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Mission of the Journal of Excellence

Terry Orlick, PhD – Founder and Editor in Chief, the Journal of Excellence.

My mission with the Journal of Excellence is to fill some important gaps in our knowledge and 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. Our focus is centered on the pursuit of excellence in the working and performing parts of our lives, as well as the rest of our lives. Our goal is to inspire excellence, provide a forum to discuss the positive pursuit of excellence, and share practical strategies and perspectives for pursuing meaningful high-level goals.

The Journal of Excellence is committed to nurturing a positive vision of education and training for better people, better performers and a better world.

There is much value in pursuing of excellence, in education, sport, health, the performing arts, parenting, teaching, coaching, leadership, health care, business and every workplace. There is also much value in the pursuing excellence in quality living, quality relationships and the development of a higher level of humanity. This is the first and only journal, which has **EXCELLENCE** in multiple domains as its sole focus. The ultimate mission of the Journal of Excellence is to provide insights and strategies that will help us to collectively become more successful in the pursuit of performance excellence and excellence in living.

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 exceptional performers and inspiring 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 experiences, 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 the Journal 9

We hope you gain from the wisdom of the participants who shared their experiences and the authors who presented their findings in Issue # 9 of the Journal of Excellence. We have much to learn from our colleagues and from the people with whom they work. If you have comments you would like to share on any of the articles, or wish to submit an article to the Journal of Excellence, email us Journal@zoneofexcellence.com.

Journal of Excellence, Issue # 9 provides a very interesting mix of topics and focus areas, related to excellence in sport, relationships, children and life.

In the first article, **When Life Bites a Top Performer**, Bruce Malmberg, a high level professional archer, shares his story about facing a career ending injury from a pit bull terrier attack, and his journey back to the top.

In the second article, **A Protocol for Teaching Resilience to High Performance Athletes**, Robert Schinke, Christopher Peterson, and Roger Couture share some theoretical background and practical ideas on how to teach resilience and optimism to athletes, from a positive psychology perspective.

In the third article, **Making the Impossible, Possible, Within a Relationship**, Lisa and Mike take us on a journey into their personal relationship and how they brought it back to life, after it was on the verge of total collapse.

In the fourth article, **An Analysis of Mental Training Programs' Influences on Intercollegiate Female Athletes' Selected Psychological Skills : A Single-Subject/Qualitative Design**, Michelle Hamstra, Kevin Burke, Barry Joyner and Charles Hardy discuss the effectiveness of a mental training intervention program with female swimmers.

In the fifth article, **Perspectives of Exceptional Adolescent Athletes and Musicians: Exploring the Meaning and Value Attached to the Performance**, Matthew MacDonald and Terry Orlick present a qualitative study that unearths a surprising depth of wisdom from teenage performers.

In the sixth article, **One Point at a Time: An Interview with an Elite Tennis Player**, Noah Gentner presents an excellent interview with Chris Woodruff, a former NCAA National champion and veteran professional tennis player, who shares his views the role of sport psychology and his sport psychologist in professional sport.

In the seventh article, **Consulting as a Creative, Cooperative Process: A Case Study by a Triathlete and her Consultant**, Karine Grand'Maison (athlete) and Eric Beck (young consultant), share their collaborative journey in preparing for Karine's first Ironman Triathlon.

In the eighth and final article, **An Analysis of a Children's Relaxation/Stress Control Skills Program in an Alternative Elementary School Setting**, Shaunna Taylor and Terry Orlick present the results and practical implications of a unique positive living skills program designed specifically for elementary school children.

I would like to thank each of the authors for submitting their work to the Journal of Excellence. I would also like to thank Karine Grand'Maison and John Coleman for their excellent assistance in proofreading the articles, Rémi Simard for his excellent work in formatting the on-line Journal of Excellence, and Gabriella Orlick for her excellent work in fine-tuning the final formatting and informing subscribers that the new issue of the Journal is up on-line.

Simple Joys,
Terry Orlick,

Editor in Chief

When Life Bites a Top Performer

Bruce **Malmberg**, Canada

Bruce Malmberg is a high performance archer. He has been a member of the Canadian National Archery Team for 8 years, ranked #1 in Canada 8 years in a row, 7 time National Champion, 9 time Provincial Champion, National and Provincial record holder, and the only Canadian Archer to Win the Atlantic City Archery Classic, which he won twice. Bruce and his brother manage Malmberg Specialty Printing, a family business centered on high quality printing services.

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Abstract

Bruce Malmberg is an international archer who suffered a potentially career threatening setback while pursuing his dreams. In this article he shares how his life was instantly turned around by this setback, and his courageous journey to recovery.

Background Information

In December 1994, I had just qualified for my first National Team. I thought I was ready for the World Championships. I had been shooting well and all of my equipment was in perfect shape. I thought I was ready, but I was NOT.

A telephone call from my friend and former Olympic Champion, Linda Thom, was an awakening that I had missed the most important thing of all, "the mental game". She explained that the best guy around for it was Terry Orlick. I said "so where do I find him". Linda said he in Ottawa, so as soon as I got my hands on a number, I called Terry and we set up our first meeting.

I now realize that leaving for Worlds with no mental prep was like putting rims on a car without the tires, pointless!

When I first met Terry we talked for about 2 hours. I was amazed at the number of athletes he had helped and really hoped that I could be one of those too. He asked me about the things that went through my mind when I shoot. He asked what I visualized while shooting. We discussed "feeling the ten" and I told Terry that I went into a super relaxed zone while I was shooting my best. My focus on the target was so intense I could hear my heart beating. I explained that this allowed me to shoot in between heart beats. I explained to Terry that while aiming the sight I had a movement pattern and it was consistent from shot to shot.

I guess that my expectations were uncertain. I thought that Terry might say, wow you have a lot of work to do, but he surprised me, and I guess I surprised myself when he said that my imagery was incredibly clear, and that I had great control over my visualization.

I think what Terry did was help me take a wasps nest of activity in my head and get everything flying in formation. He taught me that I could shoot in my head and never pick up the bow. I was shocked to hear that at first, and I laughed at the idea. But I tried doing nothing but mental imagery 2 weeks prior to the Provincial Championships and won. I had not touched my bow for the entire time. Not shooting had allowed me to rest physically and do imagery of nothing but perfect form and perfect shots, feeling the ten, one arrow at a time. I called Terry and he laughed when I said "ok, so now I believe you"!

We can all focus in our sport but it is usually fogged by anxiety, fear, or nerves. Terry's input helped me clarify that focus and pinpoint it. He taught me that I could slow down the process and make each arrow a one arrow tournament.

Terry and I have met and kept in touch on a regular basis. The biggest thing I have learned is that there is always something else you learn about yourself, especially through sport. Terry helps make sense of it all.

Life Bites

Wouldn't you know it, things were going perfectly, I was now fully sponsored and I seemed to be at the top of my game. A span of 5 minutes on the afternoon of July 25, 1999, changed my life from the #1 ranked archer in the country to needing help to feed myself.

I had arrived home after a training session and had sat down to have some lunch when I heard screaming coming from the back yard. It was my wife and our cat being attacked by a vicious pit bull terrier (dog). As I went to the patio door to see what was happening,

my wife opened the door and ran inside closing the screen door behind her. Suddenly the dog came crashing through the screen and into our house. The dog charged at my wife who was holding our cat. I jumped in between them pushing the dog to the floor. The dog broke free and came at us again. This time I grabbed the dog and threw it towards the door where I thought I could get it out of the house.

The dog jumped up again and attacked one of our cats. It clenched our cat in its jaws and ran back out the door. I ran through the door and tackled the dog on the lawn at which point it turned and attacked me. I can remember the pain of the pit bull's teeth biting through my hand and feeling the crushing pain of it. After that it was a flurry of punching, biting and wrestling to keep the 80 pound (40kg) pit bull off of me.

I yelled at one of my neighbours, who, was watching, to call 911 (emergency services) and having to tell her to "GO NOW"! That 5 minutes of unexpected terror seemed like an eternity. Everything seemed to move in slow motion and yet was happening too fast to recall. When it was over, our cat was dead, and both the dog and I were bleeding from everywhere. The pit bull didn't stop his aggressive attack until my wife ran out of our house with a kitchen knife and stabbed the dog.

The last thing I remember was handing our lifeless cat to my wife and saying, "Get him to the vet". The next thing I knew I was lying in the yard with the Paramedics working on me to stop the bleeding and one of them telling me I was badly hurt. One hundred and eight stitches and 3 days in the hospital later, my shooting career was done and my life had done a complete 180-degree turn.

The deep bites and gashes in my hands, arms, chest and legs had been heavily bandaged and I now had no use of my hands at all. I had a great deal of tendon damage in both arms and for a National Archery Team Member that spelled “FINISHED”

I spent 2 weeks in a daze, and had not even really thought about shooting until a good friend of mine said, “How’s this going to affect your shooting”? WHAM, reality check!

The trauma of the event and the ongoing barrage of reporters calling the house had me so focused on the event that I never really thought about consequences of what had happened. I guess I had just assumed that I would always be able to do what I loved, shoot my bow.

After a week of depression, I literally thought, “If Terry were here he would kick my butt right now” and I made a decision that day that no matter how long it took I was going to regain the use of my hands. The first thing I did was to set small and achievable goals for myself. The next thing was to keep track of them. It was not going to help me to set goals if I did not keep track of them. The physiotherapist said it would probably take 12 to 18 months to regain full use of my hands, maybe longer. It was then mid August and I wanted to make it to Indoor Provincials and National in March.

As I began to shoot again, I actually set a goal to not kill anyone when I went to the range for the first time. I achieved that goal. The entire first month was the most frustrating of all. My hands and arms were healing and the pain was considerable. If you have ever had tendonitis you would have some idea of what I mean.

Prior to this attack, I used a hand-held release to shoot the bow, but that was not possible now. One of my sponsors sent me a release that I could strap to my arm. I modified it to my own needs and it worked very well. I asked another sponsor to send me a lighter version of his equipment and in a short period of time I was shooting again.

I continued to set and work on achieving my short-term goals. If I was not reaching my short-term goals I was not trying hard enough. The biggest thing that spurred me on was the fact that a number of other archers (competitors) had written me off. They even joked about it. Talk about incentive!

After 7 months of diligent rehab and training, I shot and won the Provincial Indoor Championships and placed 2nd by 1 point at the National Championships. I “REFUSED” to let the dog attack slow me down and stop me from doing what I loved.

Now (4 years later), I am once again using my hands to shoot. Sometimes there is pain but I think of how far I have come in 4 years. I think about the 4 Provincial Titles, 4 National Championships and 2 Athlete of the Year Awards I have won since that dog attack. It shows me that something good can come out of everything. It shows me that what Terry taught me is true – that anything is possible if your mind and heart are in the right place.

In all that time that I was working to get back to top form, I never lost sight of what I saw myself as, and now I am that! I just keep achieving and resetting every day. I am happy in my sport and my life.

A Protocol for Teaching Resilience to High Performance Athletes

Robert J. Schinke, Canada, Christopher Peterson, USA and Roger Couture, Canada

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Abstract

Researchers and practitioners interested in elite sport have long considered why some national team athletes are more resilient than others during major games. Over the past decade, researchers at the University of Pennsylvania have created a resilience training protocol to improve the output of staff in insurance companies and students in undergraduate programs. A parallel training program has been devised to enhance the self-esteem and optimism of children in primary school. Preliminary studies indicate promising results. Recently, two of the authors herein have designed parallel training modules for national team athletes and coaching staff. Here we build on one facet of our resilience training program previously overviewed by Schinke and Jerome (2002); optimism skills. Three optimism skills are included this paper: (1) the evaluating of assumptions, (2) disputing, and (3) de-catastrophizing. This paper outlines the chronological steps of the three skills that are currently being taught to our international amateur athletes.

Practitioners working with elite sport populations including coaching staff and mental training consultants have always searched for methods to foster exemplary athlete and team performance. Among the most popular and informative methods used to understand

and then assist athletes with their performances are those that encourage stimulated recall. Interviews, such as those conducted by Orlick and Partington (1988) for instance, are one way of understanding how athletes view their performances and the

factors that affected those performances. On one level, as one of us (Schinke, 2000) noted as a result of doctoral research, elite level athletes provide rich explanations for their performances, probably because they spend so much time thinking about and attempting their athletic pursuits in an ongoing cycle of refinement. As a result, their explanations provide a fascinating and colorful opportunity to understand how athletes explain their past performances and their future expectations as they strive for the highest level of performance (Rettew & Reivich, 1995).

Why are explanations of sport performance so important to consultants interested in working with elite populations? If you listen carefully you will find that not all elite athletes explain performances in the same way, and that their slight nuances are significant (see Peterson, 1980). As Martin Seligman (1991), an eminent psychology researcher and clinician found, some explain their successes and failures in terms of controllable factors. Others tend to explain their performances to uncontrollable factors. Read any large newspaper with a sports section and you will find that these two groups of athletes are identifiable in high profile sport contexts at the amateur and professional sport levels (Schinke & Peterson, 2002a).

In some instances the consistency of entire athletic careers is tied to how athletes habitually explain their performances (Schinke, 2000). Some athletes have difficulty self-evaluating after sub-par performances where others are more willing to critique personal errors. Rettew and Reivich (1995) and Seligman, Nolen-Hoeksema, Thornton and Thornton (1988) suggested that at least some of the reason for contrasting results in elite sport can be traced to the measurable quantity of optimism within each elite athlete. Optimism in turn is understood and refined through each athlete's

style of explanation. Because optimism predicts sport performance in challenging settings, it is worth considering how sport psychology consultants and other support staff can help monitor, and when necessary, optimize their athletes' explanations.

Hence, the purpose of this paper is twofold. The first intention is to outline briefly the types of explanatory patterns prevalent among elite athletes, and then to explain how each one is linked to athletic performance. The second intention is to outline a few cognitive behavioral skills that two of the authors herein are currently encouraging national team athletes and coaching staff to employ, among other elite sport populations.

The Nature of Athletes' Explanations

Athletes explain their performances in a number of discrete ways (Biddle, 1993). Explanations are best considered through the use of an explanatory framework with dimensions and typical causes (Seligman, 1991). As two of us outlined in an earlier installment of this journal (Schinke & Peterson, 2002a), there is a formative framework through which to consider athletes' explanations. This paper outlines an intervention strategy based on Abramson, Seligman and Teasdale's (1978) theory of learned helplessness. The selection of the learned helplessness framework, which happens to be the basis of optimism interventions, is logical given more than three decades of well documented success across a wide number of clinical and motivational settings (Seligman, 1991). The dimensions used in optimism research and practice have been confined to permanence, pervasiveness, and personalization. The main attributions integrated in optimism research are those borrowed from Weiner (1986), mainly ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck. The

consideration of each of these dimensions and main attributions can clarify athletes' future expectations of success or failure providing one listens carefully. This section will outline the importance of an explanatory framework to the practitioner interested in understanding the elite athlete's explanation and what it might imply.

Permanence

Athletes' results can in part be considered in terms of permanence that is whether one or a series of results is believed as likely to occur consistently or inconsistently in the future. Where some athletes believe that their declines in performance will go on forever, others view their setbacks as fleeting (Schinke & Peterson, 2002a). Look no further than Lennox Lewis, the current WBC World Heavyweight Boxing Champion. Lewis has only experienced one loss in a professional boxing career that has spanned fifteen years. Immediately after the loss, Lewis explained his decline in performance to an unusual loss of concentration. Given an explanation of impermanence to his lapse in effort, Lewis returned to form in his next bout, and has not lost another bout since. At the opposite end of the continuum, an athlete's expectation of permanence after a loss can impede performance because no possible solution is anticipated. When considering the athlete's expectation of permanence, then, it is worth remembering that setbacks are not de-motivating providing their associated cause is regarded as short lived and indicative only of a momentary decrease in output. Similarly, success will not inspire future success unless the performer perceives it as resulting from deliberate efforts and abilities at the personal level, support-staff level, or both levels concurrently (Schinke & da Costa, 2001; Schinke & Marshall, 1998).

Personalization

Explanations of athletic performance need also be considered in terms of who and where accountability resides (Seligman, 1991). When athletes explain their wins and losses in terms of personal efforts and abilities, assignments are considered as internal, or personal. If, on the other hand, explanations are directed to other people or environmental circumstances, the assignments are considered as external. Previous research summarized by Biddle (1993) indicates that internal assignments are more common after wins and less common after losses. This premise is especially relevant for athletes of European and North American descent (Myers & Spencer, 2003). The self-serving tendency after winning, and its associated onus on personal efforts and abilities, is believed as contributing to athletic confidence (Bandura, 1997). Considering the typical response after losses, Brawley (1984) found that setbacks in sport tend to be assigned to external causes, thus sustaining the athlete's self-esteem. After all, the performer removes any potential guilt and shame following the diminishment of performance when that diminishment has more to do with someone or something else than personal attributes or actions (Weiner, 1986).

When taken from the vantage of the explanatory framework discussed here, assignments of accountability indicate more than the athlete's tendency to preserve and promote ego. They also offer an opportunity to identify the athlete's expectation of future control over performance. When working with elite athletes, there are expectations of personal control regarding certain sport related responsibilities, and expectations of externally managed control gained from the help of others (Bandura, 1997). As Seligman (1991) found, ego-protective tendencies differ among elite athletes. Some elite athletes are more willing than others to take personal

responsibility after declines in their performance. The first of these two main groups of athletes is more solution oriented after a setback, and so, the athletes are able to retrace success rapidly. The second group of elite athletes tends to be more external in their assignments of accountability and problem oriented in their analysis. With no personal accountability regarding what needs to be controlled, the latter group of elite athletes deter themselves from the intensity of performance needed for an expedited return to success. Thus, coaches and sport psychology consultants alike serve their athletes well when they encourage at least some consideration of personal accountability and potential control, especially after setbacks (Schinke & da Costa, 2001).

Pervasiveness

The third aspect of the elite athlete's explanation is its evaluation on a continuum between a specific situation and a general trait (Seligman, 1991). Qualities that can be confined to one context or span across several contexts include courage and self-confidence (see Peterson, 2000). To illustrate pervasiveness in elite sport, consider the attribute of courage to boxing. For an elite boxer, the attribute of courage can be limited to one bout, one tournament, one season, or an entire amateur athletic career (Schinke & Peterson, 2002a). Expanding further, the boxer's courage can transcend boxing altogether, and resurface in a professional career choice such as opting to become a police officer in a tactical unit. The difference between these levels of courage distinguishes contextually based behavior from courage as an imbedded trait. Though contextual behaviors are of primary interest here given this paper's emphasis on resilience in elite athletics, it needs to be said that explanatory patterns can be learned in one context and transferred to another. This possibility will undoubtedly encourage some coaches and

sport psychology consultants who aspire to make positive life-long impacts on the athletes they work with.

Moving Toward Athletic Resilience

Until this point, we have addressed the differences between two contrasted groups of athletes based on their explanations. It must be remembered, however, that optimism and pessimism are simply polar opposites of an explanatory pattern continuum that ranges from (+18) to (-18). Moderate optimists and moderate pessimists also exist within the explanatory pattern continuum. Generally speaking, the more positive group, meaning those who are more hopeful in their expectations of self and support-staff have been defined as optimistic athletes. The second group characterized by less expected control over their performance, are generally termed pessimistic athletes. When compared, not only have optimistic and pessimistic athletes differed in explanatory pattern, they have also varied in terms of responses to adversity when placed in more challenging tournaments. Seligman (1991) and Rettew and Reivich (1995) found that under adversity, optimistic athletes are more likely to maintain or improve upon their previous tournament efforts than are pessimists. Taken further, one of us (Schinke, 2000) found that athletes can improve or diminish their optimism regardless of which end of the continuum they typically reside. Thus, it seems reasonable that resilience skills can be borrowed from optimistic elite athletes in their resilient moments, and reinforced with both groups of athletes with the intention that only positive mental skills will be developed. The techniques developed by Gillham, Jaycox, Reivich, Seligman and Silver (2001) for school children, then refined for elite sport by two of us (Schinke and Peterson, 2002b; 2002c) include (1) the assessment of personal assumptions, and afterward, (2)

disputing strategies, and (3) de-catastrophizing techniques.

Assessing Personal Assumptions

An assessment of personal assumptions is the first step to resilience training. Based upon the ABC framework developed by Albert Ellis (1962), this initial step is used as an exercise to teach people, including athletes, the chronology from their initial setbacks, to their initial thoughts, emotions, and resulting behaviors (see also Shatté, Gillham & Reivich, 2000). For example, as one of us witnessed first hand while consulting with professional boxing, the link between an athlete being undermined during a pre-bout press media conference [the incident], the followed perception of being mocked and disrespected by his opponent [the thought], the pending humiliation of the athlete's boxing-related ability and character being questioned [the emotion], and the resulting diminishment of words and body posture in the moments that followed as the press conference proceeded [the behavior]. What is brought to the fore through the boxer's chronology is the understanding that the athlete's behaviors often start with thoughts, and that behaviors are often a resulting manifestation.

