences of great performers and great people.
- 2) Developing a more thorough understanding of the mental links to excellence.
- 3) Promoting excellence in performance and excellence in living.
- 4) Initiating positive real world change.

**If you have applied research or meaningful insights that are relevant to the pursuit of excellence in any worthy human endeavor, for any age group, we encourage you to submit your material to the Journal of Excellence to be considered for publication.**

## Introduction to Issue No. 5

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This issue of the Journal of Excellence focuses on how to attain high levels of performance excellence while preserving a sense of balance and joy in life. Athletes perspectives are presented on how to develop perspective, how to focus for excellence and how to be your own coach. Two models of performance excellence are discussed and compared, guidelines for gaining applied consulting experience are presented and the important role of collaboration in excellence is discussed. Finally an insightful interview with an elite surgeon provides insights for excellence in all domains.

Matt Brown, Kathy Cairns and Cal Botterill present a unique and very interesting study on the development of healthy or balanced perspectives among high level performers. Through the voices of a select group of elite athletes, insights on the art of living well and authentically in the world of elite sport are provided. Danelle Kabush and Terry Orlick present a comprehensive look at focusing for excellence as reflected by elite professional mountain bike racers. Wade Gilbert and a group of graduate students compare and contrast Orlick's model of excellence with John Wooden's pyramid of success.

Trish Brabury provides guidelines for self-coaching which are grounded in the self-coaching experiences of numerous athletes who attained world class levels in their respective fields. Natalie Durand-Bush and Gordon A. Bloom, two young professionals in the sport psychology field, share personal views on how to acquire valuable applied consulting experiences as graduate students.

To conclude the articles in this issue...John Partington presents some very insightful reflections on excellence through collaboration and Dr Curt Tribble discusses excellence in the demanding arena of cardio-thoracic surgery. Overall this is an exciting issue of the Journal of Excellence with implications for virtually all domains and pursuits.

*Terry Orlick*  
Editor in Chief

## **The Process of Perspective: The Art of Living Well in the World of Elite Sport**

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**Matt Brown, Kathy Cairns, Cal Botterill, Canada**

Dr. Matt Brown is a sport psychology consultant and counsellor at the National Sport Centre - Calgary. He completed his Masters degree in sport psychology and his Ph.D. in counselling psychology, specializing with athletes. He works with athletes of all levels and has recently begun taking performance psychology principles to the fields of education and health. Matt is a former university football player and national level decathlete.

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### **Abstract**

The demands and pressures of elite sport can result in lives that become unbalanced or out of perspective. However, there are examples of athletes who seem to transcend these challenges and maintain positive relationships with their families, friends, and community. They conduct themselves with humility and grace, and perform admirably both in and out of their sport arenas. This study is an investigation into the lives of some of these exemplars. Through a series of interviews, we attempted to shed some light on the process through which these athletes live and perform.

Using a grounded theory approach, a model of *perspective* was developed. The insights of eleven elite athletes fit into three main categories: defining the self, living authentically, and experiencing fully. Interview quotations lend powerful testimony to the notion that an elite athlete can excel in the sport environment while maintaining a healthy view of self, staying true to self and key others, and finding meaning and fulfillment in the journey. These findings provide a holistic model of healthy living to the elite performer.

## Introduction

Many of the issues faced by athletes relate not to specific performance challenges, but rather to difficulties of a more basic nature. In counselling athletes, much time is spent helping individuals relate better to coaches and teammates as people, not just as athletes. Others are helped to stay connected and intimate with significant others, friends, and family who were not immersed in the same performance environment. Many teams and individual athletes are engaged in dialogue about the personal meanings that they draw from their experiences in sport, helping them to stay motivated, deal with fears, and process the powerful emotions associated with success and failure. Still others are asked to place sport within the broader context of their whole lives, in an effort to avoid reliance solely upon their identities as athletes. It is through attention to this basic human foundation, that we have termed “*perspective*”, that athletes seem best able to survive and thrive in the demanding and often brutal environment of elite sport.

However, to date, perspective has not been clearly defined. This study was designed to paint a clearer picture of perspective, its components, and its implications. We were not seeking to describe perspective as a construct, but rather as a process of considerable complexity.

The word perspective suggests some awareness of the self in relation to others as well as certain aspects of the self in relation to other parts and the whole person. The use of the term implies a respect for all aspects of life, without focusing solely on one. The subjective component of the definition indicates relevance of personal values, and the meaning attached to different aspects of one's life. It was thought that perspective

might be a process of keeping the most basic and valuable aspects of one's life front and center, thereby managing one's world in order to stay meaningfully engaged with one's sport, the important people in one's life, and one's self as a whole.

A related concept is ‘balance’ as examined by Amirault and Orlick (1998). Athletes defined balance as staying true to a vision or goal and striving towards it or as respecting different parts of their lives. The study identified some conditions necessary for achieving balance, including making a conscious decision to have balance, having strong self-discipline, enjoying what you are doing, having a support network, respecting leisure time, and being in the moment. While the focus of the study was on fitting one's sport and other important pursuits into one's life, there were data that hinted at a more primary process of finding meaning in one's sport, identity, and relationships, and assigning value to these different domains. The current study explored the process of this meaning-making.

A review of the literature regarding the psychological difficulties of athletes highlights some of the challenges that the athlete may face. Studies identify issues with stress, anxiety, and burnout (Feigley, 1984; Heyman, 1986; Lopiano & Zotos, 1992; Parham, 1993; Raedeke, 1997), identity (Curry & Weaner, 1987; Goldberg & Chandler, 1995; Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996), relationships (Brustad & Ritter-Taylor, 1997; Goldberg & Chandler, 1995; Heyman, 1986), and retirement (Blinde & Strata, 1992; Grove, Lavalley, & Gordon, 1997; Kleiber, Green-dorfer, Blinde, & Samdahl, 1987; Sparkes, 1998). But the current study was designed to take a positive focus.

There are numerous examples of individuals who excel in sport and still maintain positive relationships with family, significant others, and the community (such as Wayne Gretzky or Catriona Lemay-Doan). Some individuals are well rounded athletically, intellectually, professionally, and personally. Some are able to maintain healthy conceptions of self, independent of success or failure in sport.

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to explore elite athletes' experiences with respect to perspective. Those factors that contribute to or detract from a *state* of perspective were examined and a model of the *process* was developed. It is hoped that the insights from the current study will provide guidance for athletes, coaches, friends, family, and professionals working in this environment.

Repeat interviews were conducted with eleven elite athletes (six male, five female) who were recruited by professionals in the sport psychology consulting field. These professionals were asked to identify athletes who were top performers but also appeared to 'have it all together/have gotten it all together'. *Elite athletes* were defined as having competed at the amateur national or international level or in the professional or semi-professional ranks. The initial interview was as non-directive as possible in order to reduce the likelihood that we would direct the participants towards the assumptions that we have about the nature of perspective. Each participant was asked the following question: "*As a researcher in this area, I'm aware of the incredible demands and challenges that the elite athlete faces. I'd like you to tell me how you have managed to cope and thrive while you've been involved in high level sport. Please feel free to discuss anything that you view as relevant to you and your life as an athlete.*" All other questions asked in the first interview were

intended to clarify points being made or help participants to articulate them further. Subsequent interviews were more directive as emergent categories and patterns were being tested. The analysis itself followed the coding protocol as outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

Based on the first analysis, questions were designed to develop the emergent categories further, to test hypotheses about relationships between categories, and to test the trustworthiness of the initial model against the perceptions of the participants. Each participant was given a pseudonym for the purpose of confidentiality. The next section provides a condensed description of the process of perspective identified in this study. For a complete description of the study, its findings, their implications, and their relevance to other literature, see Brown (2001).

### **The Process of Perspective**

The model of perspective has three primary categories: defining the self, living authentically, and experiencing fully (see Figure 1). Each of these categories is influenced by the other two, as is indicated by the two-way arrows. Each category has a set of subcategories that further elaborate on the main category. The subcategories are described in terms of their defining patterns. Each pattern is expressed in terms of two polarities: positive (+) and negative (-). The overriding category of perspective can be thought of as an overall tendency/movement towards the positive polarities of the subcategory patterns. However, it is important to note that these participants were selected as 'exemplars', and it should not be assumed that all athletes will experience this shift towards perspective over the course of their careers.

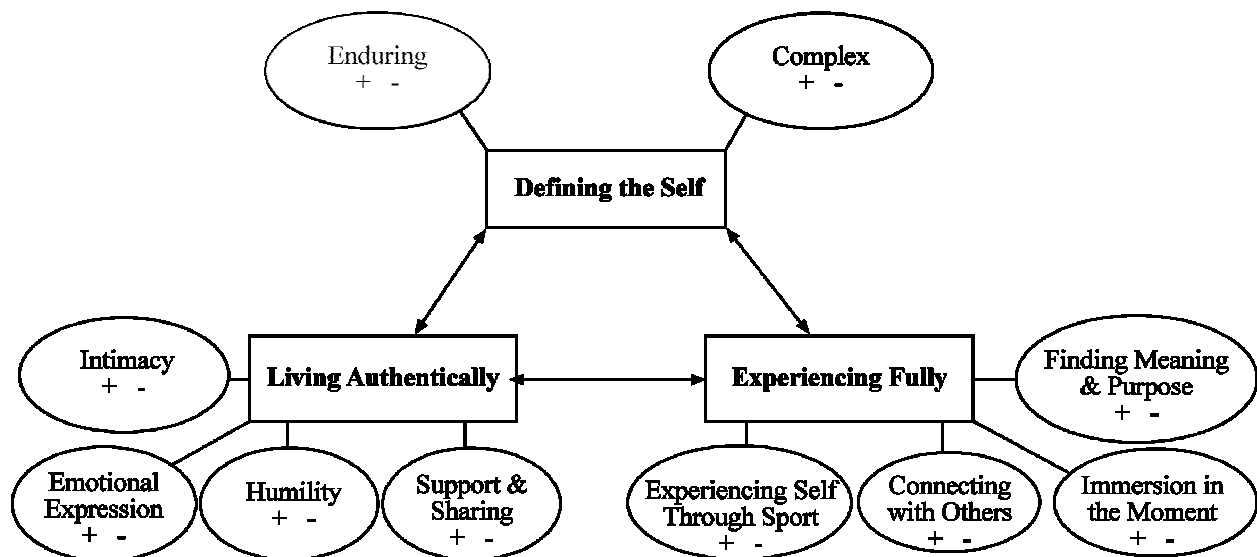
### Defining the Self

How one defines the self is of primary importance to the process. Individuals who are able to see themselves as having enduring attributes that cut across activities are able to find value in the self more consistently than those whose self-definitions hinge on sport involvement and outcomes. A sense of personal complexity provides a buffer for setbacks in any given relationship or pursuit, in

contrast to simplistic, unidimensional views of the self. These distinctions help to alleviate pressure and preserve a sense of self and personal value in the face of setbacks and transitions.

Participants viewed the self as distinct from any given activity in which they engaged. The subcategory used to describe this distinction is *the enduring self*.

**Figure 1. The process of perspective.**



### The Enduring Self

It was important to the athletes to separate their value as a person from their results in the competitive arena. Rather than being defined by their sports, individuals valued attributes in themselves that would endure independent of sport.

**CASSIE:** *I think, in terms of my worth, I think I look at my attributes as a person. What I have. And I try to look at it, not necessarily based on successes, I mean, I think that's part of it, in terms of what I gained, but I think more so qualities are what determine my worth. And I think my qualities*

*will compute to whether I get a job, or whether I can make the team, or whatever. And so that will reflect back on my qualities. But I think I try to maintain, in terms of where I am, the qualities that I have.*

The self is seen as distinct from any given role that the individual takes on.

**CASSIE:** *I have a number of roles, like the athlete, or the student, or the friend, or whatever, but I don't see myself as being defined by those things. I think I bring attributes to those things. And so that's where my self comes out in everything I do. Versus*



*it's me as the athlete. Like when I'm introduced, I don't really announce what I do. But I define myself more by my personality characteristics and the consistencies within. I: So you wear a lot of different hats but always on the same head.*

**CASSIE:** *Yeah, exactly.*

This view of the self brings with it an implied resilience.

**MEAGHAN:** *I always think of it as, if all of a sudden, on the way home, I got hit by a car and my legs were broken, or something happened, my world doesn't fall apart. You know, maybe I think of things in a drastic way, but I could go on. I still have everything that makes me up.*

Another athlete alludes to an intrinsic value that each of us has, simple by being human.

**SCOTT:** *I've said this a few times; a person's identity isn't what they do, or where they live, or what their education level is, or whatever it may be. That's not you. I think people are much more valuable than what they accomplish. And people are intrinsically much more valuable than that. And I think you're created for much more than being a good athlete, or being a good student, or being the head of a major company, or whatever it is. You have much more value than that. It's not about things. It's about who you are inside.*

Greater emphasis was also placed on the value that people add to the lives of those around them, rather than value by virtue of athletic achievement. A tie is made between positive attributes and the value one adds to the lives of others.

**RILEY:** *I think what makes a great person is just someone who enjoys being alive,*

*enjoys living everyday and takes advantage of the things around him, the people around him, and really cares for people in his community, and his friends. And I've always been a person who depends a lot on friends and I've also tried to be a good friend.*

This value distinction appears to be closely linked to a separation of one's identity from athletic results. In other words, the way individuals defined themselves far exceeded any event or accomplishment. In addition, events in the athletic realm do not dictate change in the essence of the individual.

**MEAGHAN:** *You know, people said "oh, you must be going through a post-Olympic depression" but obviously some people go through that, but I think they only go through that if they have the perspective that the Olympics are everything in their life. Because if you put everything on it, and it's over, what else do you have? Where I don't look at the Olympics as that. Yeah, you know, people get to know your name, they get to know your face. Whether that means going into broadcasting, whether that means sponsors, those things, I mean golf tournaments, people you get to meet. There are things that you can do with an Olympic gold medal, but I think when you look at it, that doesn't change the person. It changes the opportunities, but it has to be something else that moulds your life.*

Once the conditional value is let go, a celebration of the self can occur.

**MIKAELA:** *Now I accept who I am, and kind of just revel in it. You know, I always thought that when I did something, or when I accomplished this or that, then I'd be this really incredible person. And now it's like "no, I'm already an incredible person, regardless of what I accomplish". You know,*

*the way that I look at my life, the way that I treat other people, the way that I interact with people, and the way that I do the things that I like doing, and the love that I have for everything that I do, that's what makes me who I am.*

Reference is made to the kind of panic response that can occur when athletes start to struggle in their sports.

**SCOTT:** *I think that when people get caught up in seeing themselves only as what they've done, what they've accomplished, then when they start have bad results I think it leads them to make nasty choices. I think that that's where there's a lot of danger in sport or in work or in anything else in life. If you see yourself as a lawyer, and that's what defines you, and you're nothing outside of being a lawyer, you get your self-worth from it, what happens if you're sued for something and it is actually your fault and you cost a corporation a huge amount of money and you get fired? Where does that put you? You know? Your world is destroyed. And that's a pretty dangerous place to be, I think. I think, ultimately, everyone is unique and multi-faceted.*

This separation was viewed as critical to the full enjoyment of one's sport and life and the ability to cope with setbacks.

**MIKAELA:** *When I first got started, even when I went to my first Olympics, everything was so serious, and you equate everything you do with how good of a person that you are. And after a while I just figured that's all bunk. I mean, you are who you are and nobody's perfect, and yet when you get into the public eye or you get around other individuals, they feel that you should be put up on this pedestal or that you should be more than who you are. And when I was that way, I found that I had this really negative drive,*

*like everything had to be done and it was a must, and I drove myself and I worked hard, and you couldn't take a day off because if you did you'd fall behind and stuff. And then, when I didn't make 96, it was like "wait a minute, that's not the way I want to live my life". I don't want to end up in an early grave or end up really jaded too soon because I found that after 96 I lost the drive for sport. And so I found that I kind of had to change or learn a little bit more about me and separate me from the athlete. And once I did that, I started kind of just exploring and going through the things that made me me, like the things that I liked to do, the things that I liked to do outside of sport, my other interests and things.*

A peacefulness can develop in individuals who are accepting of the self.

**RACHEL:** *Athletes that are very graceful in defeat and victory, in everyday training, in their lives, I think they're just happier people, happier with themselves, more at peace with everything that's going on around them, more at peace with where they're at in their relationships, in their sport. And I believe this for myself, you just really have to take a step outside of your little bubble and put everything into perspective. I say 'perspective' lots because our sport psychologist really engrained it in our brain (laughs). I don't know if everybody picked up on it but for me it's just so vitally important and I really feel that once you have that, it kind of makes everything not such a big deal, you know, and you can just kind of go with the flow. You know, if you're happy with yourself, I think that doing well is like a bonus in everything you do. And doing poorly is just another life lesson. And that's why I think people are a lot more graceful. They're just happier people. They're a lot more content with themselves and where they're at in life.*

And this philosophy can feed one's passion for the sport, enjoying it in and of itself.

**SCOTT:** *I think the athletes that need to be successful never find true enjoyment in sport. That's my personal opinion on that. I think that when you realize that what you do on the track or do on the field or whatever doesn't really determine who you are, or doesn't really affect who you are, and you're doing it because you enjoy it, you may be good at it, those are the reasons you're doing it. You're not doing it to get money or to get feedback or whatever else.*

In summary, the self is seen as having value independent of athletic performance. Individuals recognized personal attributes that they possess regardless of their involvement in sport, as well as a quality of interaction with others that added to their sense of value.

### **Complexity**

Complexity is the second subcategory in defining the self. Individuals viewed themselves as multi-faceted. This broadened idea of the self provides balance in response to success and failure in any given facet of one's life.

Athletes could recall times when they defined themselves unidimensionally.

**CASSIE:** *We went to the (Olympic) qualifier and we were one team away from making it. I came home and that was probably the worst point in my life ever, because I put everything towards this goal. You know, make the Olympics, then I was just gonna train and then I'd decide what I wanted to do with my life. So I got back in November and was completely empty. So from November to ... it took a good three or four months, and even that was scrambling to try and find what it was that I could do to make*

*me feel like a person, to feel like I'm worthy, or those kinds of things. So that took a while.*

But these athletes discovered that a multi-dimensionality was critical for living fully and providing emotional balance.

**MEAGHAN:** *I heard Reggie White say this and I totally agree ... It should never be who you are instead of what you do. And you know that's ... I think ultimately that would be the one thing I would say about sport is that it's great for now and yet you have to be able to move outside of sport and do other things and have another life really.*

One athlete maintained that attention to other pursuits and relationships is vital to the pursuit of personal excellence.

**RILEY:** *Well I think you come to a certain level and I think the way my whole life has been structured, I've always made sacrifices for the game, but it hasn't been the end all thing. I've always wanted to improve my hockey, but I always wanted to have my education too to fall back on. I've always wanted to go to the best place to be to improve my game of hockey, but I've always kept in touch of my relationships with my parents and my friends back home to make sure that those relationships continue to grow, and that hockey doesn't shut them right off. And I think we dedicate a lot of our lives to improving as individuals, as a pro athlete, but the bottom line is you work at this game, on a game day you'll probably play the game of hockey for 2 ½ hours in the evening and maybe an hour in the morning. And then on your off days, you're practicing for an hour and maybe weights for an hour, so there's two hours. Well there's a lot more time in the day for other things, and it needs to be filled up with other things. And*

*if you don't have those relationships and friendships, what are you going to turn to?*

A philosophy of holistic development procures spaces for multiple dimensions in one's life.

**RILEY:** *I think you still need to be a well-rounded person, maybe not in your athletic endeavours, but in your life endeavours. And whether it's through education or just through reading, some type of education, whether it's going to school and taking classes or reading books, or just like picking up a newspaper every day, have a life outside of the game. I think what helped me out so much at college is that when education wasn't going well, I could fall back on hockey, and say "look, things are going well at the rink, I'm having a lot of fun there and doing well there". If things weren't going so well at the rink, maybe we lost a couple of games, I could say "well look at my GPA, I feel like I'm developing a good rapport with my teachers and I'm enjoying my classes", and they balanced each other out. And then you add another dimension of the relationship with your friends and family. They were always there to be supportive and to help you through things.*

The importance of experiences outside of sport to foster a sense of complexity and depth is highlighted.

**MEAGHAN:** *When I moved to (name of city), it was hard because I was 17 and I'd just finished high school and I was pretty timid when I came here, and so I thought if I know some speedskaters, I'll live with them. And my mom really wanted me to live in residence, because for her it was very important that I had friends outside of skating. And I mean that just comes back to she didn't want my life to be skating. Because to her that was scary. And I think that was the*

*best thing she did. Because within a week I knew so many people outside of sport, and I would say my closest friends don't do sports just because it's what you do but ... I mean it's sort of an escape when you can get away from your sport, and I guess have a view from another perspective.*

These out of sport experiences are seen as important buffers for setback, allowing athletes to step out of their sport worlds when the frustrations and disappointments are overwhelming. Observations about athletes without such buffers reinforce their importance.

**JORDAN:** *But not qualifying for the Olympics this time. I've been to two previous Olympic qualifiers but this time I wouldn't say we expected it but there was the potential to. After we lost to Poland, you know, I was very upset. (Close friend and teammate) came up to me and said "it's been a pleasure playing with you" and as soon as he said that, it was just total waterworks. And that was very, very difficult for me. But I know a lot of guys on the team are really messed up about it still. And I think it's because they didn't really have a whole lot else going on. And I think that's kind of what we're speaking about here. And I know people that, for that reason aren't doing that well with it.*

Alternative pursuits and activities seem to alleviate a 'heaviness' associated with taking one's sport home.

**RACHEL:** *I think I used to take all those things so seriously. I'd get so caught up in it. If I did badly, I was so upset. And you know, if I did well I was happy. But it was such a huge, huge focus, like tunnel vision, that was it. And I think in the last two or three years especially, I've really tried to, when I'm done my work at school, I kind of*

*try to leave it there. Especially if it's a bad day. You just leave it there, go home, enjoy my friends, enjoy my family, you know, my fiancé, it's something fresh to look forward to, getting married. Like those are sort of the things that I use outside of diving to keep myself distracted and you know, some kind of stimulation that's not sport.*

Implications for transition are implied. Retirement is a loss, but not a loss of one's entire experiential spectrum.

**MEAGHAN:** *Of course, you know, people say it's hard to retire, and I think it is. You'll miss it but you'll miss it probably until the day you die. But just because you'll miss it doesn't mean that there aren't other things that you can do in life.*

An underlying philosophy of personal complexity and a celebration of that characteristic was expressed.

**MIKAELA:** *I think the whole thing is the idea of self-discovery and realizing that you're more than one dimension. You know, realizing that being an athlete is a huge part of who you are in the moment, but it's not all of who you are. I've learned that I'm not just an athlete. I'm an artist and a singer and a poet and a business person, and all these things, and also I'm a person who can go out with friends or be a recluse, and I can respond to all sorts of different situations. All the pieces fill the puzzle of self-discovery. And I think sport should be more of a way of developing, and a way of growing, and a way of discovering what your overall talents are. You know, discovering that you're really determined, or you are able to fight back from adversity. That's what competitive athletics is for.*

**INTERVIEWER:** *"If I asked you to define yourself, what would you say?"*

**SCOTT:** *"I couldn't do it. I'm too complex. And I think anybody who tried to would be shorting themselves. I think human beings are just too complex to be defined."*

One of the main ways in which this complexity was evident was in a dichotomy of the self that most of the athletes had established and grown comfortable with. They perceived two distinct parts of the self, each allowing them to experience an important mode of living. While this may seem anti-thetical to the concept of an 'enduring self', arguably the self can be enduring but multi-modal.

**JORDAN:** *I have, it's almost like, a Jeckyl & Hyde kind of personality. In the water, I'm one of the most competitive people you'll ever meet. You've seen it in me, like I will do everything in my power to win, within the realm of the rules to a certain degree. And then there's the relaxed, like I have no problem sitting on the couch and watching some CFL, or watching a movie or whatever, just relaxing, going out with some friends and just laughing, like I'm not a competitive person outside the sporting realm, not a terribly competitive person, like to the point where everything has to be a competition. In the water, in the athletic realm, I'm very competitive. I don't like to lose. I never have been a big fan of losing. But I'm certainly more laid back outside the sporting realm.*

One cannot help but be reminded of the Yin and the Yang of Chinese dualistic philosophy.

**RILEY:** *I think I'd say that I'm an individual who's very goal oriented, who when I focus in on something that I want to achieve then I'll work extremely hard to achieve that. I'm a person who is well-rounded, who knows what's going on in the world around*

*him. He's focused on his goals but is also educated in things that are happening all over this world, and especially that are affecting the people around him. And a person who, when he's not striving for those goals is very humorous, I guess, or lighthearted, doesn't take things as seriously, enjoys just relaxing, enjoys the simple things like T.V. and just hanging out with his friends and enjoying relaxing time. So I think he's pretty much two different people: He's an intense, goal-driven individual at times, and he's extremely relaxed and at ease with the world at other times. There's sometimes not the in-between stage. There's one or the other.*

Public and social influences can make transition from 'sport-mode' to 'non-sport-mode' challenging, necessitating conscious efforts to maintain the sport-self/non-sport-self distinction.

**CHRIS:** *Actually, when I get away from the rink, I try to pretend that I'm not a hockey player. I just try to go about my business and be normal. I think the more you put yourself in the position of being special, the more you want to believe it. I don't want to be in those situations when I'm away from the rink. When I'm at the rink, that's fine, people want to be around. But when I'm away from the rink, I just try to get myself away and come home and do stuff with my son and with my wife, and go out and do normal things, just go out and walk around the mall, just little things that make me feel like I'm more than hockey. And that way I don't have to worry too much about the game. It kind of stays at the rink.*

To summarize, the athletes in this study defined the 'self' in certain distinct ways.

- One's personal value is seen as a product one's attributes and the

value that one adds to the experiences of others, rather than being contingent upon sport outcomes. This implies an experience of self that transcends any given pursuit, whereby the essential elements of each individual stay intact regardless of outcomes.

- The individual is seen as complex and multi-faceted. One can experience two (or more) distinct sides of the self, in and out of sport. Different relationships, pursuits, interests, and activities provide emotional balance in spite of the disruption of any one component of the self.

These perceptions of the self allow the athlete to experience failure, frustration, and transition without threatening the enduring 'self'.

By contrast, perspective can be lost through the tendency to define oneself and one's value through sport and performance outcomes, and to view oneself unidimensionally and in oversimplified terms.

The 'perspective end' view of the self frees the individual to experience the self *through one's activities*, rather than being defined by them and drawing personal value from them. This philosophy of the self cuts across subsequent sections and is a central piece of the perspective process.

### **Living Authentically**

The second of the primary categories in the model is *living authentically* (see Figure 1). When individuals define themselves in enduring ways and non-contingent terms, acceptance of the self for what it really is becomes easier. A recurring priority in the lives of these athletes involves the freedom to be themselves. The interviews reflect an

importance of being able to project a self that is congruent with the ‘real self’, not just outwardly but inwardly as well. This basic notion provides the foundation for the second main category: living authentically. The basic idea of authentic living was captured more explicitly in a small set of quotes. The subcategories of intimacy, emotional expression, humility, and support & sharing complete the category.

Authenticity carries with it a sensation of freedom, as described by this athlete.

*I: You said your family allows you to be free. What do you mean by free?*

**COURTNEY:** *Well, as I said earlier, I’m kind of this person where you get what you get with me. Sometimes I’m too direct maybe, but I’d rather be like that and speak my mind, and to me that’s being free. It’s just being who I am, and as I said, if I’m in a good mood you see it, if I’m in a bad mood you can see it, and that’s what I mean by free. You get what you get with me, and that’s how it is. You know, that group of mine, family and friends and my husband, they let me ‘be’ in good and bad times.*

This freedom is enhanced when one is able to focus on the obligation of being true to oneself, rather than how others are responding.

**SCOTT:** *“When you’re comfortable with yourself and what you’re doing, and you realize that who you are isn’t what you’re doing, I think you can be authentic with people.”*

Authenticity involves the removal of false representations of the self, or “no illusions” as one participant succinctly put it.

**CHRIS:** *I try to be the same person throughout any situation, whether it’s at the*

*rink or away from the rink. I don’t think I’m too much of a different person when I get into different situations. I don’t want to try to fool anybody into thinking I’m something different than I am. The way I feel about myself is probably the way I want other people to feel about me also. Um, basically, just a hard-working, honest, you kind of get what you see kind of thing. There’s no illusions. Pretty humble. Pretty even-keeled. You know, a very honest, hard-working guy that showed up to play every night. And that’s probably how I’d want people to remember me.*

This includes accepting fallibility in order to take responsibility for one’s actions.

**COURTNEY:** *It’s more than just public scrutiny too, because sometimes I think that when you look in the mirror, sometimes you don’t like what you see. Maybe you’ve reacted in a certain way in a certain situation and you know you’re better than that. If you don’t have to be infallible, then if you had a bad day, then you can take responsibility and ownership of it. Because you’re not perfect all the time. It’s too hard.*

### **Intimacy**

An important part of living authentically is having close relationships in which one feels safe to be fully oneself. While the world of elite sport can be highly conditional, fickle, and intolerant of weakness in any form, these participants paint a picture of intimacy that appears to balance the sport world realities. When a significant other fully accepts the individual, the defenses can be dropped, providing a heightened level of comfort, safety, and genuineness. A safe forum to express, without being judged, appears to offer the individual both safety and strength.

**COURTNEY:** *And I know that I need to have him there for me to stay healthy, and it*

*gives me the strength to do it. But having a place to go and just unload and be in a bad mood if I want to be in a bad mood, or be in a good mood if I want to be, and he let's me do that. It's okay. He doesn't judge me. And I think, you know, those are the people you want in your life. And I have a couple of other really close friends. So I definitely have this circle or network that are there for me.*

While one can be resistant to opening up, ultimately the experience is a positive one when one is fully accepted.

**RACHEL:** *It's so important to have that support network. And I think it's something that I started off, at the beginning of my athletic career, not understanding. It was there but I didn't take advantage of it. So I'm not afraid to show my moments of weakness, I think. I'm getting better at letting other people see that side of me. I don't have to be the tough guy all the time.*

*I: So ironically, in accepting that vulnerability in yourself, has it made you a stronger person?*

**RACHEL:** *I think so. Yeah, I feel I am. But if you asked me that 4 or 5 years ago, I would have said "no way, you're such a baby", you know, and that's the truth. That's how I feel about it now. I feel needy sometimes. That's what the word is. And I don't like feeling needy. Even now, it still bugs me sometimes. But you know, I just realized it's human nature to want affection or to want to be understood, and I shouldn't think that that's such a bad thing if it's in me.*

Complete openness and acceptance of vulnerability seems to be critical to full intimacy.

**SCOTT:** *She's a big part of my whole 'keeping things in balance'. We're best friends, like we talk all the time. Like, we can still sit down, if I'm on a road trip, I can sit on the phone and talk to her for like two hours, you know, which is really cool still. And I think that's important. We can gab about a lot of things, and there is absolutely nothing of significance in my life that she doesn't know. She knows everything. Like, the worst things I've ever done, and like everything. And I know everything about her. We don't keep anything from each other. We don't believe in that. We don't believe in separating anything. We work together.*

*I: So you can be completely vulnerable with her?*

**SCOTT:** *Absolutely.*

Significant others have the power to give license to feel emotions fully and to accept this vulnerability.

**MEAGHAN:** *I think that's exactly what I said. If your relationships are based on sport and not more than that, then there's no intimacy because that's all that makes you up. And then you really can't be open. You know, if people only have a relationship with you based on what you do or how good you are at something, then you obviously can't share your fears with them. If somebody thinks you're great in a sport and you go "man, am I ever scared", they'll think "woah, you aren't who I thought you were".*

Accepting vulnerability may be particularly challenging for males, due to societal expectations. But the payoffs are significant.



**CHRIS:** *I think over the years, we've been married four years now, and I think I'm slowly starting to try to get her involved a little bit in it and tell her more, just so that maybe she can help me out with it and so that she kind of feels a part of it also. Earlier on it was probably more just trying to hide it from her and coming home and putting on the false front of everything's okay. But she's a smart person too, and she can see right through that. So I've been trying to more lately as we go with everything, not just hockey but absolutely anything, is try to talk more and tell her more about the way I'm feeling, and then she can help me get through it.*

**I:** *What kind of difference has that made for you?*

**CHRIS:** *It not only makes your marriage a little bit better if you can share absolutely everything and there are no secrets, you know, I don't sit up in bed and just fume and worry about the next game or what happened in the last game. It's easier to get it off your chest. And it seems like once you get it off your chest and actually talk to someone about it, there's no problem anymore. It's amazing, once you do it, how it kind of just takes care of itself.*

In short, having a significant other with which one could be completely open and feel completely accepted appears to break down some of the potential isolation inherent in elite sport, as well as providing refuge from the demands of elite sport.

### **Emotional Expression**

The second subcategory of living authentically is the importance of emotional expression. These athletes all recognize the value of emotional awareness and expressing one's emotions in some way. Rather than seeing this as a sign of weakness, they refer

to it as a healthy practice that can enhance one's experiences.

Accepting and expressing one's emotions may represent the ultimate step in being authentic with oneself. The emotions can be seen as one's best indicator of what's most important to oneself and what lies within.

**COURTNEY:** *For me, my emotions reflect what's most important to me. That's how I live. And sometimes it's too much for people. But that's who I am and I'm okay with that. And for me, to suppress some of those things, which I had to do, it's not good. Like, for me, it's just not healthy. So I'm a big believer in that. You know, because you can only grow from that.*

Expressing in the moment simply becomes part of being oneself, being authentic.

**MIKAELA:** *You know, bad throw, you say whatever you have to say, it comes out, and then you go back in and you can refocus. And I've found it's so much healthier to say what you have to say in the moment rather than holding it in. And some athletes are really good at that while others are too worried about what happens on the outside. And I'm finding now that it has to be a happy medium, a happy balance. You know, just bring who you are to wherever it is you're going.*

Accepting and expressing one's emotions is seen as good 'economics of energy'.