Given that causal chains are easily identifiable with the ABC model proposed by Ellis (1962), it follows that a systematic process be implemented to teach athletes how to conduct an effective analysis of their behaviors. In elite sport, Schinke and Peterson refined the five-step process developed at the University of Pennsylvania for students and the corporate sector to suit elite level athletes (2002b) and coaching staff members (2002c)

Table 1

The Evaluation of Assumptions by Stage

Stage 1: Identifying the instigating circumstance

Stage 2: Considering the relationship between the incident and initial thought

Stage 3: Considering how emotions follow from thoughts

Stage 4: Considering how behaviors follow from emotions

Stage 5: Considering positive coping skills

The Disputing Technique by Stage

Stage 1: Identifying the initial evaluation

Stage 2: The evidence used in the evaluation

Stage 3: Errors in the evaluation process

Stage 4: The required thought processes and refined evidence marshalling

Stage 5: Comparing potential outcomes

The De-catastrophizing Technique by Stage

Stage 1: Identifying the potential steps to degeneration

Stage 2: Considering the worst-case scenario and its likelihood

Stage 3: Considering the best-case scenarios as possibilities

Stage 4: Considering the most-likely case scenario as a possibility

The first step is an identification of the instigating circumstance that starts the athlete's causal chain. Often, athletes escalate to heightened - positive or negative behaviors without understanding how they reached their behaviors. Thus, teaching an initial reflective step of incident identification helps clarify personal reactive tendencies in relation the identified circumstance. The second step is a considering of the relationship between the activating incident and the ath-

lete's resulting thought. Understanding how personal thoughts intertwine with the circumstance encourages an identification of thinking error and a reaffirmation of better suited future responses given similar circumstances. Understanding is framed in relation to each explanation's identifiable dimensions and attributions. Third, athletes are encouraged to consider how their personal emotions follow logically from their thoughts. This crucial step allows for a potential increase in self-control given that thoughts can be monitored through increased personal awareness and somatic responses. Fourth, athletes are asked to consider behaviors as sequential from the three easily identifiable steps that precede their actions. The analysis of self-control at each stage of the behavior can facilitate the consideration of better choices in comparable future incidents. Assuming the causal chain is negative, a fifth step can also be added. During this final step athletes can be encouraged to consider potential optimized coping skills such as the self-talk strategies proposed by Orlick (2000) in preparation for future similar adversities. Though each of the five ABC steps is worthwhile as its own skill, the ABC process allows elite athletes an opportunity to analyze and improve upon their entire self-control process in future challenging circumstances starting with momentary interpretations and leading to longer-term behaviors.

Disputing

Following from an assessment of causal chains, it is clear that athletes can create their own adversities based on the interpretation of events when those interpretations are negative and regarded as uncontrollable and permanent. Many a national team athlete has approached one of us with the belief that it is impossible to perform at his or her best when surrounded by a national team support-system. It is during instances of

long-term negative thought on the part of athletes that we suggest disputing skills. As two of us (Schinke & Peterson, 2002a) pointed out earlier, athletes' negative interpretations facilitate investments in positions that are often undermining of hope and effort. Given that negative interpretations create negative solutions to adversity such as avoidance, constructive problem-solving techniques are often overlooked (Shatté, Gillham & Reivich, 2000).

Disputing is defined as the garnering of positive arguments to counter the negative thoughts that end in reduced effort (Seligman, 1991). For athletes, two of us (Schinke & Peterson, 2002b) have refined disputing into a five-step intervention (Insert Table 2). The first step in the process, identical to the previous skill of examining assumptions, is to identify how athletes evaluate their circumstances based on dimensions and attributions. For instance, does the national team athlete who distrusts his team staff believe that their inadequacies are permanent or impermanent? It is also worth considering whether the inadequacies are regarded as caused by a lack of ability, or perhaps, a lack of effort. During the second step, the athletes are encouraged to identify the evidence used in their evaluation. If the initial evaluation is one of support-staff inability or disinterest, then the evidence used might include one or a series of previous experiences. A consideration of circumstances surrounding recollections encourages more accurate appraisals, and leads to a third step in the disputing process; the identification of potential inaccuracies in the athlete's evaluation. Possible evidence that would undermine the athlete's belief of permanent support-staff inadequacy would include instances where support-staff previously assisted the athlete and enhanced performance. Initially this step might require the guidance of a mental training consultant to act as

devil's advocate. However, with time, the athlete can follow through on this process autonomously and challenge personal evidence with personally garnered contradictory evidence. When athletes have identified their errors in appraisal, it follows that they consider a more positive thought process as the fourth step. During this step, the athlete is encouraged to find a more optimistic evaluating procedure to replace initial negative evaluations. One example of an optimistic countering to concerns about assistance could be the recall of previous support-staff facilitative actions. Finally, we suggest that athletes be encouraged to maintain a logbook and compare performance outcomes given their typical evaluation and newly acquired disputing techniques. The comparison between typical and more constructive interpreting will often foster some necessary persistence given that optimism might be a newly forming habit.

De-catastrophizing

Bandura (1997) noted that it is not unusual for athletes to detract from their own confidence by considering a potential inability and the likelihood of magnified negative outcomes, and then performing to expectation. Shatté, Gillham and Reivich (2000) suggested that thoughts of inability and negative case scenarios develop in a causal chain with smaller concerns evolving into larger ones. For a national team figure skater, one escalating concern might begin with the possibility of missing a triple-axel during a quickly approaching world cup competition. The concern might increase if the skater pursues a negative line of thinking and begins to believe that a personal loss of focus would ensue from the missed jump, and lead to a complete degeneration of the entire skating routine. The athlete's related negative imagery leading up to the competition might include an entire skating program filled with four minutes and thirty seconds

of missed jumps and poor footwork as a large audience of eighteen thousand spectators look on. Among optimism researchers such as Seligman (1991), this phenomenon is termed catastrophic thinking.

As a solution, the final skill to be addressed in this paper, de-catastrophizing, can be implemented. De-catastrophizing has been defined by Shatté, Gillham and Reivich (2000) as the ability to accurately examine a negative scenario, and then consider a wider number of potential outcomes. De-catastrophizing, like the previously discussed cognitive skills, is most effective when implemented in steps. The first step in the process is to identify the potential degeneration from the athlete's current events through to the identified worst-case scenario. For the concerned figure skater, the current event might be an inconsistency in triple-axel attempts during recent practices. The remaining fears in the causal chain would end with a degenerated tournament performance, a loss of confidence, and perhaps, the de-selection from a national team. As a second step, the athlete examines the likelihood of the worst possible scenario occurrence. More times than not, the athlete's worst-case scenario will be evaluated as improbable, or at least, not as a certainty given current skills. The third step in the process is a considering of best-case scenarios that hold some possibility of materializing. Typically, elite athletes who question their own capacities do not consider their likelihood of success as reasonable. Thus, just contemplating a potential success story will encourage positive thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. As a fourth step, the athlete ought to consider one more option: a most-likely case scenario. The most-likely scenario is a circumstance situated between the most positive and negative of outcomes. Through this four-step process, the athlete learns to alter thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, while

developing a complete mental skills package with mastery and coping strategies for increased resilience for broadened possibilities.

A Guideline to Teach Resilience Skills

The three skills discussed here may not be exhaustive, but they are certainly critical. On one level, as noted by Seligman (1991) and Shatté, Gillham and Reivich (2000), each resilience skill provides formalized suggestions of how to increase constructive thought under adversity. Though the skills proposed in this paper develop with practice (Peterson, 2000), they begin working immediately by providing hope to athletes through improved cognitive and emotional control. Thus it is essential that elite athletes practice their newly acquired resilience skills daily.

Second, based on refinements from our elite athlete (Schinke & Peterson, 2002b) and coaching manuals (2002c), the resilience skills proposed herein are useful because they provide several methodical step-by-step roadmaps of how elite athletes and those who are assisting them can work through adversity. Our suggestion is that the steps to each skill be followed with no shortcuts. A quick reference to the steps provided in Table 1 might be sufficient to alter thoughts, emotions and behaviors in the short- and eventually the long-term. If athletes were to overlook the emotion aspect for each skill, however, there would be some chance that their typical emotional responses could undermine appropriate thoughts, and decrease the chance of improved behaviors.

Third, perhaps the largest merit of the resilience skills outlined in this paper is their intention, an eventual shift toward athlete self-monitored resilience. Far too often, elite athletes become discouraged because they

are unable to exhibit their athletic skills under adversity. To ensure ongoing improvements of resilience, then, it is necessary that support-staff decrease their involvement in the suggested skills to the point of invisibility and monitoring. Only then will resilience be likely to withstand the test of adverse performance environments given that support-staff changes occur frequently among national teams.

There are also additional steps that need to be taken in order to ensure the success of the skills we propose. At first blush it could easily be argued a support-staff member's responsibility is to identify the least resilient among their talented athletes, and then help improve upon their explanatory patterns. Appealing as that approach might seem, we believe that a broader educational initiative is better for athletes and their support-staff. Schinke's (2000) earlier research about athlete resilience, mirroring earlier evidence from Seligman (1991), suggests that explanatory patterns are learned from significant others, and thus need to be monitored in training environments. Just as a pessimistic athlete can learn positive attributes from an optimistic coach or athlete, the opposite can also happen. When acting as a practitioner, one of us recently witnessed an instance where one athlete's pessimism affected negative change in an entire national team, most of whom were previously optimistic and solution focused. The outcome was negative reflection en masse, and subsequently, a group re-attribution intervention. Hence, educational strategies require a broader sweep with athletes, their coaching staff, and optimally, their family members receiving parallel training. This more comprehensive intervention will increase the possibility of well maintained explanatory habits leading to consistent resilience in challenging sport settings.

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Making the Impossible, Possible, Within a Relationship: An Interview with Lisa and Mike

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Lisa and Mike dedicated their life's efforts towards the pursuit of excellence. Lisa trained at very high levels in gymnastics (state champion as a child), dance (professional ballet, jazz), and acting. Mike's educational efforts had been aligned with studying and living a life of personal excellence, as well as developing programs to share this vision with others. Both sought excellence, whether it was through physical training, education or personal growth. This story is about THEIR RELATIONSHIP and how they brought it back to life.

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Abstract

I am very interested in the process of how people face something that seems totally impossible, and change it into something that becomes possible. How do you go from believing that something is not going to work, that it won't be successful, that it is finished or you are finished, to living the very thing that you thought was impossible?

In the following interview, we explore this process within a relationship. Lisa and Mike, a bright and energetic couple from Southern California had been married for 8 years. Their marriage was on the verge of total collapse. Somehow they were able to turn that relationship around, to make the impossible, possible. How they managed to do this is the focus of this interview.

Interview Transcript

Terry

Is it true that you both thought that your relationship was finished, and that there was no way it was going to work?

Lisa

I did, I was just done, I was done! So we were going to counseling. I made a commitment to go to counseling because I felt I owed it to me and I owed it to Mike, to see if we could get it back. I didn't know, and I didn't go in with any expectations. I basi-

cally just sat there and thought I just don't have the strength to continue, I'm just done.

Terry

What do you think were the pieces that ultimately helped your relationship come back together?

Lisa

I think one of the pieces was that we were both open to it, Ok let's just see what happens. I think the second piece was our counselor because she was very good at letting us say and stay in the moment, like don't worry about what's going to happen tomorrow or

next week, but just try to be as comfortable as possible with the unknown. So there was no pressure on us, this doesn't have to be done at this time or by that time, so that was good.

One night we had gone out with our friends and that was like the twilight zone for me. I had a woman who I didn't even know come up to me and say that she was divorced and so happy to be divorced, and that the guys in LA are horrible. I had a high power agent tell me that I sucked (as an actor) and I was never going to make it. It was just a flood of information that I took in and thought it out. As the time progressed and we were working things out, things just started to become maybe a little bit clearer.

It was a slow process, nothing had to be done right at that moment, which I think allowed me the space to kind of just work through my stuff.

Terry

So you didn't feel pressured at that time?

Lisa

I think the pressure I felt was coming from me, like I felt I had to make a decision but there was no pressure from anyone else, and I think that was important.

Mike

Something that Lisa would often say, was I feel so guilty for this, so guilt was a big factor because there was not a specific incident that caused this in our lives, like one of us screwing up by infidelity. It was more taking a look at the hard questions. Am I happy and can I be happy in this relationship? Can I be who I want to be in this relationship, was something that Lisa started with. And there was pressure from my perspective because there were times when we would talk and I was saying, I moved out of

the house and I'm having a hard time out here. I said I don't want to put any pressure on you to make a decision but at the same time I was kind of pressuring her because she was witnessing how much difficulty I was having. It was *my* struggle and *my* challenge to not pressure her and not pressure myself, and to let go of all the things I wasn't able to control, which was the most challenging thing I have ever done. To really truly not try to hold on to something.

Two things I really recognized and Lisa will say Yah. Lisa, how many times do you think I said, *Lisa, I'm not mad at you. I really respect the courage that you have.* I must have said that a million times, because I was in awe of her courage to really take a look at and be responsible for her happiness. As she often said, 'you know the safest thing would be to stay in this relationship. You're well liked by people, you're a young professional, people will think I am crazy for questioning this'. And I didn't see that. The whole time I was amazed by her courage, which also gave me the courage to ask what did I want at this point.

Terry

Who was initially asking the questions about what do you want in your life, and your happiness, and who you really are? Lisa, do you bring that up first?

Lisa

Yah. It's going to sound so strange but it pretty much started in an acting class by a simple exercise, a repeat exercise. I have always kind of lived a guarded life, like not real open with people, and this exercise forces you to break down those walls and communicate from within, what's coming from within you. From that point on, it was, ok what do I want, what am I doing, where am I going?

I've been with Mike since I was 15, so I know nothing else, and the holidays came and I was feeling really stifled, like decisions were being made for me, maybe they weren't but that was how I was feeling. So I was making decisions based on what people expected me to do. So nothing I did was for me. It was like Mike will be mad if I do this or my parents will be upset if I do that. So I was just unhappy because I felt like I wasn't living my life and I wasn't contributing anything because I was like a puppet for everyone else.

Terry

Can you tell me a little more about that acting exercise you were doing that brought out some of your feelings?

Lisa

It's called a repeat exercise and basically what you are doing is reading peoples intentions. Like I say, Your eyes are green, and you say My eyes are green, Yah your eyes are green, You agree, Yah I agree. You're smiling, Yah I'm smiling, You're happy, Yah I'm happy.

Like you just have to strip yourself down and show people you are there, and your emotions. And the other person has to see who you are and it could be by picking up on just little things.

Terry

Would they be trying to read emotions about how you might be feeling, like happy or sad or troubled?

Lisa

Yes exactly, and the other person repeats.

Terry

How does it shift back and forth?

Lisa

It could be an inflection. If someone says, You look mad, I look mad, Yah you don't agree, No I don't agree, You sound annoyed, No I'm not annoyed, You're not annoyed, No I'm not annoyed. It comes from the Misner technique.

Mike

It brings in the need to be totally focused, totally centered, totally here, and then totally raw. And that was huge for Lisa. That started her process.

Terry

What did you get from the repeat exercise or where did the repeat exercises take you?

Lisa

The first couple of times I had gone up to do that exercise, it was just a very superficial thing. I would just repeat and I wasn't really looking at the person or really understanding what I was feeling, so my teacher stopped me and said, well sometimes we just have walls, and she kind of fluffed it off, like you're someone who has walls and you're just going to have to break them down. And at that moment it was like, well I don't want to have walls, I just don't know how else to be. It was at that moment that it all just broke down and I started crying, and she asked for another partner to come up, and that's when I was able to kind of let go, and that partner said to me, You look sad, Yah I'm sad, Yah I can see you're sad, Yah I'm sad, and it just went on and it was just my emotions.

For the first 3 weeks of the class that's all we did, because it just breaks you down and gets you in touch with you. Then you are able to take a nursery rhyme and create this whole story you want to create, by emotions and feelings.

Terry

So you kind of opened the door there.

Lisa

Yah, and then it continued for the whole 4 months (of the class). Acting is all about reacting, but you have to know yourself and your feelings in order to emote what you are wanting to. And I was so closed off, I don't know what from, that I was just like a parrot, just talking words instead of feeling words.

Mike

Therein is the courage again. I have heard this story many times and I am constantly reminded of the courage it took to do that. She did this in front of a group of 15 people, and that courage was inspiring, and was one of my anchors in this process (we were going through). This was also the scariest part of it because I trusted that Lisa would be able to say, no I don't want this (relationship) which was the scariest part and the most inspiring part at the same time.

Terry

What was it about Lisa's courage that touched you most or that you fed off?

Mike

I think it was realizing that I don't know if I have ever had the courage to do something like that. I was sure that there must have been sometimes when I was a courageous person but this was so profound to me and so rich in meaning and so painful an experience for her. So I am watching this and I am going, oh my god, I am in this as well. So seeing that courage, just being around it. I can't quite describe it other than being in awe. It was her ability to express her feelings and emotions.

I don't think we express feelings too much. That she did it in front of a group of people,

I thought was incredible. And the courage to say, hey I don't know if this is what I want (this relationship) and to tell me that.

In the context of our life, one of the problems was that she felt insignificant in the relationship because I was taking more of the light. So she stood out from the light. That was scary, it was new and she said, I think I want to walk out to the other lighted area and not be in this lighted area.

Part of what I thought was important was bearing witness and being part of Lisa's courage, and the other part was a very spiritual process that allowed me to be open. I don't know if I believe in soul mates but we are both very spiritual and we want to be good people, and I trust that in the deepest part of my heart that Lisa wants to be a good person and so do I. And the right thing to do is to accept each other. So there is a very spiritual part of this for me.

A big moment was when Lisa called me after almost a month apart. We had agreed soon after we began counseling that we needed time apart. But not going out partying and being wild but we needed time apart to do our own work for ourselves and come back together. That was scary. We had been best friends for 15 years, married for 8 and in a monogamous relationship for those 8 years.

She called and said, I know we still have a week to go but maybe we could go to church together (for Easter mass) because that had been a part of our life together, so we went and Lisa cried the entire time. I was so choked up by it. I can't remember much of it.

It was so hard after that to leave each other because we had another week apart that we wanted to honor. And we both needed that

space and wanted that space but it was so incredibly hard, and that for me was when the flood gates were really open, and I was really crying and really sad.

Then there was another time when we went to a new church (about 3 months later) when things felt good. Something lifted from us. I felt it. There was something that happened there for me.

Lisa

Yah I definitely felt that. But for me it goes much deeper than that because the reason why I was so upset in April at church mass (Easter) was because I didn't know what I was doing. Mike is my best friend and how can I be doing this. I don't know if I want him, I don't know if I want to be married, because at that moment I didn't.

For so long I felt like ... my family thought, Oh Lisa is a success because she married well. You know, Mike's so smart and he's good looking, and this and that and the other thing. I was just Mike's wife. Yah, I was talented in certain things, but Gosh Mike's is so great, take care of him. I wanted to be the Lisa who could stand on her own feet, and to be something other than Mike's wife.

Going through that phase of not wanting to be married, I was feeling this (marriage) sucks. I've lost my independence; I can't do whatever I want. It was just too difficult. I just couldn't, I was just lost. I just didn't know who I was or where I stood or how I wanted to dress in the morning, because I always felt I had to be at a certain expectation.

Terry

Once you decided to be apart for that first month, what was happening then? How were you feeling?

Lisa

I was relieved to have space.

Mike

Yah, I knew that and it freaked me out. That was really scary at the time.

Lisa

I liked my time by myself. I would just get up for work and go to the gym, and I would come back and could spend time with me, and with what I wanted to do and where I wanted to go.

Mike

To add context, Lisa was living at home, she moved back with her parents.

Terry

Did you have enough personal space there?

Lisa

I had a lot of space. I didn't have to do anything that had to do with him (Mike). So it was nice, it was a relief. That's why I said when we went back to counseling, I want more time than this because this felt like a vacation, you know I need more time.

Terry

So you were feeling pretty good in terms of freedom and getting re-energized and doing some stuff for you.

Lisa

Yes.

Terry

What inspired you to call Mike that 3rd week when you had planned to be apart for 4 weeks. Why did you call?

Lisa

We've done Easter together since I've been going to church so I was thinking, what's going to happen this year? I just called him

and said, are we going to church together. He said I don't know, are we? And I said, yah, I think that would be good. It can't hurt. So we went and that whole episode happened (the crying) and that was a tough day cause things were so up in the air and we were so unsure. We didn't know what was going to happen.

Mike

Can I jump in? She called me on Thursday and Easter mass was on Sunday. I remember that phone call. I really wanted to go to church and I really wanted her to go for the right reasons. I remember acting purposefully. I just wanted to make sure she was not going out of guilt or any pressure that was happening, but it really was for the right reasons.

Those next couple of days (of waiting) were just a complete blur. Up and down and up and down. Anticipation and hope, and back down to what the hell is going on here. I had no idea and I was just trying to be myself as well.