**COURTNEY:** *And I think that if you can be open and be yourself with those people (supporters), it helps you to re-energize too. You know, you get that from those people. You know, that's not my motive in being with them, but by getting it out there and releasing it and whether you figure it out or*

*you don't, it's out, and for some reason, you feel re-energized.*

However, these lessons can take years to learn and accept. Individuals slowly discover the function of expressing rather than internalizing emotions.

**RACHEL:** *I think I just know better now to let it go. And just to let it go because you waste so much energy being upset about something that, in most cases, isn't a big deal. But the more you think about it, and the more you let yourself boil, it just becomes bigger and bigger, it just snowballs. And that's totally yourself making a bigger deal of it than it is. And that's what my family tells me, the people closest to me are just like "you know what, let it go. It's never as bad as you think. Just don't worry about it. Tomorrow is a new day." And I think, at this point in my athletic career, I've been doing the sport long enough that if you have one bad day you go home and have a sleep and the next day you come back and feel refreshed. You know, it's not like if you have one bad day at practice you've lost the dives or the technique forever. Sometimes you have bad days.*

And sometimes human contact, even without words, can convey shared burden and lessen the load.

**RACHEL:** *Sometimes a hug is just the only thing you can do, you know, you can't even talk. That's the only thing that can make you feel better. It kind of feels nice, you feel like you have a weight lifted off your shoulders when you can share it with somebody else, even if you don't even talk about it, just that they know you're feeling off.*

The need can even be less about finding solutions, and more about just 'being heard'.

**CHRIS:** *And once you get it off your chest, it just seems like there's a big weight that's been weighing you down the whole time and she can help you deal with it if you have to deal with it more, and if it's just something that's been bothering you, then it just seems like it's not a problem anymore once you actually say it.*

Individuals recognize the dangers of keeping their emotions bottled up.

**COURTNEY:** *Yeah. I would have liked to have done that more (expressed feelings openly), and I don't know if that's an age thing, or if when you're in sport longer, you learn more about yourself. I think it's a combination of all of those things. But at times, I think at the beginning of the interview here I said I kept some things inside and only showed certain things. It drove me nuts inside. It's not good for me. It may have been good for my teammate but it's not healthy. That's what I learned.*

**I:** *It's inauthentic.*

**COURTNEY:** *Yeah, totally. But sometimes people can't handle that. And sometimes it's better not to say anything. I do believe that. But you don't want to be doing that on a regular basis or you'll kill your spirit.*

Ultimately, the emotions can be tapped as a source of energy and passion for pursuing one's sport and other activities. The emotions are not allowed to 'run amuck', but rather are 'harnessed' and directed constructively.

**SCOTT:** *Some guys just lose control, you know, and blow up for no reason. You see it in athletes, you see it in coaches, and other things. Yeah, you've got to harness some of those anxieties and even some of the frustrations that you bring from the office to the*

*track once in a while, you know, and use them. Sometimes I think, if used properly, they can cause the body physiologically to get into a fight or flight mentality, you can possibly use that to your benefit. But you don't let any of your emotions sort of take over and dictate what you do. I think ultimately you've got to be in some sort of control. You can't let them run wild. But I think that if you use them, you can benefit from them. I use Christian worship music to warm up because it just makes me happy. It gets me into a happy mood, and when I'm happy, I feel better about my jumping. And the last few years, I've jumped best when I'm happy. When I'm just feeling really happy, feeling close to the Lord, and it's almost like a carefree, happy-go-lucky kind of mentality or space that I'm in, and that's where I like to be. And worship music gets me there. It's not typical warm-up music, but it works for me because I know the type of feel that I want when I'm competing.*

So the acceptance and expression of emotions serves multiple functions.

- Staying fully connected to oneself and the things of primary importance.
- Responding to events in a way that allows momentary experience of feelings, in order to get one's head around what has happened, then leaving it in the past and moving on.
- Being authentic with oneself and others, rather than experiencing dissonance between what one feels and what one feels is *acceptable* to feel.
- Accessing energy and motivation to pursue activities fully and passionately.

### **Humility**

The third subcategory of living authentically is humility. Humility goes hand in hand

with one's attempts to project the self as it really is. If individuals wish to be seen (and to see themselves) as a whole package, including the vulnerabilities and weaknesses, then an attitude of humility can help to curb the temptation to project a 'superhuman' image.

Maintaining humility was seen as vitally important to the participants of this study. This attitude is consistent with the idea of separating athletic achievements from one's worth and identity. If we accept that we all have qualities that make us unique and intrinsically valuable, then we should see success as an enjoyable experience, not as a source of entitlement and special treatment. Similarly, we should accept failure as a disappointing experience, not as a compromise of our personal value.

The pedestal on which elite athletes are sometimes placed can create a distance between them and the people around them. Humility allows them to diffuse the separation that might otherwise occur between themselves, as top performers, and these people. They seem attuned to the idea that the most exciting discovery that one can make about an elite athlete is that "she's just a regular person like you or me".

This breakdown of isolation was an experience common to the participants.

***MEAGHAN:** I think humility is one of the most important things, because if I look at (athlete's sport) and, you know, walking into the (name of training venue) and training, the thing I like the most is, when we have training camps, not just with our national team, but with the developmental program teams and all the younger people, and maybe older but who haven't reached the same level, I love that because I don't want them to look at me, I mean, they might look*

*up to me in my ability and what I've done, but I want them to look up to me in the way that I don't see myself as any better. Because in training camp, we do events where, this is off the ice, where you become absolutely raw in front of people. I mean you do hill runs where you're on the verge of throwing up, you're on the verge of crying. And if some provincial club athlete is stronger at it than me, well good for them. And you know, if they see me struggling with it and they can say a word of encouragement, I love that, you know, and that's good for me and that's good for them because I need that. And I don't want them to look at me as "I shouldn't say anything because I'm not at her level". I mean, we're at the same level. I might have accomplished something more on the ice but I don't want anybody ever to look at me and say "she thinks she's better because she's done this" because I don't.*

At the end of the day, these individuals want to belong, independent of accomplishments.

**MEAGHAN:** *And so, when I leave the sport, I really think that the most important thing that I want people to look back on is to say "we respected her for how she handled her success". Or my failures, and I didn't sort of want pity when I didn't do well, or I didn't want to be praised when I did well. You know, I just wanted to be one of everybody.*

Again, most fundamentally, the individual should not be changed by success or failure.

**MIKAELA:** *It (success in sport) doesn't mean that you're any better or you've got a pedestal higher than anybody or you can step on people's heads just because you beat them by a foot or a centimeter or whatever else. What happens in the pool or on the track or on the field happens, and when it's*

*done, it's done. And it doesn't mean you're any better or any worse than you were when you stepped on. But if you're successful, you're still an ordinary Joe. You still put your pants on one leg at a time and all that kind of stuff. And you're still the same person that you were before you won, or before you lost, or whenever.*

Some athletes are careful not to take credit for their athletic 'gifts'. They attempt to honour their abilities, but do not see them as a source of separation from others. They also acknowledge and value the efforts of those with less natural ability.

**MEAGHAN:** *I mean, I do believe that it's a gift that I have and I've used it to the best of my ability, but I don't take credit for it. You know, I've done the work but a lot of people can do the work and they just won't be at the top. You know, there are people that work just as hard as me or harder, but they just don't have the natural ability, and that doesn't mean that they're any better or worse than I am.*

Efforts are also taken by some to share achievement with a collective, acknowledging the efforts of many in the performance of one. This again allows the athlete to stay connected with key people within sport.

**I:** *Did your success change you? And if not, how did you keep that from happening?*

**MEAGHAN:** *You keep it from happening by how you ultimately view everything. You know, I view an Olympic medal as obtaining a goal. And not just sort of from what I did but collectively all these people helping you. I mean how many years ... I've worked with (exercise physiologist) for ten years, you know, and different coaches, but you can't just go out on the ice and win everything. I mean there's obviously teamwork involved.*

*Like, all these people that make your program etc. who are never acknowledged. It's only ever the athlete on the podium who is acknowledged.*

Still, when the public response places athletes in a special category, it can create a feeling of separation.

**JORDAN:** *It's nice to get praise once in a while, but then again, I'm not good at receiving praise. I feel embarrassed by it. I never tell people that I'm on the national team. It's not that I'm embarrassed by it, it's just I think it's like bragging and I'm not big on bragging. I'm not looking to be set apart.*

One athlete was not bothered by the special attention because she felt her key relationships are not affected by it, and ultimately she remains unchanged.

**COURTNEY:** *I love kids. Most of my friends have them. And, yeah, kids are great. So any time we can do anything to help. They make me feel special too. It's not that ... you know, whether I'm inspiring them, you know, I'd like to think that I am, and that's why they come over, because they've just seen me play and so, yeah, it's a good feeling.*

**I:** *Do you feel they put you on a pedestal?*

**COURTNEY:** That's not a bad thing, right? That doesn't change who you are. If people look up to you, you've got a unique gift. That doesn't change who you are and how you live your daily life with the people that matter to you. You know, people are going to have preconceived notions about you and if they think you're a superstar, well, you know, to them, in their eyes you are.

Some see this public response as an opportunity to step onto even ground with others and make them feel special.

**CHRIS:** *It's kind of cool, because I look back to when I was a kid, and if anybody that was in the position that I'm in now paid any attention to me at all, well I'd remember that forever. So it's kind of fun to be on the other side of it and be able to give back and realize that that kid is in the exact same position that I was in, and I would have loved if he would have given me a pat on the butt and said "good job" or made a little joke with me. I mean, that would have made my year. I still remember some stuff that players that were instructors in hockey schools did for me, and that also made me want to continue to play hockey. So it's kind of fun to be put in that position and be able to help out some other kids.*

Athletes made reference to the role that humility plays in achieving excellence.

**SCOTT:** *I think you sort of realize that you've been blessed with an ability and you don't take it for granted. There are some athletes that are awesomely talented but they never last very long because as soon as they get to a point where they have to actually put in the time and the effort in order to continue to progress, their pride or whatever kicks in, and they don't want to do that because it always came so easily. And if they had really appreciated the abilities that they had humbly, they would have continued, but they don't. They wanted the quick easy fix, or whatever, and it doesn't quite work that way.*

A distinction can be drawn between 'humble before the cameras' and a lifestyle of humility which was valued by these participants.

**SCOTT:** *And people say you're supposed to be humble, but it's a false sense of humility. It's humble in front of the media and humble in situations where you're supposed to be, but you can go and talk trash all you want. I think if you're not living a humble lifestyle, if you're not living with an attitude of humility, it's gonna come out. Then there are guys like Wayne Gretzky. He's awesomely talented, you know, best that probably ever played his sport in his position, and you never hear an arrogant word. With twenty-some years of being in the sport, some people like him, some people don't like him, but he never came across like he was better than anyone else. And look how much he's respected for it. Look how much he's progressed the sport for it. You know, I think people appreciate an attitude of humility. People recognize that, and when he goes through his bad times and slumps and things like that, they also protect him.*

In summary, an attitude of humility allows athletes to be more authentic, breaks down isolation between themselves and the general public, and offers additional opportunities to touch the lives of others in a positive way.

### **Support & Sharing**

The last subcategory of living authentically is support and sharing. Like the intimate relationships, the presence of a supportive family and network of friends can further reinforce the individual's ability to express the 'unedited' self. The athletes had considerable reverence for those relationships that were 'real' and unwavering.

The role of family and friends in supporting the elite athlete appears to be a huge one. The participants attributed a great deal of their success, fulfillment, and perspective to the presence of accepting, supportive relationships. In addition, the unconditional

support of these people allowed athletes to share their experiences with their support group, rather than having to prove themselves and their worth.

These relationships seem to reinforce the healthy perception of self that was described in the first section. For instance, separating worth from accomplishment is a recurring theme when these relationships are explored.

**COURTNEY:** *I think that when our sport psychologist worked with our team before 96, we really talked a lot about perspective, and so I think I had a good feeling or good perspective going into 96. We were there and it was for us, and not because I have to do it for my mom and dad, I don't have to do it for every Canadian that's watching. And try to live that experience. But for this Olympics, because I was in the Olympics and now I'm still fighting for my position to get there, and being where I've been, I'm doing this all for me, but I'm bringing those people along with me. But there are no expectations like "you need to have the gold medal" because in their eyes I am that. And I feel that. And that's the best feeling.*

The importance of this support takes on additional meaning when one articulates the 'nakedness' inherent in athletic performance.

**I:** *It sounds like you have a group of people, particularly your parents and (significant other), with whom you can be completely vulnerable.*

**COURTNEY:** *Right.*

**I:** *And who love you unconditionally.*

**COURTNEY:** *Right.*

**I:** *How important is that?*

**COURTNEY:** *Well that's the ultimate. That's everything to me, because it allows me to be free. You're extremely vulnerable in sport. You know? If you're having a bad day or something in your personal life is going on, how do you hide that or how do you put your armor on? Well, I've been struggling with that for the last little bit, and your play shows it, there's nowhere to hide. And so, knowing that regardless of what's going on, you have that is huge.*

But irrespective of the sport outcomes, support is unwavering.

**MEAGHAN:** *Um, I mean it was hard (major let down early in career), obviously I needed the support of family. You know, realizing that my family didn't think I was less important. And that's a big thing because I mean you have to decide why you're doing the sport. And I think for most people it's themselves, but also whether they want to succeed because they want people to be proud of them. And I think that's a big thing. You know, and that's human nature. And to have people say to you, "you know, it doesn't matter to us whether you're first or last", you know, really puts things into perspective.*

Parents can also do their athletic offspring a service by taking pride in the accomplishments, whatever they may be.

**RICHARD:** And I know, even if I don't go to the Olympics or ever get a gold medal at this meet or that meet or break a Canadian record, that they'll always still be very proud of me for what I've accomplished and be able to look up to me and say "that's my brother" and be proud to talk about me.

It is worth noting that these athletes had experiences with their parents that were characterized by a level of freedom to discover their passion, rather than having pur-

suits imposed on them by overzealous parents.

**COURTNEY:** *My parents let me explore and learn. And sometimes I'm going to make a wrong choice, but that's okay because you learn from those things. That's exactly how I've been brought up and I think that's why I'm able to live in this world and do what I do, because they've let me experience the good, the bad, and the ugly, and sure they've made some suggestions along the way, but basically they've just sort of let me go and they never had any tight reigns on me to stop me from experiencing or developing who I am.*

The outside relationships (parents, family, friends) provide a sense of security and stability that may be badly needed by the athlete.

**SCOTT:** *I've got a pretty good support network from my wife and close friends. I know a lot of people but I don't have very many close friends. I have a small group of really close friends that I can talk to about pretty much anything. And I think that brings a lot of balance and security to my life. If I'm going through pretty much anything I can make a couple of phone calls and I'll have people to talk with and, in a lot of cases, to pray with. And you probably know it's very therapeutic just getting the thing off your chest, just talking about it and getting it off your chest. And having someone there that's actually listening, and having someone there that you know cares about you, you know, almost as much as you care about yourself, it's nice.*

The support of key individuals can also help in enduring those conditions that might otherwise seem unbearable, in order to stay the course of greatest importance to that athlete.

**JORDAN:** *I've always been very close to my parents. (Name of significant other) is very important to me, obviously. So again, I've surrounded myself with good people that are always going to look after me, like the team sport psychologist. If I ever need anything I can talk to him and he won't tell me, he'll listen and help me choose the right way. But again, I've been privileged to surround myself with good people that will help me keep my feet on the ground and hopefully on the right course.*

Given this unconditional support, it should not come as a surprise that these individuals had a desire to share their athletic experiences with their supporters, rather than using them as an opportunity to prove their worth, and perform for them. In other words, when one's esteem from others is not riding on athletic outcomes, this provides a freedom to experience the sport and to share that experience with those people who are closest.

**COURTNEY:** *And they talk about energy levels and having auras, and that could be hocus pocus but when I looked up in the stands, my Mom had glow around her, just so happy to be there and share in Atlanta, and I had my jogging partner and I said "look at my mom" and she's like "oh my God, I'm gonna cry, look at your mom". And so that was a big powerful feeling to have.*

Sharing of one's experiences can provide additional meaning and enjoyment.

**RICHARD:** *And when the recruiter came to my house, I wasn't just happy because here was this guy, talking to my family, wanting me to go to school because of what I had achieved in my sport. But my brother, at the time, was five years old. And he was so impressed with the recruiter and so happy for me, he said "I want a scholarship to your*

*university too". When he was five years old! He went into my room and got my Team Canada bodysuit, put it on, and it was obviously too big for him, it was down to his ankles, and he was running back and forth in the backyard trying to show the guy that he could run too. And every time I think about that it makes me smile. And it's because of something that I did. I think that's the first time that he ever really showed any desire to achieve something. And he was five years old. So I mean, that made me pretty proud that I could be a part of that. I don't know, I'd say that would probably be my shining moment from sport, seeing my brother respond the way he did, as opposed to any personal accolade I've ever gotten or time I've ever run.*

Not surprisingly, these athletes place their relationships in a position of central importance, ahead of their personal experiences in athletics.

**SCOTT:** *You know, I think relationships, first and foremost, take precedence in my life. Sports and work and all that stuff is secondary. My interaction with people is the most important thing in life.*

In summary, individuals are living authentically when they are able to present and see themselves for what they truly are, without distortion. Key individuals can give license to this authenticity through unconditional support and acceptance. The awareness and acceptance of emotions as indicators of what is most important to the individual is an important component of this authentic living. In addition, an attitude of humility can override the desire to live up to 'pedestal status' and keep individuals well-connected to the people around them.



### **Experiencing Fully**

When individuals define themselves in enduring, complex ways, and live in a manner that keeps them connected to who they really are, they have the freedom to experience themselves, others, and their environments fully. The essence of this category is the ability to take in the full spectrum of one's experiences without preoccupation with outcomes and their implications. The four subcategories of experiencing fully are experiencing self through sport, connecting with others, immersion in the moment, and finding meaning and purpose.

### **Experiencing Self through Sport**

The notion of 'sport as a vehicle for self-expression' resonates with the athletes in this study. The manner in which individuals experience their daily pursuits depends largely upon the focus that they take. While a whole later subcategory is devoted to the assignment of meaning, that theme is also evident here.

When the self is thought to have substance independent of one's activities, the focus can be on experience of the self rather than definition of it.

***MIKAELA:** Once I started kind of taking everything that I've learned and every thing that I do, and taking all the different parts of me and bringing that into what I do and who I am, it just became so much easier. It's just so easy now. Training is fun. You have to find a way as an athlete to bring yourself into your sport, and that's what makes you unique.*

The attributes by which one is defined can be experienced through sport.

***SCOTT:** Sport is like an extension of yourself, but it's not exactly who you are. It's a vehicle to experience the parts of me, like*

*the competitiveness, the dedication, the discipline.*

Significant value is attached to the 'process' of elite sport rather than outcomes. Athletes learned to focus on the daily experience of their pursuits.

***MIKAELA:** Regardless of what the end results are, I'm walking my path, I'm living my dream, I'm doing it. And I think that speaks volumes for itself.*

One athlete drew the conclusion that her happiness would have to precede her success, rather than resulting from it.

***RACHEL:** I think it was from that movie about the Jamaican bobsled team, with John Candy. He said something to the guys. They were getting ready for the big race, and getting all psyched up, and they wanted to win so badly, it's all they could think about. And he said "you know guys, regardless of what you do out there, it doesn't matter, the person that you are now, a gold medal isn't going to change that. If you're not happy with who you are and what you've done before you get it, it's not going to change that if you get that medal.*

This insight is tied directly to the appreciation of one's daily living, finding enjoyment in the process of training and competing.

***RACHEL:** And I think success and failure as well only magnify the true person you are. And that's definitely something that our sport psychologist took the time to talk specifically with me about is just being happy with, you know, what I was doing, my own routine, happy with where I was at, because I truly feel that way. Like, if you spend your whole life thinking that an Olympic medal is the only thing that matters, is the only achievement that means anything to you, if*

*you get there and it doesn't happen, you could be a very grumpy, upset person, you know, especially if there's nothing else outside of that that's important or has great meaning to you.*

Individuals recognized a breadth of experience that was made possible through their involvement in sport. For those willing to take them in, there is a wealth of experience that can enhance one's life.

**CASSIE:** *The travels, the people, the experiences, living abroad, just the knowledge I've gained for this field that I want to work in, and people skills, because in sport you learn so much about people, and interactions and emotions and all those kinds of things. And just being able to work with people in general. I like people. I realize that I'm so fortunate to have experienced all of these things.*

In summary, the freedom that individuals acquire through healthy self-definition and authentic living allow them to experience themselves through sport rather than being defined by it. In addition, seeking out the breadth of experience available through elite sport and focusing on the process of daily living and performing further enhance the quality of one's experiences.

### **Connecting with Others**

In addition to experiencing the self through sport, individuals are afforded opportunities to connect closely with other people through their sports. One form of relationship that was considered to be extremely valuable was that with teammates. The highly emotional sport environment allows intense bonds to develop by virtue of the shared goals.

**I:** *What have you gotten out of sport? What is most rewarding about the experience?*

**CASSIE:** *I think, number one, like (name of teammate), she's my best friend and will be for the rest of my life. Like, we are so compatible. And her family is my family. So I think the level of relationship that you can get through these people is pretty amazing. Especially because you are all going for this one dream goal. And I think that kind of a thing, the support of helping each other through, so I know if something happens in my life, I know I can call any of those people and say "hey, this is what's going on". And I know that they will accept me unconditionally. And I think I can get that from a lot of people, but they just don't quite understand as much. So I think it's also ... this experience has been awesome, as I said, like, the process through it. But to be able to tell someone about it and for someone to really be able to understand it are two different things.*

The intensity of the environment and the powerful emotions it produces contribute to the formation of intense bonds that many find difficult to fully articulate.

**JORDAN:** *It's hard to articulate the bond, you'll know because you played a team sport, there is an incredible bond that guys get when they play together. And it's hard to explain it, it's just ... (significant other) and I will probably never have the same kind of bond, actually we will never have the same kind of bond that I had with this group of athletes. We haven't been to war together like the guys and I have been to war. And it's not to say that one relationship is better than the others.*

However, it is worth noting that perceiving oneself in a healthy manner may be necessary for the development of collegial versus adversarial relationships within sport.

**CASSIE:** *I don't think it's about driving and comparing to others. It's more to myself. And of course others are there to be compared to. And I hate that. I hate that kind of jealousy or the feeling that you have to prove yourself with the insecurity or whatever. And so I really try not to go there. But I think that relates back to how you feel about you. So you have to be secure with yourself before you can really connect with your teammates.*

Involvement in sport can provide opportunities to connect with others. The experience of others can be an enriching piece of an athlete's experience provided that one is open to these relationships. In addition, meaningful relationships with others can enhance one's ability to experience oneself and one's sport more fully.

### **Immersion in the Moment**

Closely related to the experiential focus that was described in 'experiencing the self through sport' is the individual's ability to immerse oneself fully in the moment. This allows individuals to fully experience parts of themselves through their activities. Athletes described a state of living and performing that fully engages them. The experience itself takes a similar form for the athletes in this study.

**CASSIE:** *There's that undying energy that you have. You can just keep running and running and running. I call it a sense of calm. I'm totally activated, but I have this inner sense of calm. But it's a fine line because one thing can set me off. But then I scream or whatever and then can come back to it by refocusing. But there's this fine little line in between.*

This state is reinforcing in and of itself. It feels right.

**COURTNEY:** *(Commenting on why she continued to play despite major set-backs) It's because I love how I feel when I'm in the moment. And you can call it the zone or the adrenaline rush or whatever you want to call it, when it's just me and I'm in that state, I feel good. And that's what life's about to me is to be happy and feel good. So I decided to continue to play. So I thought "okay, a new perspective, I'm upbeat again". People could see it in my body language so it was great.*

Athletes experience a simultaneous peace and exhilaration, wherein peak performance can occur.

**MIKAELA:** *It's that quiet kind of exuberance, where everything seems to slow down. It's like everything's going inside of you, and it's racing, but when you're actually doing the activity in the moment, it's like you can see it and everything's in slow motion. And it's like all time just kind of like stands still or just slows down. And even though you're super-pumped up inside, everything just seems to go nice and slow. You can see every little bit of what happens. You know, it's not a blur. I find when I'm not in the moment, when everything else around me distracts me, then everything's a blur and everything's chaotic. But when you really seem to be enjoying it for the intrinsic factors, and you're just able to focus everything and bring it all in, it's like, you can be nervous, but it's that quiet ... it's that nervousness that gets you pumped up, but it just feels different, it feels special. You know that this isn't an everyday all the time kind of a moment. You know it's something different. And you just shoot for that little opening, that window of opportunity to see what can happen.*

Athletes become attuned to a feeling of performing, quite distinct from an outcome focus.

**SCOTT:** *You look to repeat those moments in sport because it's like you train forever to do it properly, and when you do it properly and you feel what it feels like to do it properly, it's like "woah", you know. Then it's all worth it. But you can get lost in that state. I can remember my best jumps very clearly.*

The primary challenge to this experience is the emphasis on outcomes and their importance. One can see the clear connection between focus on outcomes and the inability to immerse oneself fully in the moment.

**COURTNEY:** *Preoccupation with outcomes interferes with the full experience of the moment. And that's your ego.*

The fear of failure can have a powerful effect on one's mindset going into competition, taking the focus away from the opportunity to fully experience one's performance.

**RICHARD:** *We went to the World Junior Championships. This was the first time that I'd ever been to anything of that magnitude and to that level. And basically what happened is I got scared. I knew the competition was getting a little stiffer, and I didn't have the security of being back home and knowing I was the fastest guy anymore. I had a little bit of pain in my ankle, but it really wasn't anything. And basically what happened was I got scared and I started making excuses for myself before I even ran, you know "if I don't run well, it's probably because of my foot". And I made myself believe that it was that bad and in hindsight it wasn't that bad at all. And afterwards I felt so cheated, and not by anyone else but*

*just myself, that I succumbed to the pressure and ... you know what, the only way you can succeed is if you don't care if you lose. I just felt so bad that I let myself ... that I did that to myself. And here was this awesome opportunity, the biggest opportunity of my life, to compete at the highest level for that age, and I just let it go. The way I was making excuses, I had beaten myself before I even ran the race. I mean, I was scared. And really who cares if you win or lose? There's all this pride and ego in sports and stuff but to me I honestly believe that if you don't put yourself out there in a vulnerable position, then you'll never really see how far you can go. You never really have tested yourself. And I mean that's the best tool you have to self-improvement and personal gain.*

At such times, the individual needs to reconnect with their intrinsic enjoyment of the activity.

**CHRIS:** *When things get going almost too well, you kind of find yourself slipping over to where you're afraid to fail. Especially when it starts to go bad at the first part of it. You're very emotional. You suppress everything. You're moody when you get home and that whole thing. And you kind of go through that for a while and it kind of gets worse and worse and worse. And then all of a sudden, you just realize "what am I playing the game for? I'm playing it to have fun." And it's my livelihood, but you're not going to do any job that's not fun for very long. So you have to realize it.*

These athletes have been able to exercise control over this experience of immersion by focusing on the process of training and competing, the feeling of their sport, thereby letting go of the outcome focus and the expectations of others.

**MIKAELA:** *And when everything was about trying to please somebody else, or trying to please the masses, or you know, or trying to please coaches, or nay-sayers, people that tell you that you can't do it. When I took my focus away from that and said "I'm just gonna go out here and have fun, and see what I can do, and please myself" it took all the pressure away, it took all of the 'have-to's' away, and it became more of a wanting to.*

Experiencing one's sport 'internally', rather than relative to external considerations appears to positively influence the quality of experience.

**MIKAELA:** *There's a drive that I have to see what I can do. And it's not because if you throw a certain distance you get this money or you get this accolade or whatever. It's just that I look at what my body does when I'm training, and I know I can perform at that top level, and so my drive is just to see how far I can go. Whereas before it was kind of like, you know, trying to be that perfect athlete. And it's like now I don't have to prove anything. And when you stop trying to prove things to everybody else and just be, and just go out and do it and love doing it, it changes your whole energy, and it changes your whole reason for being out there, and then you get back to loving sport the same way you did, you know, when you were five years old and playing t-ball for the first time, you know, or you get in the pool for the first time and swimming, or all that stuff you did because it was fun. And you enjoyed going out because of the people that you'd see, and what you could do, and seeing if you could swim faster or throw farther or run faster or jump higher and all those things.*

This shift away from the external considerations also impacts one's focus and perform-

ance state, returning the athlete to the process of performing.

**RACHEL:** *And I think once I stopped worrying so much about what other people thought of me, and I didn't worry so much about how I had to place or who I was competing against, it just seemed like I relaxed a little bit and it was easier to focus. The way I focus is I just set new goals and I really specifically try to focus on that goal and how I went about achieving it, which is through the training, the everyday ups and downs ... the process really.*

Connecting with the self involves seeing one's pursuits not as a source of self-definition, but rather as a vehicle for experiencing one's personal qualities and a breadth of experiences made possible through those pursuits. Full immersion in one's activities is enhanced when preoccupation with outcomes is overcome and one focuses on the feeling and the process of performing.

Positive growth in the categories and sub-categories described to this point appears to facilitate one's full experience of sport. This process of unburdened immersion in one's activities has important implications for the athlete. Without being consumed with pressure, one can relax and perform. There seems to be a general calming effect and a clarity that athletes experience when they are not preoccupied with outcomes, they see themselves in healthy terms, and they're focused on the process of performing.

The participants had some important insights about the role of perspective in their performances. Among these is the realization that one is engaged in one's passion.

*I: So you're on the court and you realize that there are more important things to you*

than volleyball. How does that affect the way you play?

**COURTNEY:** *It'll actually have that calming effect come over me because I am still doing something that I enjoy and I have passion for. It's been such a big part of my life. So that's okay for that to pop in for a second. In fact, with (my sport) we do that a lot. Sometimes we just look out and look where we are, you know, it's pretty fabulous. Does that take away from our game? No.*

In addition, sharing the experience with others can further enhance one's affective state.

**I:** *Now that you're at this point in your life, when you go to compete, are you a better competitor?*

**SCOTT:** *Ultimately I think it would be more beneficial to competition, because then the reasons why I compete wouldn't be for the money or the fame or the fortune or whatever. It's not for those reasons, it's because I enjoy competing and it's something I'm good at and I want to bring out the best in myself. And if I do it really well, not only am I happy, but I know that it makes other people happy too.*

Even at times of extreme pressure, athletes can let go of the pressure in favour of focusing on the feeling of the sport, thus freeing oneself to perform optimally.

**SCOTT:** *I've seen both, where you really want to make a team badly and the only thing that counts is that you make the team and you don't exactly get your best performance because you're worried about each round. And that preoccupies you. "Only five more jumps. Oh, only four more jumps." Or whatever. But when you're there and you're just enjoying it, and even though there may be something on the line,*

*you get joy from what you're doing. And there's pleasure there, not because you're doing your best. I find that usually at those times when you don't have pressure that you've put on yourself, and you just enjoy your performance, I think those are the times that you actually do your best. And those are the times, you know, it's almost like a circle, where you do your best when there's no pressure and there's no pressure when you do your best.*

The discussion took a different focus with another athlete, broadening the term 'performance', then making a distinction between the short and long term.

**I:** *People are going to ask me whether the athletes who gain perspective perform better than others.*

**MEAGHAN:** *Well, I think you have to say what is performing better. Does that mean that they win everything, or does that mean that ... obviously only one person can be number one in the world, does that mean that the ones with the right perspective are number one in the world? Or does that mean that those athletes perform better meaning that if they're fifth, or if they're third, or if they're first, they're still okay with that. What are they going to ask?*

**I:** *They're probably going to ask, bottom line, you take two people with equal ability, give one of them this type of perspective, and the other this kind of 'skating is your life', which one will skate faster?*

**MEAGHAN:** *If you're talking in one year, I don't know. It could be either one. But if you're talking over a few years, I think it's the one with the right perspective because having the wrong perspective, obviously you're looking at winning. If you're looking at winning, then you have a fear of losing. If*

*you have a fear of losing, you're going to be looking at all the other people who are trying to catch you, and all you're going to be thinking about is winning, winning, winning. If you do win one year, you're gonna go "okay, what now?" You know? Yeah, you can keep at it but I think that catches up to a person. Where, I mean I see it in all sports, and I see it in myself, as long as you have a healthy perspective and a healthy life outside of sport, that's going to continue because you're going to keep the drive, you're going to keep positive. People are going to want to be around you. And so, I think ultimately, over a few years, it's the athlete with the right perspective that's gonna perform best, but I guess for me performance isn't always being number one in the world. Performance is on and off the ice.*

The process of immersing one fully in the moment appears to be enhanced by the perspective process described to this point, and this immersion allows the athlete to let go of an outcome focus, enjoy the feeling of the performance and, in turn (ironically) perform optimally.

### **Finding Meaning & Purpose**

A crucial part of experiencing fully involves the meaning and purpose that individuals ascribe to the events and experiences in their lives. The same experiences can be given completely different meanings by two different people. The way the participants perceive themselves and connect to themselves and others can be seen in the meanings they attach to experiences. There is a sense of order and purpose in virtually every event.

An important part of this pattern is the purpose with which these athletes engage in their sports. Perhaps most importantly, they are willing to ask themselves whether their sport still holds passion and fulfillment, willing to face the implications of either

response. It seems that, in order to maintain passion for one's sport, one must be willing to leave it when it loses its magic or another focus holds more.

**COURTNEY:** *Generally speaking, I'd say I'm one that copes well, but this past year has been a trying time for me. I don't know if I've coped very well, but I know that I'm still doing what I'm doing and I'm still involved in my sport, so I know that I've had to re-evaluate and gain my perspective back on what's important to me and why I'm still playing and finding the passion again.*

This requires the courage to face when one is ready for transition out of sport, into new priorities. 'Listening to one's heart', looking honestly at where one's passion lies, can provide both purpose in one's sport and a natural indicator of timing for transition.

**MEAGHAN:** *I think the best word in there is 'passion' because that's what drives people in anything. In relationships, and sport, and work, as soon as you don't have that, then I don't think people should be doing what they're doing. You know, sometimes I think it can be blocked, and you have to rekindle it, even in sport, but once it's gone ... you know, I think that's what drives people. And I think as long as you see that that's what drives you, that that's your motivation then that's a good thing. If you lose that passion, then it's not a bad thing, it's just time to move on to something else. And I think it can sometimes even be there, but you can move on. I don't think that's a bad thing, because the passion can be channeled elsewhere. I mean, probably when I retire, the passion will still be there, but the passion for other things might be stronger.*

Individuals are able to separate the hassles of their environment from their love of the sport.

**CHRIS:** *But it is tough to go on the road and leave my family at home. The thing I guess you think about is, for our game, come summertime, however long or short it is, they've got me pretty much exclusively. Other than a couple hours in the morning when I work out, I'm at home. So we kind of tailor our lives around that. In the summertime, I'm all theirs. Whatever they want to do, I have to be around and be willing, especially with my son. In the wintertime, it's tough, but I guess it's what you get paid for. Because the game ... people ask me to come out and play shinny with them at night, and for sure I'm gonna go out and do it because you love the game and you like playing it so much that it isn't a job. I guess the job comes in when you have to get up early in the morning and take that 3-hour flight and get in and practice. Those are the hard things.*

Essentially, the first and most important question is answered based on how the activity makes the person feel. Returning to the feeling one wishes to create can generate energy and optimism about the future.

**RILEY:** *And it took me pretty much until the start of June (after a challenging set of obstacles in the prior season) to really want to start training and want to start getting back in the game. And things just sort of went over; I realized it was just another set-back and there are many players like myself who have been in this situation before. So then I just sort of started to remember some of the enjoyable times in university hockey and the world junior championships, and even in pro, some of the success I had, and remembering the feeling I had in pro where I finally felt that "hey, I belong at this level,*

*and these players are great players but I can play with them". And I think that motivation came back to me, and as I started to train again, I sort of got the motivation "well hey, I have another organization to prove to here. It's a new start".*

As other pursuits and foci start to take on greater importance a natural transition can be made out of sport, where new passions emerge and demand attention. The closing days of one's career can take on additional sentiment at this time.

**SCOTT:** *I keep seeing that there are some lectures and talks at the sport centre on athletes retiring, and how to reintegrate yourself into society and stuff like that. I think that's wild. I think if an athlete has that balance and that perspective in life, a complete life, not just athletics, they wouldn't have to be reintegrated back into society. They'd already be part of it. There are too many athletes, it seems like, that have a problem retiring, like it's a bad thing to retire, it's a bad thing to leave the sport. I'm looking forward to it. People hear me talk and they say "man, you're talking too much like you're done already". And I'm like "no, I'm just looking forward to it". I'm anticipating that part of my life because there are other things I want to get on and do. So I'm excited about going on and doing these other things. I'm not forgetting what's going on right now. I'm enjoying what I'm doing right now, and I'm working hard to make this my best year possibly, but I see other things that are after that. So it's tough for me to understand that. I think if I had continued doing sport the way I was doing sport before, and I hadn't gotten suspended, and hadn't had the life-changing things, yeah, I could see that being a problem, because my identity was athletics. You know, that's where I got my identity from.*



Ultimately, transition out of sport and into other pursuits can be faced reflectively and positively.

**SCOTT:** *It's really cool, now that my career is winding down. This will probably be my last year. If I get carded, I might stick around for the money (laughs), because they owe me a couple of years I think. (laughs) I'm looking forward to this year. Like, I'm training really hard and everything's focused and going, but I'm looking forward to the end of it also. You know, and I'm content with that. Like I'm ready to. There are other things I'd like to start doing in life that I have put on hold because of athletics. I find myself reflecting and looking back on all the years that I've been in track and field, and some of the good things, some of the bad things, and when I'm training I'm remembering some things over the years that we did, and I find myself smiling and just enjoying it. And remembering that there have been more positive things than bad things, and just looking forward to finishing off the year and finishing off the season, and then calling it good. And not being angry or bitter or leaving the sport and saying "what if this and what if that?" or having to tell tall tales about my accomplishments in track. And I see people that say "oh, didn't he go to so and so Olympics and do really well?" or "actually, I don't think he ever made a team or anything like that", and they go back and they have these big stories, and it's bad because they still don't understand what life is really all about.*

Ultimately, the athletes seem to view sport as an opportunity for fulfillment, a source of experiencing fully. When that opportunity expires, other sources are considered.

One of the most striking patterns found in this group of athletes involves their appraisals of adversity. Lessons, growth, and some

purpose are sought and attached to whatever challenges that these individuals face. While some draw on religious faith, all seem to identify a sense of order and meaning in adversity.

**COURTNEY:** *I mean, every ... I guess you could call them negative points or obstacles that I think I've had my fair share lately, and I know that I'm a stronger person for those things. And it's not always fun to go through shitty things like that, but for sure they ... and everyone tells me they make me stronger (laughs). But I do believe that and that's why, when something's dealt my way, I just find a way. And whether that's inner strength because I had to draw on those past experiences, "it's just another thing, I can do it", you know, those are the things that go through my head. But certainly they've made me stronger, even though, when you're in the middle of them, you feel weak, like you can't go on.*

These individuals expressed a faith in an order of things (some of them religious), wherein things happen for a reason, and all experiences have some functional purpose.

**MEAGHAN:** *But also, I mean, again I come back to faith because being a Christian athlete, that's the biggest thing. And my husband grew up in a Christian home and I didn't, and so you really start to question why things happen to you. And I think that's the path it put me on, the "why would this happen to me", and you don't say that God let's things happen to you, but you know, maybe ... I think for everything that happens, there's a reason. And good things come from it. And, you know, good things came of it. And ultimately I wished it had never happened, but I think ultimately I'm a better person because that happened.*

Among the benefits of adversity is a re-ordering of lost priorities, and the ultimate assurance that one can get through hard times.

**MEAGHAN:** *And that's where I really started soul-searching (after major disappointment), and I think if I had been in a position where I had won a medal, I almost get scared of what I would have become, what kind of athlete I would have become, because I had this idea that you were more important if you had a medal.*

**JORDAN:** *There's all kinds of adversity that you run into along the way. Things that get you down and then you have to reset your course and refocus on the things that you want to be or were and you'll put a little less weight into getting all hyped up over a big win or whatever the case may be.*

One athlete's 'rock bottom' experience had a profound influence on his philosophy of life, reconnecting him with the things of primary importance in his life.

**SCOTT:** *It was like a wake-up call. It's like you go through something devastating or something really hard, and it just sort of brings you back, it settles you and brings you back to a focus.*

The competitiveness of one athlete was apparent in his view of adversity as yet another opportunity to test oneself.

**RICHARD:** *It's when you fall into the little valleys or injury or, you know, something else in your life that takes away or kind of hinders your progress, that's when the true testament occurs and you have to ... it's kind of like a reality check, a gut check, and you look inside and see if you have what it takes to get over whatever hurdles are put in your way.*

Adversity was also put into 'perspective' in relation to a broader context.

**MIKAELA:** *Just because you never go to an Olympics or win a medal, doesn't mean you haven't accomplished anything. You look at all the days of training and everything that you've done, I mean, that's accomplishment. And you compare that to someone with quadriplegia or a spinal injury. They'd kill to be able to get up and go for a run or go for a walk. It helps to put it in perspective. Every day you're out there doing something that somebody else wishes that they could do.*

Shared experiences, even the painful ones are ultimately seen as valuable, and can be taken as part of a package of meaningful experiences that come with involvement in elite sport.

**JORDAN:** *At the end of the day, it's just a game. It certainly didn't finish the way we had wanted to. I wanted to finish in Sydney. But the journey, from the mountain retreat through the Pan-Am Games, through the Olympic quals, the tour of Australia, you know, it's the journey that I'll remember. And standing on the podium in (major games). I mean, if you rest it all on the Olympic qual then yeah, the whole two years was a tragic waste of time. But I would have never met our sport psych, I met my girlfriend at a tournament, and the same with all these people I wouldn't have met and have had the pleasure of meeting, and it's all part of that journey, meeting those people.*

In short, these individuals find meaning and purpose in virtually everything that happens to them. While they may struggle with events at the time, there is faith that the lesson of value in each experience will be re-

vealed in time. In addition, events and experiences are considered in relation to a broader picture; things are placed in ‘perspective’. The meanings that are ascribed to different experiences seem to reinforce the philosophy by which these individuals try to live, especially as they pertain to the definition of the self, authentic living, and the full experience of the self and others.

### Summary of Model

The process seems to be about the willingness to *see the self for what it really is*, in all its complexity, the good and bad, and the weak and strong. Simultaneously, individuals must be willing to *see value* in the traits that they have, the process of their lives, and their experiences in and of themselves. Individuals are then in a position to *experience the self for all that it can be*, and to *present themselves authentically*, that is, for what they truly are. This includes taking ownership of their *emotions*, accepting them, and using them to stay in touch with the things that are of greatest value to them.

Relationships play a large role in completing a fulfilling lifestyle. For this reason, engaging in the commitment and risk-taking required to establish open, authentic relationships further enhances the experiences and growth of each individual. In particular, close intimate relationships provide a feeling of being understood and accepted, and afford individuals both sanctuary and strength. Adopting and maintaining a sense of belonging, closeness, and community involves an openness to sharing one’s experiences with others and sharing in the experiences of others. It also requires humility when successful, and dignity in failure, that lessens the tendency to push away from people at those times.

Through the *acceptance and experience of the self and others* comes a strength to face

whatever events occur in one’s life, and a courage to let this objective guide and direct the manner in which one lives and responds. In other words, individuals are then able to find meaning and purpose in virtually every experience, good and bad, and to use those experiences to continually reconnect with themselves and others.

### Two Conceptual Trains on the Same Track

Orlick (1998) advocated the maintenance of a sense of balance and perspective in sport and life. His definition of balance, distinct from balance in a time management sense, clearly shares common ground with the perspective model: Finding beauty passion, and meaning in the different loves of your life, and living those loves – everyday. Balance is respecting your needs for achievement and relaxation, work and play, giving and receiving, intimacy and personal space (p.xiii).

Amirault and Orlick’s (1998) exploration of the term balance in the lives of elite athletes revealed that athletes refuted the notion that different aspects of one’s life could be “balanced” with equal amounts of time. Athletes respected the enormous amount of one’s time that is required to excel in sport. Temporal balance was not seen as a viable option.

Careful consideration of Amirault and Orlick’s (1998) study leads us to believe that we were investigating the same basic phenomenon. An athlete in their study spoke of an “inner harmony” meaning “listening to yourself, not everyone else and focusing on one thing at a time” (p.38). Certain common elements are evident. Making a conscious decision to have balance is similar to the importance of awareness of the perspective process. Enjoying what you’re doing mirrors the passion and purpose that the per-

spective participants sought in their sports. Being in the moment (balance) matches the idea of immersion on the moment (perspective). Having a support network (balance) mirrors the emphasis that the perspective athletes placed on intimacy, support, and shared experience.

However, we feel that the perspective model provides an elaboration of fundamental importance. Perspective speaks to the manner in which one views the self and the role that this plays in the ability to live authentically and experience fully. This mode of seeing the self is perhaps best expressed through a metaphor. Van Deurzen (1998) described the self as a vessel (container). We fill the vessel with contents such as roles, activities, and relationships. But while these ‘contents’ appear to give the vessel substance, they are unstable, and so when we lose a part of these contents, we feel empty and hollow. But van Deurzen argues that we have not lost the essence of the self. The container itself, with its dimensions and properties defines the self.

Likewise, when we recognize the qualities that we have that cut across any role, activity, or relationship, we are no longer bound

by the nature of our contents. Instead, we are able to experience ourselves *through the contents*, rather than being defined by them. This thought process may have been best illustrated by the lack of apprehension that the participants had about the prospects of transition.

Perspective involves making peace with the authentic self, then setting out to experience it fully through one’s activities and key relationships. The role of humility in staying connected to others is an additional contribution of the model, as is the central importance of authenticity, and emotional awareness/expression. We feel that the process of meaning-making is also clearer through this perspective study, in its consideration of responses to adversity.

We believe that the core questions remain constant; how can people live authentically with themselves and others in order to experience life fully, purposefully, and passionately? What are the barriers to these connections? How can we reconnect to these things of most profound importance? The future of this inquiry is daunting, but it is well worth our while.

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## **Focusing For Excellence: Lessons From Elite Mountain Bike Racers**

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### **Abstract**

Studies have shown the importance of focusing skills at the elite performance level. For example, Orlick and Partington (1988) found that attentional focus was one of the two most important skills related to high level performance at the Olympic Games. However there has been minimal research investigating how performers perceive focus, how they develop and refine focus and what kinds of focusing skills they use to eliminate distractions.

Ten of Canada's top ranked pro-elite men and women mountain bike racers, all with extensive international-level experience, were interviewed for the present. Their insights advanced our knowledge with respect to how elite athletes perceive, define and direct their focus. For example, to prepare an optimal focus for racing, athletes talked about how they planned ahead of time how they would focus for different points of the race. Through racing and reflection the athletes learned what focusing techniques helped them to stay positive and focused in all sorts of different race situations such as a bad start, a crash, a mechanical problem, and weather conditions such as muddy or dry, cold or hot. The findings present a clearer picture of how focus is developed over the course of an athlete's career. Discovering the best focus was also about athletes finding the best balance within their lives. Detailed athlete quotes and recommendations for improving focus are provided. These findings may assist athletes, coaches and mental training consultants to prepare more effectively to attain and maintain a great focus, especially in the sport of mountain biking.

## Introduction

In sport, as well as other domains, the ability to focus is one of the most important skills effecting personal and performance excellence (Orlick, 1998). Focusing skills are essential for success at the elite level in sport where the challenges are great and the demands are high. Poor performances are often a result of an inability to deal with distractions, a lack of consistent focus on the task at hand or failure to connect with the most essential features of the performance (Orlick, & Partington, 1988; Orlick, 2000).

Orlick (1996), refers to focusing as :

*the ability to concentrate totally on what you are doing, seeing, reading, hearing, feeling, observing or experiencing while you are engaged in the activity or the performance. Focusing fully not only allows you to connect totally with what you are experiencing, but also frees you to perform without being disturbed by distracting thoughts. (p. 8)*

Studies have shown that elite athletes are more successful at focusing than their non-elite counterparts both before and during a performance (Defrancesco & Burke, 1997; Mahoney, Gabriel, & Perkins, 1987), and that they have a greater capacity to regain focus following distraction in comparison to non-elite athletes (Thomas & Over, 1994).

There has been minimal research investigating how athletes themselves define focus, how they develop focus, how they get focused and stay focused. What techniques do athletes use to successfully gain, guide or shift their focus? Does their focus change over the course of their career?

The current study involved a group of elite mountain bike racers competing at a professional level. The sport of mountain biking was chosen because it is a highly demanding

sport, which has undergone no previous research in relation to mental skills. The First World Mountain Bike Championship was held in 1986, and it became an Olympic Sport for the first time in 1996. Mountain biking is a complex, high intensity sport which requires effective focusing skills for constantly changing up and down terrain (often at altitude) over rocks and logs, through trees, sand, and mud. It is a risk-endurance sport, with unique physical, technical, and logistical demands. An average elite-level mountain bike race is two to two and half hours long, therefore requiring a prolonged focus. Due to the demanding technical terrain, there is also an element of risk and/or fear in the sport of mountain biking with the potential for serious injury or death.

By exploring the way in which elite-level mountain bikers apply mental focus to their training and competition it was felt that meaningful insights might be gained that may be applicable to other sport and life domains.

## Method

Given the advantages and flexibility of the open-ended interview, a qualitative method of inquiry and analysis was used in this study. A dialogue with these elite athletes created an opportunity to discuss how they perceive focus and how they have developed and utilized focusing skills for both training and competition

## Study Participants

Ten of Canada's top ten Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) ranked pro-elite men and women mountain bike racers, all with extensive international-level experience, were invited to participate in the present study. All the athletes were National team members with several years of experience at the international level including World Cup and



World Championship races. Four of the athletes were also Olympians.

Table 1 Athlete Profiles

| Athlete | Age<br>(Dec. 2000) | Years of Mtb<br>Racing<br>Experience | Highest<br>Ever World<br>Cup Finish | Highest Ever<br>World Champ<br>Finish | Olympic<br>Experience   | UCI Ranking<br>(End of 2000<br>Season) |
|---------|--------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| 1       | 26                 | 15 (10 road)                         | 4 <sup>th</sup>                     | 2 <sup>nd</sup>                       | 14 <sup>th</sup> (2000) | 9                                      |
| 2       | 27                 | 13                                   | 10 <sup>th</sup>                    | 28 <sup>th</sup>                      | -                       | 47                                     |
| 3       | 26                 | 9                                    | 25 <sup>th</sup>                    | 38 <sup>th</sup>                      | -                       | 28                                     |
| 4       | 24                 | 9                                    | 15 <sup>th</sup>                    | 14 <sup>th</sup>                      | -                       | 46                                     |
| 5       | 31                 | 10                                   | 11 <sup>th</sup>                    | 17 <sup>th</sup>                      | -                       | 20                                     |
| 6       | 24                 | 10                                   | 6 <sup>th</sup>                     | 20 <sup>th</sup>                      | -                       | 38                                     |
| 7       | 30                 | 12                                   | 13 <sup>th</sup>                    | 13 <sup>th</sup>                      | 29 <sup>th</sup> (1996) | 37                                     |
| 8       | 34                 | 9                                    | 7 <sup>th</sup>                     | 7 <sup>th</sup>                       | 8 <sup>th</sup> (2000)  | 9                                      |
| 9       | 28                 | 15 (11 road)                         | 22 <sup>nd</sup>                    | 33 <sup>rd</sup>                      | -                       | 55                                     |
| 10      | 23                 | 8                                    | 8 <sup>th</sup>                     | 22 <sup>nd</sup>                      | 9 <sup>th</sup> (2000)  | 18                                     |

Note. mtb – mountain bike, road – road racing only

### Procedure

These high performance athletes were interviewed at a place and time of their convenience during the 2000 competitive season. Initial contact was made with twelve athletes by e-mail. The objectives of the study were explained and the athletes were informed that the interview would take no more than 90 minutes of their time. Four possible dates were suggested surrounding different races they would attend. Ten of the athletes contacted were interviewed. One athlete did not respond at all, and another declined for being too busy.

A semi-structured, open-ended interview was conducted with each athlete. All interviews were audiotape recorded and transcribed verbatim in order to produce texts which were analyzed. To ensure the accuracy of all data collected, a printed copy of the interview transcript was sent to each athlete. The athletes were asked to verify that their thoughts were accurately represented in the texts, and to make

additions, deletions or changes to the text if they were warranted.

### Results

#### Defining Focus

The athletes were first asked to define what focus is for them. After carefully reading and analyzing each athlete's responses, five main components of focus emerged.

- 1) 100% Concentration - An ability to concentrate fully on the job at hand and what you have to do in order to reach your objective.

Focus is being able to “concentrate on the one thing you're trying to do 100%” (Athlete 10).

“I am concentrating and all my efforts are aimed toward my racing or a goal that I have” (Athlete 7).

Attaining full focus or 100% concentration appears to be contingent upon, or linked to, the 4 factors listed below.

2) Eliminating Distractions (No Distractions)

In order to continually pursue a high level goal and keep the focus that is needed, athletes felt that distractions must be eliminated. Focus involves “eliminating any possible external discomforts or pests” (Athlete 8). It involves not letting other concerns become too overwhelming, “Focus is trying to eliminate a lot of the outside stress like not letting something like media attention get to you” (Athlete 3).

3) Planning and Preparing to be your best (Plan)

*To achieve an objective within a certain time frame, athletes felt there needs to be a plan for each step along the way, a “focus on what you have to do in order to get there, the job ahead” (Athlete 1). In order to be able to focus for any task, a certain amount of preparation is needed beforehand. An individual needs to take care of him or herself mentally as well as taking care of logistical concerns, or equipment concerns in order to be prepared to focus fully when the time comes to perform. “The best focus for me is just knowing that I’ve done everything that I have to do to be prepared” (Athlete 4). “If you’re focusing for an upcoming mountain bike race you try to get your rest, you try to eat well, try to check out the course and work on any difficulties you are having with the course” (Athlete 9).*

4) Having a vision of where you want to go (Vision)

Athletes felt it was important to have a vision of where you want to go and to focus on successive goals that will get you there. Focusing in this sense is “the ability to look ahead and see where you want to go” (Athlete 1). Or as athlete 4 said, focus is “defining a specific objective”.

5) Persisting with a specific objective (Perseverance).

Athletes felt that persistence is a big part of a full and effective focus. Once an objective is set, focused persistence or a persistent focus is a necessary part of continuing to go after the goal through all possible setbacks and disappointments along the way. Focus is “how you keep a specific objective” (Athlete 4).

The interview excerpt below provides an example of some of the different dimensions of focus mentioned by one Olympic athlete.

*I think focus is being able to block out everything external (**No Distractions**) and just concentrate on the one thing you’re trying to do 100% (**100% Concentration**). For racing, focus is being able to have everything set up so you can just think about the race (**Plan and Prepare**). Everything else is just what you’ve planned out beforehand so it’s just routine, your food, your travel, so you don’t have any other stresses (**No Distractions, Plan**). So you can just concentrate on riding (**100% Concentration**) and you don’t have to worry about external things like your bike and stuff (**No Distractions**). You can think about actually riding in the race (**100% Concentration**). I think being prepared is a big part of it, for me it is (Athlete 10).*

In addition to 100% concentration, elimination of distractions and preparing through planning, athletes in this study shed light on

two new dimensions of focus, those being vision and perseverance. Having a vision of what you want to do or where you want to go was felt to be an important element of sustained focus and overall performance. Vision provides the long-term focus or reason for persisting through obstacles and distractions. Creating and following a race or competition plan is the short-term focus for executing the performance. Embracing a vision or dream of what you want to be or become appears to be key to the long-term aspect of focus. It gives you a reason for “hanging in there” and “sticking to it”. Keeping that vision fresh in your mind was believed to be necessary to maintain the focus and perseverance required to reach the long-term vision or goal.

#### **Best Focus versus Worst Focus– Factors**

After the athletes shared their perspectives on focus, each athlete was asked to describe a race at which they felt they had their best focus. They described the events prior to the race which led to their best focus, as well as what transpired during the race to facilitate their best focus. Leading up to the race the athletes talked about focusing on staying relaxed, positive self-talk and positive thinking, as well as visualizing the course, including their desired feeling and strategies for the race. Good logistical planning and preparation, including knowing where and with whom they would be staying, and preparing their bike were some key factors that led to the best focus. Once the race was underway, the athletes spoke of the how their focus changes for different sections of the race. For example they spoke about how their focus shifts between their position in the race, their own pace and internal feelings, and self-reminders for how to ride certain technical sections. Feeling good physically before and during the race also helped facilitate good focus.

After describing a race at which they felt they had their best focus, each athlete was asked to give an example of the opposite, a race without good focus. Many of the factors that led to a race with poor focus were opposite to the factors that led to a race with good focus (see Table 3). For example, there was poor preparation and planning leading up to the race. Uncontrollable factors and distractions before the race led to poor focus, as well as not feeling good physically.

Factors leading to a race with the best focus and to a race with poor focus are discussed further below.

#### **Relaxation, Positive Thoughts & Positive Imagery**

In the week prior to the competition four of the athletes stated that staying relaxed was very important for having good focus, “Leading up to the race (a race with the best focus) the time I spent off the bike was really relaxing, we had really good massages” (Athlete 1). Staying positive was key to remaining calm and relaxed for most of the athletes,

*I was thinking about getting the good feeling while racing (the week leading up to the race). I'm going to feel good. The best riders in the world are going to be there. I'm excited. I'm with a new team, just the snow ball affect of all those good feelings. I was positive and confident but not cocky (Athlete 2).*

To help remain positive and confident, some athletes mentioned use of key words and positive self-talk.

*I find that to help focus it is good to have key words that you remember. By using them in training it helps you to remember them during the race so you can key on a word that helps you to spin, reminds you to attack,*

*that you are strong, that you love to climb, these kinds of things (Athlete 8)*

Another way to stay positive before and during the race was through the use of imagery as mentioned by athlete 2, “I use mental imagery, like what it would feel like to put on the leader’s jersey on the podium.” Five athletes also mentioned using mental imagery to prepare for the focus needed during the race,

*It helps to do positive imagery before the race but not necessarily the morning of, or even the day before, but the weeks up to and including. When you’re in that level of pain that is associated with racing and you need to go into your next zone, this positive imagery can come up as opposed to negative thoughts. I kind of put myself into a deep relaxation and then what I do is imagine myself riding and riding things well. And it’s a feeling as well as an image. It’s not just an image or a word. It does have a feeling with it, a more aggressive feeling as opposed to a fear feeling. With a fear feeling you kind of hold back and you kind of back away. Where with an aggressive feeling you’re more forward and aggressive and willing to attack the situations or obstacles (Athlete 8)*

*I visualize whenever I am just sitting around. I think about all the different parts of the course and how I’m going to ride them, go through the feelings I’m going to have before the race and at the start. Like just picturing staying relaxed and not getting upset if things are not going the way I want them to. I try to see how I’m going to start, knowing that its going to be harder at the end of the race and so I get ready for that (Athlete 10).*

Outside of doing imagery, six of the ten athletes also felt for them it was important

not to think too much about the race during the week beforehand,

*That is how I approach a big event, just to get as physically fit as I can and not to think about the big event too much. I make sure I know it (the upcoming race) is there, what my goals are, and to only think about the day-to-day going into it (Athlete 3).*

Thinking too much about the race sometimes can have an adverse effect,

*If you think too much about a big event coming up, you get excited but then you get a little stressed. I seem to turn thinking about it too much into something negative and then it becomes pressure. Then I just lose energy because my body is stressed and it’s a waste of energy (Athlete 3).*

### **Focus During the Race**

The athletes spoke about the types of thoughts they have and what they are focused on during a race where their focus is good. Athlete 5 spoke of being on automatic once the race is underway,

*I am on automatic mode once the race starts. The first five minutes I am focused on getting a position and after that its like I’m not focused. It’s almost like I’m unfocused, or I’m focusing so hard that I’m not thinking about focusing. It’s all automatic. It’s not as deliberate as the preparation up to the race.*

Every mountain bike course is unique in the difficulty of the terrain and the amount of ascending and descending. For both ascending and descending the athletes spoke of the importance of focusing on staying relaxed, even more importantly for descending. To stay relaxed on a descent athlete 1 said, “I try to keep breathing. When there’s some really tight descents where I

feel it's a little dangerous, I just remind myself to keep breathing because sometimes I find myself holding my breath and going oh, oh, oops. Something as simple as breathing you can forget sometimes." The athletes mentioned self-reminders that they used to maintain their best focus in downhill sections. For example, they focused on things such as keeping to the most efficient lines picked during preriding, staying smooth, looking far ahead, not panicking, remembering to let it go (relaxing and letting the breaks go), and to keep pedalling.

Although the athletes spoke of how their focus changes or shifts slightly for ascending versus descending, they also all agreed that the technical part of riding the race should be somewhat automatic. "I'm not really thinking about the riding very much during the race because hopefully I've had enough time to ride the course and think over the sections beforehand so its just automatic and routine riding during the race", said athlete 10.

There is also a constant shifting between internal feelings and the external things happening in the race, such as the changing terrain or the jockeying for position with other riders. The athletes believed that in their best races, for the majority of the time, they are a more focused on their internal feelings and pace rather than externally focused on the other competitors.

However, the race is still a thinking race and involves some external focusing. Four athletes felt that when they were given time splits and therefore knew how far behind or ahead they were of their competitors it helped them to focus on would be best at that point in the race. As stated by athlete 10, "I'm really focused on getting the time splits from different people to see how much the time gaps are closing, if I'm gaining and

how many places I'm going to be able to move up. That's what I'm thinking about most during the race." Athlete 7 summed it up as follows,

*The start of the race is a combined effort, it's internal and its external. Its external because you need to watch what's going on around you, you need to watch the people you are racing. But it's internal because you need to be more aware of your own effort. If you get caught up in the external you can blow your engine. Or if you get caught up in the internal and the race can ride away from you, and you won't ever see it again. So the first thirty-five to forty-five minutes of a race is a much more precarious place. And in ten to thirty minutes you really assess it. You're still calculating who is having a great day, who is going hard, who's going to blow up. And at the end of the first lap you really make an assessment. Was that too fast? Was that too hard? How long was the first lap? It's a thinking race but meanwhile you're in complete oxygen debt. Anaerobically you're punched. So you have to also be looking inside and deciding what kind of day you're having. You're watching everybody else but you're also reading all your meters and levels. Then you get into the body of the race which is how am I going to pace myself to and cater to my strengths so that I can win or do the best I can. I think some people get carried away with all the emotion or they get into worrying at the beginning and either they are not internal enough, or they get too caught up in the external with the racing going on.*

### **Planning and Preparation.**

There was a consensus among the athletes that in order to reach and maintain their best focus, their preparation and planning in the weeks and days beforehand played a critical part in how mentally focused they would be during the race. Athlete 1 stated, "Good

preparation, knowing that when you start on the line that you haven't forgotten anything, your bike is perfect, you've done as much as you possibly can, nothing is bugging you, that helps me focus."

Logistical preparation was a key factor in helping the athletes to have the most focused mindset before a race. Arriving at the race site early, getting to know the course well, and making sure one's bike was working properly are examples of the kind of controlled preparation that helps facilitate good race focus,

*I was there (at the course site) eight days before the race so all I had to do was think about the time trial, the dirt crit (short dirt track criterion race). I get onto the course, get into the feeling on the bike, the feeling of the pedals turning beneath my legs. Getting towards the race I get on the course again and again, getting the feeling as if I'm in the race, trying each section out (Athlete 2)*

*I make sure my bike is good, working well. I got there about eight days before the race and made sure I knew the course like the back of my hand. I was constantly redoing every section. There was one day where it was horrible conditions, raining and there were people crashing all over the course. I was thinking, this might happen during the race so I'm going to go out there and test it out (Athlete 3)*

A race with good focus often grew naturally out of good preparation beforehand. A race without good focus was often linked to poor preparation leading up to the race or not respecting the preparation patterns that have worked for them. Not arriving early enough, not knowing the course well enough as well as other factors or distractions that took place before the start often interfered with a good race focus. Four athletes gave exam-

ples of situations that interfered with good focus,

*It is usually because of things that happen leading up to the start. Every time I think back to a race that went really bad, it really has been a physical problem that started it, whether I was sick or not rested. And the things that are most frustrating that can set me off are the things that are out of my control like travel, jet lag, and sometimes diet depending on where you are and what they feed you. So the things that are out of your control really bother me. It would be really great if you could have everything just like at home but it won't ever happen so just try and go with it. Stay relaxed and hopefully things won't bother you too much. (Athlete 1)*

*I flew in the last minute. I thought, I'm going to the Nationals, its nothing so I'll fly in Friday night, with seven hours of flying, totally last minute. I got there and didn't go out for my usual steak and rice or steak and pasta. I went out for some East Indian food. I wasn't taking it seriously mentally, or physically obviously because of the whole travelling and then eating wrong and then cruising around. Then we go warm up on the course and I was like ah, I just need to do a lap and it was super technical. I was unprepared in every possible way and I brought it on myself and I didn't even see that. Then the night before the race I didn't ice my legs so every single thing I did wrong to not have the focus for the race. It was everything I did before the start line that led to me not having the right focus. (Athlete 2)*

### **Physical Readiness Influences**

Before the race there are many things that the athletes consciously prepare in order to be as focused as possible going into competition (see Table 4). Such preparation included preparing their bike and water bot-

bles, choosing the correct tire selection according to weather conditions, getting to know the course and opponents, keeping themselves as relaxed as possible, and controlling their diet and amount of rest. However once the race was under way, getting into and maintaining one's best focus seemed to be a mixture of physical readiness, mental readiness and the ability to stay on task for the duration of the race. As athlete 5 stated, "To get everything to come together on race day is so hard. There are so many factors. So you've got some factors that are within your control and some that are not. So everything that is within your control you have to try and make positive and prepare."

The extent to which one was physically prepared, healthy, fit and rested shortly before the race, and how good they felt physically during the race was very much linked to having good mental focus for six athletes,

*I went in really well focused, did everything right at the beginning, went in really very well prepared mentally, prepared to do just the best race of my life. Then for whatever reason my body physically was not up to par, and I realized that in the first ten minutes that I wasn't having the race of my life. Its very, very frustrating because mentally you're expecting yourself to do really well, but physically there is something up and you're not. In the race situation all you know is that instead of winning maybe you're fifteenth And from there you can then spiral downwards pretty quickly because then if you lose your mental and on top of that you can just continue to have a bad race. One of the things I use for my mental imagery is about challenges. So that would be an example of a time where I would cue into myself and tell myself I love a challenge. And obviously this is going to be a challenge to finish the race in a*

*respectable position and to try and turn that around and bring it back. (Athlete 8).*

*If I compare a bad race, my focus was gone because my body was gone. It didn't matter how strong my brain or my mind was. I could finish. I could dig. I could plummet emotional depths. I could draw all the mental focus I wanted but I wasn't going fast because my body was gone. I was too fatigued to be able to concentrate. And that might be my thing. I need to have physical reserves that will allow me to dig deep. When there is no room for extra thinking and you're just struggling to make the time or the speed or to hang on to the wheels in front of you, you can't think about anything else. All you can think about is stopping. I think when I'm not fit and my results are not as good, my focus is not as good. Its like not being fresh, you don't have the ability or extra strength to draw your energy. You don't have the confidence. Your confidence and focus are tied together (Athlete 7).*

Two other athletes brought up situations where they had difficulties regaining an effective focus :

*I've had races sort of fall apart where you crash and you try and get back up and get going and you crash again, and it gets worse and then you lose concentration. You just try and get on your bike and go, you're not even thinking or anything. You're not relaxing. Your heart rate is going higher and you're going anaerobic trying to get up the hill or going down. You just lose it basically. Everything just scatters and you're all cut up, and it just falls apart and eventually you get to a point and you just say, oh fuck it (Athlete 9).*

*If you're not performing well at all then it's basically a downward spiral because you're feeling bad. Then you just totally lose focus*

*and you just think about quitting or what you're going to eat for dinner. My thoughts go off the race totally. Oh, I just can't wait for this to be over. Please give me a flat tire, stuff like that. How you're feeling leads to what kind of thoughts you start to have during the race. They go hand in hand. If I'm feeling good, then happy thoughts are with me when thinking about the race. If I'm feeling bad, then bad thoughts (Athlete 6).*

### **Post-Race Focus**

Five of the athletes spoke of taking time to evaluate the race afterwards. They spoke of analyzing what went well, what went poorly and what they could do to improve next time whether it be in race preparation or race strategy and pacing.