Terry

Mike, were you feeling a bit out of control?

Mike

Yah! Because the one thing I knew in my life for sure was that Lisa and I were great friends and that we were there for each other. That was part of my identity. At some point in our relationship, our identities fused. In hindsight this (period of reflection that we have been going through) has been the best thing that has ever happened to us, independently and for our relationship.

Terry

Lisa, what was happening with you during that time between Thursday and Sunday?

Lisa

I was fine. Obviously I was going through whatever we were going through but I just thought, I am going to see him Sunday and see how it goes. Just take it day by day.

I think the reason I felt so relieved moving apart was there was so much tension between us, and I didn't want to have to go home and deal with what was going on with him. Because there was so much going on with me, that I can't give you anything because I am not happy. So I really enjoyed my time away.

Mike

We said we were going to move away from each other, and that was a tragic event for me, and then we started counseling. Ok we're away from each other but let's do counseling. We scheduled a counseling appointment about a week after we stopped living with each other. I remember going to that first counseling meeting after we hadn't been around each other for a about a week, thinking, this hasn't been enough time apart but I wanted to see what it was about (the counseling).

Lisa

I said I need more time, this is like a vacation.

When we first went to see our counselor, I thought there was just no way it was going to work, because I'm done. There is just no way that this woman is going to be able to do anything.

Mike

The first couple of times we went to counseling, we just kind of looked at each other. We'd go into counseling and Lisa would be screaming at me and I've never been screamed at in front of anyone. I was feeling, this is so bad. We were engaging back and forth, and I'm hurt and I'm scared and

I'm angry and the whole thing, and I'm not yelling, and Lisa's yelling and I'm frustrated. I put my hands in my head and I said, my god, this is really bad, and it's really hitting me, this is really bad. And the counselor said, this is really bad, and Lisa said, you're damn right this is really bad. And it was bad, the worst it's ever been.

Lisa

Our counselor was so good because in all this turmoil and all this craziness, she kept saying, 'It's ok, there is no time line, there's no pressure, you feel this way, great. She made Mike understand that it's ok to be left in the unknown. Just take it day by day, which was really nice because I then didn't have that added pressure that I have to do something now.

Mike

Yah I think that was really important, that we didn't add pressure to pressure.

Lisa

Yah she helped a lot with that. Just take it day by day. You don't want to be together, you don't have to be together. You're fine. You're where you are. If you're not happy where you're living, move somewhere else, it's fine.

Mike

And we had to agree to that though. People can make the suggestion but we had to work at that.

Lisa

And it was more you, I think. Because it was me saying, I need time. And it had to come from Mike for him to say, ok well I'll give her the time, I guess.

Mike

Yah, and during this process a lot of people expected me to be very angry and I had gone

in and out of some anger. I can remember one vivid time when I was talking to a dear friend of ours about it and I was pacing in my office, I was very upset but that was very minor. People expected me to be very angry about this. I did get angry, I just didn't stay that way for very long. I was hurt and scared and identified those clearly. I never really stayed angry at Lisa and we talked about that quite a bit through the process. I think it was really important that I understood what was behind it, if there were to be anger, there was something deeper than that which was me being scared and hurt and sad.

Terry

During these trying times were you thinking it's not going to work, or were you still hopeful, or was it up and down?

Mike

It was not good. My line was, if this was an investment, I would be pulling my money out left and right. But I knew when I said that, that I'm still keeping 5% of my money in, and so for me it was never 100%, I'm done. It was, this is really bad, I don't think it is going to work. I really don't think this is going to work and I need to cut my losses. And I didn't cut my losses, I tried to move through this in the most open way I could. But I did not think it was going to work.

Lisa, did you know that I thought it was not going to work?

Lisa

No. I don't know if I thought about that. You kept saying to me over and over again, 'you're going to have to do this, I'm not going to make it easy for you and say I walk away because you're going to have to walk away'.

Mike

Right, because I think something easy was like, all right you're going to give me this

shit, well piss off. I don't have to take this. And that's what Lisa is saying now, I was not going to make it easy because I was going to be as genuine with my process and open as I could, which I think made it tougher for both of us (to leave).

Lisa

And we've grown up together, so its not just Mike, it's Mike's whole family. I've always said through this whole thing, it had nothing to do with Mike. I didn't want to change Mike. It wasn't like, oh you're horrible, it had nothing to do with him. It just had to do with if I could be the person that I wanted to be in this relationship. So I think it just boils down to respect, really.

Terry

His respect or your respect or both?

Lisa

Both, my respect for him, and this relationship.

Terry

And that is going to help you be what you want to be or at least not interfere?

Lisa

Right.

Mike

Absolutely. I never put it that way but I've always had tremendous respect for Lisa. And when it's time to put up or shut up, it was like, I really have respect for what you are doing here, I'm really scared, but I respect this. I think that was huge, that we did respect each other in that way.

Terry

Lisa, during these emotional exchanges were you living on your own or back living together?

Lisa

We were still separated. And I go and see a psychiatrist. I was just really anxious and depressed, and my thoughts were just getting out of control.

During this whole process I had spent a full month without sleeping, maybe an hour or two hours, but I was not sleeping, so I was just, crazy. I would just wake up and then I'm awake, thinking about what am I doing, where am I going, what are my parents going to think, what is Mike going to think? So I had to get sleep. I went to the psychiatrist so I could sleep, please give me something so I can sleep. I started my medication (Zoloft) the end of May. I was just, I can't take this, it's just too much. And then during that time I said, let's just date, and let's just see how it goes, and we don't have to think about the other pressures. Then I got on medication and it seems to have really helped and balanced me back out and I don't have the highs and lows.

Terry

How long did it take to start to feel something?

Lisa

Probably a month, maybe a little longer.

Terry

What felt different?

Lisa

I was calmer, I was a little bit more grounded, and I think it just allowed me to see things clearly, because I had been sleeping, and I wasn't feeling so anxious, and I was feeling more confident in myself and just being ok with, well if it doesn't work, I will go on and I'm ok. Let's just see where it goes, maybe it will work out, maybe it won't. I was just more comfortable in myself. I was ok either way. If I left, I

was going to be fine, and if I stayed, I was still working through that but let's just see where it goes.

Terry

That shift from you feeling, it's finished, there's no chance, I'm out of here, to maybe there's a little opening, maybe a chance, maybe let's date, and feeling ok with yourself, do you know where that happened?

Lisa

No I really don't. I did it because we have been friends for so long and I owed it to Mike, and I owed to myself to see if I could. We had been together 15 years and we have a lot of ties woven in, family, you know, we're Mike and Lisa and everyone thinks we're just perfect. So I thought I really need to see for myself if this is really over.

What I think really helped was having no pressure and allowing me to come to my own conclusions on my own, and what I really wanted. I mean bottom line is Mike's a great guy. He's intelligent, he's amazing, so there is no reason for me to leave because he is so amazing but I had to see that for myself. I had to feel like I want to stay here because of me. Like I WANT to be here, not just because he is so great.

Terry

I know that some of these questions are difficult and maybe you can't answer them but I am asking you to just give me what you can. You went through periods of wanting to be together initially, to losing yourself and thinking I can't handle this, to thinking we are great friends, I owe it to him to at least see how I am feeling, to actually wanting to be back together. What do you think influenced that last step – 'Now I want to be here in this relationship'? Was there anything in particular or something you were thinking about, or experiences that you had or

thoughts about what you might miss? Or was it just that you were feeling better about you and knowing that things will be ok whatever you do?

Lisa

I think we started having fun again. We weren't living together. He was in a new scene. We weren't dealing with the day to day pressures, so we were just having fun.

Terry

Doing things you used to do?

Lisa

Yah, we would go to dinner, go to dinner with friends, and we pretty much spent the whole summer together, it was like lala land. It allowed me to see Mike having a good time and laughing and not worrying about relationship stuff and school and whatever, our responsibilities. We were just having fun and laughing and enjoying each other. And I think that the more time we spent together and the more fun we had, even though we had our arguments because obviously we were still dealing with everything, but it was like a process of, you know I want to be with that fun person.

And I think our whole process in counseling too. Mike was open to seeing the flaws that were really getting to me. And little by little he started to understand me more with certain things.

Mike

Your flaws or my flaws?

Lisa

Umm, Like you're, like I'm one way but (pause) I can give you an example. I felt like if I wanted a hamburger I couldn't have a hamburger because Mike's like, 'You're eating a hamburger'! And it may not have been done in a condescending way but it felt

like a condescending way. And so our counselor helped him understand how that could be taken in a condescending way. So then he wasn't doing things like that as much, he was aware of it. Because that had happened all the way growing up. I did a dance show and it was a kind of a stripping number but obviously I had clothes on. He flipped out. 'I don't want to be with you, this is too much, I don't want to be with a girl' (who does that). Ok, well I won't do that anymore. It didn't come from that I didn't want to do it. It came from, if I wanted to be with him I couldn't do it. And then it came to I don't want you dressing that way. And then I was wearing long sweaters and his best friend came up to me and said, you are putting on some weight and if you gain anymore weight Mike is going to leave you. Ok, so I've got to lose weight. It's like I became what he wanted me to be. I didn't become Lisa. Because that's where I wanted to go.

Mike

It's very hard for me to hear that because while I was doing those things, I did do those things, I never realized it, and it was out of a scared place for me and at the same time there was some naivety there. We were both in high school and then I also did in college too. So it's really hard for me to hear that now. I acknowledged it and wow, it sounds really sick. Thank God I am doing less of that now, hopefully none.

Lisa

It goes back to my dancing days. We'd be weighed and we had to be a certain weight so I have always had an issue with food.

Mike

Lisa was a state champion in gymnastics, she was a professional dancer, both had had body image things and boy was I insensitive with those things. And as an actor she would always say, I want to be thin, I want to look

like this and so I would say "you're eating a hamburger", that's kind of like you are saying one thing and doing another.

You can't do both, eat that way and want to have a certain build.

Lisa

And it just got to be too much, and my response would be, well what do you care what I am putting in my mouth!

Mike

And really I shouldn't have. That was not right.

Terry

So once Mike knew what was happening in those areas, are you saying he was adapting, and actually doing something, changing something and not just talking about it?

Lisa

Yes. Responding differently I think was huge.

Mike

Prior to going through this whole process we are sharing, we would talk as if our relationship was good. There was some tension right up to the event where she said I need to be by myself, but we would talk like oh, that poor couple over there, I'm glad we're not having to deal with that. Like totally blind to it.

Lisa

But I was dealing with stuff inside me.

Terry

Which you didn't express.

Lisa

Right. And so it got to the point where I couldn't even stand to hear him talk, or eat, or breathe.

Mike

She would tell me, please stop breathing (both laugh).

Lisa

Yah right, cause I had so much stuff going on inside of me, and by the time all that started evolving with Mike wanting me to do this or that, I had lost complete touch with myself. That's where it goes back to I needed to do things for me and not because of what they saw me as or they wanted me to do.

Terry

So because of some these changes you have told me about, you started to think more about what you really wanted to do.

Lisa

Yah, things were getting better and we were getting along and I think we were both making positive changes and keeping our identities, and it just evolved into where we are at this point. We spent all summer apart, actually we were apart five months.

Terry

But seeing each other a couple of times a week?

Mike

Yah, two or three times a week and towards the end of the summer we would spend the night together.

Lisa

It first started like on the week-end, like I'd come see him on Friday and then as time progressed he'd come to watch me dance on Tuesday nights.

Mike

Yah I really reinvested in her activities. I felt so lucky to be able to do that again, like I didn't want to miss a thing.

Lisa

It was just kind of like, as time went on we would come together and we'd go home apart. It was almost like reintroducing our relationship. And then it came to the point where, like I don't want to leave. And then we started to talk about, ok should you move in, and it was just evolving.

Mike

I want to go back to provide a framework. Lisa pursued me tremendously in high school. I think the entire school knew that Lisa was just crazy about me. So I got chosen, so part of the thrill is the hunt, I didn't get to hunt. I always knew that in the back of my head. It felt really wonderful that somebody wanted me and wanted to be around me. And so as we moved through our lives together I kind of had that in the back of my head. When we split this past summer part of my hope was that this needed to happen for both of us and that kept me with that 5% of hope that I previously spoke about.

And I knew I was going to be ok, I knew in my heart Lisa would be ok, even though she didn't know that or feel that. I really knew that. Then towards the end of the summer I'm going, now what are we doing here. I wanted to say no one time, that you can't stay here. And it was a big deal for the first time. It allowed me to feel that I had a say in this process. For me that was a major step in us getting back on a different path.

Lisa

It was getting to the point that we were seeing each other every Friday and Saturday and going out. So he said what if I don't want to see you tonight and I want to go out with my friends. And I said ok – go.

Mike

Her genuineness gave me a tremendous sense of freedom.

Lisa

I think it goes back to just both of us making changes along the way and not staying rigid, so that we evolved and we intertwined again, but we were not consuming the other person's identity.

Terry

So what was the next phase.

Lisa

The end of the summer. Mike had to make the decision. I either had to get my own place or are we ready for me moving back in. We had already been talking about me moving to the beach or him moving back in. We decided, I think we are ready, we are getting along. I still want to go to counseling and we are still going to counseling. So let's try it out. Let's go back, live together. There was definitely anxiety with that, just because we want to get a house and we want to do this and that, and our counselor was good to say, 'ok just slow it down, you don't have to think about that, just reintroduce everything slowly. And it has just been a process of being aware of the other person's feelings and respecting the other person and still doing your stuff, still living life separate but together.

Mike

One thing I think is important to log here. When we moved back in together, it got bad again, not really bad, but we regressed in some ways and that was I think a critical time for us. The next time we went into counseling after we moved back, it was like we were cats and dogs.

Lisa

Oh yah he was driving me crazy, this and that.

Mike

Yah, frustrated with each other.

Terry

What sorts of things were creating that?

Mike

I think it was the original things coming up in different ways. I can't remember to tell you the truth, but I just remember it regressing back to some of the frustrations that we had been experiencing.

Lisa

Because I guess old patterns are hard to break, and you are kind of doing the same things, like I don't want to talk about a house, I am not ready to get a house, that kind of thing.

Mike

I guess it was the stress of dealing with the day-to-day things. I think what was really important in getting through this was that we didn't get stuck in a right way.

We didn't get stuck in one right way. We also had very strong role models which I think was important in this process too. My parents have been married 26 years.

Lisa

33 years.

Mike

Oh yah, thank you. 33 years and her parents have been married 33 years and both of our grand parents have been married their whole lives as well, so we had role models but I don't think we are like any one of them. We found our way.

Terry

Later today, you and your family and close friends are going to the chapel to renew your marriage vows with the same priest who married you 8 years ago. How did that come about?

Lisa

I think it is more for us. Like I wanted it to be very small and now it is bigger. But I think we made a decision to come back together and when you say your vows, they mean so much more now because you know what they all mean.

Terry

What it actually entails now.

Lisa

Exactly. I made this analogy this week. When we first got married it was like a prom for me, whooo, I get to marry my high school sweetheart, this is great, just get me to the church. But this time around it is like, yah, for better for worse, for richer, for poorer. Those words mean something. I think a lot of couples don't think about that.

Terry

So how have things been going in the last little while?

Lisa

They're good.

Mike

You know, they're good. It is not perfect. It would be silly to say with 100% certainty that when we renew our vows tonight that we will absolutely stay together for the rest of our lives. This may sound like I'm not sure if things will work out, but that is not the case. The reality is that I'm more aware of the fallacy of permanence. There is so much within this relationship that I don't have control over, it's scary, but I do, with

all my heart, trust that Lisa and I are in love today, and I DO have 100% faith in our relationship as a loving union. Things are really good. I feel really connected to Lisa. I feel very comfortable in my skin around her. I feel like I can become further who I want to become. And I think we've got a great chance at it. We are going to say 'till death do we part' and I am fully 100% committed to that. But I don't want to put the pressure in the same way that we had to deal with before. It's like I accept Lisa for who she is and I believe in those statements we are going to make tonight, I am awake when I say them this time, I am really fully awake when I say them.

Lisa

I think that is what people lack when they get married, they kind of just look at, oh, I am getting married, it's the knight in shining armor. But how could you possibly know. I think the work has to come from the individual first to then be able to really work on a marriage, and people don't. And when we stand up there we don't know what it entails, I know someone right now whose husband has (a life-threatening illness) and her statement is, I didn't sign up for this. Obviously she's got work to do on herself. But how can we know, how can we tell someone that.

Terry

I guess some things we can't really know until we are into them. But the experiences you have had and the way you have grown as a result of them, makes your chances of having a great life together much more probable.

Mike

You know I can't even fathom a situation in my life, in my relationship with Lisa, a situation that would cause divorce. I just can't picture one if we work through this,

which was major, a huge deal. I can't imagine one that we couldn't negotiate because the core elements of us respecting each other and trusting and being really genuine, we can kind of put in our back pack and take with us everywhere we go, in every situation.

Terry

And maybe you can be open enough with each other so that if things are getting a little bit off track, you can kind of talk about it, like reminders.

Mike

We are still going to counseling and it's wonderful. Like that hour together just totally focused on the relationship has been great.

Terry

It's interesting because probably most people never make time for that. When are you going to make time for an hour to talk solely about your lives, and your connectedness or lack of it. Everybody is too busy.

Mike

We missed a counseling appointment about 2 weeks ago. And we said to each other why don't we do it ourselves. We met earlier in the day over lunch.

Lisa

Ah it was fine.

Mike

We didn't get into anything heavy but it was just making time for each other, knowing our time is good. It was cool.

Terry

I am honored to have been able to hear your story. I think it's great. Both of you should congratulate yourselves on doing something that so few people do. They usually face

some obstacles and say, I'm out of here. It's too hard, too much energy and want to start fresh. I am not sure that starting fresh is any better (unless it is really abusive) because you don't know what you are getting really.

Mike

That was big for us. We didn't believe in starting fresh because I am bringing my same stuff to the relationship and that investment I wanted to reinvest with Lisa. That was a key concept.

Lisa

Cause I think being single at least on my end was not what I wanted. I didn't want to go and do that whole thing. There was just no way.

Mike

So it wasn't about that, it was about finding ourselves. And for the record we don't think it's that extraordinary.

Terry

Some people who do great things don't think they are great things, it's just what they do. When you step back and look at other people where everything is falling apart on a regular basis and they are not capable of doing anything about it, and make comparisons, then it becomes exceptional. In relationships that probably has to come from both sides.

Mike

This is also the first time that somebody has taken an interest in my process in anything. Like I have never been interviewed, other than things I have done with work, but not my personal process. So this was quite an opportunity and honor.

Terry

I was kind of reluctant to ask you and Lisa to do the interview. I was thinking, what is

Lisa going to say when you ask her about doing this interview. Here is this guy who she doesn't even know asking her to share some pretty intimate things. I didn't want to create any anxiety and that's why I kept saying to you, make sure she is ok with it, otherwise it's not worth doing.

I am happy that you both agreed to sit down and share some of your journey with me. I am sure you are both going to end up doing lots of great things in your own lives. Sometimes it just takes a while for doors to open. But if you are ready, when the door opens you can do some amazing things. Thank you.

An Analysis of Mental Training Programs' Influences on Intercollegiate Female Athletes' Selected Psychological Skills: A Single-Subject / Qualitative Design

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Abstract

A single-subject/qualitative design was employed to determine if psychological skills training (PST) programs influenced athletes' levels and interpretations of anxiety, concentration, motivation, and coping resources. Two female collegiate swimmers high in anxiety and low in motivation and coping skills were selected from a participant pool of 53 swimmers, divers, volleyball, and soccer players. Both athletes completed an inventory packet consisting of a modified version of the Sport Anxiety Scale (SAS), Sport Motivation Scale (SMS), and the Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28 (ACSI-28) as well as an interview before and after an eight-week personalized PST program. Overall, the findings in this study were positive and indicated benefits from the PST program. Results indicated positive changes in both participants. Both had a reduction in total anxiety levels and an increase in total personal coping resources. Results are discussed in terms of overall strengths, weaknesses, and recommendations for future research.

The anxiety and performance relationship has been studied extensively in the field of sport psychology. Consequently, many theories have evolved from the research literature. From the drive theory (Spence & Spence, 1966) to the catastrophe cusp theory (Hardy & Fazey, 1987 as cited in Gould & Krane, 1992), researchers have sought to explain how arousal and anxiety affect performance both inside and outside of sport. Anxiety can be divided into various dimensions such as trait, state, somatic, and cognitive anxiety (Spielberger, 1966; Davidson & Schwartz, 1976). To obtain objective measures of anxiety and its various dimensions, several inventories have been developed to measure the distinct dimensions.

One inventory commonly used in sport is the Sport Anxiety Scale (Smith, Smoll, & Schutz, 1990). The SAS is a trait anxiety inventory that measures cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and concentration disruption levels of athletes. Although the SAS is a reliable and valid measure, it strictly measures the amount (or intensity) of anxiety that athletes experience.