*After the race I think it's important to look back on your race. If you had a really good race its really important to look back and see what you did well. Even if you did do well (had a good result), maybe you performed poorly and everyone else performed even worse. Even if you won, you still may have been able to improve on things. And then if you didn't do well in the race, (its important to think about) your perception of what went badly, why was it that you didn't do well. Was it your focus? Was it what you ate? Was it the course? Were you too excited? Things like that. I think it's important to go back and look at it. But I also think that has to be done quickly and then to move on. Get information from it and use it but move on (Athlete 8)*

*After the race I really like to look at all the time gaps to the position where I finished and go through the race in my head. I look for all the places where maybe I lost a little time or I maybe could have pushed myself a little harder. I'll really go through the race and try to think of all the places where I*

*could still improve in the course or in my strategy (Athlete 10).*

### **Refocusing**

In the sport of mountain biking racing there is a high probability that something will happen which will cause the racer to suddenly be brought to a complete stop momentarily in the middle of a fast paced race. The most common occurrences that can temporarily cause the racer to be sidelined are 1) flat tires and other mechanical problems with the bike, or 2) a crash. In these situations, the racer is instantly forced to refocus their thoughts and energy from the race to an unexpected flat tire or a painful crash and then shift focus again to get back into the race again.

### **Flat Tires**

When it comes to something like a flat tire, the athletes stressed the importance of practicing how to change a flat tire before it occurs in a big race. When faced with a flat tire during a race, the athletes emphasized the importance of remaining calm, easing back into the pace of the race slowly, and staying positive about the rest of the race,

*What I've learned is that you have to start back slowly, not to go crazy right off the bat getting your legs huge and full of lactate. So you just start easy again and try to be relaxed about it. Okay, I've lost so many positions but hopefully I can come back. You have to try and look at it in a positive way like I just got a rest, I had something to drink, stretched out. There's really no positive way to look at getting a flat tire but I guess you can try (to make the best out of it) (Athlete 1).*

*Basically I find that you just have to slow everything down. You have to turn the adrenaline switch off. You might have it (adrenaline) going when you're changing*



*your tire but when you hop on the bike you have to rethink. Sure you could punch it and make up the time by doing the fastest lap out of anyone on the course which is usually what happens. But you have to breathe deeply and just slow it all down. Start going back at it and get the positive feelings from the course. Because if you hop on the bike and you got the adrenaline going, you become erratic. You're not focused on the task at hand and what's in front of you and the trail. So I find that if I just slow it down and even though I may have lost ten spots, just slowly work on picking people off, each person in front of you as a goal, to slowly reel them in and just drop them (Athlete 2).*

### **Crashes**

A second common situation that can suddenly throw one's focus off momentarily is a crash where you are thrown off your bike and possibly end up in some pain. Athlete 4 described what it is sometimes like to crash during a mountain bike race, "For like half an hour it's as if you're just sitting in a chair and someone is hitting you with a crow bar. On top of the pain, you're also sitting on a bike with a heart rate of one-hundred and eighty". After crashes you can keep on going but sometimes it can be questionable whether it is wise to continue.

The athletes also talked about the importance of slowing down for a moment to refocus after a crash. In a race there is the race adrenaline which is telling you to get back going as fast as possible. The athletes spoke about the importance of slowing down their breathing in order to refocus and get back into the rhythm of the race again, as well as taking the time to make sure they were not seriously injured,

*I've had many times where something will happen and it totally blows you off. It could be a person crashing into you, could be just*

*a crash, could be a mechanical. I have a key phrase which is, "I love a challenge", and when I start dwelling on it (a problem), I just say to myself, "I love a challenge and ya, just go for it!". In Mazatland I crashed really hard on the first lap. I was in second, right with the leader, and I just lost it and did a huge superman right down the descent. I got back up, got back on the bike, and the whole drive train was all wrapped around itself. So I unwrapped it, got back on the bike again and the seat was just totally bent right out of whack. So I was getting on (the bike) going, "oh no, what am I going to do?". And then I thought, "No, I love a challenge" and then I just attacked and that was it. I just ignored it (the seat) for the rest of the race. It's interesting when you can do that and keep that from affecting you. Ya, you're a little bit sore the next day but I still finished fourth (Athlete 8).*

*With a crash your heart rate just goes way high. That whole ten second motion of about to crash, to crashing, to fully off your bike, to rolling around, to picking your bike up, you've held your breath for ten to fifteen seconds so your heart rate has gone up, your adrenaline is pumping. You just gotta get on and just refocus. Focus on slowing down your breathing and realizing that it is not the end of the world because its not. You've still got the rest of the race (Athlete 2).*

### **Focus and Training**

When asked how their training focus compared to their race focus, the athletes indicated they practiced the kind of focus needed for racing in several different ways. Athletes 1, 3, 8, and 10 mentioned that they practiced race focus in training by pushing oneself to suffer like one would in a race during training, simulating race situations during interval training, practicing positive key words and self-talk in training to be

used in racing, visualizing feeling strong in upcoming races while training and using smaller training races to prepare for bigger races. Athlete 7 summed how focus is practiced in training, “In training you put things together in small packages and then you put those packages into bigger packages until you get to the race.”

*For example, if you're doing intervals and you've been working on your pedal stroke, and you've been thinking 'push pull' as in circles. You need to remember that in races so in your training rides during your intervals you just say those to yourself, "ok, push pull, push pull" or during your interval you say "attack, attack, or focus", "I'm strong", "I'm good, I can win", or "aggression". If you say these key words as you're doing your interval; number one, they should help your interval go better because you're getting into your race zone, and two, it becomes a little bit more innate in that hopefully the key words will come naturally when you're racing hard. I find that when you're racing hard there is very little blood flow going to your brain. You almost have to brainwash yourself beforehand to actually think of stuff and to overcome the negative feeling of, "oh I don't feel very good", or "this is a hard hill", or "it's really hot today", or "I should be beating that person". All those negative things need to be off set by the positives. I have positive phrases that I've made up for myself and they are very general, mostly about working hard and keeping focused and pushing, or attacking, or going as hard as I can. I sat down and I made these phrases, and then slowly I use them in practice. And that takes time because I have to remember that you want to use them in practice, and then I have to physically do it during practice. And I forget if I don't keep reminding myself. So it's hard work. Then as you do it again and again it becomes more*

*natural. That's why you kind of need to start at the beginning of the year. Its not something where you just on a Friday can get psyched up for Sunday's race, and then Monday to Thursday don't ever think about the things you've done. It's something that you really have to practice. (Athlete 8).*

*I think that race focus compares to training focus. I like to know a couple days ahead how my training is going to be so I can mentally prepare for that and plan my day. For a lot of my training rides I repeat different loops and I keep a record of my times to see if I'm improving. That's what I focus on during my rides to keep it going. I do a lot of focusing for racing in training. While I'm training I think about all the races I have coming up, and just going through them in my head as much as I can which motivates me for my training. I think about all the races I have coming up and just try to visualize how I want to be doing at those races, visualize feeling really strong in those races while training (Athlete 10).*

Some athletes found that race focus could be simulated in training for certain situations. For example, long, hard training rides can be used to simulate some of the preparation needed for a race. Others mentioned they practiced their race focus when they were using a race for training. However, it is important to note that in some segments of training the goal is to taper or to go easier.

*The whole focusing for racing is different than the training I'd say for me. When I go train there is a feeling of feeling good, like when I'm ready to peak for a race but that's different because usually I'm not training through that portion. But say I'm in a three week training block, there's no racing, the way I focus is just this is my job, its going to really suck. This is what I have to do to make money to be able to do what I do. I*

*think a lot like that. Okay, I've gotta do this this week and its going to be even harder next week but I'm going to see good form the weekend after and then I'm going to have those positive feelings. Have a good race and feel good about myself and maybe get some money (Athlete 2).*

*Sometimes if I'm doing some big epic ride and I'm doing it with other top riders, then we're going to be out there a long time, its going to be hard so I'll do all the things. I make sure I don't eat too close beforehand, that I eat enough. I make sure I bring water, I make sure I'm drinking. So it is kind of like practicing racing. But I don't go out on a solo ride and go okay, I'm going to go through all the stuff like before a race because its not like race. Whereas if I go out with other people and its going to be intense or if I do practice races that are races but they're not important to me, that's sort of similar (Athlete 5).*

Athlete 6 brought up how racing is much more emotional than training which makes racing difficult to simulate in training. Therefore training races are a means of simulating the emotional component of racing,

*The training, it seems to be totally different from the racing because you don't get the feelings involved that you do with racing because racing is quite emotional. Leading up to the race there's a lot of hype and excitement around. When you're at home by yourself there's none of those feelings involved so it's a totally different feeling. It's harder too (to focus for training as compared to racing). When I'm at home a lot I'll just do training races and stuff instead of doing the training. Training races help me get motivated and focused for training because you can get a better simulation of the race instead of being by yourself and*

*trying to duplicate it. Its good to go to just a small regional race and you can still get the feeling. There's a lot of people around and you get people to push you to a higher level because sometimes when you're by yourself, you'll do a workout and you'll just be like ugh, I don't want to do this. But when you're around other people, they're pushing you to dig deeper and race hard.*

### **Improving Focus**

When asked if they felt they presently had good mental focus, four out of ten athletes responded with a confident yes, while the remaining six were still hoping to improve their mental focus. For example, athlete 2 thought he could have better mental focus when dealing with an injury, athlete 3 wanted to improve upon not being so easily distracted and reacting emotionally to situations, and athlete 9 thought his mental focus could be better at big qualifying races.

When asked if there were any areas they were working on to improve their mental focus, either to increase their present level of performance or performance consistency, nine out of ten athletes mentioned specific things they were working on or would like to work on. Three out of the ten athletes mentioned wanting to improve their confidence in their preparation, their training and their technical and physical racing ability,

*I think you're always trying to work on your confidence. There's always a bit of doubt coming into races, whether you feel like you're going to do well or not. Another part you can always work on is just maintaining focus throughout the middle of the race. There's always a time in the middle of the race where's there's a little bit of a lull. You sometimes let down a little bit and start thinking about how much longer the race is and thinking I'm not feeling too well. So its important to work on being able to just focus*

*on pushing through that and being confident right until the end. I don't think it (confidence) is something you can consciously work on during a race. I think you can work on just getting ready, visualizing, knowing that you're going to have those kind of feelings during the race. Just recognizing that it is going to happen, and coming into a race with confidence....confidence can be a very fragile thing. It comes with experience, having confidence that you've been training well and have taken care of your preparation, and other things (Athlete 10).*

All athletes were working on very individual aspects of focus in order to improve the quality and consistency of their performance. Improving focus included working on technical skills and diet, mental focus for riding in the rain, analyzing races better and applying more mental skills and tools, keeping training routines during the race season, training better, taking care of yourself and increasing motivation to push 100%:

*I think it's really important that consistency is there, that you're always focused and always doing the same thing. This is better than having a really good day and then three races where you just have zero focus. I've always been very consistent so I want to keep it that way. But I want to be able to work on my focus so that I can reach that prime focus where I go above and beyond my capacities and reach that one hundred percent more easily. I think it (consistency) comes with practice and through working with a Sport Psychologist. If your motivation is good then the intensity of your training is good. If the intensity of your training is good, your fitness and performance will be at a higher level. All that starts with motivation. And I think before that is focus because if you're not focused, you're not*

*going to have the motivation to ride. So I think it's all intertwined (Athlete 8).*

*For me to ride technically well more consistently would be the best thing I could do right now to improve my performance. I think my preparation there is the problem. I'm not doing enough technical riding in my actual training. I always avoid doing it because I don't like doing it alone. It's mostly during racing that I ride single track. I know I'm capable of doing it because I've done it and after a few days I improve a lot. Diet I think is also a really big thing. I'm learning this year a couple things about my diet. Things like allergies or tolerance to certain foods is huge because I think after all the years of shovelling huge amounts of food through your body, your organs and your digestive system have done a lot of work. I'm in my tenth year now of cycling. So I'm just starting to figure out a lot of stuff out and going good. My body is developed. I'm developed as much as I'm going to be now at twenty-five. You have to take care of yourself. You have to eat well, sleep good. God knows, you've seen the posture on some of these bike riders after ten years. It's not attractive. So it's a bit of a compromise there. The years help you but if you don't take care of yourself they can hurt you too (Athlete 1).*

### **Changes over Race Career and Race Course**

Eight of the ten athletes had been mountain bike racing nine to twelve years. The other two have been mountain bike racing four and five years but they both were road bike racers for five to ten years before switching to mountain bike racing, which has many skills that are transferable to mountain biking. Now that the athletes are at the professional level, some talked about how their focus has changed and progressed from their beginnings in the sport until now. When

racing is your job there can be more pressure put on your placing. “There’s more pressure for placing and outcome now. There’s no security so you’re fighting for a job” (Athlete 2). As athlete 7 succinctly summed it up, “It’s a natural progression, when your hobby becomes a job, you then go to positioning. Then you go to money and you waver back and forth. But you have to do it in the end because you enjoy it.”

Athlete 4 talked about the changing demands he’s faced throughout his career,

*It went from fun riding to professional riding. The sponsors want me to do well. The CCA wants me to go do this race and this race and I don’t have much say. The other thing is that races are just so much harder than they used to be. If I compare racing Quebec Cups as a junior to racing World Cups as a senior in 2000 where the calibre is just crazy, the whole racing aspect is definitely different. There are so many more variables to take into account from travelling logistics, media, and having everything ready for the race. You have to think one month in advance to get registered for a World Cup. You have to figure out where you’re going to sleep and who you’re going to go with. So it’s more of a job now than it used to be.*

Athlete 9 described how his focus has changed in races as he has improved as a racer,

*When I first started racing mountain bikes it was like, my god, am I going to be able to stay on my bike? Am I even going to be able to ride the stuff that these guys are riding? And then when I figured that out, it was like ok well my technical ability is pretty good and I can survive the races with these guys. Then I was more focusing on who I’m racing against, how I can beat them, or if I could*

*beat them, finding out their weaknesses, just through knowing them, whether they be climbing or descending or abilities in different weather conditions. I know people don’t like certain conditions and who likes what conditions, who goes good in what conditions. I can sort of focus on them by either trying to stay with them if I’m not too sure what’s going on, or trying to stay ahead of them if I’m pretty confident you can beat them. So definitely it (my focus) has changed since I started. Where before I was more concerned about finishing or completing an event, now I’m more concerned about winning.*

The pressure and enjoyment levels can also change over the course of an athlete’s career. Athlete 1 talked about how he felt he’d come full circle in this respect,

*When I was a junior I wasn’t worried about the outcome. I was just there to go my hardest. Now there’s more pressure to perform when I’m on a big team. On these bigger teams when you’re around a lot more of the successful athletes I learn more and more that they’re not so worried about the results and that they (good results) just come. It’s always harder when you’re trying to make a breakthrough when a breakthrough is all you need. So I guess it sort have has come full circle again for me from when I was a junior until now. I felt less pressure when I first started too because it just wasn’t serious. Then there was that struggle period in between where I was feeling like ah, I have to get a better result and justify why I’m doing this. Now I feel like its okay, I’ve relaxed and results are still coming.*

In response to the question of how their mental focus has improved or changed over the course of their racing career, some unique answers were given as well as some

common ones. Some examples of the unique changes in focus included the aspects of learning to redefine what 100% is, increased sacrifice while maintaining balance, better preparation, better relaxation skills, better ability to keep the proper perspective, knowing how to analyze better, and racing smarter.

*I think when you first start racing you push yourself, but you push yourself maybe to ninety percent and the more you race and the more you learn about yourself, the more often you can push yourself to one hundred percent. I can't push myself one hundred percent easily and I don't do it every race. So when I do it's a really good race for me. I think when you hit a certain pain level, your body just tells you that's it. And in most cases it's kind of like you hit a V in the road and you subconsciously make the decision of whether to go harder or whether to slow down or keep the same pace. If you choose the safe route then you're not going to blow up. You'll probably finish the race in a respectable position but what you need to do if you're not winning is to choose that other option which is to go that extra two or three percent and risk failure. Because it's possible that you could blow a gasket and not finish the race or all of a sudden have to crawl back. But if you do succeed you will probably really succeed through having pushed yourself that two or three percent more than you would have. I think it's really hard for me to make that decision and more often that not, I subconsciously take the safer route for whatever reason that is, whether it's a confidence thing, or a motivation thing, or just lack of wanting to go. That's why I say my mental focus is only a seven or an eight. Right now every race I don't know when I'm hitting that V. After the race is over I look back and think, "Ok, I could have gone harder there", or "I probably should have decided to go harder there*

*when that person attacked, I should have counter-attacked", things like that. And a lot of times it's just telling myself, "don't think, just go." I think when I first started I never rode one hundred percent during a race. It was always the safe race. Even though physically, you're exhausted at the end of the race, you don't have the ability yet to push yourself that hard. Now I think I realize that there is a distinction and I have been able to go beyond that. I think when I began was like kindergarten and now I feel like I'm in university. And it's just the finer points of all aspects of the focus I've improved upon (Athlete 7).*

### **Athletes Suggestions for Developing Focus**

The final question posed to the athletes was whether they had any advice for someone up and coming in their sport on how to develop their best focus. The athletes noted that developing focus is an individual pursuit, but they also offered advice that can definitely speed up the process. Most advice centered on the aspects of learning through trial and error, learning proper race preparation and keeping a healthy perspective as to why you compete in the sport. Athlete 1 felt that developing focus is a very individual journey,

*I think it is a very individual thing. The way people learn and the way they develop is very personalized. At a junior age I didn't have much guidance. When I think about anybody who has been over coached and over taught, especially at a young age, a lot of them have just quit. You look at somebody like Greg LeMond and actually his life experience. He learned a lot for himself. He did a lot of things on his own and was more of a free spirit, kind of a corny cliché, but he did a lot of that. So he developed into a super champion. Everyone has got talent. You've got talent. I've got talent. Sometimes you just don't improve for a few years for*

*whatever reasons and it's how you come through that (Athlete 1).*

Other athletes also felt that developing focus was individual and they had several suggestions to give such as preparation advice, visualization techniques, learning through talking to others, not comparing yourself to others, reading books on sport psychology, and the importance of learning through trial and error,

*I think it is individual (developing focus). I mean I have lots of suggestions for juniors and I've helped out a lot of juniors. I tell them what to focus on and what I think might develop their ability to focus. I talk about preparing, about diet, and how that will help them. I think by just telling them that, they think about it. I think that helps build their confidence and focus. I might suggest breathing exercises when they're sitting at home. And then labelling yourself, like I'm a wolf. I think that's a good way to teach somebody about focus. Start off that way, the breathing and relaxing, and thinking of yourself as a racer, what animal you'd want to be when your out on the course and then how that would work with your racing (Athlete 2).*

*It's so individual. I think that you just need to find (possibilities) and experiment. So just take every chance and talk to people, not being afraid to talk. Pick someone's brain, it's not a bad thing and a lot of people want to share it. If someone came up to me and asked me questions I'm going to be more than happy to share some of my experience, so not to be afraid if you have questions to ask them (Athlete 4).*

*Go through things methodically. Get a pattern on how you prepare step by step for a race and follow that. It takes a bit of time because you'll learn through trial and error*

*what works best for you. I think visualizing the course and the whole positive thing is really important. The biggest thing I can say when I see people coming up is not to compare themselves to others. It's like when you talk about heart rates. You can't compare my heart rate to a top male rider's heart rate. You have to look at where you are at one point and where you are at the next point. That's what you want to know, where you're at, what you want to be, what you've got to do and not anybody else. It's like anything when you establish small goals. When you get something finished by breaking it up into small tasks you feel great. Well you can break your race prep up into small tasks, then when you know that you've done everything that you can up to that day ... and don't think about anyone else. Then you will start to reach your goals (Athlete 5).*

Athletes 3, 6, and 7 emphasized keeping things in perspective,

*Keep perspective. It is bike racing and it's a lot more pleasurable if you make it fun. You need to take as much experience from others and from all the road races as you can and keep it fun. It can't be fun all the time but not to be scared of having a fun moment or having a fun day. Keep perspective. You've got two legs and two arms. Having a quadriplegic neighbour definitely put a lot of perspective on stuff for me. Find something to bring you back down to earth if you think you are not totally there, or if you could get too caught up into it, go back in the real world for a couple of days and just keep perspective (Athlete 3).*

*I would say that you have to really remember why you're doing it. You need to do it because you love it. You need to be patient and when you can honestly say that you've done everything in your powers to prepare,*

*and you're confident about that, then all you need to do is to focus. You need to do all your homework, and all of your research, and have all the ability and faith that you've prepared properly. Then you focus it all through your bicycle and that's your focus (Athlete 7).*

*Just stay calm because there is no point on wasting energy being nervous. I tell people that at the end of the day, it's just a bike race. Perspective, and staying calm (Athlete 6).*

### **Integration and Conclusions**

This study advanced our knowledge on how elite athletes perceive, define and direct their focus. To prepare an optimal focus for racing, athletes talked about how they planned ahead of time how they would focus for different points in the race. For example, athlete 10 described how his focus changes over the duration of the race as follows,

*Part of my race strategy is to start off at an even pace and not go out too hard. So right off the start you have to worry about getting a good position. During the first thirty seconds I try to move up a little bit and then just focus on relaxing and not getting caught up in using any excess energy fighting someone for position after that. Because it's just a waste of energy at the start to try and gain one or two spots when at the end you can make it up no problem. So the first lap or two of any race I just try and focus on staying relaxed, just spinning and not wasting energy. The way I race I'm really focused on maintaining a steady pace and watching my heart rate. And then as the race moves on, it's usually easier to move through people which helps because when you're passing people you feel a lot better. Towards the latter point of the race it is important to keep pressing and not slow down to the pace of the people you are*

*passing. I have to try and focus on maintaining my pace and moving forward as much as I can towards the end.*

There is a constant shifting back and forth from internal to external focus as described by athlete 7,

*The start of the race is a combined effort, it's internal and its external. Its external because you need to watch what's going on around you, you need to watch the people you are racing. But it's internal because you need to be more aware of your own effort. If you get caught up in the external you can blow your engine. Or if you get caught up in the internal and the race can ride away from you, and you won't ever see it again. So the first thirty-five to forty-five minutes of a race is a much more precarious place. And in ten to thirty minutes you really assess it. You're still calculating who is having a great day, who is going hard, who's going to blow up. And at the end of the first lap you really make an assessment. Was that too fast? Was that too hard? How long was the first lap? It's a thinking race but meanwhile you're in complete oxygen debt. Anaerobically you're punched. So you have to also be looking inside and deciding what kind of day you're having. You're watching everybody else but you're also reading all your meters and levels. Then you get into the body of the race which is how am I going to pace myself to and cater to my strengths so that I can win or do the best I can. I think some people get carried away with all the emotion or they get into worrying at the beginning and either they are not internal enough, or they get too caught up in the external with the racing going on.*

Athletes can prepare themselves for the shifting of focus that goes on during a race as described by athlete 8,



*When I'm pre-riding the courses usually I decide which areas are good for attacking, standing up, sitting down, doing certain things with the bike, going smooth etc. Then it's just a matter of reminding myself before the race starts and then remembering during the race. Even different strategies per lap, deciding what the goal of the first lap is going to be, second, third, fourth, and then following through on that in the race.*

The athletes also spoke about different types of focus that they consciously shifted into for different parts of the race. For example, the athletes mentioned the importance of remaining relaxed while climbing, and more critically, while descending,

*Its good to stay relaxed while climbing and descending but I'd say even more importantly when you're descending. I try to keep breathing. When there's some really tight descents where I feel it's a little dangerous, I just remind myself to keep breathing (Athlete 1).*

The athletes also used positive self-talk and self-reminders to maintain an effective focus throughout the race. There is a continual shifting between how the athlete is feeling internally (ie. heart rate, target pace), where the competition is in relation to them (ie. position, time splits from leaders etc.), when to eat or drink (ie. its more important to focus on drinking in the heat), and what to focus on for descents (relaxing, looking ahead, breathing) or climbing (staying relaxed, keeping pace).

### **Extending Capacity of Focus**

An athlete's focus can be more limited at the beginning of their career in comparison to ten years later as a professional. As athlete 10 mentioned,

*When I first started I had to focus a lot more on just getting to the race and making my bike work perfectly. Now that I'm on a big team I don't have to worry about that, I'm able to just focus entirely on feeling good for the race.*

The limits of focus can be extended with experience. For example athlete 9 talked about how, when he first started racing, all his attention was focused on staying on his bike, and whether he would be able to technically ride the whole course. When his technical ability improved enough, it enabled him to focus more on fine tuning his strategy depending on who the competition would be and what the weather and trail conditions would be. Athlete 10 also talked about the focus needed for technical skills in the beginning,

*I think the first two or three years when I was still improving on my technical skills it (technical riding) was more of a focus but now I think after two or three years I was at a sufficient level for all the big races. There's nothing that's going to really scare me or break my focus mentally on the race courses, it's all fairly routine in the races.*

The same athlete talked about what he was able to shift his focus to once he didn't need to focus so much on his technical riding,

*I'm not really thinking about riding very much during the race because hopefully I've had enough time to ride the course and think over the sections beforehand so its just automatic and routine riding through the course during the race. I'm more focusing on drinking and getting the liquids down, how far in front of me the next people are and maintaining the gaps. I'm really focused on getting the time splits from different people to see how much the time gaps are closing, if I'm gaining and how many places*

*I'm going to be able to move up. That's what I'm thinking about during most of the race.*

This study confirms that athletes are able to accurately report their focus across varying situations, and that they can describe focus accurately through self-analysis and language. Although skills that once required much conscious attention became automatized at the level they are at now, (ie. Technical riding skills, tire changing skills), they were still able to self-report these processes by reflecting on their initial experiences in the sport as illustrated by the following quote from athlete 9,

*I remember the first time I flatted I was trying to fix it and I was having so many problems with my gloves getting all wrapped in the tire bead and all this crazy stuff going on. Now it's like automatic, you get a flat; Ok I take my gloves off. I try to ride as long as I can and get everything ready so when I stop I can go right into changing the flat.*

As the athlete advances and gains experience in their sport, less conscious focus is needed for the basics, although they should never be forgotten, and more focus can be given to refining and finding ways to continually improve or get the edge. As their daily life and performance becomes more routine, the athletes can turn more of their attention into fine tuning their focus and mental game.

All athletes in this study experienced anxiety, doubts and distractions at one time or another. They all developed different focusing skills to combat distractions, anxiety, negative thoughts and negative feelings. For example, they developed precise and methodical preparation skills for racing in order to combat distracting anxiety and build confidence as illustrated by athlete 10,

*I think it's just being completely prepared and knowing exactly what's going to happen that gets me in a relaxed state, getting all the anxiety out of the way by knowing the whole course, knowing my bike is working well and having planned out my strategy for the race.*

Through focused practice and learning from experience, the skills developed become automatic more easily, to the point that one can trust their own preparation and abilities,

*If you stress out or you're thinking too hard, that's when you start to make mistakes. When I just let the ten years I've spent developing my skills go by instinct, then it flows a lot better for me.*

The present study suggests that as the athletes gain increased mastery over their technical and mental skills, they are free to enter a higher level of focusing and begin to fine tune their performance by focusing on the right things. The athletes in the present study described many improvements and refinements they had made in their focusing skills over the course of their sport career. Their detailed descriptions show that they became increasingly effective in their focusing skills and were committed to the continued improvement and refinement of their focusing skills.

### **Reflections**

Focus, and in particular competition focus, is the result of the sum total of an athlete's prior training and preparation. As athlete 1 said, "Focus, I believe, is like a sum of all the things you've been through." An athlete begins with a vision or goal, and focuses on attaining those goals. There is a link between focus and goals, as identified by Athlete 4,

*I think it (focus) goes with motivation. That's the main drive. You have to set your goals before your training year or racing season. And once you know what you want to do, that gets you the most focused.*

Focus is a part of every step you take. Focus is required to manage every aspect of a high performance athlete's day, with continual attention to daily goals and planning ahead keeping the long-term vision in mind. Gaining a high quality focus is an ongoing learning process. Elite athletes engage in a process that centers on continuing to learn about their body and mind as they attempt to do what helps to make them feel best and be enter their best performance focus. Answers are sought to questions that will allow them to become their best, such as : How much sleep do I need every night to feel my best and to be able to put my best effort into my training? What kinds of foods do I need to eat every day in order to meet my individual nutritional needs? What activities should I be involved in inside and outside of my training and how will they impact my training and racing? How can I enter and maintain my best focus for the duration on my performance?

Athlete 7 touched on the encompassing texture of the word focus,

*Focus is an interesting word. It's like a focal point of so many aspects of sport. You're talking about the mental focus but its interestingly tied to the physical preparation. And then everything else is all percentages and pieces of the puzzle. The focus is just what comes out when the puzzle is all put together. It might not be the right puzzle. You can change your pieces around and try a new focus, a new combination. But it is what shows up at the race when you've done all your homework and all your*

*preparation, and all your distractions are put aside.*

As focus develops, certain things become automatic and more instinctual over time. For example, the athletes talked about how changing a flat tire becomes instinctual and automatic after enough practice. Other examples of "pieces of the puzzle" that can become automatic are going to bed at the appropriate time, eating well and adding certain elements into training such as stretching and positive mental preparation. After a certain amount of practice, less conscious effort is required to focus well and perform well. Focus becomes more fluid and natural when you know how you want to focus and practice doing it. As training quality and intensity increases over an athlete's career, the ability to focus for longer periods of time also increases in training and racing.

When beginning mountain bike training it takes more concerted concentration just to learn the basics and get through the course safely. Through continued practice, certain aspects of preparation routines become habit and there is an increased emphasis on learning what to focus on, or not to focus on, during training and competition in order to attain the highest quality training and performance.

Preparation strategies are very individual. Going into a competition some athletes prefer to surround themselves with others in order to distract themselves from their own nervousness. Athlete 8 talked about the importance of knowing how one focuses best,

*For an internal focuser, like myself, if I'm distracted externally then I'll just lose my concentration and forget my strategies. We travel a lot together as teams. It's interesting to realize that other people perform better under different circumstances*

*than me. For example, my teammate is more of an external focuser. So the two of us can't really spend a race morning too much together. If I don't talk to her then she'll just be too nervous, and if she talks to me then I'll forget what I'm doing. So we know that about each other so it helps us, which is kind of neat.*

Through racing and reflection the athletes learn what focusing techniques help them to stay positive and focused in all sorts of different race situations such as a bad start, a crash, a mechanical problem, and weather conditions such as muddy or dry, cold or hot.

### **Issues of Balance**

Discovering the best focus is also about athletes finding the best balance within their lives. For example, one athlete might find they focus best by being a full-time athlete, if given the opportunity and support to do so. Others might find they focus best while pursuing other interests such as school or a career concurrently. The extent to which one respects different parts of their life, or feels good about experiencing a sense of balance, may be an individual matter. However in the long run, keeping a sense of joy, balance or perspective in one's pursuits and life is extremely important. Some athletes in this study valued balance, and continued to develop other parts of their life and pursue other interests during their competitive years. Athlete 2 talked about the importance of balance to him,

*I think I have a really good balance and that's the way I approach the sport. I've got a lot of friends outside of cycling and I'm glad I have that because if you make this (mountain bike racing) your life you can miss out on a lot. I haven't missed out on anything growing up, the teenage years, and in my twenties. And I see what some of the*

*guys have missed and how they deal with society. Like you look at a top male rider, at the bar at the Worlds, no one to talk to. He can't talk to anyone, no social skills. He's burned everyone's bridges, no one to hang out with.*

Some athletes focus solely on their sport and restricted participating in anything else that might interfere with their sport performance. One athlete commented that this kind of focus would mean great sacrifice,

*The person would sacrifice anything for whatever he's doing. The guy with the best focus, like the top male riders, they'll do anything. Like I know for a fact, (top male rider), he won Nappa, a really fast guy, the guy lives for his bike. It's all focus. He doesn't do anything. Everything is devoted to make his legs faster and to make him faster. Everything is related to how it will affect his race. Every single day of that guys year is planned out, rest days, everything. He wouldn't dare think of eating a tenth of a chocolate bar or a coke. All he does...he's focusing on everything that he thinks makes him a champion. He does psychological preparation too to relax himself, mental imagery for thinking about the next race, the next task at hand, the next interval. He sacrifices everything and that's what makes him a great champion.*

Great focus also means one is fully committed to their sporting goals as well as fully confident in themselves, as illustrated in the following quotes by athletes,

*A great focus would be to just be totally confident in yourself. If you don't feel 100%, not to panic and just deal with that. So a great focus would be to just trust yourself. A great focus would be to be so confident in yourself that nothing will stop you, and being confident in yourself comes from a*

*whole bunch of stuff that a person has figured out that they need. Therefore they've done everything they've had to and they're just focused and calm because they are totally confident and they know what they can do. I think that would be the ideal focus (Athlete 4).*

*I think great focus is having self-confidence but recognizing your limitations. If someone has that, they are confident in their abilities that they've already got but recognize the things they need to work on. (Athlete 5)*

*Someone who has great focus is completely relaxed. At the race they are not fidgeting at all at the start line or jumping around. You can see they're just completely calm and ready to race. They're not running around before the race stressing out about different things. They're just very calm and methodical and ready to race (Athlete 10)*

Great focus was also described by two athlete as similar to Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi's (1999) definition of flow and Orlick's definition of focused connection: a state of connection where one becomes totally absorbed in what one is doing, to the exclusion of all other thoughts and emotions,

*My best performance, I believe I have had such focus that I am actually performing instinctively and subconsciously. If you actually asked what I was thinking I would say my head was empty of thought. When this happens, it is the ultimate focus (Athlete 5).*

*You need to love what you're doing, love mountain biking, enjoy it, and focus on that, focus on the course, focus on being the best you can. If all those things are met then I*

*believe that you can show up and you can attack a course, and be almost like Zen or in the zone where your focus is where you don't hear anything. You don't see anything. You're just following that wheel, or you don't even see that, you just see the course. You don't even see the time. Your ride is completely effortless. The hills aren't even there. That's sort of the perfect focus (Athlete 7).*

So focus comes back to connection with individual goals and how much you want to achieve the goal(s) you are pursuing. Your focus is what guides your energy and your motivation.

### **Questions for reflection:**

How willing are you to focus your day and life in ways that will allow you to fully pursue your personal and performance goals?

How willing are you to be disciplined with your mind, body, eating, preparation, focus, training and sleeping habits?

How committed are you to keep the joy in your pursuits?

Sport offers a wonderful medium for developing positive and effective mental skills for enhancing life. Training and performing in sports (and the performing arts) are among of the best ways to nurture self awareness, self-discipline, joy and high quality focusing skills Through these kinds of activities you are challenged to push your limits, to gain a better understanding of the nature of focus, to find reasons to continue with your pursuit and to overcome many obstacles along the road to developing one's best and most joyful focus.

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## **Elements of Talent Development Across Domains**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this review was to analyze models of talent development and case summaries of elite performers for common talent development elements across domains. The Wheel of Excellence (Orlick, 2000) and the Pyramid of Success (Wooden & Jamison, 1997) are two well-known models that were selected for analysis. Across the two models and the 25 case summaries, eight common talent development elements were found: (a) commitment, (b) confidence, (c) desire, (d) focused connection, (e) genetics, (f) ongoing learning, (g) opportunity, and (h) support systems. Each element is best viewed as a composite of several related concepts that are often described in the literature. A description of each element, its related concepts, and a supporting example from one of the case summaries, is provided. Based on the present review, no single model of talent development appears to capture the complete range of internal and external elements required to fully develop talent.

## **Elements of Talent Development Across Domains**

Talent development has been an active and challenging field of study in recent years. Many practitioners and researchers believe that identifying talent can lead to future success, and therefore it is an important area of inquiry. There exists an on-going debate over the contribution of genetic attributes (nature) versus environmental factors (nurture) in the development of talent (Ceci & Williams, 1999). The nature versus nurture conundrum poses several important implications for developing talent. If talent is mostly natural or genetically pre-determined, then parents, teachers, and coaches can do little to influence talent development, as important talent elements such as personality and intelligence may already be preset at birth (Cohen, 1999). On the other hand, if talent is largely developed by nurturing abilities, acquiring expertise, and pursuing excellence, then parents, teachers, and coaches are critical to the development of talent (Bloom, 1985; Ericsson, 1996). Important decisions in the home, at school, and in training programs are made every day on the basis of which account is accepted.

Howe, Davidson, and Sloboda (1998) reviewed current research on the concept of innate talent and acknowledged evidence of early skill emergence, special capacities to acquire specific abilities, and biological involvement in exceptional skills. They suggested, however, that childhood experiences, interests, opportunities, parental support, extensive training and deliberate practice were the real determinants of excellence, and rejected the innate talent account in favor of equal opportunity to nurture excellence. Rowe (1998) in direct response to Howe et al., suggested that genetic differences determine talent because regardless of the amount of practice accrued, most people

will never “hit a tennis ball like Pete Sampras, sing like the Three Tenors, solve a differential equation like the late physicist Richard Feynman, or program a computer like Microsoft’s founder, Bill Gates” (p. 421).

Although the debate continues without the likelihood of a short-term, scientifically based, definitive answer, the most commonly held view is that talent is a special combination of nature and nurture (Singer & Janelle, 1999). There is a strong belief that talented individuals, regardless of their domain, have a genetic advantage, and also must work hard under optimal practice conditions to excel. Therefore, both nature and nurture affect talent development, and parents, teachers, and coaches can all play important roles in facilitating the acquisition of expertise and the pursuit of excellence (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998).

## **Talent, Success, and Excellence**

The goal of talent development is to achieve success or excellence in a chosen domain. Success or excellence can be personally defined and will vary across individuals and domains. However, the approach used to achieve success or excellence may be similar for all domains. Two individuals who are internationally renowned for their contributions to developing talent are performance enhancement consultant Terry Orlick and basketball coach John Wooden. Terry Orlick (Orlick, 2000) and John Wooden (Wooden & Jamison, 1997) have each created models that can be used to guide the development of talent. Orlick focuses on excellence while Wooden uses success as the ultimate goal of talent development. For Orlick (2000), excellence is “using what one has to the fullest capacity” (p. 40). Wooden’s definition of success “is peace of mind which is a direct



result of self-satisfaction in knowing you did your best to become the best that you are capable of becoming” (Wooden & Jamison, 1997, p. 174).

Although the models are different in structure, they both provide a framework for developing talent. The purpose of this discussion is to compare the Wheel of Excellence (Orlick, 2000) and the Pyramid of Success (Wooden & Jamison, 1997) for common elements, and then compare these elements to the talent development process across domains.

## Two Models for Developing Talent

### Terry Orlick and ‘The Wheel of Excellence’

Dr. Terry Orlick is the author of over 200 articles and 24 books, and he has been recognized for excellence in consulting and teaching. Additionally, he is the President of the International Society for Mental Training and Excellence. Dr. Orlick has 28 years of experience as a mental training consultant with elite performers. Much of his expertise was developed through hours of individual interviews, careful observation, and extensive two-way interactions with athletes, coaches, and performers in a variety of domains. Dr. Orlick has worked with many diverse groups, including astronauts, performing artists, children, athletes, military leaders, surgeons, teachers, and parents. Dr. Orlick developed his Wheel of Excellence to provide a working framework for the pursuit of excellence.

The Wheel of Excellence comprises seven critical elements: commitment, confidence, focused connection, positive images, distraction control, ongoing learning, and mental readiness. Orlick (2000) claims that these seven elements are crucial to guiding

people to success, and must be used in concert for the wheel to function properly.

Commitment, confidence, and focused connection form the hub and foundation of the wheel. They create perspective and desire, and give a person an internal mental connection with his or her goals. The first of the core elements, commitment, is attempting to be the best one can be and doing everything required to excel both mentally and physically. The second core element is focused connection, which involves getting in touch with one’s pursuit. It is the ability to connect with a task through total concentration. The third core element is confidence, or having belief in one’s own potential, and the courage to overcome obstacles.

The outer four elements are positive imagery, distraction control, ongoing learning, and mental readiness. They help to relate the person to the tasks, goals, and performances involved in the pursuit of excellence. Positive imagery allows a person to create and re-create good feelings, sensations, skills, and actions that are important to the successful achievement of a task. Distraction control is what enables one to maintain focus when confronted with distractions or setbacks. Ongoing learning is the process of self-evaluation and acting upon lessons learned from evaluation. Mental readiness is being able to prepare oneself for learning and performance by creating positive feelings.

The Wheel of Excellence is a versatile explanation of the elements required to achieve excellence. It can be used in many areas of life, from sports and relationships to the workplace. Any person committed to the pursuit of excellence can use this model as a guide. The Wheel of Excellence may be beneficial to teams as well as individuals; as each individual on a team becomes more

successful, the team may become more successful. An important application of the Wheel of Excellence is the impact it could have on children's talent development. According to Orlick (2000), anyone in a position to teach children can give their students a head start on achieving balance, joy, and excellence by introducing them to the Wheel of Excellence.

### **John Wooden and 'The Pyramid of Success'**

John Wooden was an All-American basketball player at Purdue University. After college, he coached basketball at Indiana State and at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). At UCLA he established one of the greatest coaching careers in college basketball. During his 27 years at UCLA, Wooden created a dynasty, winning seven consecutive National Championships between 1967 and 1973, and ten championships overall. Coach Wooden has become known as the "Wizard of Westwood," and is one of only two individuals inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame as both a player and a coach.

Wooden's Pyramid of Success is based on individual blocks, which he believes are personal qualities necessary for achieving success (Wooden & Jamison, 1997). According to Wooden, both the positioning and the order of blocks are very important. He constructed his pyramid by initially using two cornerstones and worked his way up to the pinnacle that leads to success.

Wooden begins his pyramid with what he considers to be the two most fundamental personal qualities: industriousness and enthusiasm. He believes success is not possible without these two cornerstones. According to Wooden, industriousness is working hard without cutting corners. Success requires hard work and without hard

work you have nothing to build on. Enthusiasm is enjoying what you're doing and having the soul to do it.

Between these two cornerstones lie the foundational blocks of friendship, loyalty, and cooperation. Friendship is devotion, respect and doing things for one another. Producing one's individual best in a group effort is a powerful force that Wooden refers to as loyalty. Cooperation involves idea sharing, listening, and it seeks to find the best path to success for the group.

The next level of the pyramid includes self-control, alertness, initiative, and intentness. Self-control is needed for discipline. Loss of self-control may negatively impact performance. Alertness is being able to observe and learn from what is going on around you. Initiative provides courage to make decisions and take actions. Intentness is the ability to concentrate on your objective, resist temptation, and be determined to reach your goal.

The center of the pyramid involves the elements of condition, skill, and team spirit. Condition is a combination of physical, mental, and moral conditioning. Skill is the very core of the pyramid. One must be able to perform the entire job quickly and properly. Team spirit requires personal sacrifice for the welfare of others.

The next level of the pyramid is comprised of poise and confidence. Poise is being yourself and satisfying your own expectations. Confidence is a belief in yourself to become the best you are capable of being. Poise and confidence develop from proper preparation. Before achieving success one must acquire competitive greatness. Poise and confidence allow individuals to bring out the best in themselves in the most difficult circumstances. Reaching this competi-

tive greatness allows individuals as well as teams to perform at their finest.

The pyramid is held together by faith and patience. One must have faith or the belief that things will work out. Patience is required to achieve competitive greatness, excellence, and success. Success is the pinnacle of the pyramid. It represents the culmination of all the elements coming together to achieve excellence. Success does not mean perfection; it is the end result of accomplishing one's goal.

Each individual has the building blocks and the potential within themselves to achieve personal success, but it is up to that individual to realize his or her own success. It is the role of a teacher, coach, or consultant to assist or direct the individual to bring out personal excellence. The challenge is to create an environment that allows individuals to work together as a team in order to be the best they can be.

### **Common Elements of the Two Models**

Upon first glance the two models are more different than similar. They are vastly different in appearance and structure (wheel vs. pyramid) and the number of constituent elements (7 vs. 17). Furthermore, the Wheel of Excellence appears to take a more individual orientation whereas the Pyramid of Success is described more from a team perspective. For example, The Pyramid of Success includes friendship, team spirit, cooperation, and loyalty. None of these team or group oriented elements are evident in the Wheel of Excellence.

However, there are also many similarities between the two models. For Orlick (2000) and Wooden (Wooden & Jamison, 1997), success and excellence are very similar. In both models the objective is self-fulfillment and the talent development process is more

important than the end result. Success and excellence are moving targets that differ for each individual or team. The development of talent, therefore, is viewed as the process of realizing one's full potential as a performer and human being.

In addition, both models attempt to differentiate at least some of the elements based on importance to achieving success or excellence. The Wheel of Excellence is comprised of two layers. The inner wheel, or hub, includes commitment, confidence, and focused connection, while the remaining four elements are relegated to the outer layer of the wheel. The Pyramid of Success clearly identifies industriousness and enthusiasm as the cornerstones of success upon which the rest of the blocks rest. Furthermore, faith and patience are referred to as the "two essential qualities that are like mortar keeping the individual blocks firmly in place" (Wooden & Jamison, 1997, p. 191).

The Pyramid of Success is also presented as a hierarchical process to achieving the ultimate level of total success. As Wooden himself has stated, "the position of each block and the specific order of the tiers of blocks in the Pyramid have great importance" (Wooden & Jamison, 1997, p. 174). Similar to Wooden's view of his Pyramid blocks, Orlick (2000) considers all of his elements critical to achieving excellence. Weakness in any of the seven elements will result in a 'shaky wheel'. However, unlike Wooden, Orlick presents the pursuit of excellence as a more dynamic and fluid process that is dependent on interaction between all of the elements. The elements, or mental keys, cannot be easily separated into distinct blocks as in the Pyramid. For Orlick, "the seven links to excellence are closely connected, and each plays a significant role in nurturing ongoing commitment" (p. 16).

Based on a review of the literature, it appears that the two models have not been integrated or compared for common elements. Although each model provides insight into the elements of talent development, their differences raise questions about their transferability across domains. To gain a broader perspective on the elements of talent development, and to test the Orlick and Wooden models, case summaries of talented individuals were prepared (see Table 1). As much of the literature on talent development, including the models prepared by Orlick and Wooden, includes cases of talented sport performers, only two sport cases were reviewed.

Each student in the graduate course selected a talented individual, from among the predetermined talent domains, and prepared a case summary. The sources of evidence used to prepare the case summaries included autobiographies, biographies, video documentaries, newspapers, journals, magazines, and Internet articles. Case summaries were written using a theory-building case summary structure (Yin, 1994). Each student was also asked to prepare a concept map illustrating the performer's talent development process. The case summaries were reviewed by the course professor and discussed during in-class review sessions.

**Table 1 Case Summaries by Domain**

| Domain   | Case Summaries   |
|----------|--|
| Art      | Ansel Adams, LeRoy Neiman, Michelangelo (di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni), Pablo Picasso, Steven Spielberg             |
| Business | Bill Gates, Michael Eisner, Steve Jobs, Leigh Steinberg, Sandy Weill, Oprah Winfrey                                  |
| Music    | Ludwig van Beethoven, Charlotte Church, Harry Connick Jr., Elton John, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Antonio Stradivarius |
| Science  | Leo Hendrik Baekland, Alexander Graham Bell, Thomas Edison, Benjamin Franklin, Jean Paul Sartre, Nikola Tesla        |
| Sport    | Bobby Orr, Jackie Stiles   |

The case summaries were analyzed for common elements of talent development. These elements were then compared to the talent elements cited in the Orlick (2000)

and Wooden (Wooden & Jamison, 1997) models. As an additional method of data triangulation, the elements were also compared to talent development research

literature (e.g., Bloom, 1985; Cohen, 1999; Ericsson, 1996; Gardner, 1983; 1998). The talent elements were reorganized into eight common elements (see Table 2). Each element is best viewed as a composite of several related concepts that are often described in the literature. For example, the element of desire is sometimes referred to as drive, passion, unusual motivation, or

enthusiasm. All of the elements appear to be essential for developing talent, and therefore no attempt was made to rank them according to significance or importance. A description of each element, its related concepts, and a supporting example from one of the case summaries, is provided in the remainder of this paper.

**Table 2 Elements of Talent Development**

| Element            | Related Concepts  |
|--------------------|---|
| Commitment         | Dedication, Industriousness, Work Ethic                     |
| Confidence         | Attitude, Belief, Faith, Optimism, Positive Images          |
| Desire             | Drive, Enthusiasm, Passion, Unusual Motivation              |
| Focused Connection | Concentration, Distraction Control, Intentness              |
| Genetics           | Multiple Intelligences, Personality, Quick Learner          |
| Ongoing Learning   | Deliberate Practice, Education (formal / informal)          |
| Opportunity        | Creativity, Curiosity, Environment, Initiative, Risk Taking |
| Support Systems    | Coaches, Cooperation, Family, Friendship, Teachers          |

### **Eight Elements of Talent Development**

#### **Commitment**

Commitment is an integral element in the talent development process. Orlick (2000) defines commitment as deciding to be the best one can be and doing everything required to excel both mentally and physically. Commitment is a quality that was referred to in most of the case studies. The term commitment encompasses related concepts as well. Qualities such as dedication, work ethic, and industriousness are directly related to commitment, and may be seen as evidence of it. In every talent domain, a

person must be committed to achieving high levels of performance in order to reach his or her goal, and to maintain that level or surpass it.

An abundance of literature supports the element of commitment with regard to talent development. For example, Orlick (2000) put commitment in the heart of his Wheel of Excellence, and Wooden (Wooden & Jamison, 1997) refers to the quality of industriousness in reference to commitment. Wooden explained that there is no substitute for hard work, and that worthwhile results

are achieved only through hard work and careful planning. The ability to engage in ongoing learning, another one of the key talent development elements (see Table 1), depends upon an individual's commitment. Ericsson (1996) found that only the most committed performers were willing to complete the 10,000 hours of deliberate practice associated with expertise. Deliberate practice requires a high level of commitment because it is often considered the most difficult and unenjoyable type of practice that differentiates the expert from the average performer (Ericsson).

Basketball player Jackie Stiles is an excellent example of a performer who has taken commitment, specifically deliberate practice, to high levels in order to excel in her sport. She is the most prolific scorer in the history of college basketball (men's and women's) with 3,339 points. She exemplifies commitment by spending countless hours practicing in the gymnasium. One particular daily practice routine consists of 200 shots from four different places on the court. She continues her practice session until she makes 1,000 shots. Jackie Stiles demonstrates hard work, the desire to improve, and dedication that truly exemplify her commitment to developing her basketball talent.

([www.webkrafts.com/stiles/articles.htm](http://www.webkrafts.com/stiles/articles.htm)).

### **Confidence**

Confidence is one's internal resource to utilize his or her strengths to accomplish any task, whether mental or physical. It is one's uncanny ability to thrive in the face of adversity and eagerly accept new challenges. Essentially, confidence is the unrelenting knowledge that one will succeed regardless of circumstances.

Confidence is an essential element of both Orlick's (2000) and Wooden's (Wooden &

Jamison, 1997) models. Orlick uses the word belief synonymously with self-confidence. Furthermore, Orlick states the steps to personal belief include, but are not limited to, (a) someone believing in you, (b) thinking maybe you can, (c) acting as if you can, (d) believing you can, (e) knowing you can, and (f) trusting you will. Wooden defines confidence as respect without fear. Confidence develops from being prepared and keeping all things in proper perspective.

Confidence was identified as a major component in the talent development process in the case summaries. Specifically, Michelangelo, known as the 'father and master of all the arts', displayed his confidence as fearless arrogance (Stone, 1976). He did not allow any criticism of his work or the objections of his father to hinder the development of his artistic career. When he became bored in one facet of the arts, such as Fresco, he had the confidence to study and master other artistic endeavors such as sculpting, poetry and architecture.

Michelangelo's supreme confidence allowed him to engage in the deliberate practice required to develop his extreme talent. Michelangelo displayed all the qualities that Ericsson (1996) claimed must be present for an individual to succeed and fully develop their talent. For example, Michelangelo's practice routines displayed the following characteristics of deliberate practice: (a) maximal concentration, (b) a set of structured rules, (c) specially designed to improve the current level of performance, and (d) involved delayed gratification.

### **Desire**

Desire encompasses a person's intrinsic motivation and passion. It relates to the consistent yearning to reach one's own personal satisfaction. Supporting components of desire include, but are not limited to drive,

passion, enthusiasm, and unusual motivation. These components are subjective and unique to each individual.

Desire was an element identified by Wooden in his Pyramid of Success; however, he identified it as enthusiasm (Wooden & Jamison, 1997). Orlick (2000) identified desire, along with joy, passion or love for the pursuit, as a source of commitment. He suggests that in order to achieve excellence one would have to possess desire. Desire and its common components were very clearly identified in case studies of Oprah Winfrey, LeRoy Neiman, Sam Weill, Charlotte Church, and Elton John.

An example of desire is evident in the life story of Oprah Winfrey. Oprah was raised in a poverty-stricken, drug ridden, and abusive environment (Mair, 1994). After numerous years of misfortune she relied on her strong intrinsic motivation to improve her life. She endured a broken family, rape, and a lack of family support to become the most successful businesswoman in America. As a result, she has been described as remarkably determined, talented, and ambitious. Her incredible desire is evident even now after she has reached the pinnacle of the corporate world, as she continues to show enthusiasm and passion toward bettering herself and others.

#### Focused Connection

Although Orlick (2000) listed focused connection as the second element of excellence, he also stated “focus is everything...focus is the most important mental skill associated with ongoing learning and consistent high-level performance” (p. 7). For talented individuals to perform at optimal levels, they must focus solely on the task at hand. Often times, when a performer is fully focused, it is referred to as being in the zone (Orlick). Additional concepts of talent were identified

that support the focused connection element. Those additional (supportive) concepts are distraction control, intentness and concentration.

Often, when a performer experiences focused connection, they also experience the optimal level of distraction control. Distraction control is the ability to maintain or regain a positive, effective focus when faced with potential distractions, negative input, or setbacks (Orlick, 2000). Intentness was another concept related to focused connection. In Wooden’s Pyramid of Success, focused concentration and distraction control are identified as intentness (Wooden & Jamison, 1997). Wooden defines intentness as the “ability to resist temptations and stay the course, to concentrate on your objective with determination and resolve” (p. 185).

A case study in which the performer exemplified focused connection was Thomas Edison. Edison was a hard worker who remained focused on his goal of becoming a full-time inventor. Edison overcame many obstacles such as economic and physical hardships, and a lack of formal education. For example, he was expelled from school after only three months and relied on his mother’s home schooling for his early education. He later taught himself to read and write, he sold candy for money and even after several failed inventions he persevered until he finally invented the light bulb. This tenacity for meeting any technical challenge, combined with his relentless desire for learning and exhaustive research, are the reasons Edison was able to fully realize his talent and become known as one of the greatest inventors in modern history.

([www.biography.com](http://www.biography.com);  
[www.infoplease.com/ce6/people/A0816770.html](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/people/A0816770.html))

## Genetics

Genetic traits that are transmitted at birth can play a major role in determining the direction and course of one's life (Cohen, 1999). Genetic traits that can be transmitted from generation to generation include, but are not limited to, components of personality such as aggressions and altruism, normal and maladjusted behavior, and physical components such as body weight, body composition, and muscle fiber types (Andersen, Schjerling, & Saltin, 2000; Cohen, 1999). Related genetic components that were evident from the case studies included the ability to learn quickly, personality traits, and multiple intelligences. Each of these related elements could significantly affect one's ability to achieve success in a given domain.

Although there is a tremendous body of literature, both research- and opinion-based, on the genetic influence on talent development, neither Orlick (2000) nor Wooden (Wooden & Jamison, 1997) addressed this important element. As a result, they have avoided the contentious nature-nurture debate that dominates the talent development literature today (e.g., Ceci & Williams, 1999). When asked about this, Orlick stated that he, and likely Wooden, avoided the genetic issue because it is not something that an athlete, coach or consultant can change. He went on to say that "what we can control is making the best of whatever we have".

The concept of multiple intelligences is used as example of a genetic element that will influence the talent development process. Gardner's (1993) groundbreaking work suggests that human beings exhibit more than the two commonly accepted academic intelligences of logical-mathematical and verbal-linguistic. Gardner (1993; 1998) theorized at least six other human intelligences: spatial intelligence, musical intelligence, bodily-

kinesthetic intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, and naturalistic intelligence. Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences implies a belief that people vary significantly in their genetic make-up and would lead one to believe that genetic predispositions toward specific intelligences significantly affects one's ability to develop talent in one intelligence area or another.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is a prime example of genetic influence on talent development (Deutsch, 1965). Mozart was born into a musical family and demonstrated genius-level musical talent at a very young age. His father, Leopold, was a prominent musical instructor in Salzburg, Austria and served as a court composer for most of his adult life. Mozart's older sister began music lessons on the clavier at the age of eight, toured and played music with Wolfgang for the better part of his childhood, and became a well-known piano teacher, in her own right. Wolfgang, at the age of three, picked up his sister's clavier and instantly played a few bars of music after watching her practice the instrument for a short time. Leopold recognized the ease with which young Wolfgang seemed to pick up the simple instrument and encouraged his son to continue. Leopold quickly introduced Wolfgang to other instruments and musical compositions and was delighted with his son's progress. Wolfgang mastered his first musical work a few days before he turned five. He wrote his first composition at the age of six. He performed before royal courts in Salzburg, Munich, Versailles, Paris, and London, along with his sister, before the age of seven. He wrote his first full orchestra composition before he turned nine. He was a quick learner, experienced musical success at a very young age, and became the most accomplished musical composer of his time. While acknowledging



significant opportunities and support systems, much of Mozart's success can likely be attributed to his innate inherited musical talent (intelligence).

[www.mozartproject.org/biography/mozart\\_a.html](http://www.mozartproject.org/biography/mozart_a.html)

### **Ongoing Learning**

Orlick (2000) expresses the importance of developing an effective evaluation procedure to pull out lessons, and to act upon those lessons on a consistent basis. He argues that one's rate of learning, and the performance levels one may attain, are directly affected by the extent to which one engages in a thorough, ongoing, and constructive personal evaluation – also referred to as ongoing learning.

Ongoing learning encompasses everything from formal education to self-education to deliberate practice. The characteristic of ongoing learning that separates it from general learning is that the individual plays an active role in choosing the process by which his or her talent is to be improved. The individual makes conscious and calculated efforts to pursue knowledge in his or her talent through self-evaluation, reflection, experimentation, refinement and repetition. By evaluating and reflecting on past performances, the individual can discover what it was that he or she did well and what he or she did that failed. These reflections provide the foundation upon which lessons are learned and talent is ultimately refined. In this sense, ongoing learning is congruent with theories of reflection and self-directed learning (Jarvis, Holford, & Griffin, 1998).

The importance of ongoing learning is an essential component to developing talent. Howe, et al (1998) stated that studies of long-term practice and training suggest that individual differences in learning-related experiences are a major source of the

variance in achievement. Furthermore, Howe and colleagues suggested that high levels of accomplishment invariably require lengthy and intensive training, and even people who are not believed to have any special talent can, largely as a result of training, reach levels of achievement previously thought to be attainable only by innately gifted individuals.

Antonio Stradivarius is an excellent example of a lifelong learner (Hill, Henry, & Alfred, 1963; Jalovec, 1970). Stradivarius created what many experts consider perfect instruments. He studied under a world-renowned violinmaker for 10 years. Even after his tutelage ended, he continued to learn and experiment in the field of violin making. He created and destroyed many violins in his pursuit of creating the perfect instrument. He constantly experimented with new designs and was not afraid to use innovative techniques or to push the creative envelope. Stradivarius would reach out to other violinmakers to find new ideas to improve his understanding and expertise. As further evidence of his ongoing learning, he continued to create and innovate until his death.

### **Opportunity**

Opportunity is an element that can be either acquired or created. Individuals may have an environmental advantage based on geography, financial means, social connections or formal training. Individuals who lack the environmental opportunities may have superior initiative, curiosity or a risk taking attitude that allows them to create their own opportunities.

Opportunity is not found in either Wooden's (Wooden & Jamison, 1997) or Orlick's (2000) models, and it is only seldom mentioned in the talent development literature (e.g., Bloom, 1985). However, it is evident from the analysis of the case sum-

maries that opportunity is a critical element in developing talent.

Two case study examples of experts in their domains that represent the continuum of opportunities are Bill Gates and Steven Spielberg. Bill Gates was born into a family of means (Wallace & Erickson, 1993). His parents provided him with enough financial support to receive the best education money could buy. He was also afforded the opportunity to develop his computer skills during a time when computer costs were prohibitive for many. This exposure to both his trade and an elite social climate provided the foundation with which Bill Gates created his empire.

Steven Spielberg is an individual who largely created his own opportunities. As a young college student, Spielberg was on a tour at Universal Studios when he saw a small, vacated custodial office. He jumped off the tour bus and investigated the office. He made this office his own and in order to avoid getting caught, Spielberg dressed professionally and acted like a studio executive. This office is where he started his empire that eventually revolutionized the film industry. If Spielberg had not taken the initiative and taken the risk to create his own opportunity, his talents may never have been discovered.

([www.mrboy.com/spielberg/life.html](http://www.mrboy.com/spielberg/life.html);  
[www.scruffles.net/spielberg/biography](http://www.scruffles.net/spielberg/biography)).

### **Support Systems**

An essential ingredient that talented individuals often possess is a well-established support system. Whether it is family, friends or mentors, successful individuals are encouraged to reach their full potential through the cooperation of others around them. Support, however, is not restricted to families, friends, and mentors. Often teachers, coaches, coworkers or teammates pro-

vide critical information that creates a well-defined support system. The support system allows an opportunity for the individual to build his or her self-esteem and lessen the impact of any self-doubt.

Although it is believed that support is necessary to guide an individual in their pursuit of success, neither Orlick (2000) nor Wooden (Wooden & Jamison, 1997) explicitly addressed this critical element. Terry Orlick's Wheel of Excellence allows for the individual to be in control of his or her own outcomes. He believes there is a process of ongoing learning, however, he doesn't acknowledge that the learning needs to include external support to help motivate the individual. Wooden on the other hand does acknowledge support with the cooperation and friendship blocks in his Pyramid of Success. However, cooperation focuses more on providing support rather than receiving support. Cooperation centers upon establishing good communication between others and yourself to find the best way to reach the team's goal.

The critical role of support systems has been validated in other talent development literature, most notably the study by Bloom (1985). Bloom conducted case studies of 120 highly talented (i.e., expert) performers from across three talent areas (athletic, aesthetic, and cognitive). It was found that talented performers proceeded through three distinct talent development stages: (a) home and early years, (b) middle years, and (c) later years. The role of support systems was considered the most critical element of the talent development process, "unless there is a long and intensive process of encouragement, nurturance, education, and training, individuals will not attain extreme levels of capability" (p. 3). The results of Bloom's study show that developing skills and abilities early in life are often contingent

upon effective encouragement and support from one or more sources.

A case study conducted on Pablo Picasso's life further illustrated how encouragement and support provides an opportunity for the individual to succeed later in life (Penrose, 1980). Picasso's father was a painter, drawing instructor, and museum curator. His father's extensive knowledge of art, and willingness to share it, helped Pablo by providing a natural artistic environment through the talent development stages. Early in his childhood, Pablo's father pressed him to consistently improve. If his father did not feel that the painting was sufficient he would not allow him to proceed about his business until the painting reached a satisfactory level in the mind of his father. Some may say that his father pushed him too much, but without this encouragement Pablo may have failed to realize what he was capable of creating or achieving. By the age of 10, Picasso could draw as well as any art teacher. Picasso's early childhood encouragement was mostly from his father. However, in his adolescence, Picasso's friends provided most of the support. For example, Pablo and his friends made numerous art trips to Paris. This helped Pablo broaden his outlook on the possibilities within art. Through the supportive efforts of Picasso's

father and friends at an early stage in his life, Pablo was exposed to the experiences that helped him develop his talent.

### **Summary**

In comparing Terry Orlick's (2000) Wheel of Excellence with John Wooden's (Wooden & Jamison, 1997) Pyramid of Success, we find that both models share some common critical elements. However based on the 25 case summaries, the two models do not paint a complete portrait of the full range of elements required for talent development across domains. For example, neither Orlick's nor Wooden's model explicitly discusses the importance of genetics, opportunity (whether provided or self-engineered), and the effect of a robust support system. Based on our review, eight composite elements appear to be prerequisite for developing talent. The degree to which these elements are predominantly innate or environmental is beyond the scope of the present discussion. These elements, when used in conjunction with popular models of talent development, provide an important overview of the talent development process. Coaches, parents, teachers, and consultants across domains can refer to these elements in their quest to identify and develop talent.

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## Stepping on Up: Guidelines for Self-Coaching

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### Abstract

Self-coaching in sport (athletes coaching themselves) is a little understood concept. A review of literature from both the sport and business environs provides minimal coverage. Bradbury (2000) defined self-coaching as “the ownership and practice of self-development and organisational activities oriented towards enhancing performance and goal achievement” (p.229). Clearly delineated steps or guidelines are not evident. Results from self-administered questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with 1996 New Zealand Summer Olympians (97) and previous Olympic medal winners (36) respectively provide interesting data for discussion in an effort to identify steps to enhance this experience. Respondents' voices and reflections on their self-coaching experiences support the results. In some circumstances athletes have no option but to self-coach while others do it by matter of preference. It is an obligation of academics and practitioners to explore this concept with the aim of establishing practical guidelines to aid athletes in their search of excellence.

### Introduction

Self-coaching in sport is undertaken by virtually all athletes at some stage of their athletic career. Although a large number of developing and elite athletes are engaged in self-coaching, an important and prevalent dimension of coaching and performance enhancement, it is seldom discussed or recognised as a legitimate processes. The academic literature does not provide guidelines or steps to enhance self-coaching, but does suggest that some athletes undergo a process whereby they are responsible for their own sporting destiny. In New Zealand many athletes do not have access to the

guidance of a full-time coach and thus are responsible for their own performance enhancement and self-coach not by choice but by default.

This lack of guidance for 'self-coachers' can be problematic. Speaking of their misfortune in the 2000m double scull finals at the 1996 Olympics, New Zealander Philippa Baker uttered a post-mortem. “We've done a lot on our own and I don't know if people realise how difficult it was winning those world championships” (Niumata, 1996, Atlanta '96 p.III). Likewise, New Zealand coxless pairs rowers David Schaper and Toni Dunlop

trained without their coach Steve Gunn.

*We were a bit concerned initially because we had a couple of months by ourselves. It was really hard because we had never trained like that before. You normally always have your coach there to motivate you and check that you are making technical changes. We started off being a bit lazy and then realised that we had to get hard on ourselves....It has been a big learning curve on taking the responsibility for our own training (Sanders, 1997, p.B5).*

In order to investigate this phenomenon of self-coaching in more depth, a study consisting of self-administered questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and a concept mapping exercise was undertaken. The purpose of the study was to identify steps to enhance the performance of those athletes who self-coach.

Specific detailed self-coaching steps or guidelines are not offered in the academic literature, but Gallwey, (1986); Greenwood, (1986); Hall, (1997); Whitmore, (1994); and Zepke, Nugent, and Roberts, (1996) present a skeleton of guiding steps in the popular literature to assist an athlete to develop their own specific self-coaching plan. These steps can be summarised as identifying strengths and weaknesses; reflecting on skill performance; identifying areas for change; implementing a plan of action; experimentation; situational analysis; and posing questions for the athlete to answer.

Many athletes can identify their final goal but cannot visualise the steps to get them from their current point to where they would like to be. A systematic “business-like” process would no doubt be beneficial and was recommended by a few of the interview respondents. This “process” can be explained using the analogy of a road map.

Speaking of the situation Schaper said: The scenic route, the direct motorway route, or the unplanned “tiki” tour<sup>1</sup> route will all arrive at “some” point. Depending on which route is taken, the end destination may not be the intended one, the arrival may be too late, or too much energy may be expended in getting there. A structured plan comprising this is where we are now, this is where we want to go and this is how we are going to get there, would be much more effective; especially if the idea was to get to the final destination (goal) in an expedient and efficient manner.