Facilitative and debilitating anxiety refers to whether a person perceives anxiety to be beneficial or detrimental to performance, respectively. Alpert and Haber (1960) discovered the value of distinguishing between facilitative and debilitating anxiety when using the Anxiety Achievement Test, which proved to be a better predictor of academic performance than traditional debilitating anxiety scales. In 1977, Mahoney and Avenier also discovered that anxiety in sport does not necessarily have to carry a negative connotation. The gymnasts with superior performances in this study used different methods of coping with anxiety. This may suggest that athletes could be taught to capitalize on anxiety's energizing properties

in a manner that is conducive to enhanced performance.

Jones and Swain examined directional interpretations of anxiety and have found relationships between an athlete's directional interpretation of anxiety and levels of competitiveness and performance (Jones & Swain, 1992; Jones, Swain, & Hardy, 1993). Highly competitive groups reported anxiety to be more facilitative than athletes who were less competitive. Likewise, good athletic performances were associated with more facilitative cognitive anxiety interpretations compared to poor performances. Facilitative and debilitating interpretations with respect to elite and non-elite athletic status were also studied (Jones, Hanton, & Swain, 1994; Jones & Swain, 1995; Lanzillo, Burke, Joyner, & Hardy, 2001). Elite athletes were found to have more facilitative interpretations of anxiety compared to their non-elite counterparts, while no significant differences were found in the amount of anxiety experienced.

Another common factor in athletic performance is motivation. Some researchers have sought to understand and measure motivation in terms of choice, effort, and persistence of certain behaviors (i.e., Smith, Smoll, & Curtis, 1979) while others have sought to understand motivations in terms of individual factors such as intrinsic psychological needs or external rewards (Deci, 1975; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Whether investigating motivation from the outcome or individual factor perspective, it is important to remember that the two are not independent of one another (Weiss & Chaumeton, 1992).

Researchers have found that an athlete's motivation level has subsequent consequences on athletic performance (Pelletier et al., 1995). As athletes' motivations to participate becomes more self-determined, they

are likely to display greater persistence (Pelletier, Brière, Blais, & Vallerand, 1988) and greater interest and satisfaction with their sports (Brière, Vallerand, Blais, & Pelletier, in press as cited in Pelletier et al., 1995). Considering the potential consequences of motivation, Pelletier et al. (1995) translated a French motivation inventory (EMS) to measure the various components of sport motivation. The EMS has subsequently been translated and validated in English, and is known as the Sport Motivation Scale (SMS). The SMS measures intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation (Pelletier et al., 1995).

Many different psychological skills training (PST) programs have been developed to teach athletes skills and techniques such as anxiety management, imagery, goal setting, concentration, self talk, thought stopping, and confidence (Weinberg & Williams, 1998). In fact, a growing body of empirical literature demonstrates the effectiveness of PST programs (Carboni, Burke, Joyner, Hardy, & Blom, 2002; Greenspan & Feltz, 1989; Vealey, 1994; Weinberg & Comar, 1994; Wilson, Burke, Joyner, & Hardy, 1998). Weinberg and Gould (1999) advocate the use of oral interviews and various written psychological inventories when designing individualized PST programs to optimize the effectiveness of the program. One such inventory that measures a variety of psychological skills is the Athletic Coping Skills Inventory – 28 (ACSI-28; Smith, Schutz, Smoll & Ptacek, 1995).

Martens (1987) requested that sport psychology professionals remain open to different scientific paradigms and research strategies. Smith (1988) also suggested that case studies and single-subject designs might provide insights important to the study of sporting behavior and the effectiveness of interventions. Case studies and single-sub-

ject designs allow researchers to investigate the internal experiences of participants. These designs are particularly useful when determining the effectiveness of psychological skills training due to the need for individualization. Previous studies have used single-subject designs to study the effectiveness of psychological interventions and their relationship to performance with notable success (Carboni et al., 2002; Greenspan & Feltz, 1989; Kendall, Harveaiko, Martin, & Kendall, 1990; Swain & Jones, 1994).

The purpose of this study was to determine if psychological skills training (PST) programs influenced athletes' levels of cognitive and somatic anxiety, interpretation of anxiety, concentration disruption, motivation, and coping resources. A single-subject design was chosen due to the need for individualization in PST programs. Two athletes with high intensity levels of debilitating cognitive and somatic anxiety as well as concentration disruption as measured by a modified version of the SAS; high levels of amotivation and extrinsic motivation, or low levels in intrinsic motivation as measured by the SMS, and/or limited personal coping resources as measured by the ACSI-28 were chosen to participate in the study and took part in an eight hour individualized psychological skills training program over the course of 7 to 10 weeks. It was hypothesized that following the individualized PST program a) athletes would have lower levels of cognitive and somatic trait anxiety prior to competition, b) athletes would interpret their anxiety as more facilitative, c) athletes would have a lower incidence of concentration disruption, d) athletes would have greater intrinsic motivation or lower levels of extrinsic and amotivation, and e) athletes would have greater personal coping resources.

Method

Participants

The participants (N = 2) in this study were chosen from a NCAA Division 1 school in the Southeastern section of the United States. Participant ages were 21 and 19 respectively. Both of the participants were from the university swim team and both were Caucasian. The participants were chosen from a subject pool of 53 athletes representing various sports including women's volleyball, women's swimming/diving, and women's soccer. Departmental and university approval was obtained to insure the well being of the participants throughout the investigation.

Measures

Modified Version of the Sport Anxiety Scale (SAS)

The Sport Anxiety Scale was designed to assess cognitive and somatic dimensions of competitive trait anxiety. It consists of 21 items divided into three subscales: somatic anxiety (9 items), worry (7 items), and concentration disruption (5 items). Participants are asked to respond to statements such as, "I am concerned about choking under pressure" on a 4-point ordinal scale where one equals "not at all" and four equals "very much so." Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients were .88, .82, and .74 for the somatic, worry, and concentration disruption subscales respectively. Test-retest reliability over 7 days exceeded .85 across all scales. Convergent validity was supported by correlating SAS responses of high school athletes (n=837) with their responses to the Sport Competition Anxiety Test and, to a lesser extent, the State Trait Anxiety Inventory. Finally, football players' SAS scores were predictive of their pre-game Tension and Confusion subscale scores on a short-

ened version of the Profile of Mood States, which established predictive validity (Smith, Smoll, & Schutz, 1990).

A directional scale was added to the SAS for the purpose of this study. Participants were asked to rate the degree to which the intensity of each symptom experienced is perceived to be either facilitative or debilitating to athletic performances. This was assessed on a scale ranging from -3 (very debilitating) to +3 (very facilitative).

Sport Motivation Scale (SMS)

The SMS was designed to assess various components of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation in the sport context. This scale consists of 28 items divided into seven subscales (four items each), which assess three types of intrinsic motivation (IM-to know, IM-for accomplishment, and IM-for stimulation) and extrinsic motivation (EM-external pressure, EM-internal pressure, and EM-identification) as well as a subscale to assess amotivation. Participants answer each statement based on the question, "Why do you practice your sport?" and then rate each statement on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 equals "not corresponding at all with why I practice" and 7 equals "corresponding exactly with why I practice." Cronbach alpha coefficients (N=593) ranged from .63 (EM-identification) to .80 (IM-to know, IM-for accomplishment) with a mean alpha coefficient of .75 reported. Confirmatory factor analysis (LISREL 7) supported the hypothesized seven-factor structure of the SMS. In addition, construct and convergent validity were demonstrated (Pelletier et al., 1995).

Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28 (ACSI-28)

The ACSI-28 was designed to measure individual differences in psychological skills within a sport context. It contains 28 items

and seven subscales: coping with adversity, peaking under pressure, goal setting/mental preparation, concentration, freedom from worry, confidence and achievement motivation, and coachability. Participants respond to each item on a 4-point Likert scale with 0 representing almost never and 3 representing almost always. Cronbach alpha coefficients (N=1027) ranged from .62 (concentration) to .78 (peaking under pressure). A total (Personal Coping Resources) alpha of .86 was reported. Smith et al. (1995) reported both convergent and predictive validity for the ACSI-28.

Procedure

The coaches of the teams were contacted, informed about the purpose of the study, and asked to participate before setting up a time to meet with the athletes. At the team meetings, all athletes from the volleyball, swimming/diving, and soccer teams completed an inventory packet consisting of a letter of informed consent, the modified SAS, SMS, and the ACSI-28 without the coaches present. Athletes were identified for inclusion in the study based on how many of their scores fell above the 75% quartile for somatic anxiety, worry, concentration disruption, total anxiety levels on the SAS as well as the three extrinsic (EM-external control, EM-internal pressure, and EM-identification) and amotivation subscales on the SMS. Additionally those scores that fell below the 25% quartile for the three SAS directional subscales (somatic, worry, and concentration disruption), the three intrinsic motivation subscales (IM-for accomplishment, IM-for stimulation, and IM-to know) and all of the ACSI-28 subscales were flagged. Seven athletes who had the met the aforementioned criteria on over half of all the subscales (12 out of 22) were contacted about participating in the study; all but one were swimmers and the other was a soccer player. Two swimmers agreed to participate in the study, and

private, individual meetings were scheduled for the following week. The remainder were contacted two other times, but all declined to participate. One final attempt was made, and the athletes were offered the chance to participate with a lesser time demand (i.e., as controls receiving no intervention, but still participating in the interview and data collection), but all declined again.

At the individual meetings with the two participants, the researcher's educational approach to psychological skills training was discussed, the inventory packet was completed again, and an initial, semi-structured oral interview was conducted. The purpose of the interview was to determine how the athletes perceive their current psychological skills and to assure that the anxiety, confidence, motivation and coping resources they reported on the inventories coincided with their interview responses. The interview was also vital in deciding which psychological skills to focus on during the intervention.

Based on interview and inventory scores, needs assessments were developed with the assistance of an AAASP certified consultant, which served as a guide for developing the participants' intervention programs. Next, a second meeting was scheduled in which each athlete was provided with a copy of the needs assessment and an oral explanation of the evaluation. The needs assessments provided the athletes with written feedback about their current psychological strengths and weaknesses as well as psychological skill suggestions. Each of the athletes had an opportunity to agree/disagree or expound upon the assessment. The implementation of the individualized PST program then commenced. Although schedules varied due to individual needs, the PST consultant met with participant 020 for a total of 8.75 hours in 8 sessions over 10 weeks, and met with

participant 021 for a total of 8 hours in 7 sessions over 7 weeks.

Participant 020's first session was devoted to the second completion of the inventory packet and the initial interview (1 hour). The second session consisted of a review of the needs assessment (10 minutes), a self-talk lesson (40 minutes) and completing performance feedback sheets (10 minutes) to increase awareness of self-talk. Ways to interrupt and change negative self-talk were also discussed. The third session was devoted to concentration and arousal management through concentrated breathing techniques (1 hour). During the fourth session, progressive relaxation was discussed (20 minutes) and practiced (40 minutes). Participant 020's fifth session was a review of the relaxation techniques covered to that point (20 minutes) and imagery exercises (40 minutes) to optimize the vividness and controllability of images. Session six was devoted to debriefing the events of the swim team's final meet (1 hour). The seventh session was a discussion about goal setting (30 minutes) and goal setting exercises (30 minutes). Finally, the eighth session was a discussion about concentration (25 minutes), concentration exercises (25 minutes), and the completion of the final inventory packet, final interview, and social validity questionnaire (55 minutes). The social validity questionnaire was adapted from Weinberg and Gould (1999) and consisted of questions to assess the PSC/researcher's characteristics and the effectiveness of the intervention program. Each participant reported answers on a 7-point Likert scale.

Participant 021's first session consisted of completing the inventory packet again and the initial interview (1 hour). The second session was a review of the needs assessment (10 minutes) and how to use self-talk to build and maintain confidence (50 min-

utes). Session three was used to learn about imagery and its uses (1 hour). In session four, imagery scripts were designed for the participant to help build confidence and maintain the appropriate arousal level (60 minutes). The fifth session took Participant 021 through an active progressive relaxation exercise (20 minute discussion; 40 minute practice). Session six was a concentration lesson (25 minutes) followed by concentration exercises (35 minutes). And, the final session was devoted to goal setting discussion (20 minutes) and practice (10 minutes) followed by the inventory packet, final interview, and social validity questionnaire (1 hour).

Because the athletes were at various points in their seasons upon the start of the PST program, an A-B single-subject design was used in this study. Descriptive statistics were calculated to determine inventory means for the entire sample and each sport. Additionally, one-way ANOVAs and Scheffe post hoc tests were conducted to determine if the inventory scores of the three teams were significantly different.

Each participant's answers to the initial and final interview questions were compared to their scores on the respective inventories by the researcher and three independent observers. Two of the three independent observers were AAASP certified consultants and the other holds a Master of Science degree in Kinesiology with an emphasis in sport psychology. Interobserver agreement was reported for each participant's initial and final interview to determine the correspondence between the interview answers and the time 2 and time 3 scores.

Graphic representations of the results for cognitive and somatic anxiety levels, directional interpretations of anxiety levels, concentration disruption levels, motivation, and

personal coping resources were presented for each participant. Results were examined for decreases in anxiety intensity levels, debilitating anxiety interpretations, and concentration disruption, and increases in intrinsic motivation and personal coping resources.

Results

Participant 020

Initially (time 1), participant 020 had 18 scores that exceeded the cutoffs. When she completed the same inventory packet at the start of the intervention phase (time 2), 17 of her scores exceeded the cutoff. The only subscale cutoff she did not exceed on the SAS was the concentration disruption level. On the SMS, the scores that exceeded the cutoff were for amotivation, IM-for accomplishment, and IM-for stimulation. All eight scores on the ACSI-28 exceeded the cutoff.

With regard to changes in anxiety, motivation, and coping skills after the PST program, there were several positive changes found across the three time periods. Participant 020's total anxiety level was reported to be 73 prior to the intervention and 61 following the intervention. All of the anxiety levels were reduced (see Figure 1), and all of the directional scores became more facilitative with the exception of the concentration disruption direction scale, which remained the same. The greatest change was found in her SMS scores. The amotivation score dropped from 27 (Time 1) to 7 (Time 3). Her scores also indicated a shift to the higher end of the self-determinism continuum. While the coping resources as measured by the ACSI-28 did increase (see Figure 2), the change was not as marked as with the other two inventories.

Figure 1.
Participant 020's Sport Anxiety Scale subscale levels.

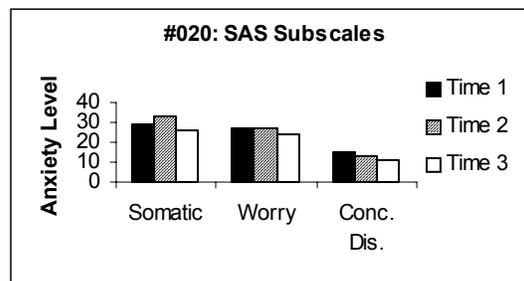
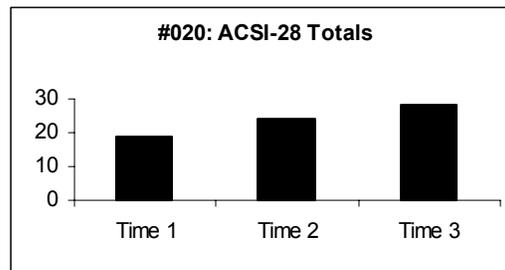


Figure 2.
Participant 020's Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28 total scores



According to participant 020's social validity questionnaire, she believed the PST program was beneficial to her sport performance. She reported that her performance anxiety had been reduced, she no longer interpreted her anxiety to be as debilitating as before, her concentration disruption had been reduced, her motivation had increased, and her ability to cope with sport related stress had increased. Further, she reported the PST program was enjoyable and that the PST consultant was flexible and easy to relate to.

Participant 021

The first time the swimmers completed the inventory packet, participant 021 met or exceeded 12 of the cutoff scores for inclusion in the study. The second time, immediately preceding the PST program, she met or ex-

ceeded 10 of the cutoff scores. At the completion of the study, she met or exceeded only six of the cutoff scores.

Participant 021's SAS scores were similar for Time 1 and Time 3 with anxiety levels (see Figure 3) and debilitating interpretations during Time 2. Participant 021's most dramatic (dramatic & drastic) change over time was the ACSI-28 scores. Her total personal coping resources score (see Figure 4) was increased from 39 (Time 1) to 56 at the conclusion of the study. Her extrinsic motivation was decreased, however, her intrinsic motivation decreased as well.

Figure 3.

Participant 021's Sport Anxiety Scale subscale levels.

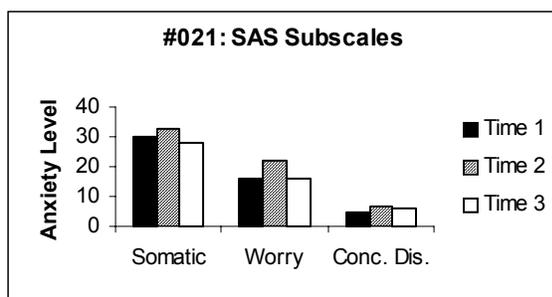
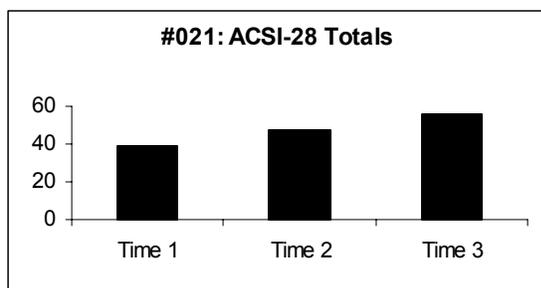


Figure 4.

Participant 021's Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28 total scores.



According to participant 021's social validity questionnaire, the PST program was only marginally helpful to her sport performance.

She did report that her anxiety interpretations had become much more facilitative following the PST program. This report collaborated with her directional scores on the SAS at Time 3 compared to Time 2 and 1.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine if a psychological skills training (PST) program could influence athletes' anxiety levels and interpretations as measured by the Sport Anxiety Scale, motivation as measured by the Sport Motivation Scale, and coping skills as measured by the Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28, and qualitative questions. It was hypothesized that following a PST program, athletes would have lower levels of cognitive and somatic anxiety, more facilitative interpretations of anxiety, lower amotivation and extrinsic motivation, and higher levels of intrinsic motivation as well as personal coping resources. The two female swimming participants both had lower cognitive and somatic anxiety levels and more facilitative anxiety interpretations following the PST program. Both of the participants also had an overall increase in personal coping resources as well. While participant 021's extrinsic motivation decreased, so did her intrinsic motivation. Participant 020, on the other hand, experienced an increase in intrinsic motivation and a decrease in amotivation. Her extrinsic motivation scores increased as well, however, her overall motivation became more self-determined as compared before the PST program.

The qualitative aspect of this study added considerable depth to understanding how different athletes experience anxiety and motivation. While the inventories provided a base level of understanding, the interviews allowed the researcher to better understand the particular situations where anxiety was and was not a problem. Allowing the ath-

letes to expand upon answers enabled personalized PST programs, which in turn enhanced the efficacy of the program. For instance, participant 021 stated that swimming in events that she was not used to swimming in, increased her negative self-talk and decreased her confidence. Interventions such as imagery and self-talk were then designed to address that particular issue.

This study also emphasized the need to distinguish between facilitative and debilitating anxiety. Participant 021 experienced high levels of somatic anxiety, however she stated that, "...If I wasn't like that [nervous stomach, dry mouth, increased heart rate], I wouldn't be ready. It would mean that I was taking the race too lightly and I wasn't ready for it..." Therefore, if successful attempts at reducing her somatic anxiety level were made, the result might have been more negative than positive.

When interpreting this study's results, several factors must be considered. At the start of the intervention, the swimmers were 10 – 11 weeks into the competitive season. The season subsequently ended four weeks through their intervention program. This could have affected the results for two reasons. One, it makes logical sense that the variables under investigation would be more severe at the height of the competitive season and less severe at the conclusion. Second, literature supports the notion of mood disturbances while training in high volume (Morgan, Costill, Flynn, Raglin & O'Connor, 1988; Morgan, Brown, Raglin, O'Connor & Ellickson, 1987; Raglin, Morgan & O'Connor, 1991).

There was also a head coaching change within three weeks of the first data collection. The head coach of the swim team resigned unexpectedly, and the assistant swim coach became the interim head coach. This

event was likely the cause for the spike in anxiety levels and directional interpretations at the second data collection, immediately preceding the intervention. Both of the athletes had different relationships with the original and new coach, which could have further influenced motivation or coping resources depending on whom they had a better working relationship with.

Participant 020 was a senior in college, while participant 021 was a sophomore. This could have affected the findings as well. Participant 020 had been swimming longer and reported burnout. At the end of the season, her college career was over, whereas participant 021 had two more seasons. The differences in motivation trends could be attributed to the differences in the participants' futures. Participant 020 was no longer bound to the swim team by scholarship, whereas participant 021 was. This could help explain why participant 020's motivation became more self-determined than participant 021's. However, participant 020 did continue to swim competitively, and when asked about her motivation she stated, "...I have those [upcoming] meets, and I want to do decent at them. If I don't go my best times, I won't cry over it, because I am done. It's just fun now. So, I am more motivated now than I was."