The jacket cover of Lawrence and Scheid’s 1987 book, *The Self-Coached Runner II*, states “Here is the first book designed specifically...[to teach] you how to coach yourself”. The introduction continues, “...designed to act as your coach and to train you to coach yourself” (p.xiii). The stated emphasis of this book is to teach people how to teach themselves, yet no guidelines are provided for this to occur. Pre-set training programmes are provided, similar to a cafeteria menu for readers to pick and choose from, but direction on how to write or develop their own is not given. Other written material also makes similar claims but does not substantiate it.

Hodge, Sleivert, and McKenzie (1996) are an exception and reveal that the aim of compiling their book, *Smart Training for Peak Performance*, is “to provide you [the athlete] with the 'tools' to design your own training programme [in a systematic manner] in order to achieve peak performance” (p.140). They stated, “You need to identify clearly what a peak performance looks and feels like for you - paint the picture...” (p.7).

This is the first step that the researcher has identified for the elite athlete. Once the

<sup>1</sup> A New Zealand colloquialism for a meandering trip.

athlete is self-aware and understands their philosophy towards goal achievement then a vision of what it takes to achieve his or her identified goals and a plan of action aiding the athlete to reach peak performance can be developed. Attention and effort are focused on the set goals, which then provide a feedback and evaluation mechanism for the athlete.

Moortgat (1996), while a developing tennis player, faithfully recorded his training in a diary. He did not have a training plan or plan of action. If he had had a plan of action to complement his diary, he may have been able to review and evaluate his activity and find it to be more beneficial. He says:

*...I started keeping a log of what I did on and off the tennis court. I had no real idea of what I was doing,...I wanted to be able to look back and document just how hard I was working. I continued this log...never really having a plan, but just writing everything down (Introduction).*

Newman (1986), a track athlete and former editor of Canada's national coaching magazine *Coaching Review*, discusses self-coaching from his personal experiences when in his youth he did whatever he thought was required to get in shape for racing and enhance his outcome. He finished ninth out of a field of 3000 in a cross-town race and attributes his success to his self-designed and unwritten training programme. He offers what he terms strategies for self-coaching, two of which may be interpreted as steps or guides:

- develop and commit to a programme for the entire training and competitive season; and
- set realistic and achievable training goals.

Both Moortgat and Newman did not have written or planned training programmes.

Many of the interviewees expressed this as well. It would be interesting to note whether Newman, Moortgat and the interviewees may have improved their performances if they had followed the above steps and those presented in this article.

Hall (1997) writes that self-coaching can be learned and improved like any other skill.<sup>2</sup> He identifies four major aspects to self-coaching, which could be interpreted as steps. They are:

- the ability to recognize weaknesses;
- the ability to identify the cause and design ways to address those weaknesses;
- the ability to efficiently manage time for maximum productivity in practice;
- the ability to recall practices and races to examine what went right and wrong (p.22).

He suggests that a sailor (or an athlete) can be overwhelmed or discouraged when identifying and prioritising their weaknesses and it might be difficult for them to be honest with themselves. This quality is critical for self-coaching to be effective (Bradbury, 2000). Next it is necessary to focus and analyse the cause(s) of the weakness(es). Reflective questioning, as Greenwood (1986) and Zepke et al (1996) suggest, can be quite beneficial by asking 'why' when analysing each skill or activity. Developing questions for you yourself to answer will help review and remedy the weakness(es), which is important for the necessary changes to be made. Hall also considers time management quite important so the athlete can efficiently

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<sup>2</sup>The use of the term "skill" is debatable as the author believes self-coaching is a concept comprising many aspects.



allocate time to spend on improving each weakness. The last step, training and competition debriefing, can assist in planning for the future by asking questions, which start with “we could’ve tried...what if...should we...” (p.24). Hall is one of the few practitioners who has written specifically on self-coaching. He is highly supportive of self-coaching and believes the only person who can help an individual improve in their sport is that individual.

Greenwood (1986) and Zepke et al (1996) provide support for reflective questioning. They identify steps such as make observations about the training, identify areas for improvement, implement them, and continue observation for reflection upon further changes. These steps are similar to those outlined in the coaching models of Côté, Salmela, Trudel, and Baria, (1995); Fairs, (1987); and Worthington, (1980). As noted, many authors suggest steps but many are from practical personal experiences and not researched ones.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The eligibility criteria for participation in this study was based on being a member of the 1996 New Zealand Summer Olympic Games team or winning an Olympic medal for New Zealand. A 52% response rate was received from the questionnaire posted to the 97 members of the 1996 Olympic team in which 11 of the 26 Summer Olympic sports were represented. (New Zealand was represented in 15). Interviews were also recorded between the researcher and 36 Olympic medal winners from the 1956 to the 1996 Olympics. These athletes came from the sports of archery, athletics, badminton, canoeing, cycling, equestrian, field hockey, rowing, shooting, swimming, and yachting.

## **Interview and Questionnaire Construction and Protocol**

A questionnaire and an interview format were designed to elicit perceptions about Olympic athletes’ experiences and ideas on self-coaching. Both tools were piloted on New Zealand World University Games team members and only minor changes were made. Both were similarly structured with sections investigating background demographics, general information on coaching experiences and then more specific information on self-coaching experiences. Participants were then given the opportunity to supply any further information on self-coaching not previously addressed.

## **Procedure**

In accordance with the requirements of the New Zealand Privacy Act (1993), the New Zealand Olympic Committee posted the covering letter and questionnaire to each of the 1996 Olympic team members and an interview information sheet and consent form to all Olympic medal winners. The covering letter and interview information sheet detailed the parameters of the research providing the purpose of the research, the right to withdraw, confirmation of privacy and confidentiality, and information about the use of the research results. With the permission of the interviewees, audiotape and detailed note taking recorded the interviews. These audiotapes were transcribed verbatim, including the researcher’s questions and comments, and their accuracy confirmed by the interviewees who suggested minimal changes.

## **Data Analysis**

Analysis of the data was mainly qualitative. The questionnaires had both open and closed questions. The closed questions were coded and then analysed via the SPSS computer package and the open questions were categorised and analysed. The researcher, to

ensure familiarity of content, reviewed the interview and open questionnaire response transcripts and then highlighted key phrases for analysis. The variety of responses provided was reduced for coding purposes without losing the voices and ideas of the respondents. Following this, the summary of the interview responses was posted to the interviewees for concept mapping to ensure that reliability of the categories had been achieved. The variety of interesting results, together with some relevant literature, enabled the creation of a list of potentially useful steps to assist athletes when self-coaching.

## Results and Discussion

### Rates of self-coaching among respondents

Of the 1996 Olympians, just less than half (43%) said they self-coached, just over half (52%) said they sometimes self-coached while less than one-tenth (7%) said they did not self-coach. Of the medal winners, almost half (47%) said they self-coached (of which around one-third said they self-coached with the assistance of an outside advisor), almost half (47%) said they sometimes self-coached, and six percent reported that they did not self-coach. With such a high level self-coaching activity it is the obligation of academics and practitioners working in the coaching and performance enhancement fields to explore guidelines for self-coached athletes to employ.

Even in situations where an athlete has access to a coach, athlete empowerment and athlete self-responsibility should be encouraged. The resulting potential growth may carry over not only to their athletic endeavours but to all aspects of their life. Members of New Zealand's 1976 Olympic gold medal

men's hockey team support this. Barry Maister spoke of his coach:

*...he taught us to be self-critical and therefore to be – to take responsibility for our own training...He would often say, “what are you doing wrong” as a first question, and so we very clearly got self-critical, self-analytical and we learned to take responsibility for our actions...it wasn't just to please him, it was a self-internal thing...I still abide by it today (18 February 1998).*

### Guidelines

All of the steps described in the introduction stem from the personal experiences of the writers. Two objectives of the 1998 study were to establish whether elite athletes used similar steps and to then uncover additional ones. The questionnaire respondents were provided with a list of 9 potential steps and were asked to rank each step from 1 – 9 with 1 being the first step and 9 the last. An “other options” section was provided for them to add more steps if they wished. As an open-ended question, it was more difficult for the interview respondents to answer especially those who participated in Olympic Games previous to 1984. Some interview respondents had actually followed a planned process while others approached self-coaching haphazardly or had never really thought about it. This was the situation of many of the Olympians who competed in Games previous to 1984. The interview respondents put forth many ideas, most saying the same thing as the questionnaire respondents, but using different wording.

**TABLE 1:** Questionnaire respondent's ranked potential steps for self-coaching.

| Proposed Steps                            | Mean | Questionnaire Respondents' Ranking | Author's Ranking |
|---|------|------------------------------------|------------------|
| Identify a vision                         | 1.93 | 1                                  | 3                |
| Set goals and objectives                  | 2.89 | 2                                  | 4                |
| Identify a personal philosophy            | 3.02 | 3                                  | 2                |
| Develop a plan of action                  | 4.05 | 4                                  | 5                |
| Develop self-awareness and self-knowledge | 4.34 | 5                                  | 1                |
| Assessment of your performance            | 6.32 | 6                                  | 7                |
| Observe and self-reflect                  | 6.36 | 7                                  | 6                |
| Make changes/corrections                  | 7.52 | 8                                  | 8                |
| Reassess your performance                 | 8.50 | 9                                  | 9                |

The questionnaire respondents provided minor ranking variations to the order of the potential steps as noted in the last two columns in Table 1. In accordance with the interviewees, they felt a vision of knowing where you wanted to be, was a first step. The interviewees expressed this in terms of completing a situational analysis by determining where you were, where you wanted to go and how you were going to get there. There was also agreement on the second step of setting goals and objectives to achieve the vision. The questionnaire respondent's step three, identify a personal philosophy, and step five, develop self-awareness and self-knowledge, did not arise in the interviewee responses. Step four, develop a plan of action, appeared as the interviewees' step three, to write a progres-

sive plan and identify strategies to achieve goals and objectives. A minimal amount of the interview respondents considered implementing the plan as a separate step. The low support for this as a step may be due to it being assumed that it would automatically happen when the plan was developed.

In the potential steps presented in the questionnaire, the author felt the questionnaire respondent's step five, develop self-awareness and self-knowledge, was step one and their step three, identify a personal philosophy, step two. It was felt that the athlete should understand themselves and their philosophy towards their sporting endeavour before they could identify their vision. Their self-awareness, knowledge of

the self, and their personal philosophy would impact what their vision would be and how they would set out to achieve it.

The questionnaire respondent's steps six to nine were ranked the same as the author's but with step six and seven reversed. The mean ranking of the questionnaire respondents' step six, assessment of your performance and step seven, observe and self-reflect, were 6.32 and 6.36 respectively indicating only a slight difference in the ranking.

The interviewees did not provide detail for the remaining steps presented in the questionnaire but did suggest analysis by questioning, discussions, reflection and assessment and reassessment of skills to initiate corrections and improvements, basically combining steps six to nine. A few of the interviewees considered the outside assistance of a coach, mentor or advisor but the questionnaire respondents did not, even though they highly recommended this as a strategy for self-coaching (Bradbury, 1999). The questionnaire respondents also did not suggest year-end review as a step. This may be because it was not suggested in the nine potential steps and that it was felt to be inherent in steps six to nine.

The idea of accountability and reviewing the plan at year-end was little mentioned. This is definitely a requirement for self-coaching. In response to a question asking the interview respondents to explain their training regime, many of them included an evaluation or year-end review of their training but yet did not often propose it as a step for self-

coaching. Andrew Lindsay, a 1996 Olympic archer, commented on his training review and analysis.

*It's like an annual report. We made this much money, I shot these scores, and I think to myself that's a really good score, lately my scores have been really high. I write down all the positive things first, and then I wasn't happy with how my concentration was, or I wasn't doing a certain thing right, and I'll work on it (13 June 1998).*

Craig Barrett a 1996 Olympic race walker who collapsed from exhaustion within sight of the 50 kilometre race finish line and gold medal at the 1998 Commonwealth Games, supported Lindsay's approach.

*I do a lot of my training by heart rate...I'll monitor my sessions, I'll analyse how the session went, I'll make comparisons all the time, so I'm very, I'm just analytical I guess, by nature that's the way I work. And I'll take a very methodical approach...It's kinda over the top in comparison to what most people would do...I set an achievable goal, what's my objective for the season...at the end of the year sort of treat it like I'm in a business...I've got to be accountable to people...did I achieve my goals... (5 June 1998).*

It is interesting to note that the interviewees were not provided with a list of potential steps whereas the questionnaire respondents were and the steps are very similar. The interview respondents were asked to provide their steps in the order they felt necessary to follow as outlined in Table 2.

**TABLE 2:** Interviewee's Steps to Self-Coaching.

| Interview Responses  | Ranking |
|--|---------|
| Identify where you are, what you want to do, where you want to be  | 1       |
| Set goals and objectives to get the big picture  | 2       |
| Write a progressive plan and identify strategies to achieve goals and objectives realising your own strengths and weaknesses | 3       |
| Discuss, ask questions, analyse to think how to do it better   | 4       |
| Identify weaknesses and then strategies to correct performance and make improvements   | 5       |
| Implement the plan   | 6       |
| Have an outside observer critique and evaluate what you are doing  | 7       |
| Accountability: year-end review to see if goals and objectives achieved  | 8       |

In support of the above results some of the interviewees expressed their attitudes succinctly. Brant Woodward, a 1996 clay target shooter whose goal was to win an Olympic medal, spoke of his attitude towards a set plan.

*What I'm finding, especially over the last few months...had a slump in form and I'm trying to sort it out, and pushing hard...So I'm sort of seeing that for me to achieve what I need to achieve, I'm finding now I've got to get more and more regimented about the process I put in place. While a lot of it up to date has probably been a bit more of what one might say loose, as far as no set procedure, I'm seeing that I'm getting into a procedure where I'm making myself actually train a lot more. Not only at range training; if I can't get there then what I do, every moment I have spare, I'm thinking about how I'm going to approach this next training session. What I'm going to do, what to achieve, writing those things down, becoming I suppose very sort of, a lot more organised about it. So when I go out to the range this weekend, I'll be going there with a particular purpose to be working on a particular aspect, and the aspect that I believe is holding me back...And as I shoot, at the*

*end of each round, I'll be reflecting a little bit on why did that work or why didn't that work. Even if you have had a bad day training, you've got to be able to walk away with some positive aspect (17 April 1998).*

Paul MacDonald, double gold medallist in the 1984 Olympics and gold, silver and bronze medallist in the 1988 Olympics, agreed that training programmes should be more formalised but was a little tentative about it.

*It scares me that it (programme development) has become so regimented now. I think it's a tool you need, and that a lot of that can be done mentally. We get very much into the programme of setting goals and little goals and all the correct things that you have to do. And putting them down on paper, but sometimes it becomes so formalised that its scary...For some athletes it definitely needs to be done. Other athletes would do it naturally. Occasionally you have just got to get out there and thrash yourself (9 April 1998).*

In contrast, Ann Hare, a 1996 athletics Olympian and a professed self-coacher

religiously planned and supported the formalised, regimented process.

*The last two or three years of my career I was coaching myself. I would actually sit down and write a plan so that I had, what the goals were, how they were spaced, whether it was practical to do them, whether I had to maybe treat one as a minor goal, you know, just going through that whole goal setting process. And then I would write out how I wanted my training to be structured around those events. It was always a method of working backwards, I was always taught to work backwards...then work out what the actual training sessions were going to entail...once I'd done all that I would actually get my coach, who really was an advisor at that stage, just to come and have a look at it and he'd sort of, 9 times out of 10, there would be nothing that he would change (17 April 1998).*

Sharon Ferris, a 1996 Olympian in the Europe class, works similarly to Hare supporting and reflecting on the planning of her self-coaching. Programme planning is very much Sharon's life. Everything she does or thinks is aimed at her Olympic dream and she trains 24 hours a day in search of that dream.

*I've got a big wall chart that has every month, every regatta I am doing, every training, what days I can have off, what days I can do this, doctors' appointments, how many hours I am going to train, right up to the end of 2000. For analysis and revision I have a diary, and also in that programme I have, "three weeks before, choose mast and sail that I will compete with" in such and such regatta (5 May 1998).*

## Conclusion

Many New Zealand athletes are assuming the role of a coach and coaching themselves

without any steps to guide this endeavour. This paper has suggested research-based steps or guidelines to enhance their performance through self-coaching. These steps were re-worded slightly from those in the questionnaire and those gained in the interviews to aid in comprehension and implementation by the end users. They are as follows:

- identify a vision
- set goals and objectives
- situational/experimental analysis
- develop a plan of action incorporating strategies for goals/objectives achievement
- identify feedback mechanisms for performance assessment
- monitor and review
- identify control mechanisms for performance reassessment.

These steps or guidelines offer the elite athlete a structured business-type plan to aid them in preparation for self-coaching. The steps are clearly delineated and easily followed. By implementing self-coaching strategies (Bradbury, 1999) self-coaching experiences can be enhanced.

Application of the findings from this research may assist New Zealand athletes and athletes world-wide to achieve a higher level sporting excellence. Self-coaching is not applicable only to New Zealand. Other athletes who participate to achieve their optimum potential may have to deal with situations by self-coaching not by choice, but by default. Self-coaching steps may guide them in this search of excellence.

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## Acquiring Valuable Consulting Experiences as Graduate Students: Insights of Two Young Professionals

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### Abstract

One of the world's largest sport psychology association, the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology (AAASP), advocates student attendance and participation at its annual conference for continued personal growth and career development. Yet, it is surprising that so few articles in our journals have focused on different areas pertaining to the career development of sport psychology graduate students. It is probably fair to say that currently, students in our field acquire most of their information through their courses, by reading and exchanging ideas with peers and professionals, and by attending conferences. While there have been a few publications outlining potential academic training and career options offered by different graduate programs, there does not appear to be any information on ways to acquire applied consulting experiences as graduate students. This article will attempt to shed some light on this topic and encourage readers to reflect upon their own experiences to help young professionals gain some valuable applied work in the early stages of their career. Based on the literature and our own personal experiences, we will present information on the development of knowledge and skills for high quality consulting, gaining entry and trust, and building effective relationships with athletes and coaches.

### Introduction

The importance of acquiring applied consulting experiences early in one's career has been echoed over the years by both professionals and graduate students. Many students enter the field of sport psychology with the desire to do some applied work with athletes and/or coaches as early as possible in their program. Oftentimes, it is what motivates them to develop skills in this domain because they are eager to apply what they learn from theory. We can both certainly attest to this.

While most young academics receive ample amounts of theoretical and practical training concerning the proper ways of conducting research and teaching, many have been disappointed in the actual applied, "on the field" training they have received. It is noteworthy that this issue has been raised during several workshops, student meetings, and discussions at previous AAASP conferences. This issue was also discussed at length in a recent article by Silva, Conroy and Zizzi (1999). They stated that applied

training and supervised applied experiences are lacking in contemporary sport psychology graduate programs, and this could affect the credibility and future advancement of this field. In their conclusion, Silva et al. said that “students and young professionals, the future of the field, must also assume a more proactive role in the advancement of the field and thus facilitate the emergence of sport psychology as a worthy and notable discipline *and* profession in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” (p.317).

One way to do this is for students and young professionals to openly share their views and experiences as graduate students. As a result of a workshop we conducted with students at the AAASP conference in San Diego (Durand-Bush, Bloom, & Schinke, 1997), and the positive feedback we subsequently received, we decided to write a paper to address some issues that were raised regarding the acquisition of applied consulting experiences as graduate students. It is hoped that this article will shed some light and generate more discussion on this topic so that students will be able to adequately prepare themselves to meet real life challenges when they begin their professional careers.

An important step in acquiring applied sport psychology training lies in the choice of an appropriate graduate program and supervisor. Fortunately, some researchers have examined these areas to provide useful guidelines (see Andersen, Van Raalte, & Brewer, 1994; Andersen, Williams, Aldridge, & Taylor, 1997; Waite & Pettit, 1993). Waite and Pettit surveyed recently graduated sport psychology doctoral students to investigate their background, training and work experiences, and perceptions of their current profession. They reported that 56% of the participants spent time consulting with both athlete and non-

athlete populations. Of interest is that despite this, some of them stated that they were displeased with the lack of formal and structured training they received as students to develop knowledge and skills regarding the delivery of appropriate services. Waite and Pettit suggested that “these comments and findings provide a strong message that a more sound formal preparation for applied work is needed, e.g., practicums, lab courses where technical skills are practiced and supervised, internships, etc.” (pp. 247-248).

Andersen and colleagues (1997) expanded the work of Waite and Pettit (1993) by including a larger sample of recent graduates, including those from both doctoral and master’s level programs. Their research revealed that teaching and research positions were the main source of income and employment for the recent graduates. With respect to finding full-time income-generating applied sport psychology work, the outlook was unfortunately not very positive. Andersen and colleagues found that only a few of recent graduates in sport psychology with a doctoral degree were earning “substantial income” from their consulting work. Also, master’s level graduates reported not having enough training or applied work experience to get work in this area. What is interesting is that it was also found that 21% of the participants had no practicum experience working with athletes, and 50% had 100 hours or less of contact with athletes. Although it appears that many young professionals in this field want more applied sport psychology work, their lack of experience and structured training as graduate students may be the most important factor hindering them from reaching their goals.

What can be done about this? There is no doubt that students must have access to

credible, “applied” sport psychology training programs that offer supervised practica and structured internships (see Silva et al., 1999). They must also have access to competent thesis and internship supervisors who play a crucial role in the development of graduate students. In many cases, students consider them to be mentors and rely on them to develop skills and acquire sufficient applied experience to be able to subsequently obtain employment. Thus, thesis and internship supervisors must be willing to not only invest a considerable amount of time in the supervisory process, but also share extensive information that will prepare students for work after they graduate. We are reminded of a motivating phrase that our supervisor frequently repeated to us: “Great mentors are those who encourage and provide an appropriate training environment for their students to surpass them.”

In another study, Andersen, Van Raalte, and Brewer (1994) assessed the supervisory skills of sport psychology supervisors associated with graduate programs that offered applied sport psychology practica and/or internships. They also asked students to rate their supervisors on these same skills. Although most supervisees reported they were pleased with their supervisors, it was difficult to determine whether or not they were satisfied with the specific amount and type of feedback they received about their strengths and weaknesses as consultants and their ability to implement different psychological interventions. This suggests that more research needs to be conducted to examine, and most importantly, enhance the supervisory and graduate training process.

The questions “Who makes a good supervisor?” and “What are the best methods for acquiring applied consulting experiences?” have led us to compile additional information based on our own

graduate training and interactions with students and professionals in the field. Following are some lessons and recommendations that have helped us generate potential answers to these very significant questions. It is our hope that they stimulate more discussion for the future.

#### Acquiring Knowledge / Skills

There are several issues surrounding the possibilities of consulting as a graduate student and it is important to do some homework ahead of time, before even enrolling in a program of study. What are logical steps? First, it is a wise choice to invest time and effort into “shopping” for a suitable program. People invest valuable time into buying a car or a house and searching for a graduate program should be done in a similar fashion. You should not be afraid to scrutinize information and to ask questions. After all, your graduate experience may or may not open many doors for you in the future.

Fortunately, we have access to valuable resources to help us in this process, one of which is the “The Directory of Graduate Programs in Applied Sport Psychology.” Sachs, Burke, and Gomer (1998) developed this extensive resource for aspiring students and professionals in the field of sport psychology. According to these authors, their directory “is intended to provide a starting point for students searching for a graduate program, as well as serve as a reference work for others in the field” (p. 1). This valuable aid should be consulted by all individuals seeking a career in sport psychology.

Note that in browsing this guide, it is important to pay attention to the orientation of the programs, the number of professors with whom you could work, their area of expertise, the opportunities for supervised

internships and funding, and anything else you feel is relevant. Once you have targeted a few programs, we encourage you to contact the professors with whom you would be interested to work, even though this might seem intimidating at first. Our personal experience and those of others indicate that most professors are very receptive and helpful when students ask for information. In fact, many professionals in the field are eager to guide students in their quest to find an appropriate program, therefore you should take advantage of this opportunity.

In selecting our graduate program, it was important for us to know we would have access to professors who had valuable consulting knowledge and skills and were willing to supervise and give us feedback. We also made sure that we could potentially work with athletes and coaches once enrolled in the program. This might sound simplistic but you must carefully examine your options because some programs are predominantly research-oriented and offer little or no applied opportunities. By contacting professors ahead of time and asking them about their own consulting experiences and the links they have with coaches and athletes, you will be able to make an informed choice in the selection of your program.

If becoming a sport psychology consultant is one of your goals, other criteria you should consider are opportunities for certification, number of supervised hours, and qualifications / reputation of your supervisor. If you have the option, choose to work with a trained, respected professional in the field who is willing to mentor your work and show you the “tricks of the trade.” We were fortunate to receive feedback from our supervisors and get several referrals to work with athletes of different ages and

levels. After demonstrating our skills and establishing a few contacts, we realized that word of mouth was the key, and our opportunities to continue working just grew.

Once you have enrolled into a specific program, it is understood that you will begin your training by taking courses to acquire background information and fundamental skills in sport psychology and/or counseling theory and application, before you formally start working with athletes. Depending on the number of courses offered each semester and the number of faculty members available to teach these courses, it may take over a year before you can begin some applied work. Once again, you can see how important it is to investigate your options when you are searching for a program. If there is only one or two professors to teach courses and supervise you, you might have to be patient and willing to postpone consulting for a while.

The choice of courses is also important. You want to make sure you will have the opportunity to develop a strong knowledge base, as well as valuable consulting skills that will enable you to be effective when you do begin your work. This means you should look for opportunities to practice. We had the chance to practice with our peers in some of our counseling classes. We had to film ourselves as well as conduct mock interviews in front of the class, after which we received feedback from the professor and our classmates. We also had to develop an intervention program for a clientele of our choice, which included a component on our personal consulting philosophy. This was an excellent learning experience and after these courses, we felt more prepared to go to work in real life settings.

### **Gaining Entry and Trust**

Once you are ready to start consulting, there is another process with which you must get fully acquainted. It is that of gaining entry and trust. Before we actually started consulting, we read several articles and books on consulting / counseling (e.g., Botterill, 1990; Halliwell, 1990; Halliwell, Orlick, Ravizza and Rotella, 1999; Ivey, 1988; Orlick & Partington, 1987; Ravizza, 1990; Rotella, 1990; Salmela, 1990). We also formally and informally sought the advice of many experienced consultants to find out how to get started and how to make a first good impression. We did this within our own academic settings as well as at various conferences and meetings in which consulting and performance enhancement issues were discussed.

In our first consulting experiences, we tried to work with a coach who had some knowledge of sport psychology, believed in the benefits of mental preparation, and thus supported our work. We found it important to continually nurture our relationship with the coaches and support staff. One of us began working within a familiar sporting context from previous competitive experiences. This added credibility and helped to gain the trust and respect of coaches and athletes. However, in other situations, we were not familiar with the sport but we went to great lengths to learn about it. We read up on various rules, tactics, and lingo. We also asked coaches and athletes many questions, and spent considerable time observing practices. We showed a genuine interest in learning everything we could about the sport and the culture, and this undoubtedly facilitated our interactions.

As a student or young professional, it is wise to remain open to work with a variety of populations. Some students tend to want to

work with high profile elite teams or sports right from the start. In fact, it is probably a good idea to start with an individual athlete or a lower-level team just to get some experience, depending on the knowledge and skills you previously acquired as an athlete, coach or consultant. If you can, get involved at the beginning of a season or cycle so that the athletes see you as part of the team from the beginning.

Upon entering a consulting relationship, we met with coaches to discuss our roles, objectives and competencies. We were very honest about what we could and could not do. It was important to gain an understanding of their goals and expectations before starting to work with the athletes so that our interventions were congruent with theirs. We thus chose not to impose our preferred techniques or interventions. Instead, we allowed the situation, goals and needs of the coaches and athletes to guide us through the process. We certainly tried to educate them about issues related to mental and emotional preparation and challenged them to engage in some form of mental training on a daily basis, but we refrained from imposing any strategy or technique for which they were not ready or in which they outwardly were not interested.

Despite this, when it came time to work with the athletes, it was important that they be open and receptive to mental training to a certain extent. They had to be willing to try and practice some techniques before casting them away as ineffective. We encouraged them to apply what they learned in their daily training so that they wouldn't see mental training as an isolated process. One thing we chose to do early on was to work only with athletes who appeared willing to make a commitment right from the start. Remember that there are always some athletes who are apprehensive and do not

want to get involved. It is important to respect their opinions, particularly if they are forced by their coach to attend your individual and/or team sessions. We have worked with some athletes who at the beginning, straightforwardly stated that they did not believe in mental training and resisted participation in team activities, but two years later, thanked us for helping them adopt a positive attitude and for teaching them such valuable skills.

Another important lesson is that you should get familiarized with the context as much as possible *before* doing any intervention. You might want to talk at length with the coach, assistants, or captain(s), and attend practices to get a general idea of how the athletes behave and perform before you meet with them. It helps if the coach introduces you to the athletes during the first meeting because it shows that he/she believes in and supports the mental side of the game. Also, get to know the support staff because they are a great source of information. Make sure that you have a clear cut agreement with them in terms of your roles and responsibilities so that you do not overstep any boundaries.

On the issue of establishing trust, we would like to make a note that although we believe in the usefulness of assessment tools, we learned that it is best to administer them only after having gained the athletes' respect and trust. Some coaches and athletes have reservations regarding the use of questionnaires, so it is wise to discuss this option and ask their permission first. We have also realized that not all athletes benefit from filling out questionnaires. They may be beneficial if athletes are open and receptive to them, if the results are discussed in debriefing sessions, and they can readily use the information to enhance their performance.

Another lesson was coming to the realization that you need to pay your dues when you first start consulting. This means you must be prepared to do volunteer work. Oftentimes, paid positions are the result of previous volunteer experiences. We have talked at great length with some people about the issue of remuneration and it is still not clear. Some professionals are reticent to reveal how much they charge while others will gladly provide the information. At the doctorate level, we charged \$25.00 per hour, which was consistent with what we were paid for a teaching or research assistantship at the University of Ottawa in Canada. Keep in mind that charging athletes a minimal fee may make a difference in their level of commitment and adherence to meetings and their intervention program.

Also, if you want to be effective, your consulting work will most likely incur some personal costs. Plan to spend some money for materials and traveling to competitions. Yet, remember that it never hurts to ask your thesis or internship supervisor, or the team coach or manager if they have a budget for photocopies, books, tapes, videos, or traveling expenses. We were fortunate to receive some support from our graduate supervisors. Additionally, we had access to a private room to do our consulting work, as well as to different types of equipment such as a video camera, tape recorder, and dictaphone.

Trial and error is definitely part of the process when you are first starting. Nevertheless, it is extremely important that you receive ongoing feedback from trained professionals. Our weekly meetings with our research group and supervisor were extremely rewarding. These forums allowed us to discuss not only our research progress but also our evolving consulting skills and experiences. We would get constructive

feedback on our interactions and most importantly, learn from each other's successes and mistakes. Note that we have met students outside of our program who had a tendency to keep information to themselves. It was almost like they did not want to reveal their secrets for fear that other students would copy them. We feel that if you have the opportunity to be immersed in an environment where resources are there for you to learn, you should be sharing information to expand your knowledge base rather than limiting it. Collaboration can benefit everyone.

### **Building Relationships**

The process of building relationships goes far beyond gaining the athletes and coaches' trust and respect. In fact, if you are planning on building strong and effective relationships, you should probably opt to work on improving them on more than a few occasions. We have found it is important to take your time when developing relationships, especially when working with a team. Allow the athletes to get to know you as a person. Go the extra mile to show that you care about matters both related and unrelated to their sport performance. Showing up early for practices and spending time in the coach's office or dressing room will give you an opportunity to interact with them in an informal way and also to get to know them as people, not just as athletes and coaches.

In addition to these types of interactions, you must establish where you will meet with the athletes for individual consultations. Some academic programs require that you meet with them in an office or classroom on campus, while others offer more flexibility. We had the opportunity to meet with athletes in various settings depending on their preferences or those of their coaches. To this day, we personally like to interact in

a natural milieu, that is, the athletes' training venue, our home, a café, or even outdoors. When we meet in an office or classroom, we try to make the environment as comfortable and as non-threatening as possible. We are also aware of gender and ethical issues involved in working with men as opposed to women. These can vary based on the institution or the association for which you work. Be informed of your options.

An important issue in building effective relationships is confidentiality. One of the first things you probably learned in your consulting courses is to keep all information about your clients confidential. This cannot be emphasized enough. If coaches want updates, relay information in a general fashion without revealing any names, unless the athletes give you permission to do so. This can be difficult at times because we have found ourselves in situations in which coaches have bluntly asked us: "What's going on with him?" or "What should I do with her?" You must be prepared to answer these types of question without jeopardizing the confidentiality you established with the athletes. Referring to a verbal or written agreement or contract you established with the coach at the beginning can be useful in justifying your actions.

We have heard the experts in our field mention that often their work involves spending time with athletes and coaches at practice and competitions, without doing any particular intervention or formal consultation. In lay terms, they simply hang out with them. Some of them have even said that sometimes they wonder what it is that influences a positive effect because periodically, they did not engage in any formal work. However, over the years, it became evident to them and to us as well that this is part of the process of not only gaining trust and respect, but also building belief and relationships.

Our commitment to developing positive relationships with athletes and coaches has led us to invest a lot of time standing in the “background,” observing and providing feedback when it is solicited. Similar to Salmela (1990), in many instances, we have found it best to wait for “teachable moments” to initiate or resume communication with athletes and coaches. This allows us to spend a significant amount of time listening rather than speaking. We noticed that many teachable moments occur when traveling with them to competitions. Some of our best talks have been done informally on the bus, in hotel rooms, or walking to and from sites.

In building strong connections with your clients and capitalizing on teachable moments, you should be flexible and willing to adapt to different situations. We have realized how important it is to be ready to change part of our plan or a specific intervention to meet the coaches’ and/or athletes’ needs and interests, particularly if an intervention is not that meaningful to them in the first place. One of us remembers asking a well-respected consultant how he prepared to work with a professional hockey team. His answer was: “You must always have a plan A, a plan B, and even a plan C in case things don’t work as planned on a particular day.” This implies a tremendous amount of preparation prior to meeting with athletes. It is not uncommon for us to spend a few hours preparing for a session or even four or five hours writing a personal relaxation script for an athlete.

Building reliable relationships obviously involves engaging in ongoing personal evaluation and drawing lessons from successes and failures. Face it, you will not always be effective as a consultant. In fact, you will most likely learn and grow by experimenting with different consulting /

counseling interventions, strategies, and techniques, much like you have learned in other areas of your life. It can be frustrating and even embarrassing to make mistakes, but do yourself a favor and accept the fact that it is part of the learning process. Even the experts have admitted and discussed several mistakes they have made throughout the years. What is important is that you learn from your personal errors and those of others as well.

It cannot be overemphasized, doing regular checks is useful and essential. An excellent way to monitor the effectiveness of your plans and interventions is to seek the coaches’ and athletes’ feedback on a regular basis. You do not always need an assessment form to do this, simply talk to them and be ready to accept criticism. It is also important to continually reassess their goals and needs, and yours as well. It has been effective for us to monitor their progress by asking many questions in person, over the telephone, or through e-mail.

Should you set some limits when establishing relationships with your clients? It is important to ask yourself this question because we often walk a fine line between being the athletes’ consultant and being their friend. Oftentimes, we work with athletes who are the same age as us or even older. There is no doubt that we develop strong bonds with them as they progress throughout a season, however, maintaining a certain distance allows us to keep a holistic view and to be more objective when it is important to do so. For us, this means, for example, that we refrain from socializing with the athletes outside of team activities. It is important to not only set limits but also to know your limitations as a consultant. Being objective will enable you to realize when you have to refer athletes who present



you with problems beyond your competencies, scope of knowledge, or even level of confidence. If you are not sure what to do in a particular situation, seek feedback from your mentor or supervisor, or talk to other professionals in the field. Remember that referring athletes does not mean that you are abandoning them. In cases where we did refer athletes, we continued to work with them on issues for which we were qualified and they respected us even more for being honest and for providing them with positive alternatives.

Effective consulting also requires that you be aware of and realistic about the time you can devote to your consulting work. It is not wise to commit more time than you can allocate. Because you must prove yourself, particularly in the early stages of your career, the quality of your work is extremely important. In some cases, you might have to restrict the number of athletes or teams with whom you will work at once. Preparing handouts, attending practices, competitions, and social events can be time consuming. Also, you cannot forget your course work or thesis/dissertation. If you are as passionate as we are about consulting, you will find it easy to get carried away with the number of hours you invest into your applied work, however, you must rely on your organizational skills and plan accordingly to ensure you meet all of your program goals. Let us remind you to be patient with your progress and that of the athletes with whom you work. Sometimes, it takes more than a

year for athletes to buy into the process of mental training. Despite this, we find that seeing or hearing the positive effects we have had on one athlete makes our entire experience worthwhile. Note that we prefer to refrain from taking credit for the successes of athletes. Instead, we congratulate them on their work and the outstanding effort they invested into becoming mentally prepared. We recognize that we are only a small piece of a large puzzle, and staying humble is a strength that can take you very far.

In sum, we have learned tremendously from our graduate training courses and readings, as well as from our exchanges with athletes, coaches, peers, and other consultants. We are satisfied with the experiences and skills we acquired as graduate students, however, we did have to be quite proactive. There is much room for improvement in terms of offering students more formal, structured, and supervised practica and internships. We certainly hope that a course of action will be taken in response to Silva et al.'s (1999) recommendations for enhancing the training of graduate students. We also hope that the lessons we shared in this paper will help students to increase the quality of their work. We invite your comments and feedback, and encourage you to organize your own workshops at conferences and to publish some of your lessons so that we can continue growing together and making a positive difference in other people's lives.

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## Excellence Through Collaboration

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John Partington, Canada

Dr John Partington was a Professor in Psychology at Carleton University in Ottawa for 27 years. He recently retired from his University position. His insights and courses in sport and performance psychology, social psychology, and play were highly regarded by colleagues and students at the graduate and undergraduate level. For 25 years John collaborated closely with Terry Orlick on a number of innovative projects which brought out the best in both of them. John is still as active as ever both mentally and physically and enjoying his retirement pursuits.

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### Abstract

Collaboration is an extremely important issue in the real world of excellence that has rarely been addressed in the literature. In this article, the value of and obstacles to collaboration are discussed. A series of specific examples of successful collaboration are presented. Implications are drawn that can lead to higher levels of collaboration and excellence in many applied fields. Note: This content of the article was based on a keynote address entitled Excellence through Collaboration which Dr John Partington delivered to the 1998 AAASP Conference in Hyannis, Massachusetts.

### Introduction

I want to share some thoughts with you about an important topic that has rarely been addressed - excellence through collaboration. When you approach your retirement years, you know that you're not finished, but it certainly is a time to reflect, and to take stock of what you have done, and what is left to do. Looking back on my career, brought me face-to-face with something I've felt a little uncomfortable about, which is that the work I am most satisfied with, and proud of, has generally been done in collaboration with others, including patients, students, athletes and other performers, and of course colleagues. Why should that bother me? Would other sport psychologists feel the same way if they had generally worked with others rather than working in-

dependently? Does our culture play a role in this?

In an essay by Len Zakowski "On Becoming an Expert in Sport and Exercise Psychology", he advised students to become "scientist-practitioners" by developing a strong theoretical orientation, as well as skills in modes of inquiry, knowledge about psychometrics, and working experience through well-supervised internship training. The successful graduate of this curriculum could be truly self-sufficient and independent. When I compared this image to my own experience, I had to conclude that only now, after thirty four years of post-doctoral on-the-job training, do I begin to approximate the skills of the scientist-practitioner model in a sort of 60-40 ratio. So how did I get any useful work done, and avoid screwing

up clients during this long period of development? Answer: I collaborated most of the time. The pooling of skills, sharing of responsibility, and resultant increase in efficacy always helped to get the job done, by bridging the gap between my personal deficits and the challenges of the project.

What pushed me to write on the topic of collaboration was that the essay by Dr. Zakowski made no explicit reference to training the prerequisite skills for collaboration. I believe that if we work together we can significantly improve training for excellence in sport, exercise psychology and other disciplines.

My paper provides a reconstruction of several samples of my collaborative work, selected to represent different points in my career. Through these accounts I hope to give you the opportunity to begin to consider some of the individual, interpersonal, situational, and cultural factors which may have an effect on the likelihood that expert and fruitful collaboration can occur.

The first example of collaborative work is from my days as a social/clinical psychologist in the late 1960's. During my first two post-Ph.D. years I had worked at an alcohol and drug addiction center as a researcher/counsellor. I was mostly doing clinic-level program evaluations to provide feedback for counsellors, but my published research was still quite academic. One of my (1970) research reports was entitled, "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. High: Multidimensional Scaling of Alcoholics' Self-Evaluations". I did this study for the wrong reasons - to keep using a then novel judgment-analytical procedure which I'd used in my Ph.D. thesis on personality impression formation, and also to make a flashy impression in the literature, thereby impressing my boss. Though the study was nominated for a

Raymond Cattell young scientist award, it was still a dumb study, because it did nothing but confirm the then current stereotype about the alcoholic passive-aggressive personality pattern disorder. These results are "pretty", but what do you do with them?

After three more years of post-Ph.D. jerking around like this, trying to find my own way, I re-examined these findings and I asked myself what I could do to understand an individual with serious drinking symptoms, and what I could do to help him, with the aid of this personal understanding. In retrospect, I think that this question set me free; free from much of what I had learned in graduate school. Now, rather than being driven to seek homothetic quasi-understanding to build theory, and thereby gain recognition and power within the profession, I was ready to break loose and try whatever research or intervention approach was feasible to help someone in need.

For the first time in several years I became excited about the possibility of doing research. I was now at a university in a different city, I contacted a different addiction center and asked whether I could work with a recently admitted, and statistically typical alcoholic (i.e., male, early 40s, married with two children). The clinic director agreed, with the proviso that I treat the client in collaboration with one of their case workers. The social worker, in turn, suggested that the client's wife be involved. During our first team meeting, after listening to the usual history of concerns, I explained why I was there, and proposed that, as a team, our goal could be to help the client develop toward an ideal self, one whose actions he could live with, and whose actions would make life better not only for him, but also for his wife and daughters. I explained that we could identify an ideal self, efficiently, by regular team discussions of the validity

and implications of findings from several psychological tests, which I could administer to the client. I further explained that the three of us, social worker, wife, and me, could serve as drama coaches to help the client learn to enact his new self-ideal role comfortably and consistently. Following discussion, this plan was accepted by the client and other team members. We executed it over a period of sessions. We used both traditional and novel measures, and the role-play psychodrama included both in-office coaching of simulated situations, as well as pre- and -post coaching for dealing with specifically targeted problematic situations in the client's life.

Let's very briefly examine findings about the client's ideal self from Jackson's traditional Personality Research Form. The client wished to become more socially connected, i.e., more affiliative, less aggressive, less autonomous, more nurturant, and also to become more stable or mature.

For the novel measure, I listed, on a hand-out, fifteen types of people. These included a paragraph to represent an alcoholic, together with fourteen other person labels. The client was asked to represent, in his own mind, each of the following fourteen persons: your father, mother, wife, and work supervisor, your favourite male and female actors, your sports hero, a respected public figure, someone you fear, someone you admire, and someone you love deeply, as well as your sober, high, and ideal self. I then asked the client to make numerical judgments of similarity between the person types; e.g., "How similar or dissimilar is your ideal self to your sport hero"

It took about three weeks for an acceptable self ideal role to emerge from our team discussions of these various measures of ideal self. This process was unlike anything I'd

learned from tests and measurement courses. For example, we'd all gather around a table and study the profiles and the people maps, in a spirit of curiosity and discovery. We would decide whether we agreed or disagreed with that representation. The numerical data were merely the starting point for us. The facts were always friendly because ultimately it was us, together, who generated the facts consensually. What applied value can be found in an empirically-based fact, like a score on a personality trait measure, if the individual who needs and wants to develop and to change for the better, can't understand and therefore can't "own" or incorporate that information? Our process, though unscientific in the traditional natural science sense, led to personal knowledge in the form of exciting possibilities or hypotheses to guide the client's growth. After several weeks of drama-style coaching to help the client learn his new role, the client announced that he was ready to try it alone. He explained that he had borrowed a tent trailer and intended to take his family on their very first vacation. One year later, a home visit found the client still sober, in good standing at work, and playing recreational hockey two nights a week for fun. The daughters had improved school grades, and his wife seemed a bit less distant. She mentioned that her husband had repaired the back gate and recovered the living room furniture.

I had never before seen such a positive outcome for an alcoholic in treatment with me. I believe that the readiness to collaborate among all team members had a lot to do with this. It took a while for all of us to click, especially me. At first I would feel irritated by the social worker's stereotypical phrases like, "How does that make you FEEEL? (with eyeballs rolling up into her head), but later I had to acknowledge that her client-centered style helped things along.

Similarly, at first, I couldn't remain open to the wife. She seemed aloof and held herself apart, not sharing in some of the humour. But later I began to appreciate her matter-of-fact, no-nonsense, survival-based contributions. This case taught me that collaboration requires tolerance of individual differences, and patience to allow things to happen. Collaboration in this case paid off for all concerned.

Next I'll discuss collaboration with students. I have selected only two illustrations from the hundreds possible. The first began in the spring of 1975 when I was approached by Betsy & Debby, two undergraduates enrolled in my Study of Play course. They breathlessly explained that the Carleton University Daycare Center might lose its government funding due to lack of an outdoor play space. Although the university had designated a small plot adjacent to the center, the center's director insisted that the area be made safe and conducive to the development of the children's social, cognitive, and physical skills, as is the case for the design of the indoor daycare facility. The students wanted me to serve as their advisor so as to enable them to apply for a government Opportunities for Youth grant to cover summer work salaries for six students to design and build a creative playground for toddlers. The student's firm and passionate commitment to do something good was infectious. It brought out the good in me. So I got involved and together we prepared the proposal, which secured funds to pay for student salaries.

We then organized a playground planning workshop, inviting a couple of professors, as well as several experienced and well-placed professionals from the Canadian Council on Children and Youth, and the Provincial Ministry of Sport, Culture, and Recreation. We also hired four additional students to

bring in expertise from the Schools of Architecture and Engineering.

To prepare ourselves for the workshop we quickly devised an observational protocol to assist in making systematic observations of toddlers at play in several local parks and in other outdoor daycare facilities. We also sought input from teachers at the center, and from parents whose children were attending the center.

The planning workshop generated super concepts. Then our team held several lengthy meetings to sort through all the ideas, because each proposed play structure had to be considered not just in terms of safety, and developmental potential, but also in terms of cost, since the grant money was for salaries only.

The play space required fourteen weeks to design and construct. One student assumed the role of construction superintendent, another did the accounting, and the rest of us did the labouring and scrounging for materials and construction equipment. The building stage involved a happy mixture of fun in the sun, hard physical labour, and cold one's at days end (what I mean here is cold Perrier). Translating our formal knowledge about playfulness and design, into concrete realities was rewarding for all of us. Other fruits of this collaboration included the following:

- A play space which literally saved our Day Care Center, and provided a safe outdoor environment within which the toddlers could explore, discover, create, and learn to get along with each other with minimal adult intervention.
- A Handbook designed by our team to assist community groups to develop

their own toddler play spaces. This handbook, complete with hints and graphs, was made available through the provincial Ministry of Sport and Recreation.

- A meaningful and exciting multi disciplinary learning experience for six students, as well as summer salaries.
- Materials and data for two honours student theses and for a journal publication.

The second example of collaboration was my last masters thesis student, Debbie Stewart. At our first meeting, when I asked about her previous research, she outlined in rather dull tones the research question, method, and findings of her honours thesis. Apparently, her study had contributed more to her advisers program of research than to her own interests. Then I asked if there was anything related to sport and performance about which she was truly curious. She quickly told me about her concern for her boyfriend, a football player from our local University of Ottawa. Apparently, he was struggling to make the huge leap into the National Football League (NFL). After playing briefly for a professional team in Texas he was now on the injured list and worried about ever successfully making the pro transition. When I suggested that she might like to do her master's research on this problem, she asked, "How can you do an experiment on that"? So started her nine month conversion toward qualitative methods, a conversion which for me had taken thirty four years.

In parallel with her philosophy of science and methodological readings, we also reviewed literature on career transitions in general. Based on some of this, we soon

developed a structured, open-ended interview schedule which Debbie used as a guide for interviews with her boyfriend and three retired professional football players available in the area.

Next, we contacted a top NFL agent to explain our purpose and to seek advice about how to contact other NFL players. In order to provide conceptual leverage for our future content analyses, we decided to seek input from three types of players: a) veteran pros who had made the transition and successfully established themselves; b) pros who had passed the main part of the transition but who were still struggling to secure a solid footing; c) and finally, we also looked for a few players who had been equally great at college, invited to camps, but were ultimately unsuccessful in the transition.

With help from agents, and from a growing social network of contacts among pro players, we managed to involve twenty-one players as informant-collaborators. Of the six successful veterans, five had been All-American at college, and four had received professional awards, such as All-Pro and All-Madden. We contacted athletes through their agents, or through other pros. We explained to each player why we needed his collaboration. This was done either via telephone when possible, or by letter. We arranged to secure their input through audio-taped self-interviews, guided by an improved interview schedule. This procedure was convenient for them, and realistic for us. When necessary, clarification was obtained by follow-up telephone calls. Some may ask at this point, does being an interviewee-informant constitute collaboration? In my view, the answer depends on how the participant is approached and oriented, how the questions are asked (open or closed), and whether a two-way channel remains open between investigators and informants. Lis-



ten to how Debbie approached her informants, and judge for yourself:

*I'm a sport psychology student working on my masters thesis. After I graduate I'd like to work with athletes. Maybe one thing I can help them with is adjusting to things in their sport life, like overcoming injuries, and handling big career changes like moving from amateur to pro sport, handling big career changes like moving from amateur to pro sport, getting traded, and retiring. For my thesis I'd like to find out what its like for players like you to move up from college to pro football. I've talked to four pro players who have gone through this change, and they've helped me to know some of the important questions to ask.*

*... When answering the questions feel free to say everything that comes to mind, even if you think that it may be off-topic. You are the expert on this subject, and everything you have to say is important.*

*... If you want to talk a bit more about this change in your career, or if you have any questions just call me collect or call my advisor, John Partington*

When the data came in, Debbie and I worked together on the content analyses of the transcripts. She would attempt to identify categories and code lists of typical reports. Then she would come to me, often in despair. We would usually play around with other possibilities for hours, in a very loose, open atmosphere of discovery. Usually during this process, Debbie would start smiling again. We developed a really great give and take style; when I would run out of gas, she would come on strong, and vice-versa. Two heads are truly better than one if both can maintain a playful attitude. Before doing final content analyses Debbie con-

vinced eight friends to work independently to see whether their independent reading of the transcripts would generate similar categories. Once satisfied that we understood the findings, we wrote them up, along with implications and recommended advice. We then re-contacted two players from the successful group and three from the struggling group to have them review our preliminary draft report to ensure that our advice would be useful to other players in transition.

This project involved Debbie and I as collaborators, several agents and pro players as helpful contact people, twenty one players as informant-collaborators, with five of these also serving as experts to review our recommendations, as well as eight of Debbie's friends assisting in data analyses. Cooperation from everybody was important.

Collaboration also appears in the findings and implementation of the findings. We found that the most important element in successful transition to the NFL is the new players' openness and willingness to seek advice from the veteran players. During all stages of the transition, from before the draft to after team cuts, players who made a successful transition into the NFL asked questions of experienced players, received answers, and were open to this advice. One player put it this way:

*I got to meet a lot of NFL players in their off-season when they came back to my university to work-out or take classes. I could ask them anything. I learned a lot. I took two classes with one of the guys and I would ask him all kinds of stuff when we'd go to lunch - how he worked out, what their schedule was like, how he went about picking an agent, how he invested his money, just everything that I knew I would have to do if I made it to that point. So that was the biggest part of my preparation.*

Another finding may also be related to this advice seeking - i.e., when facing the transition, those who made it, reported not feeling equal to other players in the league in their particular playing position. They knew they lacked experience and they recognized that there were many outstanding veterans from whom they could gain valuable advice. They tried to make friends with experienced players and treated them as mentors. Whereas players in the unsuccessful group reported feeling equal to other players. They made friends with them, but were less likely to seek their advice.

In any event, it seems that collaboration among players, in terms of seeking and giving advice is a key element in facilitating the transition from amateur to pro football.

Fruits of collaboration from this project include the following: Debbie got her degree and helped her boyfriend. Many other players will soon be helped in their transition by advice in a Handbook currently in preparation, which Debbie will make available to agents. Finally, working on this project helped me through the transition to life beyond my university career. There are rich intrinsic personal gains available from working in collaboration with others. Now retired, I will miss the opportunity to collaborate with all my students

Turning next to collaboration with colleagues, I have to say that the best team of people I've ever worked with, outside my family, were people most of you know - Terry Orlick, Cal Botterill, Wayne Halliwell, and John Salmela. At our 1977 Canadian Sport Psychology Conference, Salmela, as a member of the International Society for Sport Psychology (ISSP) Managing Council, called for bids to host the 1981 ISSP meeting. Orlick and I put together an Ottawa bid which beat others in Canada, and the next

year Salmela and I flew to Munich where we presented our bid. It took our combined efforts and resources to win the honour to host the Fifth World Sport Psychology Congress in Ottawa, Canada. John was, and still is, very well respected and well-connected at the international level of our discipline, and he is, as you know, both energetic, and socially adroit, at times bordering on the Machiavellian. My contribution was a professional-looking bid, an exciting short film prepared to show the wonders of Ottawa, and I believe the clincher was at the right moment I distributed 12 bottles of Double Dimple scotch all around the table.

After our return to Canada, Cal, Wayne, Terry, John and I began to meet regularly for the next three years to conceptualize and plan the program, and to identify and contact productive and influential speakers from both within and outside our discipline. Anyone who has been involved in this kind of ambitious, long-range project knows the importance of collaboration. You can't alone. For example, the aura and critical mass of a well-prepared team presentation can sell the conference message and thereby gain endorsements better than most individuals could do. Moreover, throughout the long-haul, momentum can be sustained, even when one or two individuals fall sick or become over committed.

What made our lengthy collaboration work in my view was the mutual commitment in our team to three goals for this conference: First, to firmly establish the discipline of sport psychology as a central and powerful force in the mental preparation of athletes. The second goal was to raise public awareness and concern over the erosion of values in sport, with the hope of getting sport back in perspective. That, in fact, was the title of our conference (Sport in Perspective). Our third implicit goal was to boost the work of

sport psychologists in our country. In addition to these common goals, another factor in our successful collaboration was our similarity. In those days, each of us loved to work hard and to play hard; we all liked to take a chance, break some rules, and try to make a statement or have an impact through what we were doing. These similarities generated mutual respect and liking, which in turn, facilitated the resolution of issues when they arose. We were generally able to keep our big egos out of the way. In the count-down months before the conference, Carol Anne Letherin joined our team and, provided super-efficient management (Carol Anne went on to become the first female President of the Canadian Olympic Association). Finally, on-site, our team was strengthened with the addition of a large company of very bright and energetic sport psychology graduate students from the University of Ottawa.

The congress attracted participants and delegates from many disciplines, and from 42 countries, including Papua New Guinea, each of the FEPSAC countries, including those behind the then “iron curtain”, and even two from the People’s Republic of China. Our charismatic Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau, gave the opening speech, and then the well-known figure skater, Toller Cranston, provided a dazzling performance to get us all into the spirit of sport and performance.

We also sought children’s input for getting sport in perspective at the conference and initiated a national art contest to have children send in drawings of their favourite moments in sport and physical activity. The three published volumes of proceedings reflected world-wide input on motor learning and control, coaching, and on value issues in sport. Through collaboration we made sig-

nificant progress toward achieving each of our conference goals.

Before moving on, I want to insert an addendum. As Co-chairmen for the conference, Terry and I experienced great difficulty in maintaining our role as equal-status collaborators, especially when dealing with large bureaucratic organizations, for example, when seeking funds from our Federal Government through Sport Canada. The usual first question was, who is in charge? When we answered, “we both are”, the trouble would begin. It seems that people in formal organizations don’t understand or accept the pre-fix, “co”, which Webster defines as implying, “together with”. This is one indication that there may be subtle cultural pressures against collaboration.

### **Magic Moments**

Now to conclude I will try to recapture some of the magic, and some of the magical moments which I’ve experienced through twenty five years of association with my colleague Terry Orlick. During those twenty- five years Terry has accomplished a prodigious amount of influential work without me, and I to have done some useful work without him both inside and outside the sport domain. However, in a recent conversation, Terry and I agreed that we always feel most inspired when working together. I’ll touch on two examples of our collaboration. My purpose is to provide you with evidence to help you understand what made our collaboration both necessary and possible.

My initial encounter with Terry was at the First National Conference on the Child in Sport and Physical Activity. That brief contact led me to ask him to join a panel I was organizing to discuss the role of play and games in child development. The panel was for elementary school teachers as part of their professional development program.

Later that year, Terry invited me to accompany him to Montreal to attend another first national conference, this one on the Movement Sciences. You can see from all the First National Conferences that interest in play and sport was exploding at that time. During this brief period of acquaintance Terry and I became aware of our common applied interests. We were certainly on the same wave-length in our joint concern about the growing trend in sport toward antagonistic, rivalrous competition.

At the Montreal conference I met an old football teammate of mine, Harvey Scott, who had turned into a Sport Sociologist. It turned out that he was a colleague of Terry's on a project involving native youth in the high arctic. As things should happen at any conference, Harvey and Terry started talking shop, and I jumped in raising questions about the goals of the program, and about the methodology. In a soft spoken put-up or shut-up tones they invited me to become involved.

I will now tell you about this first arctic project we worked on together. At that time native children in the arctic at around the grade 6 level or earlier were taken from their home settlements and placed for 9-10 months in large regional schools. They were supervised and taught by non-native teachers using a "southern" curriculum like that in Edmonton Alberta. Needless to say there was a very high drop out rate, with the drop-outs ill-equipped to fit back into a traditional life-style. Over the years as these youth became adult, alcoholism and wife and child abuse increased. To counter this trend the North West Territories recreation department initiated the Territorial Experimental Ski Training Program (TEST). The goal of this competitive cross-country ski program was to motivate northern youth to greater general achievement in life. The authorities

recognized that the schools were failing to do this. The Board of Directors of TEST hoped to give Indian and Inuit youth a better chance to compete in the rapidly approaching "modern" world. The program began in the urban government town of Inuvik in 1967. Unfortunately, the first evaluation phase from 1971 to 1973 had yielded little, because no prior baseline measures had been obtained and because measures had been used which were inappropriate to children from a native culture.

Terry and I wanted to study program effects on younger native youth in small settlements, because such kids were more likely to hold traditional values at the outset. Our timing was fortuitous because the TEST Board members were thinking of introducing the program into settlements the next year. Our challenge then was to develop some appropriate psycho-social measures quickly, and to obtain baseline measures before the kids started skiing. Thankfully, Terry had already made several prior visits to the north, so he knew what the children were like. My contribution would be experience in test construction, after work with Doug Jackson.

This phase of the project would require us to work hard, fast, long, and closely together. Such a situation involves more than two "scientist-practitioners" combining their expertise and professionalism. Rather we were, and still are two very, human, beings, each with different needs. In those days Terry could work forever without a break. In contrast I've always looked forward to a tea and pee break about every seventy five minutes, a good run or ski at noon, and I like to eat now and then. If not, watch out. Most grandchildren call their grandfather something nice like, "Papa", at dinner-time mine call me "Grumpy John". To his credit, Terry has learned to read and respond to my

needs. I too have learned to accommodate to Terry's work style. Thus, at the person-to-person level, collaboration demands interpersonal sensitivity, and both courage and social skills to communicate your feelings when necessary.

While telling you about the measures we developed, I'll keep emphasizing the importance of collaboration. Our initial discussion of the scope to be covered by the measures showed that we both like to err in the direction of thoroughness. Thus we decided to use multiple indices both at the individual and social level.

For our social level assessment of change in achievement motivation, we decided to perform McClelland-style content analyses of children's stories which were re-regularly published in the monthly newsletter of the settlement under the headings, Town News, Bush News, and Sport News. There are 12 native adult education students who do the editing. Naturally, we recognized that the school teachers would have to collaborate with us on this because of their familiarity with the children's idiosyncrasies in the way they expressed themselves when using our language.

The other social-level measure was taken from Roger Barker's work on behaviour settings. The social opportunities in a community and any changes therein can be identified by listing and describing all the behaviour settings in a community. We all know that the school gym is one place, physically and geographically. But depending on social changes in activity, leadership, and participants, the gym could represent several different behaviour settings, such as for bingos, for dances and for adult aerobics classes, in short a variety of social opportunities. Would the introduction of the TEST program change the social opportu-

nity structure of a small settlement? To answer this question, once again, we would need collaboration from several native and non-native residents who were well-acquainted with and accepted by the people and places in the settlement.

Turning next to our individual-level measures, the first was to determine whether there would be an association between skiing achievement and social acceptance by peers. We decided to use the usual sociometric device which asks children to list three others who you'd like to be your friend. For a measure of school achievement the usual indices like grades were useless because grades were seldom assigned, students of several ages were all mixed together in the same class, and some bright students were doing work to catch up due to periods of absence out in the bush with their family, trapping and hunting. Thus, all that we could do was to discuss our need to collaborate with teachers as soon as we arrived in the north, so that we could put our heads together to identify some qualitative indices of students, school performance and attitudes. That is what we did when we got up there, we collaborated with the teachers.

This brings us to the development of a culturally appropriate individual measure to assess change in self conception and in attitudes relevant to the self-change goals of the TEST program. In our first work session on this, Terry and I found ourselves finding good reasons to crap on everything available, which was easy to do. Actually this initial strategy has become a ritual for us now. We always have to clear things away in order to create. This is easy for the two of us because of our similar attitudes. For example, each of us has come to the conclusion that it is important to beware of any and all tests and measures. There is nothing

mean-spirited about this. It's just that this kind of attitude helps us to keep focused on clients needs, rather than becoming ensnared by an over-concern for using the "in" methodology of the day.

After we wiped the slate clean, the first few minutes were difficult. Where do we go from here? We started with just a general awareness of how settlement kids might be functioning now, and of how they might be functioning after being influenced by the ski program. How can I describe what happened next? You know how writers in the play literature talk about kids entering a play state? That is what it was like for us. Each of us seemed to slip across a boundary, to a place of mind which didn't concern itself with rules and consequences. At this point, usually one, then the other will cast an idea out onto the still waters of our mutual focus. Sometimes it happens faster. We toss our ideas back and forth like kids playing catch. But right from that first work session, and certainly more so now, we tend to be gentle with each other's ideas.

I can best explain this by reference to how a concertmaster put it to me in one of our interviews. He was recalling a situation in which he had been trying to allow his body to discover something it didn't yet know, that is, the way to produce a particular musical statement through the violin. He spoke as follows:

*What you are doing is exploring. You are trying out different stuff. And then there always comes a time when it happens, almost by accident. Now if you're cool, and not tense, and with a little bit of luck, you may be able to just notice it. You go, "Oh jeez, it happened. What was I doing then"? If you don't pounce on it with both feet, if you just see if it will slide by you again... sort of while you're looking over*

*here, maybe that thing will happen over there, and maybe you'll be able to sort of catch it.*

That is what I mean by Terry and I being gentle. We don't pounce on seemingly great ideas, nor do we stifle those which, at the moment, appear less promising, because later on that idea might fit. We have learned to nurture our ideas.

As I recall, in this first test development experience, I talked about Osgood's Semantic Differential as a general format, because it has been used to measure how people evaluate and define a wide range of concepts. I scribbled "Me" at the top of a page, and scribbled a few bi-polar scales down the page, like "active-lazy", "cooperative-competitive" Terry said, "yah, maybe we should hold on to that". He liked the fact that we could insert dimension labels that the kids could understand. But then he reminded me about how northern kids love reading comic books way more than reading school books because they like action pictures better than words. I connected that suggestion to Hadly Cantrill's pictorial measure of life satisfaction. It was developed to use with African people to predict their discontent, and thereby to anticipate revolution. The measure shows a picture of a mountain, with the top being an ideal place to be. The respondent is asked to show where he is now on the mountain and where he thinks he'll be in two or five years. I'm a little unclear about how long the next creative step took, but I do remember Terry showing me a day or two later some sketches which he produced. The sketches showed stick figures on skis, one at each end of a wiggly line representing a ski trail. Each figure was saying something, like they do in comic books. Euroka! The "Skimetric Differential" was born. The final twenty-two dimensions included self-attributes, and attitudes important to tradi-

tional Northerners, as we had gleaned from writings of the Canadian cultural anthropologists who had spent long periods of time doing field work in the high arctic. The items represent the importance of sharing and team work, attitudes about winning and being humble in victory, and man struggling with nature rather than competing against man, and the importance of helping others over beating others.

Once drafts of the skimetric test were available we held a series of interviews with Indian and Inuit children to determine whether each child could understand each item, and if not, how could the item be changed. I'll never forget those fun-filled collaboration sessions.

Finally, armed with potentially decent measures, and with permission from the TEST Board and the School Board, we obtained test-retest and criterion validity data from a sample of 380 native students in Inuvik. This turned out to be very hard work, since we could only deal with three or four children at a time, and they liked to lie down together on the floor while filling out their tests, wiggling and giggling. To assess criterion validity we asked three long-standing northerners, who were familiar with the families of many of the school children, to select two extreme samples to represent students from low and high achievement oriented homes. Our Skimetric test found that kids from non-achieving homes were more traditional in the sense of being more collectively and sharing oriented. These findings encouraged us to think that our new test might be sensitive to personal changes associated with the ski training program.

I mentioned that we worked hard on this trip, but I didn't mention how cold and dark it was all night and all day too. Such conditions provide another reason why it's im-

portant to collaborate with someone you know and like. A research mate really helps when working in the field, especially far away from home and in a different culture. This lesson was particularly reinforced for us years later in a double culture-shock situation when we were asked to work with tank and armoured reconnaissance units in preparation for NATO war games in Germany.

My last item about collaboration in this study concerns what I call "honey-bucket" diplomacy. On our first night in Inuvik, after our meeting with the TEST Board of Directors, I was asked by one of the key board members to critically review the methodology of an opinion survey. It seems that the largely white city fathers intended to use the survey as a means of obtaining ammunition to support new restrictions on the use of beer and alcohol, restrictions unpopular to many in this community. I was tired and a bit put off, but Terry knew that it was best for me to do it because he knew from experience that in the north you are expected to give help. Terry had learned this previously when he wanted to study northern games. Yes, he could observe the games at the big event, but he had to join the honey-bucket brigade to carry away and dispose of human waste. Collaboration, it seems, begets collaboration.

Lets move on to our work in the small settlement of Tulita (Fort Norman) where over a three year period 1973-1975 we made several site-visits to assess effects of the TEST program, through our measures, and by observing skiers while training there, and also as they competed up in Inuvik at the Top of the World Games. With all of our measures and observations though we learned a tremendous amount we failed to find support for the expected effects of the program. If anything, those children most actively in-

volved with TEST seemed to become more, not less, traditional. One explanation for this is that the school principal, and coach, allowed the kids to take skis out on the trap lines when their family left town to live in the bush. Another possible explanation emerged from our detailed investigation of one particular case. This boy in 1973, at base-line testing, had a marginal sociometric status; i.e., only 7% wanted him as their friend. Later though, after he started to become a good skier, his popularity increased from 7% to 18%. However, in 1975, when he really began to excel in skiing, his popularity dropped back to 7%. This suggested to us that there may be normative peer pressures against too much achievement in non-traditional activities like competitive skiing (and possibly even school work). Greater light was shed on this when we interviewed the mother of a national caliber skier who had been trained by the TEST program. Her sad comment was, “He doesn’t come home much anymore”. The son’s achievement and success in modern world sport had taken him away from her, and from her community. Remember, in these traditional settlements people are still very interdependent. They still need each other for physical and cultural survival. So the question was raised, do natives have an achievement program, or do they just have a problem with our kind of achievement?