The previous statement adds validity to the distinction of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation variables. Motivation cannot be reduced to a single variable and a person cannot be described as either high or low in motivation. As the participants' comments and Deci (1975) suggest, many factors contribute to an athlete's overall motivation. At the start of the study, participant 020's main reason for participating in swimming was her scholarship, and she reported that she felt controlled by the team and coach requirements. When the external control was

lifted, her intrinsic motivation and joy for the sport increased.

Another limitation to this study was the lack of control participants. Participants were not recruited to participate as control participants for this study, which further prevents cause and effect to be determined. Having control participants could have helped to determine if the participants in the treatment group experienced more positive changes following the PST program compared to the control group. Control participants would also help to guard against the threat to internal validity known as statistical regression to the mean. Since the participants in this study were chosen based on their outlying scores, there is a chance that their scores would move closer to the mean with time. If there were control participants whose scores remained at the extremes, internal validity would be enhanced.

Even though there are reasons to view the positive results with caution, there are also reasons to be optimistic about the findings. Both of the participants reported that the PST program was beneficial to their sport training, had reduced anxiety levels, lessened debilitating interpretations, and increased personal coping resources. Participant 020's motivation became more self-determined as well. Also, Greenspan and Feltz (1989) and Weinberg and Comar (1994) have collectively reviewed 68 pub-

lished studies and concluded that, in general, psychological interventions that are educationally based effectively improved the competitive performance of college and adult athletes. Overall, the findings of the current study would support this conclusion. Further, the qualitative nature of this study enhances our understanding of anxiety, motivation, and coping resources.

Future studies could better continue to study the effectiveness of psychological skills training programs in several ways. Female collegiate swimmers were chosen for inclusion in this study; however, future researchers should look at males and other age groups to increase generalizability. Researchers should examine PST programs utilizing various individual and team sports. Examining performance outcomes versus or in addition to psychological indices could also provide valuable feedback. Current research has focused on implementing PST with individual athletes from various teams and then examining psychological indices or performance outcomes. It would be interesting to see the effects that PST could have when designed for particular teams. Further, future researchers should incorporate control participants within the design of the study to determine cause and effect with more certainty. This is a practical area of interest with real world implications for sport in today's society.

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Perspectives of Exceptional Adolescent Athletes and Musicians: Exploring the Meaning and Value Attached to Performance

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Abstract

This study investigated the views of exceptional adolescent performers who embraced challenges and lived close to their potential. The participants were ten young performers (seven athletes and three musicians) who were identified as top performers who also had their lives together. In-depth interviews revealed that these exceptional adolescent performers strived to maintain balance in their lives, built positive relationships with others who assisted them in their performance pursuits, approached obstacles with a positive perspective, grew through ongoing learning and improving, completely absorbed themselves in their performances, and found passion in their performance pursuits and their lives. In this article we share the wisdom of youth that emerged from these young performers,

Introduction

Perspective has been defined as having many elements in one's life, assigning *meaning* and *value* to each element, and continuing to respect not just one but many or all of these elements (Brown, Cairns, & Botterill, 2001; Botterill & Patrick, 2003). Perspective involves being fully absorbed in

a performance and still being aware of the most important things in one's life (Brown et al., 2001). As for potential benefits, a sense of perspective can increase the joy associated with performance and life experiences and help protect the performer's self-worth (Orlick, 2000), help reduce anxiety and burnout in performance situations

(Anshel, Kim, Kim, Chang, & Eom, 2001; Bond, 1993; Orlick, 2000), re-energize the body and mind, and free individuals to pursue new levels of performance and live closer to their potential (Amirault & Orlick, 1999).

Brown et al. (2001) explored the concept of perspective directly with elite performers. They interviewed eleven elite athletes who were described by professionals in the sport psychology field as top performers who have it all together. The athletes defined themselves as enduring and complex individuals who stayed true to themselves and others, and who embraced the full sporting experience while being free from a preoccupation with outcomes and their implications.

There is minimal research on what perspective adolescent performers bring to their performance and their lives. Two perspectives appear in the adolescent performance literature. First, some adolescent performers approach their performance from a perfectionist perspective. Perfectionism in adolescents can lead to burnout (Fiegley, 1984; Gould, Tuffey, Udry, & Loehr, 1996), cognitive anxiety (Hall, Kerr, & Matthews, 1998), stress and depression (Anshel et al., 2001). Second, adolescent performers may become so completely driven by their performance pursuit that they begin to live unbalanced lives, forming a one-dimensional identity around being an athlete or performer (Adler, P., & Adler, P.A., 1987; Brewer et al., 1993; Parham, 1993). The formation of a one-dimensional identity in adolescents can threaten their self-worth (Brewer, et al., 1993), lead to emotional disturbance (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990), cause burnout (Coakley, 1992), delay career development (Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996), and jeopardize outside interests such as family, work responsibilities, and physical health

(Ewald & Jiobu, 1985; Hughes & Coakley, 1991).

The current study was designed to investigate the perspectives of adolescents who were able to *cope* and *thrive* both in and out of their performance domains. What elements of perspective did these adolescent performers bring to their performance and their lives?

Methodology

Two interviews were conducted with each of the 7 athletes (3 males, 4 females) and 3 musicians (2 males, 1 female) who were attending a private school in central Canada. The performers were between the ages of 17 and 19. The athletic director and music director were asked to identify students who excelled in a performance domain and who also seemed to “have it all together”. Those who identified these exceptional adolescents believed that having it all together included excelling in at least two performance areas – academics and athletics or music – and respecting other aspects of their life, including family, friends, and leisure time.

Some performance accomplishments of these participants included one female receiving a full scholarship to play golf for a Division I school in the United States, another female being selected to play for the National Junior Rugby Team, and one male who played with the National Youth Orchestra.

The two open-ended interviews that were conducted revolved around how each performer viewed their performance and its meaning. The first interview was transcribed verbatim and analyzed based on elements emerging related to perspective. The second interview provided an opportunity to check our interpretation with the participants and to obtain further detail on relevant points.

Results

There were six main elements that characterized these adolescents' perspective: passion, balanced perspective, valuing people, learning and improving, positive perspective, and complete focus (see figure 1).

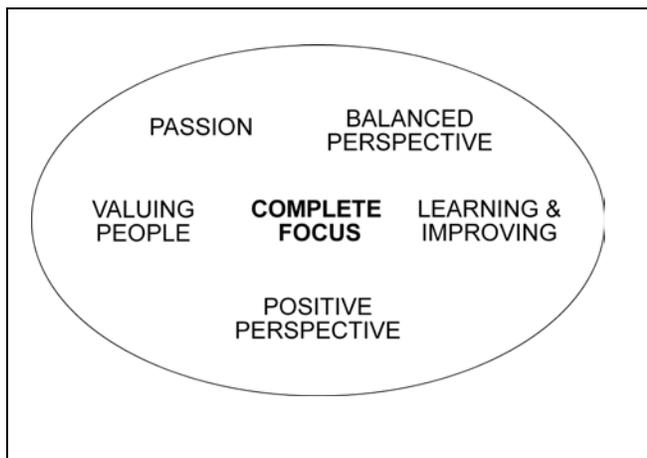


Figure 1. Elements of Exceptional Adolescent's Perspective

Each of these key elements, and their accompanying sub-elements are described below, along with representative quotes.

Passion

All ten performers expressed a deep passion for what they were doing in their sport or musical performance domain. They described their passion as a strong love for the performance, high enthusiasm, and a deep desire to learn and perform.

After playing for so long, it's my love (#5).

For me, passion is just playing my heart out every time I get on the field (#2).

I think that it's the passion that inspires me to perform. I don't think I would perform if I didn't have that passion. I

think if it wasn't there, I'd just drop the instrument (#7).

These performers felt that passion consisted of many different feelings. The most common feelings expressed by the participants are presented below.

Energizing

The first element of the passion is an energizing feeling that the performers get from performing or engaging themselves in the activity. There is an energy or vibe that feels great to them. One performer explained this energizing feeling in the following way:

I guess it's just a feeling of intensity almost. I don't know, it's like an adrenalin rush almost when you're out there. Just like a rush. Like an energy buzz kind of thing. I think pretty much the main reason that I play football is like that adrenalin rush...just the feeling that I get. I like going out there and playing football. I like the feeling of the game (#4).

One musician drew parallels between the energy associated with athletics and music:

People used to always ask me, why do you do these shows for free, because it's only now that I'm starting to use these as employment, to do gigs and stuff. But when I was younger, it was all pretty well volunteer. And I said, 'Well, why are you on the football team? Why do you go to practice every week?' I mean it's because you enjoy doing it and you enjoy the rush you get when you're out on the field, just like being out on the stage. And, so, it's really the ability to pull off the audience...I love the ability to get on stage and really have the audience in the palm of your hand and really

take them where you want to take them musically or artistically you know (#9).

It's [the passion] the excitement and the feeling I have for the music. Throughout music, they have little nuances, like forte's in pianos, and the way you kind of shape a phrase or something. And if you have that passion, you're able to shape phrases differently or have unique interpretations of the music...You have to have a passion for the music, in order to make it sound interesting.... And what I do before a good performance is...you look over your piece and you look over what you want to do and how the piece can excite you throughout the way or how you can show your emotion through it (#7).

In brief, the passion and accompanying energizing feelings served to motivate these performers and raise their performance levels. Their passion pushed them to work hard, kept them involved in the pursuit and helped them rise up to performance challenges.

Enjoyment

For all ten performers, their performance domain brought them a great sense of joy. Although the training and the performance itself involved a lot of hard work, they were able to work hard towards their goals and still have fun.

There are days when you're like, 'I don't want to go...I don't want to go and listen to coach drill' [Laughs]. It's just hot some days and pissing rain on other days and you just want to go home and go to bed. But it's so worth it. It's so worth the fun and the work and the tears and the sweat and everything. It's just fun in the en (#2).

I've had a lot of experiences where it's not fun anymore and my skills will then dissipate and I'll just end up leaving the sport. I know from experience that fun has to be a part of it (#3).

To have fun at least is the main thing because, I guess, what's the point of life if you're not having fun. If I don't like playing sport, there's no point in really doing it (#10).

These performers discussed, in great detail, many things they enjoyed about the performance experience.

I think there's just so many things about it [the performance]. It's really hard to point to one particular thing...I like going out and just like walking by myself on the golf course. Just enjoying the atmosphere, and just sort of everything around me and just kind of appreciating it for what it is. Sometimes, I enjoy putting with a crowd watching, clapping. Or sometimes, I might enjoy just going out with a group of people and just having a good laugh. Sometimes, I might enjoy seeing myself improve. I went back to a course I used to play on four year ago...And I just felt, "Wow, I've really improved." And kind of seeing yourself progress is rewarding in itself (#10).

Being successful is so much fun and it just makes you want to get out there and do more for the game and do more for yourself...You can't be successful if you're not going to have fun at the game (#2).

If you don't have fun, you're not going to want to play, or have that focus, or give up as much of your time" (#6).

It [performing] is something that I really enjoy doing and I think that definitely helps in encouraging me to do well at it (#7).

For one musician, feeling the joy and expressing love for what she is doing helps her connect with her audience:

You can tell when a performer loves what they're doing because it just comes through the audience. No matter how ignorant you are about the form of the piece or if you don't know anything about music, you can still tell when somebody loves what they're doing. And I think that's almost infectious. People grow from seeing a performance where you know the musician is just obviously in love with what they're doing, you're inspired, no matter who you are. So I think that that's really important that people continue to do that for other people (#8).

To truly experience joy through the performance, these performers stressed the importance of being involved “for yourself”.

When you play the game because you want to play the game, you're going to play better than if you're playing it because someone else wants you to play (#4).

If you're not having fun you shouldn't be playing really. You always hear these girls or guys who make a career out of practicing day and night and getting pushed all the time. They really don't like it. I met this guy and his parents went to his tryout day and I guess this kid missed this putt and then the father just goes up and goes beserk on him. He grabs the putter and just starts swinging

away at the green, and makes this huge gouge out of the green (#10).

In summary, engagement in sport or music brought many sources of enjoyment to these performers' lives. They believed that joy was an essential part of their pursuit and that it was a key factor in elevating their performance level.

Appreciation

Most of these performers expressed a sincere sense of appreciation for the performance pursuits in which they were engaged. For example, one athlete spoke of truly appreciating the opportunities that her performance experiences have given her, including the chance to develop unique physical skills, travel, and represent her school and country. She felt that it was important to take advantage of these experiences.

Another athlete sometimes took a step back to rekindle his appreciation for the game:

Sometimes when I'm playing bad, I'll watch soccer on t.v. And I don't know why but you sit and watch them play, you get an idea of what they're doing. And you start thinking about what you did wrong. You watch soccer and realize how nice of a game it is and why you like it again (#6).

One musician spoke of how appreciation grew with time, and another shared how enriching the musical experience can become.

I definitely have a better appreciation for it now. That's something that grows from the beginning...certainly now when I hear classical music or hear any kind of music, I definitely have a better appreciation for the sounds and techniques used...And appreciating it for all it's aspects and not just for the way it sounds.

Appreciating the way it's built, the way it's transcribed into a performance (#6).

Music is a full, enriching experience on a level far beyond. I mean you could take it on a spiritual level for those who are into religious music. You can take it on an emotional level. And you talk about all these elements and the ability to touch people. You know, singing at funerals is so... moving. And you're glad that your gift is able to bring peace to someone else. And not a lot of things can do that, can touch someone in that intense way. And so there's an incredible responsibility that comes with that. Because you have this voice and this god-given talent. You better use it to try to better your life and better other people's lives (#9).

Although each performer showed a slightly different form of appreciation for the performance, each form spoke to the deep passion that the performers held. They loved to perform and recognized the importance of the performance to themselves and others.

Fulfillment

Most of the performers spoke about engagement in their performance domain as a fulfilling experience that offered a feeling of completion in their lives.

I don't know if it can be described. Just think of something that seems more natural than what you're doing right now. To you, it fulfils something that you need to do. So it's kind of like a feeling of fulfillment. You love doing this. And it's something that just feels good doing it (#4).

The meaning comes from the emotional intensity you get from performing - the

feeling I get of completion, I guess personal completion (#9).

Just learning and growing as a performer, I find that performing is something that always has had an enthralling effect upon me. I get up on stage and I just love it (#8).

It [performing] is a test of my will every time I go on the field. If I don't get a chance to do that or prove myself in that way, I feel like something's missing (#3).

You have a passion for it...but not like a complete obsession over your entire life because you're just kicking a soccer ball around. [Laughs]. You still have to love the game but...you've got to realize that it's just a game. If you have an obsession, and you lose a game or do something bad, it throws you out of focus. Because all you can think about is that mistake, or that bad game, or that loss. And so it eats away at you I guess (#6).

In summary, for these performers, passion represents a deep attachment to learning and performing. They are energized by performing and through it experience a sense of challenge, fulfillment, joy, excitement, connection and completion. Performing is a central part of their lives, and part of who they are.

However, it is not all they are, as will be illustrated in the following sections of this article.

Balanced Perspective

The central element of a balanced perspective involved having a balanced approach to performing. All ten performers spoke of a number of different things in their lives that were important to them, including their performance, family, friends and school. Edu-

cation was also very important to these individuals and choosing a strong academically centered university for future study was a primary focus. The performers were also involved in a number of other sporting and community activities. They spoke about the importance of balance and setting priorities.

These adolescents described themselves not just as performers but also as individuals with many facets to their lives. When discussing whether being a performer was their sole identity, one participant said, “No. Of course not. But I do think it’s become part of who I am. I think it’s just too important to me not to become part of who I am” (#8).

Another performer discussed the value placed on performing in relation to his other life priorities: “I’d say it holds equal ground with them [the other priorities], which is pretty big” (#6).

Not only did all ten performers carry a sense of balance into their lives and into their performance, they seemed to benefit from the balance in one or more ways. These benefits are outlined below.

Stress relief

Seven of ten performers discussed their performance experience as a way of relieving stress. They viewed their performance time as a release or escape from their regular lives. Through their performances, they were able to take their mind off everyday worries and pressures.

Well, if I’m stressed out in school...I get into the gym, and I don’t think about those other things that are going on. And you can just get out and play. And even if I’m stressed, like even outside of basketball time, like school’s hectic or whatever, I could just go to the gym by myself and just play around. And it just

takes your mind off whatever else you’re thinking of (#5).

The performance actually helped them in dealing with everyday frustrations surrounding school, friends, and family. Their performance time provided them with a forum to release their energy. They left the performance setting with a feeling of calmness and felt more ready to face the everyday challenges. For some performers, the physical contact involved in their sport serves to release some of the aggressiveness they were feeling. “I guess you relieve some of that stress when you hit somebody (in my sport).It helps, yeah” (#1). Another performer felt that the performance can bring happiness when life is frustrating, and that this happiness carries over from his performance into his life:

When you’re feeling down or anything like that, you go to the soccer field. You have a good game. Everything sort of disappears again and you’re happy again. It’s just sort of, if you’re angry or anything and you just go out there and take your frustrations out (#6).

For many of these performers, the performance part of their lives served as a stress relief, by giving them a break from everyday demands and reduced the frustrations in their day to day lives.

Opportunity to rejuvenate

Five out of ten performers mentioned that leading a balanced life gives them a chance to rejuvenate and return fresh to the performance. Just as performing offers a relief from the everyday demands, the everyday events can also offer a release from the performance:

Just like soccer is a release from regular life, I think you need a release from soc-

cer too. You can't work hard all the time. You've got to go out with your friends and got to have some fun (#6).

The performers explained that if all they do is practice and perform, they start to lose the passion for performing and it becomes too much like a job:

So I think you need balance. If you don't have a balance...there's so many people that do that. They go to the course. They don't have fun at the course (#10).

I think you'd get sick of it [the performance] if that was the only thing you were ever doing or ever thinking about. Like I don't even really think about it during the days and stuff when I'm at school or when I'm sitting at home watching a movie or anything. That's my other time...It keeps you refreshed...If you're only focusing on just one thing and you don't have balance then you'll just burnout (#5).

Sometimes school even helps to kind of balance. To put things in reality. If you have other work you're doing besides music, it kind of takes away from your focus on that...And other performances go smoother, go better because I have school work there to kind of take away my emphasis away (#7).

Contingency plan

Four of the ten performers discussed the importance of getting a sound education, in case their performance pursuits did not work out as planned. Education gave them a back-up plan in case of a career-ending injury or lack of success at higher performance levels.

If I had the opportunity to drop school altogether, I probably wouldn't take it just because I know that I would be

kicking myself in the ass as for when my football is over because you can't play football for ever (#4).

I've often said, talking to the family, why haven't we gone off and try to do this professionally? And it all comes back to get the grounding. Because that is the most important thing you can do, far beyond the music. Because it [the musical performance] can be very powerful in that sense and you can get lost in it...I mean, many people have done it and many people have been successful so I can't comment on their experience. I only know from my own experience now that, I can see that having not had this grounding, I wouldn't be where I am today...Music is such an expression thing. And I've grown intellectually I think through education and my ability now to express to what I'm feeling (#9).

Without a sense of balance, which included respecting other areas of their lives, these performers felt they would limit their future opportunities and ultimately deter their ability to develop.

Just a game – more to life

All ten performers pointed out that ultimately they see their performance as just a game or part of their life, and that there is more to life than the performance itself. They valued their performance but also stated that others involved may place too much value on performing. As a result of their balanced approach, the performers saw their performance as part of their lives and were able to place the performance within the context of their entire lives.

I enjoy it [the performance] and it's a big part of my life but it's not the only part. And it's just a game in reality (#6).

On the big scheme of things, golfing isn't life (#10).

It might help me if I was less serious in the performance and kind of took a step back and put this whole performance in perspective, in terms of what it's going to mean. That's what my teacher keeps telling me, 'Just put this in perspective. It's not that big of a deal. You're just playing in front of a few people here. And it's not going to make or break your music career.' So you're kind of contextualizing the performance in your life. I mean it's just one performance. It's not that big of a deal. You're kind of looking at the other people around. You kind of look at the world around you and realize that you're not the most unprivileged kid. You don't have the most stressful position in the world right now. You've got to kind of get back to reality. Even if you mess up, so what? There's people that are starving. I mean, it's not the end of the world basically (#7).

Carrying the view that the performance is just a game and there is more to life has advantages. First, realizing that it that is just a game prevents these adolescents from getting too caught up in the performance and placing excessive pressure on themselves. The view helps them to decrease their worry and increase their ability to relax, freeing them to enjoy the performance. One performer explained how she maintained calm in an important tournament:

I went to Florida this December and I played golf with a bunch of girls and I was having a ball of a time because I'm not in the snow or anything – I'm down south. All these girls put so much pressure on themselves. And, obviously, I had pressure on myself because I had to go down there. And then there is a lot of

added pressure but, I mean, I kind of put that into perspective. I remember saying to them, 'There are so many feet of snow where I come from and it's hot out right now. I'm wearing shorts. Like, C'mon.' I'm just having a ball of a time. I remember I hit one, kind of to the left and I'm like, 'No big deal.' And the girls are like, 'I can't believe you just said that,' because it was a really tight competition (#10).