To sum up, this study illustrates three things: First, the collaboration between Terry and I was both necessary and fruitful; second, our willingness to collaborate and work on the opinion survey actually opened the door for us to do our work in the settlements; and third, our findings suggest that perhaps the individual winning, competitive-ethic variety of achievement is antithetical to traditional native valuing of interdependence, and is therefore threatening and disruptive to

those whose native and life necessity predicate collaboration.

I will now move on quickly to one last example of what I have learned about how collaboration can lead to excellence. This example is focused on the evaluation which Terry and I conducted of our elite amateur sport system, as reflected in the mental preparation of our athletes for the 1984 Olympic Games. Many of you by now have probably read about this in the article, “Mental Links to Excellence”. Thus, I won’t rehash the methodology and findings. Rather, I’ll stick to items relevant to collaboration.

First, how and why did Terry and I become involved in this as collaborators? The answer is that in the fall of 1984, Abby Hoffman our new Director General of Sport Canada, the head— of amateur sport, wished to investigate horror stories she had been hearing through the grape-vine concerning the possibility that some of our Olympic athletes had had their heads and performances screwed up by a few clinical and a few sport psychologists, a few coaches, and a few quacks. I’m sure she invited Terry in because she was aware of his broad and intimate knowledge of coaches and athletes at the national level in about nine sports, and because she knew that he had been seeking funds to find out exactly why some of our athletes had done so well at the ‘84 Games. I was called in because Abby had heard me give an invited talk at a recent SCAAPS meeting on “Evaluating Sport Psyching” and Terry recommended me as “an essential part of the project”.

From that talk she would know that I had broad knowledge of evaluation methodology, that I had never worked with elite athletes (thus I was naive), and finally, she probably sensed in me the same reservations



that she herself had about the value of mental training. Another possible reason why she brought us in together rather than separately may be because we were seen as a credible team, following our visible co-hosting of the Fifth World Congress. As it turned out, having the two of us made it possible for me to interview all those athletes with whom Terry had worked, thus censuring a bit more validity to the interviewing part of our procedure.

The key thing which I suggested at our first meeting was for Abby to strike both a steering committee and a working committee to ensure that all client groups likely to be affected by the study would have input into the formulation and execution of the investigation. I learned this strategy from the work of Michael Patton. When people are involved as collaborators, study findings are more useful, because those involved feel a sense of ownership of the study, and are therefore much more likely to respond constructively to study recommendations in the Final Report.

To illustrate client involvement, do you know who formulated the opening question for our interview schedule, and survey questionnaire? At one of our working committee meetings we were trying to decide whether or not to use brief video clips of the start of each athlete's Olympic performance to get them back into the spirit of the competition, so that their interview recall might be sharpened. Abby, our top client (and former Olympian), piped up, "Why not just ask them, when you got to the line, were you ready?" When we tried that question out the next day with a couple of local Olympic athletes you could just see their hair stand on end, and their nostrils flare. No videos necessary, thanks to Abby's insightful collaboration. How could Abby,

later on, not feel that she had played a significant role in the study?

By making sure that key figures in sport were personally involved like John Bales who was, then Technical Director for the Coaching Association of Canada, and some top national coaches, and athlete representatives, it was possible for us to convince Abby to broaden the scope of our investigation to encompass, not just the horror stories, not just what went wrong, but also the success stories, so as to learn how athletes prepared mentally to achieve excellence at the Olympic Games. Moreover, the committee collaboration also ensured that after the findings were in, analyzed, and the Final Report written, we were given support to do a number of other things. First, to present the findings at the National Coaches Seminar, after which Jack Donohue, head coach for Men's Basketball, rushed up to tell us that he'd already telephoned home some rich quotes to be put up on the player's bulletin board. Next, we wrote the book, **Psyched: Inner Views of Winning**, and we subsequently received support from Sport Canada and the Coaching Association not only to print it, but also to make free copies available to all national coaches and to every single carded athlete in Canada. Thus our findings didn't just sit in a drawer. They reached those who could profit directly and immediately from them.

Let me insert a little anecdote here. When Abby first brought us in for this study, it was no secret that she had little respect for certain sport psychologists, and held serious reservations about our discipline. Moreover, we knew that she believed that athletes should train very hard physically and try to make it on their own. This is probably because that's what she had done as a middle-distance competitor. After our book was completed, before it went to press, I asked

her for a piece to include. One of the things she wrote was, “The stories in this book demonstrate that if we neglect the mental side of high performance, we will do so at our peril”. I believe that this statement represents a slight shift in her attitude toward athlete preparation, and I further believe that her active collaboration in our study had something to do with it, as it did for changes in my own attitudes.

The fruits of our extended collaboration on this project continued to materialize. After the book, came a Sport Canada funded workshop organized by Terry and I for sport psychologists slated to work with athletes at the 1988 Olympics; this was to enable them to share their goals and strategies. Next we developed and published the Consultant Evaluation Form designed to enable consultants to receive feedback from clients on concrete behaviours and characteristics related to their effectiveness. Subsequently Terry and I developed Mental Training Exercises to help athletes determine their present level of mental readiness, both for quality practice as well as for successful competitive performance. These exercises were designed to model what our best athletes have reported doing. Hence, the athlete respondent can know at once not only where he is strong and where he is weak, but also what he needs to do more of to improve. Our collaboration with athletes in the past, has made it possible for us to build a collaborative bridge, called the Mental Training Exercises, to enable a seeking athlete to symbolically link up with procedural knowledge of former athletes, and thus find a key to more successful performance.

Now I simply must insert the next few remarks. It took me all summer to dump the negative moments of my career, before I could go on to write this happy account you’ve read to this point. I’ve given you a

sanitized version of things. I admit that there have been terrible moments as well as magic moments through my many collaborations. Moments filled with jealousy, suspicion and disappointment in others, and sometimes even white hot rage. But as I examined each of these memories, I was able to realize in retrospect that those occasions could have been avoided if I had been trained to assert myself to negotiate, and above all to forgive. With such simple personal skills training I could have accomplished so much more. I never collaborated with many professors in my own department because I couldn’t trust them. What a waste. I couldn’t trust them with my ignorance.

To conclude I would like to return to two as yet unanswered questions which I raised at the beginning of the talk; i.e., why, before writing this paper I have never felt truly comfortable knowing that most of my work has not been done independently, and why didn’t Len Zakowski mention the importance of training to be collaborative in his essay?

At the beginning of this article I hinted about possible cultural influences. Please don’t groan, but I want to take us back to a 1977 article by a sociologist, Ed Sampson from Clark University. The article was entitled, “Psychology and the American Ideal”. Sampson was criticizing American personality psychologists of that era. He started out by observing that the American cultural ideal at that time was to be entirely self-sufficient, to be able to stand alone, to be able to succeed and become “number one” through individual striving. Let me insert anecdotally that around this time an NBC camera crew came up to Ottawa to record a program on Terry Orlick’s cooperative games. When the play leader explained the cooperative rules, a camera man was overheard to say, “Why, that’s down-

right Un American”. Now back to Sampson. He singled out the then current research focus on Androgyny. He explained that the androgynous personality represents a synthesis, within an individual, of the best of culturally defined male and female dispositions. Such an individual would certainly be socially self-sufficient. The research was showing that androgynous Americans were very successful and well adjusted. The interpretation of these findings was that this kind of personality synthesis was a valued goal for everybody. But Sampson chided psychologists for falling into a cultural trap. Of course socially self-sufficient, androgynous individuals fit comfortably within the American culture, which values individual self-sufficiency. But then Sampson asked, what if this cultural imperative of self-sufficiency is flawed? What if such a cultural expectation results in more and more people dropping out, because they can't manage to “get it all together” and thus they can't make the grade? And what if the American ideal of standing tall and independent may become a less and less realistic strategy for dealing with the increasingly complex challenges of our modern world? Sampson urged American personality psychologists to recognize and accept their role to be social leaders through their research, rather than just being social commentators of what seems to be working now. He asserted that if Americans have a better chance of survival through interdependent, collaborative efforts, then psychologists should be leading the way, by learning through their research how to prepare people to join their individual talents together so as to provide a productive group level synthesis of talents for dealing with problems.

When I read Len's essay about the scientist-practitioner, I saw Len's model through Sampson's eyes; i.e., as a model of different skills synthesized within an individual sport

psychologist. Naturally, I have to ask the following questions: Are we being realistic to expect all of our students to incorporate a synthesis of the best dispositions and skills of both the scientist and the practitioner? As an aside, are they expected to learn the rules and procedures of natural, or human science, or both? Will a student's striving to achieve his or her own personal synthesis of these skills make him or her less likely to learn important social skills through opportunities to work together with others on team projects? Will our students curricula be so loaded with theory courses, psychometric courses, stats courses, content analysis and qualitative research courses, and counseling courses, that our students will have little energy left, or motivation to learn how to join, or synthesize, their skills with those of others, by working together on truly changing and all-consuming applied projects, to solve real problems being experienced by real people?

I want to finish by passing on a related lesson which I learned from an interview with Robert Cram, principal flutist for our National Arts Center orchestra and Director of the University of Ottawa School of Music. He was talking about preparation of those students who actually want to make music, in the performance sense, as opposed to teaching or composing. In our terms, these students would be like our applied students, who want to go out and work with athletes. He said the following:

*The thing that is really pushed in school is the mechanics, how you do it, how it's going to work. There is one layer after another that is given, basically all mechanical. One of the main problems in teaching students (to actually make emotionally meaningful music) is that they think that they are going to learn, by adding stuff on; pick up a bushel of this and a basket of that; dump it on top*

*of what you already have, and they are going to become great flute players. I find that the hardest part of teaching is to teach kids that they have to get rid of all that stuff, so that you can start giving them something that actually does the job for them. It's like wanting to learn how to swim - first, you have to take off your clothes.*

Robert Cram was saying that too much training about technique or mechanics and too much formal theory can get in the way of being able to make a personal connection with the music on an emotional level, which is absolutely necessary for making music in a performance situation. The lessons that

Robert Cram said his students really needed, included learning personal dispositions and skills like having patience to be able to listen deeply to the music so as to feel what the composer is saying through the dots on the musical score. Only through such non-academic but very essential skills can anyone make music which may inspire others. Is there a parallel here to what we are trying to accomplish with our applied students? Are we guilty of piling too much on? What can we do to help our students to collaborate with athletes, to listen patiently, to feel with them, and ultimately to inspire and be inspired by them?

## Interview with Curt Tribble, Elite Surgeon

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Curt **Tribble**, Chief Surgeon and Head of the Department of Surgery, University of Virginia Medical Center and Terry **Orlick** Interviewer, University of Ottawa  
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### Abstract

Dr. Curt Tribble is one of the world's leading cardio-thoracic surgeons and one of the most insightful performers I have ever had the pleasure to meet or interview. In this interview Dr. Tribble discusses his insights on excellence in surgery. He shares what he feels it takes to be a great surgeon, including having a vision of function and the ability to deal effectively with an element of uncertainty. He discusses the critical importance of focus, distraction control, optimism, teamwork, having fun and dealing with sub-optimal outcomes, all of which are relevant to the pursuit of excellence in virtually any mission or pursuit.

**Terry:** Could you tell me a little bit about the setting you work in and how you overcome challenges in that environment.

**Curt:** There is certainly no mystery surrounding the job we have to do when we go into an operating room. The stakes are very high and expectations are high as well. We've gotten to the point these days in which heart surgery is quite safe, quite remarkably. But it is a big operation. Even for people who have a large amount of medical problems or who are relatively old, we expect to win. That is in contrast to a time when my predecessor, who was the chief surgeon when I came the University of Virginia. They were the pioneers in heart surgery. He was telling me that nineteen out of his first twenty patients in valve replacements died. They didn't expect to win. They expected to lose. We expect to win, we expect that our patient will survive.

We expect things will go well. So the expectations are high and the stakes are high in that setting. The operations are extraordinarily complex and they last six hours. Twenty to twenty-five people will be involved on the team where there are machines that will ventilate the air in and out of the patient, and pump blood in and out, warming, filtering, oxygenating. All that has to be going on at the same time that we do our thing.

We always play music in the operating room. I have a list of music that is acceptable to everybody. The more unusual the case, the more I want the music to be familiar and enjoyable for everyone. I don't want the music to bother anyone. We have a CD player and play about five or six CD's. I lay them out and tell them how I want the CD's to be played. Once the operation is underway I have to set the cycle or the

rhythm of the operation, the intensity of the operation. Not all parts of the operation require maximum concentration, some things are very mundane. I know that not only is there that rhythm to the operation but that the team can't maintain a very intense focus completely during that entire time. They have to have an event flow as well, in order to be as sharp as they can when they have to be. Frequently as we prepare to get into the operation we will talk about a game or jokes that they heard, or about your favorite dog or something like that, but as we settle into a more intense time, then that idle chatter falls away and everyone knows we are going to focus more totally. Sometimes we cut off all the lights, so the only lights that are on are the ones that beam down on the heart. We wear headlights ourselves and magnifying glasses over our eyes so that we can see better, and everybody else in the room has this as their focal point. Everything is focused on that one area.

**Terry:** Could you talk a bit about how you try to set an optimistic atmosphere, and why you think it is important?

**Curt:** I know that everyone on my team will look to me as a role model. They will take their cues in how they are going to behave from me and I feel that responsibility. I know that I have to set the stage for what is optimal for my patients. I don't mean that I go in there and with false bravado. What I mean is that when we will go in I want to make it clear to everybody that I believe we are going to do that operation and that we believe that we have a very reason-

able chance to get the operation done successfully, if we all pull together. I know they will not pay attention to everything that we need to get done, if they don't believe we have a chance. There are so many tiny details, just as an example each suture is sewed to a needle, every operation requires 200 different needles to finish and each stitch is sewed more than once. There is a lot of sewing, a lot of things to do, a lot of details. The suture is as fine as your hair, the vessels are no bigger than the inside of a ballpoint pen. If people are not paying attention, they are not taking proper care, and **they won't pay attention if they don't believe that we are doing it for a reason, that we have a chance, that we believe we can do it.** I've seen it so many times, someone will walk in and say, I don't know why we are doing this, this seems just like a drill, or maybe a warm autopsy. If someone says that, there is no use in even getting started on this case.

In some of our emergency operations, you come into a chaotic area. Last summer when I was getting ready to go bike riding with a friend, one of our residents called from his car phone. "Meet me at the hospital, there is someone at the hospital who has an aortic catastrophe". So I hopped in the car and sped over there and entered into a scene of utter mayhem. The lady was in the operating room and everybody was scrambling to get the heart-lung machine ready and the instruments out and the patient ready.

I knew that my first job was to get control of the situation. The first thing I did was to assess the groups in the room, the anaesthesiologists, the profusionists, the nurses and the residents and I put somebody in charge of each group. I told the chief anaesthesiologist, this is what I want done, this is what I want for the profusionist, this is what I want for the instruments, and for the residents. I want you to be prepping the patient. I wanted to get everybody in the mindset that I was going to be giving an order every 30 seconds or so on what we were going to do. I wanted them to focus on me on what we were going to do, so they'd pay attention and start working as a cohesive whole. We were able to get the room under control and gradually regain a focus and regain a team spirit. I've learned ways to achieve that. You walk in the room and you get your game face on. I want them to know that I'm serious, I'm here to focus. I'm ready, focused, intense, and optimistic about what to do and ready to respect everybody and their role on the team. Some of this has built up over time with routine operations to prepare for those chaotic days. Together our team is very stable and some of those people I have worked with for fifteen years. I know that whatever happens will be built on over time, days, months, years of tradition, shared memories or ethic, stories, or whatever.

**Terry:** What do great surgeons have?

**Curt:** I think that the thing that separates the good or great ones are those with a vision of what they want to accomplish. I used to think as a younger person, that there was some innate ability or dexterity with their hands but I don't believe that is true. Some people do have a God given talent for

cutting to the right cell layer every time, but it is not necessary to have that. They are the rare Michael Jordan's of surgery, but more common are the Charles Barkley or the Magic Johnson or Larry Bird kind of people who really aren't the greatest athletes. Those three guys were not the three greatest basketball players in the USA but they were great players, and they were great team players. One of the things they have always had is a vision of what they wanted or a vision of what they wanted to create. They knew what everyone needed to be doing, they knew where everyone else was.

I finally realized that that is what the great surgeons had. They knew where they were headed, they knew what they wanted to create, they knew how it had to function at the end of whatever they needed to be doing. They don't really care how it looks, it is more a vision of function, how it has to work when they are done. They are driving towards that relentlessly. Anything that is not part of that vision can be dispensed with. It doesn't matter if the wound around the incision is bloody, or the rags are a little bit dishevelled. It doesn't matter if the stitches are a bit uneven, as long as they are doing the job. Every stitch can be different, every stitch has a different function, all going towards a vision of a functional result.

Another quality great surgeons have is the ability to deal with uncertainty. I see people who are paralysed by the element of uncertainty and in our work an analogy can be made to kayaking down a river. You're coming down the river and the rapids are coming. You leave one and you enter another. You really don't get the opportunity to determine how the rapids are dealt out, or how the problems in the operation are dealt out. You try to control and prepare for them and keep it as organized as possible. You keep the flow as good as it

can be, and the more used to the operation you are the more likely you are going to be able to do that. But inevitably you are going to have to be able to deal with different levels of uncertainty. You have to have a confidence about uncertainty. At certain times, I have to know that given everything I know, probably no one knows better than I, certainly no one is here other than I, and I will decide, and I will live with it.

I was faced with a very difficult time a week ago today. A lady I knew had been called in for a lung transplant and I got the call. We had everything set up and we were going to put the heart in one person and the lungs in two other people. They called me and told me that the donor had gotten a gun shot wound to the head and had a deterioration of the lungs, which sometimes does happen in head injuries. The lungs will get wet and their lungs will not oxygenate as well. As far as I know no one has ever used lungs like this before to transplant. We had this lady who had been flown in from far away to have a lung transplant and I knew she was waiting for a long time and I knew her and her husband. I knew she was dying, not that minute, but I knew that she would probably not last to another operation. I had a responsibility not just to her but to other people in our program because if we do too many crazy things and our patients don't live, our program could be closed down. There is a careful scrutiny of our results and my job is not necessarily to save everyone's life. The mortality rate on earth is one per person and no one gets out of here alive. I can't fight death. It is an exuberable thing. I can prevent suffering and that is my job.

I have to decide if what I am about to do will ameliorate a person's suffering. If what I am going to do is not going to make her live longer or live with less suffering then it is the wrong thing to do. For me there is an

ethical uncertainty in terms of doing something that no one else has done. I was faced with that dilemma with this patient. I knew that the lungs had only deteriorated an hour prior to this period and that they couldn't be that bad, but they had dropped below our acceptable level criteria. I thought about this, and decided that I would put both of the lungs in one patient. She only needed one healthy lung but I thought she could get by on two compromised lungs.

The medical physician who was taking care of her came into the office and said, Kurt I heard that you are planning to go ahead and transplant. The lungs are no good. I said, they are marginal, they're marginal. He said, have you ever heard of anyone doing this before? I said, no. Have you ever done this before? I said, no. He said, what makes you think this is going to work? Given all that I know, I think this is the right thing to do for this patient, and I am going to do it, and I did. She is alive and doing fine today, she is off the ventilator and her lungs cleared up.

I have to be able to deal with clinical uncertainty. It would have been easier to walk away and say, the lungs are not good, the lady is going to die anyway. I felt I could live with the uncertainty that existed. That is a characteristic that great surgeons have had over the years, pushing ahead with an element of uncertainty, even when you may be criticized when the outcome might not be good, might not be optimal. I think that those two things, the vision and dealing with the element of uncertainty, are a big part of the make-up of a great surgeon.

**Terry:** What are your personal performance related goals?

**Curt:** I want to be the best surgeon I can be, everyday. My goal is to be the best surgeon I can be today and to



have fun doing it. My goal is to examine my life at any given time to see if I think I could do what I am doing right now in perpetuity. If I can't, I am doing the wrong thing. Most of the time I need to be in a groove or a niche, in a place or a zone, in a flow in my work where I would be happy with it from now and into eternity.

**Terry:** What is the best process for getting there?

**Curt:** The idea of process being so important was something that I stumbled on myself, and that I pass along to the residents. It is such a long program, four years of university, four years of medical school, seven to ten years of formal training in cardiac or heart surgery before you are even remotely ready to be independent. You are not even ready to be a master surgeon, you are just ready to be on your own. It is such a long process that if the process is not fun, if it is not stimulating or exhilarating, then you can't really do it. You shouldn't do it. You won't become your best unless the process itself is a fun thing to do. When we perform our best, especially in very difficult operations, we look forward to coming into the room together. We know we are going to be able to do that operation. We are excited, we are juiced. We get into a groove. It is a fun room to be in. That is the environment that we have to be in to do our best work. That's the environment that I demand for myself. If I don't have that, or it gets out of bounds from that, then somehow I am going to bring it back. The idea of the process being important is vi-

tal to optimal learning and optimal work.

**Terry:** What do you do to heighten awareness and focus?

**Curt:** We teach and get people to think about awareness. I think and talk about the fact that we can have multiple parallel levels of consciousness. I try to use all my senses when I am in the operating room, to hear, feel and see things that are occurring. The sound of the heart rate machine is almost below the level of audible sound but you can detect a problem with the machinery if you listen for it.

There are times when you have to exclude everything around you and focus. This takes me back to the days when I was swimming. The way we were taught to swim the breaststroke was to go through the water with a smooth and graceful flow. In one part of the stroke, where your face is straight down in the water, the water goes along your hairline and covers your face and your ears and you can't see or hear things outside the pool. All you focus on is what is beneath you. That time is very quiet, very serene and peaceful. But you must also come up for air at times, you must come up to wax and wane. For me the rhythmic, almost staccato rhythm of sewing a thirty or forty stitch circular anastomosis graph to an artery is like that. The cycle is repeated with each stitch. You come out, and you go back in, and **your focus brings you back to the point where every fiber of your being is focused on that stitch.** During those times, someone

could drop a stack of dishes and I am certain that I would not have any awareness of that as I focus back in on what I am doing. I am always learning and I am getting better and better at doing it. The analogy of the breaststroke is very helpful to me when I am blocking in and coming back out, blocking in and coming back out and developing that even flow of focus.

**Terry:** Can you tell me a little about how you have learned to deal with setbacks or sub-optimal outcomes?

**Curt:** In every academic surgery department we have a conference that deals with untoward outcomes, deaths and complications, called a morbidity conference. As I began my training in surgery we had a weekly morbidity conference and it was a very important focal point in my week.

That was a time to analyze and learn. The conference also served as a sort of catharsis, a confessional if you will, but I really didn't understand every facet, the layers of that for a while. Charles Bosk wrote a book called *Forgive and Remember*. He became fascinated by this one central focal point of surgical departments, this one weekly conference of analysis of bad outcomes. He wanted to learn how people dealt with the fact that they were going to fail often. This is one thing I ask my residency applicants. Having gone through your record, as far as I can tell you have never failed at anything. You've been a great student, a great athlete, you've accomplished all these things and you probably have not experienced failure, at least not

in its ultimate bitter, full boring way. Usually I am right. How are you going to deal with failure, because it is going to be a reality of your life? You are going to have things that are not going to work well. You are going to have things that you can't change and things that are not going to turn out the way you wanted. How are you going to deal with that reality? They usually don't have a plan.

My own thinking in that regard began in the early days reading this book. I realized that one had to be able to forgive oneself and others for things that didn't go well. I saw people who were able to forgive themselves very easily, they blamed others. I saw people who could forgive everybody else but themselves, and the guilt and feelings about what had happened would eat them alive. They couldn't really deal with it. You have to be able to do both, you have to forgive yourself and others. In order to attain that forgiveness you have to learn, and remember the lessons from the outcome.

You can never really get rid of those memories. I can remember so very many of my patients that haven't done well. I know their names, and I can see their faces and I know their families. Sometimes I honestly feel that they are in my house at night. I can get up and they are there, but I can live with that because if they are there, they know that I did my best. They know that not only did I give them my all, and did my best, but that I learned from them, and no matter what went wrong with their operation and no matter how bad it

was, I will do better in the future with other people. I think that is the only way that you can learn to live with yourself and forgive yourself, and forgive the others on your team. There is an implicit assumption that everyone tried and everyone did their best and that everyone will learn from that. That organized weekly conference helps to keep that ethic alive.

I did not really incorporate that process into a more intimate, or immediate micro level until I was sewing these little anastomoses, tiny junctions of grafts around the heart, twenty-five stitches, twenty five times in five minutes. Nothing was quite like sewing those things. Nothing that I had done previously required the time pressure, because the heart is without blood flow at this time. The heart is just dying as we work, and you get that sense of urgency when you work because I know if I sew that thing wrong the patient will die. The heart will never work again.

As you begin to sew that graph, the first part is easy. You go along, you feel a little rhythm, you're moving, you feel like you are getting in the flow of that anastomosis. As a learner I would come along and be feeling good about what I was doing. My supervisor would be standing at the side of the table watching me. I knew I had to develop a vision, an evolving vision of what was acceptable or what was our goal. The only way I would learn that was by watching and doing, and watching myself doing. I knew I had to learn as I went. I couldn't just say to him,

you take the hardest stitches. I had to learn and I had to remember when I came around the anastomosis that the quality of the stitches had to improve. As the pressure of each stitch grew, the importance of each stitch was greater. A single untoward event at the toe of the anastomosis would have a death dealing effect, it would have dire consequences. We call those stitches, "widow maker" stitches, they can kill a patient.

As long as the stitches are going in the right places and you are getting good feedback from your mentor, your conscience, you're feeling good. Often I'd get down to a part and he'd say, that is not good enough, you missed that, you caught the back wall of the vessel, that would have closed off if we had left that stitch there. A flood of emotions flow into you, you're mad, you're mad at him (your supervisor), you want to argue, no I think it is OK. Yet you have to bend to his knowledge, his authority and listen to his idea, even if you disagree. You don't have time to argue. What you have to do is take the stitch out again and get it right and move on.

That stage seems pretty straightforward, but guess what, the next stitch is even more important. Yet I saw myself still back in the last stitch that he didn't like and I'm supposed to be ready for this more important stitch. I couldn't do it right under those conditions. We often say that under those conditions, perfection is the enemy of good. You have to know what you can accept. If you keep trying to get it just right, you'll destroy the vessel, you will tear it up.

You don't get too many chances to get that stitch just right.

I learned under those conditions that I had to incorporate that important concept of forgive and remember into the microcosms of seconds. I had to do it, analyze it, or listen to an analysis at first, and learn from it. It was my goal to be able to analyze it, judge it, learn from it, remember that lesson, forgive myself if I didn't like the outcome, deal with that emotion, move on and keep trying to be better. I needed to do it, analyze, learn from it, forgive, and suppress but not completely. Just like on a computer screen you hit the minimize button to take it down to a small icon because the next screen has to be the next stitch. You have to be able to focus on that next stitch entirely without losing the lesson that you learned on this one. It has to be in there somewhere, so it can add to your combined experience, shared lessons, memory, knowledge, vision or image you are trying to create, the vision of what the perfect or acceptable anastomosis looks like.

I had to compress that down to a really tight system and I had to do it over and over and over. I had to go over those steps time and again in a staccato, rhythmical way. Once I learned that, I learned that I could apply it with everything I did. I loved playing basketball and I had never been as good as I wanted to be. When I learned that lesson I became a significantly better basketball player, a better shooter. In shooting baskets, inevitably you are going to miss some, and I used to mope around and feel bad about it. It

bothered me and I didn't know how to deal with it. This is the way to deal with it. You do it, you look at the results, think about how it happened, good or bad. Were you too tired, did you take the shot with someone too close to you, should a teammate have taken it? Analyze, learn from it, forgive yourself for it, suppress it so it is in your memory, so that it is going to make you better. Then every shot makes you better. You are on a healthy plane. You are on a learning plane, constantly learning. You're not feeling bad about it, you are feeling good about it. No matter how bad the shot was, you can learn from it. What will I do different? How will I be better? How will this help me? This will make me better?

Sometimes a resident who wouldn't listen to me in the operating room, would listen on the basketball court. People are used to being coached on the court, the pressure is a little less, maybe the emotions are different, it was a teachable moment. It was a time when they were receptive to learning. I would say, that shot didn't turn out the way you wanted did it? "No." What did you learn from it? Analyze it so you know how you are going to get better. We would talk about that a little and I would say, you can take that lesson back to the operating room with you. Think about it. Do it, analyze it, learn from it, forgive yourself and the others as to what happened, suppress and move on. It will make you better. Personal quality control.

I have learned that this process is really a healthy life tool for me. I even use it in my relationships, for example with my wife. I might be grouchy and fuss at her. Then I say, OK I did something, it is done. I can't change it, but I would rather have said so and so, and I am going to do better the next time. It's going

to be part of our shared tradition and whatever we do we are going to try to get better, whether it is how we talk to each other, or how we dance together, or perhaps a problem in the family. It is a very healthy tool in my life and one that I apply it to everything I do.

## Editorial Statement

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The focus of The Journal of Excellence is the sharing of knowledge and wisdom that is relevant to the lived experience of excellence in any domain (e.g., sports, performing arts, health, workplace, education, joyful living). Qualitative research of an applied nature, such as case studies, interventions, interview studies and narrative studies are welcomed. The journal also publishes personal accounts, short commentaries, interviews, poems or stories that offer insights into the nature of high level challenges and the mental links to excellence. Reviews of books, videos, films or conferences as well as notices of upcoming conferences and events will be considered.

The Journal of Excellence is looking forward to sharing your ideas with others committed to enhancing excellence in all domains.

*Louise Zitzelsberger, PhD*  
Editor

## Instructions to Contributors

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Submissions to the Journal of Excellence should be in English only. In preparing manuscripts for publication, authors should follow the guidelines in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (5th ed., 2001)*. Please submit one copy of your manuscript in Microsoft Word and forward it as an attachment to: [Journal@zoneofexcellence.com](mailto:Journal@zoneofexcellence.com)

All submissions must be preceded by an abstract not exceeding 150 words. All figures and photographs should be submitted on-line in Tiff format (600 dpi.). Tables should be included in the Word document. A short biographical sketch describing each author area(s) of expertise, performance or research interests and affiliation(s) should accompany the article.

The Journal of Excellence is a refereed journal using a blind review process. The editor and two other reviewers read manuscripts. The review process is completed as quickly as possible.

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## About the International Society for Mental Training and Excellence (ISMTE)

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### Introduction

Founded in 1989, the focus of the ISMTE is excellence in performance and excellence in living. The founding President, Lars Eric Unestahl, organized the First World Congress in Örebro, Sweden, in 1991. Terry Orlick became the second President in 1991, hosted the 1995 World Congress in Ottawa, Canada and initiated the Journal of Excellence. Keith Henschen became the third President in 1998. Keith and Rich Gordin hosted the 1999 World Congress on Mental Training and Excellence, in Salt Lake City, USA.

The next World Congress on Mental Training and Excellence will be hosted by Pavel Bundzen in 2003, in St.Petersburg, Russia.

### Vision

Education and Training for better people, better performers and a better world.

### Mission

- Promote Excellence in Sport, The Performing Arts, Education, Work, Health and Life.
- Create, collect, produce and share valuable, practical resources and educational opportunities for those in pursuit of excellence, and those assisting others in pursuit of excellence.
- Serve as a vehicle for the on-going advancement of knowledge, education, interventions and consulting in Mental Training and Excellence.

### Focus

- Excellence within multiple pursuits: Sport, Performing Arts, Workplace, Health, Education and Joyful Living.
- Committed to a truly applied orientation with practical research and experiential knowledge as a base.
- Focused on what is relevant in the real world of application to Quality Performance and Quality Living.
- International in orientation and scope, open to learning from people in different fields and different cultures who are committed to excellence and the value of shared wisdom.

### Mental Training

Mental Training is centered on the systematic training and nurturing of mental skills and perspectives that are linked to performance excellence and quality living.

Mental Training embraces teaching, coaching and nurturing positive perspectives, positive planning, focusing skills, refocusing skills, imagery skills, goal setting skills, teamwork, collaboration, commitment, confidence, mental and emotional preparation, distraction control skills, stress control skills, positive mind-body connections, balanced excellence and ongoing learning.

## **Initiatives Sponsored by the ISMTE**

### **Journal of Excellence**

ISMTE sponsors the publication of the on-line Journal of Excellence, which is devoted to nurturing excellence in all human endeavors – excellence in performance and excellence in living.

The biannual internet based Journal of Excellence is applied in orientation, relevant in content, and wide-ranging in application to a variety of performance disciplines and real world applications.

### **Certification as a PRO Mental Training Consultant**

ISMTE offers an Internet-based Advanced Program on Mental Training and Excellence (PRO). The program consists of 21 credits leading to certification as a Mental Training Consultant. For more information, visit our web site at: [www.ismte.com](http://www.ismte.com)

### **Mental Training Forums, Symposiums and Workshops**

ISMTE offers workshops, forums and symposiums for performers, coaches and consultants. Participants share their experiences and gain from collective wisdom.

### **The World Congresses**

ISMTE hosts a World Congress on Mental Training and Excellence every 4 years.

The first was held in Sweden in 1991, the 2<sup>nd</sup> in Canada in 1995, the 3<sup>rd</sup> in the USA in 1999 and the 4<sup>th</sup> will be held in St. Petersburg, Russia in 2003.

The World Congress provides a forum for people from around the world to share their knowledge and practical insights, related to Mental Training and Excellence. Many applied presentations and practical workshops are offered by leaders in this field.

When you subscribe to the Journal of Excellence you automatically become a member of ISMTE. The cost is \$34.95 US / \$44.95 Cdn per year. For further information email: [ismte@rems.net](mailto:ismte@rems.net) or fax: 1-819 827 2652.

Members receive two new on-line issues of the Journal of Excellence, as well as all back issues, and information on the World Congress and mental training courses.

### **Upcoming ISMTE Congresses 2002 & 2003**

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For Information on the **2003 ISMTE World Congress** on Mental Training and Excellence in St. Petersburg, Russia, visit <http://www.slh.t.se/ISMTE.htm> or email: [ismte.wc@mail.admiral.ru](mailto:ismte.wc@mail.admiral.ru)