This performer ended up winning the tournament in Florida, and commented that she plays better when she is having a good time.

Another performer explained how she perceived the performance situation:

You'll see people [players] who are high maintenance and are like, 'Oh my god Coach! What am I going to do?' I hate that because it's just a game in the end. Like it's not going to matter twenty years from now. It's just a game. So I think it's just really important ...you can't let little things bother you in life, especially in sports. Because if you do, it's not going to help you to perform to your best level possible (#2).

It is interesting to note that when some performers who first said they viewed their performance as just a game, were asked to discuss their perspective in more detail, they also said that sometimes the performance is a little more than a game. "I wouldn't say that it's only a game but it's not life either" (#4). The view that the performance is 'just a game' is only part of their view of the performance. They are also extremely passionate about their performance and know that a certain level of seriousness is necessary to train and perform optimally. The important point is that they are able to deal with the pressures of overcoming obstacles because

they see the big picture. If these performers did not have a balanced approach to performing, or had nothing else in their lives, they would probably have difficulty seeing that the performance is just a game or maintaining a balanced perspective in their life.

Experience everything

A final advantage that performers mentioned in regards to carrying a balanced approach to the performance is the benefit of leaving themselves open to a vast array of experiences outside of their performance domain. They believed that these experiences offered great opportunities and were important because they are part of fully living.

I need to have different activities in my life to keep me stimulated. I think otherwise, I get into the fear of stagnation and just remaining in one place. Moving forward is really important and I always want to be moving forward throughout my life. So having the balance of different activities will keep me diverse and more open-minded, with the ability to move forward. You can always pick up a new activity or drop one or things kind of just come to an end. So you have to be willing to just incorporate lots of different experiences into your life so as to be able to move forward and be able, for me, to be fulfilled (#8).

The more opportunities you are exposed to, the more worldly you can be and the better you can cope, not only in the music standpoint but I think in lifestyle. Especially now that careers are much shorter ... So by having that wide range of experience, you can bring that into whatever craft you choose. Focus is important when you're going to record an album or perform. But not be so focused

that you disregard other elements and lose track of the rest of the world and the rest of what's important (#9).

You've got to have those other things there to help you play well. Like seeing my dad on the sidelines ... That's all important. Having my family come out and even watch the game means a lot to me. They like watching me play. I guess if I didn't spend as much time with my family, they wouldn't care as much to come out to my games or support me (#1).

Three performers discussed how they applied their learning in school to their performance domain. One performer explained that she applied the communication skills and determination necessary to be successful in school to her performance domain. Another performer felt that the questioning nature of academia can be related to her performance:

It [school] makes you kind of question everything and I think that has helped me a lot in golfing. Like the things you learn in school, you can relate it back to your entire life and to golf. You can kind of relate it all back (#10).

I'd guess you'd say it's sort of like a cycle. Soccer's tied to school. School's tied to soccer. Soccer is like a relief from friendships and then you need your friendships to help with soccer again. And friends are really from school now. It's sort of all tied together. So it's a nice balance. If one thing's out of place, it just throws everything out of cycle (#6).

By carrying a sense of balance, these performers did not limit themselves to just one performance domain but opened themselves to a vast array of life experiences. Clearly, they wanted to experience the full spectrum

of life and were prepared to seek out or create there opportunities for themselves and for their performance.

Valuing People

All ten performers discussed valuing experiences in their performance domain that were linked to other people. They viewed their performance domain not only as a venue for personal accomplishment, but also as an experience in which each participant benefits from others. When the performers spoke of what provided meaning in their performance pursuits, they all mentioned belonging to something bigger than themselves. They saw the value in “we” and not just “me”.

They were not alone in their journey to performance excellence. They recognized that coaches, teachers, parents, and friends were there to assist them in many unique ways. They saw their sport or music pursuits as an opportunity to develop long-lasting friendships, which added joy and longevity to the performance journey. Valuing other people freed these performers to perform for the benefit of the group, lifted them to new performance heights, and simultaneously provided deep friendships along the way.

Sense of team

Nine of the ten performers said that they have a deep sense of being part of a whole performance unit. Even when asked specific questions about their individual performances within the performance context, these performers would often relate back to the importance of team.

Well, when you play for a team, it's never about yourself. I know people often say, 'Play for yourself,' but not for others. But I think it's important to play for others as well because they're

there...just because it's a team really (#2).

In an individual sport I can get discouraged and decide to quit or whatever. I may give up on that challenge if it's just for myself. But when it's a team thing, I can stay motivated because other people are involved (#3).

One musician and one athlete shared how all parts of the team come together to create something wonderful:

And it's just so impressive the way it's built together to be this one entire work where there are so many different elements - like melody, and harmony and rhythm and tone. And it's just almost like a building. And it's incredible the way people can put that together (#8).

We get along because we have one thing in common, we're out there playing football together. So that helps out a lot... There's not one person out there that hates someone else. We just all get along because it's something we want to do and work together. It's a great sport. It means a lot to me just being out there and being part of something. That you can make something big happen out of this (#1).

These performers acknowledged the contribution of others on the team. They congratulated their teammates on good performances and thanked them for their help. They felt that acknowledging the contribution of others helped prevent them from becoming too egotistical or feeling superior to anyone on the team. One musician explained:

It's nice [to have the leading role]. But in the same sense, my concern was I

didn't want people to see me as someone who is so self-absorbed that I'm better than everybody else. They're all there to help me. They're all there to help the main player on the team. So you just have to be real conscious of it. And after a while, it just became natural, you do your job, they do their job, and treat everyone equally (#9).

When trying to decide which university to attend after graduation, two performers visited the universities and specifically asked the coaches how the members of the team got along together. Strong team cohesion was something they valued and sought out.

In summary, the performers saw their own participation as a contribution to the whole. They saw the performance environment as an opportunity to push themselves and others, and they appreciated the efforts of other team members.

Friendship

Another element of valuing people was the importance of making friendships within the performance domain. The experience went beyond simply performing :

Sports have always been a huge part of my life. Because, it's not just the sport itself, its the people you meet, the conversations you have, just the friendships you build with teammates...It comes way beyond the scope of the sport I think (#10).

Some of the friendships turn into long-lasting relations. They explained that you experience so much with people inside the performance that you cannot help but feel a close connection. For some, the connection seemed to stem from trust built on the field:

If you trust them on the field to do what they have to do, then it helps you off the

field. Like off the field, you'll trust them to do the same thing...And then, as far as friends go, it will bring you closer together (#4).

Having friends on the team helped them to enjoy the process of performing and could even help them to bring more intensity to the performance:

You want to go out there and not just have it be work. You want to have fun. And you know that if you're working with somebody...If it's your friend, obviously you're going to care more or try harder. And during practices and games, you're going to work hard. You've got to have someone there to help you along. If you don't care about the guy, if you don't like the guy at all, you're not going to have the same enthusiasm for practice (#6).

You just sort of build those friendships that...People that you never would have met otherwise. But playing on the same team for so long, we just...we have so much in common and we have so much fun whenever we're together. So I think that's the biggest thing it [the sport and team] has done for me (#5).

In brief, the performance experience is an opportunity for these performers to develop lasting friendships that increase their joy in their performance and in their life in general.

Support

All ten performers expressed the feeling that they were not alone in their performance pursuits. Family, friends, teammates, coaches and teachers were identified as their main supporters. Every performer felt that he or she always had and will continue to have someone supporting him or her in their performance pursuits. Each felt that they had

the support of some key people regardless of performance outcomes:

I'll go out and have a really horrible game but they'll still be happy because they'll still come to my game...No matter whether you play shitty or really good, they're still going to be there no matter what. It's nice to know that they'll always be there for you. They'll come to all your games and just be supportive (#2).

Even to this day, I've had so much parental support along the way that they've really got me to where I am. You need the people behind you (#5).

If I didn't have the support, I guess I really wouldn't be playing for something. Your parents come to the game. You play for them to watch you. I mean, if you didn't have everything there, then why would you be playing? (#1).

I think you should play for them [the coaches] sometimes just because they are the ones that got you this far in a way, just with their knowledge and support (#2).

You can find yourself getting too involved in it [the performance]. You can catch yourself when you're making these mistakes. And I think sometimes friends can really kind of take you back and say, 'This is why you like the game (#10).

Someone's always on your case about this and that, helping you. I mean they will get on your case about things. They're just trying to make you better and you have to understand that. It's nothing personal from the coach. So you can't let that get down on you (#1).

If your coaches aren't there and your teammates aren't there for you, thinking that you can do it, then how are you supposed to be able to believe in yourself that you can? (#5).

I think it [support] has to come from within a little bit also. I think support from friends and stuff and from people believing in you can really help and reassure you that you can do it and everything. But you have to believe in yourself. Because anyone can tell you, 'I believe in you,' and you don't, then you're not going anywhere. So it's self-supporting (#10).

In conclusion, the valuing people perspective involves viewing one's performance not from a "me and me alone" perspective. The performers see the performance as an opportunity to combine their talents with others for the purpose of creating something bigger than themselves. There is also a wonderful opportunity to build friendships along the way. Verbal feedback from coaches and teammates also provides support. Feedback from teammates is effective because teammates can relate better than most other support people. Performers also appreciate when instruction from coaches is positive and they tend to view almost all coaching feedback in a positive way.

The overall support network serves to help these performers strive for new performance heights, recover more quickly from mistakes, increase their joy, belief and motivation in their pursuits.

Learning and Improving

All ten performers discussed their performance as an experience centered around constantly drawing out lessons and seeking improvement in their performance. One participant commented: "I can never settle with

where I am. In sport, I always want to be that next step higher” (#5). This same performer said she loves to practice because that is where she improves the most.

Each performer spent time reflecting on their performance, learning from each performance and finding areas for improvement. Most of the performers felt badly after a poor performance but then quickly began to analyze the situation.

After a loss, well, usually the first few hours or so is just regrets. The things I should have done that I didn't do for the team...I put a lot of blame on myself most of the time and think about the little things that I should have done, that I didn't do. After a couple of hours, I start to calm down...And I sort of think about what I did do wrong and what I did differently in that game compared to what I had done in previous games that I'd played well or had won. I think about it a lot. I break down in my head just about everything that went on through the whole game, whether I was on the court or not. It makes me realize that when I go into the next game after that or the next practice, I'll work twice as hard trying to think about all the things that I did do wrong that I want to improve on. And then I'll just concentrate on small areas for starters and then I'll try to expand on them too (#5).

You can't help but try and figure it out, like understanding why you played bad (#6).

If we didn't win, of course we can learn from it but we should have learned during it. Whatever that team that we lost to had to offer, we should have recognized it earlier. Because that's what a good team would do (#3).

Reflection also occurs after optimal performances.

If I have a good performance, I try to capture the mindset that I had before that performance each time I do it (#7).

The ability to make a mistake, correct it, and move on is definitely important in terms of progression and moving forward and kind of keeping your interests and your abilities growing (#8).

I think I'm trying to play for improving my game on a certain day to a better score. Not just playing just for the sake of playing. I think a score is kind of to monitor your progress. And I'm not just going to play to try to get a scholarship or win some money. I'm going to play for myself (#10).

From where I was in the past, I've improved so much that I want to just keep it going (#5).

The joy resulting from ongoing improvement can be immense as illustrated by this musician:

I like the satisfaction of the sound that I make. Like one of my strong points is my sound and I find it very satisfying to get through a piece and work through it. Day after day, it can only improve. And I like the satisfaction of hearing my improvements...You always have the goal to get better. And therefore you base your work ethic around your idea, your goal of improvement (#7).

Although these performers strived to win and enjoyed it immensely, they were not over-consumed by winning. Four performers stated that improvement was more important

than winning. They viewed the performance as more of a competition with themselves:

I mean, you want to win for yourself, beat yourself kind of thing. To get to the next level, I think it has to be more self-winning...Measuring yourself against other people, I don't think that's good. I think you have to measure against yourself and work for yourself towards your goal (#10).

If you just keep improving, then you're just going to keep passing everybody else (#5).

In summary, all ten performers learned from each performance and steadily improved by reflecting on both good and poor performances. Small improvements, and viewing every performance as an opportunity to learn and improve, motivated these performers. Winning was a joyful experience that resulted from ongoing improvement which was most important to them.

Positive Perspective

All ten performers felt that they carried a positive perspective to their performance experiences. Even after less than optimal performances, they were able to see “the good” in the performance:

I wasn't overly impressed with that performance but I was glad that I was able to pull that off...I try to find the good things in everything...the good elements of it...And often a performance that may not be most optimal, maybe what you think is the worst, it's not so bad (#9).

These exceptional adolescent performers approached performance situations expecting the best and knowing that they would try to do their best. They were open to opportunities. After a poor performance, they

looked forward to a “next time” and did not dwell on previous mistakes. Some also drew upon humour to maintain a positive outlook when things were not going so well. By maintaining a positive perspective, they felt they were able to keep the joy in their pursuits and perform at a higher level.

Expect the best

Six of the ten performers spoke of expecting the best when they entered the performance arena.

I'm not the type of person to let things worry me. And I don't run around with 'what ifs' in my head... you have to go in and expect the best. You have to play your best and what happens is what happens kind of thing (#2).

For some of the performers, expecting the best was tied to self-confidence:

If you're not confident that you can do something, you're not going to do it. I'm positive, but I think I'm confident as well that I can do the shot. Because if you go over a shot and you're like, 'I'm just going to hope for the best,' the best isn't going to come. [Laughs] (#1).

One performer took a slightly different view on being optimistic.

You can be optimistic and that's fine. But if you've trained hard and prepared well then you don't need to be. It's just doing what you can do to achieve your goal (#3).

Do my best

Five of the ten performers described how they focused on doing their best and that's all they can ask for in a performance. When performers worried about the performance,

the view of doing just doing their best helped these performers focus on what was within their control.

Just try your best really. Whatever happens, happens. Just let things fall into place. If they don't fall into place, they don't fall into place. But, they'll fall into place somehow. What you want may not fall into place the way you want them to but you need to just keep working at it and you'll probably end up somewhere (#10).

When I start to get all worked up with all these [worrying] thoughts I just realize that I can't do anything more than my best. So once I've done my best, I don't have to worry after that because that was the best I could have done (#3).

One performer expressed a contrary view:

If I play my best but still get beaten, I'm not going to be happy with that. I'm not going to be happy if I get outplayed by another person...It's not just that I want to beat the person I'm playing against. I need to have a good game. But I'm not going to be happy if I play my best and still get outplayed (#6).

Having the perspective that all you can to do is your best helped most of these performers to see their performance in a positive light. By reasoning with themselves, they were able to approach the next performance positively.

Open to opportunities

Seven of the ten performers discussed bringing an open mind to their performance experience, being receptive to new ideas and open to opportunities within their perform-

ance domain. They spoke of their willingness to try new skills and persist with them especially when they were initially difficult to perform.

Well, for any sport, you just go into it having an open mind. Just willing to learn the new skills and drills, and everything that you learn when you first get into a sport. And it's hard work and it's hard to understand but no one's perfect at anything they first try to do. You have to just give everything a chance. And you can't give up on it the second you make a mistake or you're embarrassed in front of the rest of the team. You have to just keep trying. You won't get anywhere unless you do (#2).

When you're just starting out...you're not going to be the best. You have to realize that it takes a lot of work to be the best (#5).

If you're not open ... then you're not going to be able to reach your potential. You're going to get stuck down lower. But if you keep your mind open and you learn from the mistakes of the past, then you will learn from it and get better (#6)

After gaining experience and becoming established in their performance environment, the performers continued to be open to challenging themselves with new skills. One performer's willingness to challenge her creativity helped her to evolve as a performer:

I think music is something that it's always possible to move forward...There aren't any huge obstacles standing in the way necessarily. I find music is just something that seems to stretch on forever. It's something that provides you with kind of an infinite ability to grow.

And you can go down so many different paths in your creativity that you're always going to be better than what you were before. I think pushing your boundaries really helps to make yourself a better performer (#8).

As a result of their ability to keep their minds open to opportunities, these performers became better, and were continuing to improve.

Humour

Five of the ten performers spoke of using a sense of humour to maintain a positive outlook on their performance, especially in their approach to mistakes. They shared examples of how humour helps maintain enjoyment:

It's about enjoying it [the performance] and my personal way of enjoying it is by seeing humour in mistakes (#8).

I remember I went to this camp, this elite training program, and they were saying how that every single swing you have, say something funny to yourself. You know, I found that was actually kind of amusing...I did it. I think it really helps you. You can do it in anything, you can do it in any other sport you know. If something didn't go your way or whatever. You still say, 'I'm number one!' [Laughs]...I know it's totally unrealistic but it kind of helps. I know it's a bit optimistic but it keeps it fun (#10).

I think the release of stress that humour provides in a performance shows your humanity to the audience. If you make a mistake and you're kind of like, 'Oh!' If it's funny and you laugh at it then I think they kind of see that it's okay to make mistakes because you don't get all up tight and don't close up because of it.

And it keeps the openness and the connection with the audience going. Because they see that you're really enjoying the performance and it's okay to make a mistake because you're here to enjoy yourself and so are they. I think humour is important in maintaining your openness and the optimism of the performance. If you find humour in it, you're more able to bring something positive out of the experience (#8).

Clearly, the ability to find humour in challenging performance situations helps some of these performers to release stress, put the performance in perspective, and remain optimistic.

Always a next time

Five of the ten performers mentioned that they helped themselves regain a positive perspective after disappointing performances by reminding themselves that there is always a next time or another chance to redeem themselves.

If I do go out and I do have a bad game, I'll usually spend a while being mad. But then once I realize, I take a deep breath, and think, there's still tomorrow, tomorrow's game where I can turn it around. It was just one game that I didn't play well and I can change something the next time (#6).

So you just need to say, 'Well, you know what? Those were probably some of my bad shots. I still have good shots to come.' Just try and help yourself through it and just say, 'I just had two bad shots really. It wasn't the biggest deal in the world. There are so many other things going on.' And put it into perspective and say, 'It's not the biggest deal in the world...A lot of things could happen so you never know (#10).

A less than optimal performance did not deter these performers from persisting through disappointment. Their basic approach was:

When you get down, get back up (#6).

Move forward

One of the qualities of these performers was that do not dwell on their mistakes for very long. They were able to move forward to the next performance challenge in a positive manner by letting go of the poor performance:

I can't keep thinking negative thoughts about that game. You've got to move on and think positive (#1).

Performers felt that past mistakes are irreversible and that what happens next is most important:

Just shake it off. There's nothing you can do about it. Just go out hard and try it the next time (#1).

The thing about football is that you can't let what's happened before determine how you're going to feel for the next half. Like if I have trouble in the first half, yeah there's going to be those feelings like, Ah, shit. This was real bad. I'll feel bad about myself but then I'll try to check myself before I fall into a hole that I can't get myself out of before I get so depressed about how bad I've been playing. You've got to stop. You've got to look at how you've played and say, Okay, the past is the past. I've just got to forget about what happened (#4).

I don't think something was a mistake unless you do it twice...It's like sort of second chance in a way but it's also

looking into the future which is better than just dwelling in the past (#3).

In summary, the performers all had a positive perspective towards their performances. They expected something good to come from performing, were happy to give their best, kept their minds open to opportunities, sometimes drew on a sense of humour to keep things in perspective, and were able to recover from mistakes and look forward towards the future. The performers reached new performance heights largely because they were able to carry and regain a positive perspective.

Complete Focus

All ten performers discussed their ability to focus completely during both practices and performances.

When I'm on the field, I sort of go into a zone you know. And I just focus on what I have to do. And everything else is lost. Everything in life that's going on is gone out of my head...Because if you're having a problem with friends, girlfriend, whatever, everything's gone. It's not in the back of your head when you're playing. The only thing is your focus, getting on the field, whatever you have to do...I'm just thinking, Just go and play (#6).

You just don't want to have other things on your mind when you play. They'll inhibit your performance. Like you can't think about school, or your boyfriend, or the fight you're having with your parents or anything like that. I think you just have to be focused on what you have to do and how you're going to do it. And if you don't have a focus, you may make many more mistakes than you normally would (#2).

Their focus was complete in their sport or music performance, and then when they were in other contexts, their focus remained in that other context.

I think you'd get sick of it [the performance] if that was the only thing you were doing or ever thinking about. Like I don't even really think about it during the days when I'm at school or when I'm sitting at home watching a movie or anything. That's my other time. So when I step into the gym, it's just one focus. I just couldn't imagine having just that one focus all the time (#5).

I think the focus is essential for the improvement. I think if I'm not focused, I'm not going to get the improvement. And my frustration will kind of erupt due to my lack of focus. So I think those two are very tied together. (#7).

(When drawing out lessons for improvement) I focus on the mistakes I know I've made and remember not to make them again (#8).

I'll take mistakes made in the last game and use it to get me on the field and focusing on things I can do better. And then I try to do better. Try to run harder, move faster, hit harder (#4).

In order to continue to learn and improve, these performers also pointed out the importance of focusing on themselves and what they want to feel or accomplish, rather than focusing on others.

Golf is more you against yourself. If you focus in on other people and what they're shooting, you're done. You have to focus on yourself...This year it was really tough for a lot of girls because they're focusing in on the coaches

watching them. They think of so many things. Whereas, you really have to think that you're not in a competition and it's just you (#10).

Just focus on yourself and you'll be fine (#6).

(Just before I start) my heart beats fast. I kind of have steady breathing. It would probably be kind of like a horse, a horse in the gates before a race type thing. Like you're kind of breathing heavy and your heart's thumping but I'm not shaking and I'm not screaming or anything. It's all just kind of focus (#4).

You're always thinking of breathing, you're always thinking of these things, but you tend to try and take the emotion of the piece and let that carry you. And everything else just falls in place (#9).

You are sharing it [the performance] with them [the audience] but still concentrating on what you value about the music. And let that come through rather than worrying about how you'll sound to the other people (#8).

When the performers discussed their focus, some mentioned how other people had helped them learn to focus on the right things.

The coach is the most positive person, which is really nice to have in a coach. He's really positive and instead of saying, 'Well, that's really crappy,' he'll say 'This is more ideal'. So, it's more positive reinforcement rather than the negative stuff that you get a lot from people like, 'Why are you slicing?' or something like that. Instead of that he would say, 'Oh, it's just a little something at the end' or 'it's your timing' or

put a little more of a positive spin on things which really is encouraging. It helps you refocus on what you want to do. I think that's a key. It helps me focus (#10).

Focusing on Conclusions

The perspectives of these exceptional adolescent performers revealed not only how they viewed the performance, but how they viewed the performance in the context of their entire lives. The perspective elements may be better understood by discussing the performers' views both *within* and *surrounding* the performance.

Within the performance, the performers viewed what they were engaged in with a great deal of passion. The element of passion, love and desire appeared to form the root of their perspective, a root from which other elements grew. Within the performance, they were committed to learn from every experience, everyday. These performers saw the performance experience as a chance to evolve into something better. They were committed to carry a positive perspective into every situation, which opened them to a variety of opportunities that came their way. A positive frame of mind freed them from dwelling on doubt, hesitation, and from basing their self-worth solely on performance outcomes.

Surrounding the performance, the performers sought balance in their lives. A balanced perspective appeared to keep a performer's passion in check, so that the passion did not become obsessive to the point of totally consuming them. Clearly these performers attached a high value to their sport or musical performance, however it was just one facet of their life that they hoped to develop. Surrounding the performance there was also a network of supportive people who were an integral part of their experience. These per-

formers felt their performance experiences would have lacked the same kind purpose or meaning without the involvement of these important people.

We believe that highly developed focusing skills were a critical part of what helped these exceptional adolescent performers to *live* the different elements of perspective presented in this article. More specifically, their focus or connection with their experiences empowered them to find passion, live with balance, value and benefit from others, strive for improvement, and view things from a positive perspective. These performers were able to view their performance from a positive perspective because they learned to focus on the positives in each situation. Their ability to focus on the positives kept their perspective positive.

The extent to which these performers were able to carry a complete or engaging focus into different parts of their life, likely determined the extent to which they could live their lives with balance. A focus that is fully engaging can help all of us benefit from our various experiences inside and outside our performance domains. The challenge is to transfer this fully engaging focus from one situation to another.

These exceptional adolescent performers lived balanced lives. They were able to maintain an intense commitment to their sport or musical performance domain, without neglecting other important life priorities. They were successful at completely absorbing themselves in whatever they were experiencing in different contexts of their life. This allowed them to learn and grow as performers and individuals, to develop meaningful relationships, and to live their passions every day. The challenge facing us as educators, parents, coaches, teachers, performers, administrators, and sport psycholo-

gists is to help more performers to approach their pursuits with these same healthy per-

spectives. Hopefully we will all work together in this important quest.

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One Point at a Time: An Interview with an Elite Tennis Player

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Abstract

The effectiveness of mental training has been widely studied within the field of sport psychology (Martin, Moritz, & Hall, 1999). In addition, several researchers have begun to conduct evaluations of programs and consultants (see Gentner, Fisher, & Wisberg, 2001; Gould, Murphy, Tammen, & May, 1991; Gould, Tammen, Murphy, & May, 1989; Orlick & Partington, 1987; Partington & Orlick, 1987a, 1987b). However, there remains a dearth of information in the literature regarding athletes' experiences with sport psychology. This interview provides sport psychology professionals and athletes an opportunity to hear one elite tennis player's "voice," regarding his experiences and views on sport psychology. He provides some very valuable insights on the importance of developing a close personal relationship with a sport psychology consultant, effective strategies for dealing with distractions, focusing on positive aspects of performance, becoming confident and the search for happiness.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to give "voice" to one athlete, Chris Woodruff, a professional tennis player, to better understand his experience with sport psychology. The transcript presented is from an interview I conducted with this elite tennis player regarding his experience with sport psychology.

Chris Woodruff is 30 years old and recently retired from competitive tennis after 22 years. He was an NCAA Singles National Champion and 2 time All-American in college. He competed on the ATP tour for 14 years reaching a singles ranking of number 12 in the world. He captured 2 ATP titles, played on the United States Davis Cup

Team and reached the quarterfinals of the Australian Open. While competing on the tour, Chris worked with a sport psychology consultant for over 6 years. He is currently finishing his collegiate degree and volunteering his time with an NCAA Division I tennis team.

Interview

Noah

When you think about your experiences with sport psychology, what stands out for you?

Chris

For me personally I don't know necessarily if it's one specific thing that stands out. I tried to incorporate it as a state of mind and

as almost a ritual. By that I mean I tried to make it a habit to incorporate into my training. It was a way of mental training for me. I'd always focused on the physical part of tennis, the strategies of how you break your opponent down in terms of his strengths and weaknesses. Sport psychology was something that I discovered relatively late in my career; by late I mean I started playing professionally in 1993 and it wasn't really until the summer of 1997 that I felt like I was using it full time.

Noah

You mentioned that it's a state of mind or a ritual, can you talk a little more about that in terms of practice and things like that?

Chris

Well I would try to meet with a Sport Psychologist once a week when I was in town. Obviously with tennis being such a global sport it was hard to do that. I tried to keep in touch through e-mail and telephone. Looking back on it I think people make the mistake, they treat a sport psychologist like a medical doctor and what I mean by that is you go to a doctor if your sick and most people seek sport psychologists out when things are going poorly but I think honestly where you can make the most impact is when things are going well. It's not something that is just superficial, it goes a lot deeper than that in terms of learning how to control your mind. Back to my point about using it when things are going well, I think it has to become a habit going in. I think it's important for the person you are talking with to know how you feel when you have a sense of balance and how you feel when you're down, those two things are very important. I think it's very important that the sport psychologist knows how you feel when you're up and down, and then I think he can get to know you on a more personal

level and get to know how your inner emotions work when things are going poorly.

Noah

You talked a little bit about how you discovered it pretty late in your career. Can you talk a little bit about that process and discovery?

Chris

Well with tennis being an individual sport it's tough, you don't really have anyone out there to lean on. It's a very private sport and it's a very, I think, cut-throat sport because you're playing against somebody, so there's always a direct outcome after your match. It's not a meet or tournament where you have 2 or 3 days to get it going. If you win you advance, if you lose you go home. So I started in 97 because things were going poorly and I was finding myself becoming distracted. Distracted to me has numerous meanings. You could be distracted by the travel or the loneliness, so I think my situation was unique because I came to the sport psychologist I use with multiple problems. I was distracted off the court with the travel and the loneliness of the business and I was also distracted mentally on the court. I would let, for lack of a better word, demons get inside my head. I think tennis is such a competitive sport that it's easy to become caught up in the winning and the losing of it. By demons I mean that I would always try but I think I would try to the point where I was over-trying, and when I was over-trying I would say things internally that probably shouldn't be said. I think that my mind was becoming so cluttered that it was impairing my ability to go out there and just let it happen.

Noah

So it was just a lot of negative thinking and...

Chris

A lot of negative thoughts that were blocking, what I would call, and what I have read about, the Ideal Performance State.

Noah

You just mentioned reading things, could you talk a little more about that?

Chris

Well I used to work with Dr. X, a sport psychologist, and I read some articles by him and I also read *In Pursuit of Excellence* by Orlick. So, I read Orlick's book and I was seeing a sport psychologist and then it became apparent that just because I was reading all this stuff I wasn't gonna be able to figure it out on my own.

Noah

And you said you were reading things and you got to this point where you were kind of like, "I can't do this on my own, I need help".

Chris

Right, right, I guess to equate it if you're having problems in school you get to the point where you're like, "I just can't grasp the concept, I just can't do it on my own, so I need to go get help." You could look to the sport psychologist as a tutor, the way I tried to look at it.

Noah

Can you talk a little bit more about how that played out, being a tutor?

Chris

Well when we started we had to try to find out what the problems were and I was having problems with distractions, basically is what we called them, on the court and off the court, and we tried to use different techniques, very simple almost child-like techniques. I just remember Doc always using

very simple techniques. For example, 1997, the year I was playing some really good tennis, we used what was called a toolbox. The analogy behind that was that you went to Sears and you bought a little plastic toolbox and you put that toolbox in your bag when you went on the court. And on the changeover you would not allow your mind to think about negative things or things that had happened in the past to influence the match. Such as, well you lost a big point so the match starts getting away from you, who was in the stands-the crowd, the weather, anything that was a variable that could affect the outcome of the match. With the idea being that the answers to all your problems were within that toolbox. And you'd sit down on the changeover and that toolbox would serve as a reminder, no different than if I went out there and could have written that on my wristband, it was something to trigger my head.

Another concept that we worked on was, I would tell the sport psychologist where I was going to play the next tournament. We'd sit in there and we'd try to visualize and feel what that tournament was going to be like. I had played all these tournaments before so I could elaborate to him on what the environment was going to be like and sometimes I even knew who I was going to play so we could visualize that. So when I showed up for the tournament I had some idea about what I was going to try and focus on that week, a tool that I was going to use.

Noah

So you used a lot of imagery with him to work with the distractions and things that you really needed to focus on for a particular match or tournament?

Chris

Yes, a lot of the work was done before I showed up for the tournament. So it wasn't

like the equivalent of cramming for an exam. I'd already prepared mentally, I knew what I was getting into based on the sessions that we had before and what we'd talked about. So when I showed up I'd already done the work so I didn't have to cram.

Noah

Can you talk a little bit more about that process of preparing really early for those things?

Chris

Well, earlier in my career, to me preparing was physical, it was hitting a lot of tennis balls, making sure you were in tip-top shape. As I became older, I sort of re-structured the training and spent less time hitting balls because it was taking effects on my body, and I just felt like it was important to show up ready to play these matches. For me I always knew I could hit tennis balls as well as anybody, so I felt like being mentally prepared was equally as important as being physically prepared.

Noah

Can you talk a little bit about what it meant to you to be mentally prepared?

Chris

To me being mentally prepared meant that I had, in my own mind, met the requirements and achieved the things that we were going to try and work on for that particular week. For example, if I were going to play in the French Open, I had already done all the work necessary to know that the points were going to be long, and it was going to be a totally different style of tennis. There were going to have to be a lot of adaptations taking place for somebody who hadn't played on clay a lot. So I knew going into it there was going to be a lot of adversity and that's what I mean by mentally ready or prepared.

Noah

So it sounds like you did a lot of event preparation and really took into account the differences from different tournaments or maybe the people that you might be playing. So it sounds like it was kind of event-driven, it was like, "I have this event coming up and..."

Chris

Correct, the idea for me was trying to become not result oriented, it was always staying in the now, the present, it wasn't focusing on the winning and losing. It was giving yourself the best chance of succeeding, to achieve your goal. I can remember many matches where I walked off the court and I lost but after the match I wasn't hard on myself, I didn't beat myself up. I said, "Well, I achieved what I wanted to mentally, even though I lost, I did what I had set out to do."

Noah

What was that like for you to be able to do that?

Chris

It was a sense of relief and I think it helped me conserve energy. By not worrying about the winning and losing and by being mentally how I wanted to feel, it made the trips go by smoother, it made the trips go by a lot quicker, and I think internally I was a lot happier because of what I was achieving. I felt like I was ascending toward the top of where I wanted to be mentally.

Noah

You mentioned that you wanted to develop that present focus and not focus on outcomes or the future. Could you talk a little about the process of working toward getting there?

Chris

Well, I think as an athlete you always want

to win and I think when you hear the great people talk they always talk about, “Well, I can’t really control what my opponent does, I just have to go out there and take care of myself and I’m not going to pay attention to the scoreboard. If I go out there and play my own game, the rest will take care of itself.” So, I think once you understand and you have that mentality, and it also has to do with trusting your own game and having confidence in yourself, and once you’re able to achieve that, the winning and losing will take care of itself, I think.

Noah

You’ve mentioned the travel a couple of times. Would you mind talking a little more about that and how sport psychology has played a role in that?

Chris

Well I think anytime you’re traveling as much as I was the first 5 or 6 years which was roughly about 34 or 35 weeks out of the year, I think it becomes mentally frustrating. There are so many distractions that go into it, with the airport delays, and other distractions, and these distractions can kind of impinge your performance. So, I tried to look at this, early in my career. Before I started getting some help I looked at it as more of a hard-line approach, you know this is a job, you have to pack it up and go out there and go it alone. Prior to getting help I took that attitude. Later on, it was a much more positive way of thinking, a lot of people would crave to be in your position rather than be sitting behind a desk. And just try to really relish the fact that I was a professional athlete and I was making good money, you would never make this money shy of being a CEO or a bigshot in a company. I just tried to really relish the fact that what I do for a living is unique it’s a great opportunity and it’s fun. But then, always in the back of your

mind is the grass is always greener on the other side, and it took along time to see.

I remember early on in my career it was always such a relief, you know I couldn’t wait to get home. And it was tough early on cause I’d be losing in a match and scheduled to leave that next day and I’d think, “Oh if you don’t win you’re out of here tomorrow.” So we just tried to work on looking at it on a more positive outlook rather than, it’s not so much something I have to do but it’s something I want to do. I think there’s a big distinction between the two. It showed me that when you have a job you need to make sure you enjoy it because if you have a job you don’t enjoy you can run into those mental barriers that I described earlier.

Noah

Can you talk a little bit more about that process of coming to that realization that you have to enjoy it when you’re out there?

Chris

I think the first thing I did was, I had to understand what it meant to compete. That when you went out on the court that competing was not winning and losing. Competing to me, and I think this is the caveat of the whole thing, to me competing meant to try and achieve personal satisfaction, that competing was not going out there and winning and losing, back to the old adage of becoming result oriented. *To me self-satisfaction was eventually gained by the ability to be true to yourself, being prepared and actually loving the fact that you were playing professional tennis. And, I think my career really rocketed once I could finally grasp that concept.*

Noah

So, just enjoying being out there and knowing that I’m gonna accomplish my goals as

opposed to focusing on the goals that somebody else has set for me?

Chris

Right, you bring up a good point, something else that was happening early in my career, there are ups and downs. To me, pressure is something that you only put on yourself. Once I discovered that that was what pressure meant, in my mind's eye it helped me. Before, pressure was picking up the paper and reading, “Woodruff chokes,” “Woodruff lets it slip away.” You know, “Where are the next young American tennis players?” When you see things like that, that is what I meant by some of the distractions that go along with playing professional tennis. I think once I understood the pressure, and it took me a long time to realize this, who cares what the paper writes, it's only a matter of you finding what makes you happy. And when I talked about winning and losing and having to block out all this stuff, when I found out I could overcome those intangible things, that's when I felt like I was at my happiest.

Noah

You mentioned earlier, “I got help” or “I needed help”, can you talk about that decision to seek out help so to speak?

Chris

Anytime you self-admit you need help it's a blow to the ego. There have been many athletes, and I see it every day helping the tennis team here at the university, people look at going to get help as a sign of weakness. And it took me a long time to realize that it's almost the exact opposite, that it's a sign of strength that you can swallow your pride and you can go in and admit that you have a couple of problems. Because I think in the course of my playing sports, there have been maybe three or four people who just have it. There's an article about tennis, what is the

“it” when you say, “They got it.” What does that “it” mean? I mean, is it a magic potion? And I think there have been some athletes, you know Sampras and Agassi and Becker, who had “it”. They were blessed or whatever you want to call it. They were extremely gifted, they didn't need that help that some of us need. And it doesn't mean that people who go get help are weaker, it just means that they might not see things in the same light as the people that I just mentioned did. So, I think it was almost the exact opposite, I felt better about going to get the help. It was like the sewage had been let out of my body. The pollutants just finally overwhelmed me and it was hampering my play.

Noah

I think that's a great point because often times people say that those people who go and get help are the weak ones but then there are a lot of people that say they're the really strong ones.

Chris

Right, and I think the people who say that (that only the weak ones go) are maybe insecure. From a competitive standpoint they might be a little insecure and so it's like they're hiding it and they don't want to admit that they have a problem.

Noah

You mentioned very early on as you were talking about your experiences that the consultant really needs to understand how you feel when you're up and when you're down, can you talk a little bit more about that?

Chris

Well, I think it's really hard to grow if you're only going in when things are going poorly, because based on past experience, if we're always going in when things are going poorly, in the field of sport psychology

there's only so much the guy can tell you. So starting out, when I was always going in there when things were going poorly it was like we were taking 2 steps forward but we were always taking that one step back. So, we were always just barely keeping our chin above the water. When I went in there when things were going well we could...this is complicated and I'm not sure if I am saying this right...but when I went in there when things were going well it was like we could build on the positives and maybe not focus on the things we had been over until I was blue in the face but we could see things in a different light and be like, "Ha, that's what works for you." So then we could kind of throw away the negatives and build on the positives. And forget about the negative things, and we tried to focus on what I was feeling when I won this or how were my emotions when I served out the match. And we could take those positives and in turn use those as guides for when I got into a tough situation on the court.

Noah

So taking those feelings when things were going well and then being able to maybe implement them to get yourself to that point when things weren't going well?

Chris

Right, so for example if I served out a match at 5-4, we could take that and I did it, as opposed to, "Ahh, Doc I lost a match, I blew it again." We could take that how you felt, and what positive things did you do to serve out the match. We could take that, those experiences, and then apply them to when I got into that situation again. We could take those positives and use them as a model for the whole match and use those same upbeat emotions, that staying in the present, one point at a time, whatever you want to call it. We could use that as the standard model. And ultimately the goal would be that you

would never think about negative things when you were on the court and you would emulate only the positives. So if I were going in there when things were going well we could use those positive things to overthrow the negative things, so then ultimately every time I would go in to see the sport psychologist we would always try to keep it positive and we wouldn't have to have that negative review. You know, "Back in 1996 you came in here and said that exact same thing," instead we could say, "Ahh here's where you're positive, let's try to think about these things." And I'm not saying that was like a cure-all, I mean I lost my share of matches but I thought it was good that we were able to use those positives the way we did.

I guess what I'm saying is, if you always went into the doctor with a sore knee and he'd give you the pills, which would be the positives, "Go home and take these pills." If you went home and you didn't take the pills you'd have to go back in and you have the negative knee ache again. So, what I'm saying is if you went in with the positives, you talked about it, you got a grasp of what the concept of what exactly the positives were, it would make you feel better and the knee ache would go away so to speak. So we're not constantly having to waste all our time on the negative knee because I took the pills. That doesn't mean my knee's always perfect, it still could hurt, but if I go in and I try to do the positives and focus on the positives, chances are it's gonna cure.

Noah

So you take those pills, or techniques, and build on them (**Chris:** Exactly) and then you just keep building on them (**Chris:** Exactly) as opposed to going back to, "Oh, my knee hurts." (**Chris:** Exactly).

Noah

Ok. I just want to go back again to when you think about just your overall experiences with sport psychology, what stands out to you?

Chris

Well, it's helped me in two ways. It's helped me focus. Now that I'm not playing tennis anymore I have the positive effects of sport psychology on me that can be carried over to life. I could have folded up the tent when things were going poorly in '97. I thought about quitting the game numerous times prior to '97, so now when I come across a difficult task I tell myself, "Hey, you can get through this." It's taught me about patience, just having patience, whether you're in a traffic jam and you're late, not to try and panic. How to reason things out, how to be positive with everything in life and relating to tennis, you try to control your inner emotions, I guess is the one thing I would say sport psychology has done for me. It's enabled me to control my inner emotions. Sure I have my bad days where I lose my temper and I don't think rationally but I think it's really helped me, it's taught me to grow up and really become a problem solver rather than being negative and focusing on, "Well great, I got screwed again, the cards are stacked against me." It's taught me how to see things on the brighter side and be more positive, which helped me. Ultimately it helped me accomplish what I was trying to accomplish in tennis, it helped me just feel good about myself. And, rather than having an inferiority complex, it's taught me how to keep a positive outlook on things.

Noah

So, really it's helped with tennis but also just in general with the way that you carry yourself and how you feel about yourself?

Chris

Right. And ultimately, there came a time when I just lost interest (in competing in tennis at that level). I don't blame that on sport psychology. I think there is such a thing as burnout, when you're playing so hard and the tough thing about my sport, I think, is there's always a direct result. In school, maybe you don't see the direct result until the end of the semester when grades come out, but in tennis you saw the direct result and there were a lot of times when there were rocky roads there. So, that was the one thing that made tennis tough, you saw the result at the end of the day.

Noah

You talked about how you used the things you learned in sport psychology in other parts of your life. Would you mind talking a little more about that?

Chris

Well, I feel I'm a more positive person. With school, you compare it to tennis. I try not to become so grade oriented. I try to focus on how to study. You know, in tennis I tried not to focus on, "If you lose this match," I tried to focus on playing one point at a time, and not if you lose this match it's the end of the world. So, that's a good comparison right there. And I keep coming back to this point of results. I think if you rush ahead and think about the results, that's when the mind goes into panic. You know, if you look at the syllabus and say, "I got a paper due this time and I got a paper due this time," you know, you're immediately going to panic. Rather than if you compartmentalize, just like tennis you had to compartmentalize the points, I mean you play one point and it's gone, and then you're focusing on the next, and I keep coming back to this term too, the process of it and not the result.

Noah

That's a great point. People get caught up all the time in what's gonna happen...

Chris

And it's unavoidable, thinking about the result is unavoidable. I think everybody has, whether it be an athlete or a student or in the work world, I think everybody to an extent has a competitive side and they want to do well. I think it's those people who can play the points one at a time, and block out all of the distractions who become the best. Ultimately I guess in a nutshell it's your ability to be able to block out all the distractions. That's what makes the great ones good. They have this innate ability to focus on what is important and block out what isn't important. I think that's ultimately how you succeed in life, you have the ability to focus. The people who have the ability to focus are the ones who succeed. And not all of us have that same level, or are born with that ability to focus. And it's the ones who aren't necessarily born with that focus, or who aren't taught how to focus at a young age, like Tiger Woods' father did to him, he taught him how to focus at such a young age. It's those people that need to go get help and I think they can ultimately achieve the same goals that those who are born with it can.

Noah

So, it can kind of level the playing field so to speak?

Chris

Yeah, I think it can level it. You go see a sport psychologist to free your mind up and not become so mechanical. But paralysis by analysis, I think that could be very true. That's the only drawback that I would say with sport psychology is it makes you become too analytical sometimes. The goal you're trying to achieve is to free your mind

up and not become so analytical, but I've seen many players become too mechanical. They become so ensconced in, "I gotta," you know, in making the first serve that they becomes so mechanical (in their thought process) and they can't free up. And I think ultimately the goal of a sport psychologist is to free your mind up.

Noah

So instead of freeing up, they break everything up into the littlest part...

Chris

Exactly. Well, with the goal of the sport psychologist being to try to get you to go out and play without thinking, sometimes I think old habits die hard, and I think you have to be careful who you work with. That goes back to my point that it's important for the sport psychologist to see you when you're up and when you're down and to get to know you on a personal level and to get to understand what makes you, you.

Noah

You've mentioned a couple times the importance of having the right person, the right sport psychologist...

Chris

I think you need to use them on a regular basis. You have to get to know their personality and whether or not it's a fit. With me I'm a type A personality, I'm very regimented, hard worker, very dedicated, very cerebral. The guy I worked with is also extremely cerebral, a good thinker, but he did a good job of never letting me see him get upset. And he had good balance and that was something that helped me because when I came to him I needed some balance. And he was able to provide that. So it's important that you get to know your sport psychologist on a personal level. And it's tough if you work with what I would call, (not saying the

guy I worked with isn't a guru), the commercialized sport psychologist. They're so busy and they make so much money that sometimes if you're not at the top of your playing field or the top of your profession, they don't have time for you.

Noah

So it sounds like he was able to see what you needed, or maybe you told him what you needed...

Chris

Correct. He was able to travel with me to some tournaments. We lived in the same town so we could always deal on the more intimate level than if we were shooting e-mails back and forth to each other and talking on the phone. He was just always willing to make time for me.

Noah

And that intimacy was more effective for you?

Chris

Absolutely, compared to the guy who's got 4, 5 other people he's working with and he's promoting himself, so to speak. Whereas the guy I work with, you know we live in the same town and we got to know each other on a personal level.

Noah

Earlier you had mentioned that one of the really important things was learning how to control your emotions. Could you talk a little bit more about that?

Chris

Well, me being type A and having a fiery temper and being competitive, extremely, ultra competitive, I think that sometimes got in the way of me performing, and I would let that impair my performance. Whereas Michael Jordan's extremely competitive but

he's another guy that I would say, he's born with that "it". You know he's hard as heck on his players, he's very hard on himself but he just had that intangible gift. Somebody like myself, I couldn't necessarily reason or think the way he did or have that self-confidence that he had. So my sport psychologist tried to help. I think we all have our little insecurities and we all struggle at some point with our confidence. Are we good enough to succeed? And I think for me it just took a while longer to grasp the idea that I was good enough to succeed and I was a pretty good player. And I probably never really did get that confidence that I needed to get to that next level. Maybe I needed to box that confidence, somebody who boxes that confidence that they have. But to an extent you are who you are, this is my personality. We were always working on trying to get me to become more confident, that was also a long term goal, trying to get me to become more confident. We tried to fit it into our model but I don't necessarily know if we got there, got my confidence out of me.

Noah

You mentioned Sampras and Agassi and Jordan as having that "it", and we talked a little bit about other people not having that "it", and using sport psychology as a way to get closer to it. Would you mind talking a little more about that?

Chris

Yeah, I think there is only so much, or only so many mental tools that one can offer. And in sports I think there are only so many roads you can go down before you get shut out. And back to my point about you are who you are, the guy I worked with, we could only do so much and then the rest I think I was who I was, so we were always battling that problem. In order to be successful I think the person has to feel like he can

change but the reality is I think you can only change a person so much.

Noah

So you might come to this point where maybe you've gone as far as you can and the consultant has to understand who you are and work with that and try to change but knowing you can only change so much.

Chris

Right, you're always trying to have that relentless pursuit of perfection, with the operative word being pursuit. I mean you're always trying to pursue it. And I think there comes a time where you've exhausted yourself and then you can't transform yourself out of some mold and walk around and be somebody you're not.

Noah

Before we finish up, is there anything you'd like to add ?

Chris

I think that sport psychology is very technical. I think it's deeper than an art. I think it's complicated. And sometimes it's very difficult to find the solutions. It's easy to say to somebody, just play one point at a time, but it's like, "What exactly does that mean?" Because in tennis ultimately that's the best way to become successful and the people who are extremely successful have the ability to focus and not give in to the moment, and I think that is what makes the great ones great. They do not give into the moment. They have an unbelievable ability to block out all the things that might make them fail. I don't think that they even think about failing. I don't think they question, "Well what happens if I don't win, or if I don't do this or do that?" You have to have that focus, and if you don't have that focus you have to somehow tap into it.

Some people think they can do it alone, I've been down that path in school. You think you can do it alone and it continues to get worse and worse, or you avoid it, "I'll read it tomorrow or I'll read it over the weekend." And you don't tackle the problem. That's kind of similar to a career. If you avoid, avoid, avoid, there's only so many years you can play tennis and tennis is so tough because tennis is match play every single day.

Noah

You mentioned with some of the sport psychology techniques that they're easy to say but they're tougher to implement. Could you talk a little more about that?

Chris

Well, for example if you have a tendency when you're closing out a match for your heart rate will go up, you go in and you say, "Ok, Doc when I'm serving out the match my heartbeat is going way up." He may tell you, "You have to breathe more." What is "breathe more"? Does it mean take deeper breaths, does it mean breathe quickly? Breathing more could be a way of saying take your time, walk around and take your time. I think that's where it's tough. You have to get the sport psychologist to live in your moment. That's what makes it so tough often times. Maybe the sport psychologist is someone who's never had to play in front of 15,000 people. They're probably not gonna have to speak in front of 15,000 people. Imagine if he had to give his talk to 15,000 people, and the wind was howling and your papers were going everywhere, it becomes awfully tough.

It goes back to that personal relationship that I was talking about. You have to tell the person you're working with, everything you can about yourself and how you feel in situations, so that you almost have hiero-

glyphics, that when you go in and he tells you to breathe, it's like subliminally you understand what he means by breathe.

Noah

So they have to be more specific and also having an understanding of who you are, so they know what you need, and you also have an understanding of who he is so when he says things you kind of...

Chris

Right, so you understand each other. Because my breathing when I'm serving out the match, my plan of attack, might be different from what you have to do to breathe. You may focus on your breathing so you're doing it every breath. I may just try to take a deep breath in and breathe out. They're different. That's what makes sport psychology such a unique field in my opinion. You deal with people all trying to achieve the same goal probably but there are a lot of ways to go about getting that person to achieve that goal.

Noah

Anything else you want to add?

Chris

I think the other thing with sport psychology, is that you're dealing with people's emotions and when you deal with people's emotions, I think it's very hard ultimately to find out what triggers that emotion and I think ultimately that's where one can fail. You're trying to find out the root of the problem. There are so many things that could be bothering you. Ultimately if you meet with someone for a month or two or three or a year or however long you meet, ultimately, there is one problem that is significant over all of the other little problems. It could be I'm distracted. Well that could be a ton of things. Am I distracted because of the crowd, am I distracted because of the way I'm playing? So there's just so many

things that go into it. That's one thing that I always found very difficult, we were always seeming to try to find what the root of the problem was. And for me the root of the problem was, I was distracted. Distracted in various ways but I became distracted in my field of work. You're dealing with emotions and anytime you're dealing with emotions, it's awfully tough to find out what the problem is and what the emotion is that's giving you trouble.

The other thing I would throw in is now you have somebody's emotions but you have to keep it simple. You don't want to get this paralysis by analysis. You take someone who is very analytical like myself, it's very easy to fall down that road of becoming too mechanical. You have to somehow keep it simple. I can't think of a more simple concept than going and buying a toolbox, that's a perfect example of how to keep things simple.

Summary

There are several factors that seem to characterize Chris Woodruff's experience with sport psychology. First, having a positive and personal relationship with his sport psychology consultant appeared to be of major importance in his experience. He was very close with his consultant and that relationship allowed them to work very well together. One of the things that they worked on was dealing with distractions both on and off the court. Chris was dealing with many distractions including travel, loneliness, and negative thoughts. He and his consultant used sport psychology to work on dealing with those distractions.

A major characteristic of Chris' experience included the way he implemented sport psychology techniques. He spoke highly of the use of simple, well explained techniques, like the toolbox. He seemed to believe that

these techniques were the most effective for him because they were easy to understand and implement. In addition to using simple techniques, Chris appeared to believe that it was important to focus on the positives when working with his consultant. He mentioned that constantly reliving the negatives was counterproductive and that using the positives as a model for future success was the most effective way for him to work.

One of the ways in which Chris worked on dealing with these distractions was to begin to focus more on the moment and play one point at a time. This seemed to be another major component of his experience. He said he was constantly trying to become more focused on each point and to not worry about the past or the future. He also worked on trying to focus on his own goals. As he continued playing, he learned that achieving his own goals was the most effective way for him to perform and to become happier person.

Attempting to become happier with his sport and his life was another major component of

his experience. He admitted to looking at the negative side of things, such as travel, especially earlier in his career and used sport psychology as a way to help himself be more positive and to enjoy his sport more. Finally, Chris mentioned the many lessons that he had learned from sport psychology. These included patience, focusing on the moment, and enjoying life. He felt that he was able to implement the skills he learned from sport psychology in other parts of his life and that his life was much happier because of that.

This interview provides valuable insight into one athletes' experience with sport psychology. Such detailed insights would be impossible to find through quantitative studies. Therefore, it is important that researchers employ qualitative methods of inquiry to give athletes a "voice". By listening to athletes' "voices", sport psychology consultants and professionals can gain a better understanding of athletes' experiences and improve their ability to improve performance and life quality.

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Consulting as a Creative, Cooperative Process: A Case Study by a Triathlete and her Consultant

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Abstract

In this article, we, Karine and Eric, share our consultant-athlete relationship with you. We worked together in the summer of 2003 in preparation for Karine's Ironman triathlon competition in Wisconsin, where she hoped to qualify for the World Championships in Hawaii. Since we were both master's students in sport psychology at the time, we felt it was a unique opportunity to reflect together on the consultation and learning process. We hope you can experience both what it is like to consult and what it is like to be on the receiving/performance side of things. In this article Eric presents his point of view as a beginning consultant, and Karine shares her experiences as an athlete which includes her post-race Ironman report to see how things ended up. We expect that you will find our comments (and the little mistakes we made) amusing but very educational, as our comments in this article were written separately and without consultation this time!

Imagine that you are beginning as a sport psychology consultant, and you receive the following email from the first triathlete you have ever worked with, right after an important qualifying race. How would you react to this challenging email? How would you deal with the accompanying feelings?

Want to know how it went at Muskoka? I qualified for Wisconsin! So I am very happy about that.

However, something very special happened to me for the first, and hopefully last time: I just DID NOT WANT TO RUN. When I got off the bike, everything was going excellent, I was so happy with my swim, and on the bike I had passed two girls in my age category. I had eaten

and drank enough, and I was looking forward to run, but when I actually started to run, BANG!

I kind of blew out, I don't know, I did not want to run at all. I had a knot in my throat, I was in tears, I was walking and really, really, really did not want to start running. I had to use every imaginable psychological tip I knew of only to run for a couple of minutes and then stop again. I walked at the top of hills, at the bottom of hills, at aid stations, and at many other times whenever a good excuse crossed my mind. I let two or three girls in my age category pass me without a blink. For one of them, who was running right behind me, I stopped running, and looked at her saying: go ahead! Unbelievable.

I hated the running part so much that when I finally got to the finish line, I started crying. There the camera zoomed in on me, and the interviewer said: "It's a lot of emotion, isn't it?" [...] What a horrible experience.

[June 17, 2003]

Eric – The Consultant Side

There were two basic reasons why I wanted to work with Karine during her journey. First, it simulated very closely what it would be like for me to work with a high-level athlete who already knew a lot about sport psychology. Second, and she didn't know this at the time, I asked her because after hearing her discuss her training in class, I felt that I could help her enjoy her sport more. Enjoyment soon became the central theme of the consultations from my perspective.

I want to discuss how the process felt for me. I want to capture in my own words how

it felt to consult as well as to describe how I knew, or at least believed, that I was being helpful and effective.

In the beginning, I was nervous; I didn't know if I would be able to help her. I wasn't sure what I had to offer, but it turned out that I felt pretty comfortable right from the start in the actual sessions. It certainly helped that Karine was very proactive during the process. She almost always had something she wanted to discuss or tell me, even before I asked her how she was doing. She would often start by saying something like:

"the funny thing is, the more confident I am that I will do well, and the more pleasure I get while competing, the less "proud" I seem to feel afterwards... it seems like before when it was so hard, and stressful, that the relief/pride was higher at the end... something I should think about. Or maybe the distance-related challenge was not that big, since I had covered the distance in training, and I didn't have a time-related challenge since it was the first time on a new course... I don't know. Let's talk about it some time!"

[July 28, 2003]

Also, I remember in our first meetings being afraid to offer things that she may not appreciate or find useful. The reality is, she didn't like all the ideas or suggestions I had. I certainly tried to give her choice between different things when possible. I now know that it is probably unreasonable to expect your client to like every idea you have for them. I also learned that having an athlete not like some of your ideas is a normal part of the experience, especially in the beginning years. I actually believe that those discussions help to establish trust between the consultant and the athlete. From my point of

view, it clearly reflects to the athlete my belief that I am not an expert in *their* performance. In addition, the cooperative character of the relationship gives the athlete a chance to assert responsibility about her own performance as well as about the direction of the consultation process.

"As for your focus/enjoyment thing, I haven't actually wrote it down in my agenda after my sessions, but it often pops up in my head DURING training, and it is a superb reminder that it is most important that I enjoy what I do, and I found it helps."

[July 4, 2003]

One of the first things I noticed was how different each session felt. There were a couple of sessions where it seemed as if I did all the talking. There were others where I felt as if I only said a few words. If I had to guess the sessions that were most effective, I would say that they were those when we shared equally. As well, sometimes it felt as if I was teaching, and other times my role was just to listen. I believe that I was most effective when there was an equal balance between the two.

We always decided to meet at least a few days before any race or event. I certainly felt more comfortable meeting a few days before as opposed to the day just before a race. Knowing that there were a couple of days for her to reflect gave me the confidence to try different things or suggest ideas for her to consider. If we had met too close to a performance, I might have held back for fear of causing Karine to be anxious instead of improving her performance. However, I could have easily been contacted through email or phone if there were any 'emergency' concerns right before an event.

From my perspective, I always felt a very high level of comfort when talking with

Karine. I can't recall one moment where I felt uncomfortable discussing a particular topic. There were moments when I was unsure of how effective I was being, but this was not related to a lack of good communication. As well there were times when I wasn't sure how open to be about a subject. I sometimes wondered how much of my personal feelings about her performances I should share with her. I wasn't always sure where the line between being proactive and imposing was when working with an athlete. I remember being a little worried and anxious about discussing confidence issues with her. What if I unknowingly was making her feel less confident by bringing up the subject? I felt the best approach to take was to ask questions in a way that made her feel more confident about her sport. For example, "Karine could you tell me the three things your coach would say you improved the most in this summer?" Plus, I always tried to focus the conversation on when and how she could feel more confident.

"Thanks again for everything, I now appreciate talking to you about what I feel, I am slowly becoming more at ease... It's never easy to reveal personal weaknesses..."

[June 26, 2003]

In the end, one of the best parts of the consulting process for me was listening to her stories because she was very skillful in the art of self-reflection.

"I also recently discovered (as I think I touched upon in my last email) that I work better if I have a precise idea of the workout I have to do, the distance I have to cover. My training schedule works by time (eg. 2h15 running) and not by distance. But when I know in advance up to where I will go, it is like a challenge and I have to be focused to attain it, whereas if I just bike here and there with no pre-

cise course in mind, I tend to slack off... I was wondering if that was what Csik-szentmihalyi was referring to for his junction of challenge and skills, of precise goals and feedback. Anyways, now I try to cover as much distance as I can, instead of focusing on the time I have to do. Isn't that what distance training is anyway?

I also noticed that I like to know the course a little bit, it is encouraging to pass this house, and to climb this hill and knowing that after there is a nice little stretch, etc. I guess that's what the visualization of the race course is for... I will prepare accordingly for Wisconsin."
[July 4, 2003]

I think as a beginning consultant you learn as much (or more) from the athletes you work with as they do from you. Each athlete has an individual way of dealing with and seeing their sport and life. As a consultant you have a chance, even if only for a short time, to be part of that world. I often talked to Karine for over two hours at a time. I have to admit that I found the process exhausting. I don't think anything can really prepare you for how much energy it takes to consult, especially if you really try to do it well. It might have been better to shorten the sessions, but there always seemed to be something that was worth discussing. Usually, after we talked, Karine headed for a few hours of training. I personally didn't have any energy left afterwards to do much of anything but rest. I do remember that at the end of each session, I really had a sense of wanting Karine to do well. During each consulting session I tried to give my best, and when it was over I could only hope I did enough.

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Before hearing what Karine has to say, here is what Eric wrote, in his Journal, after their meeting following the Muskoka qualifying race...

*This was the first meeting after Karine qualified for Wisconsin Ironman. It followed a tough race in Muskoka. From what she told me, she basically blew up on the run or at least in the transition zone and at the beginning. It turns out she actually ran pretty fast. I basically intended to listen to her tell her story.*

*She is really excited to talk. We only talk once every 3 weeks or so, so there is usually a lot to talk about. Its always fun. The one thing that is very different when I talk to Karine is that I know she knows almost as much as me. She knows all about pre-comp plans, visualization... etc. I find I have to be really original and also try to see what she might not be seeing. Sometimes it takes two to see one. I also find that it is more like a creative, cooperative process than me being in charge. I really enjoy it.*

*In terms of today's topic. I brought in a time sheet of the top five competitors. So we talked about how she felt she did. The main focus was how does she know how hard or fast to run/swim/bike. When I asked her, she didn't really know. I also asked her if running fast has to feel hard. I think she sees the best result as something that has to be painful. I tried to suggest that a person can run fast and it could still feel easy. Easy speed. I don't think she really agreed. I actually said that feeling hard and running fast might be cousins but they're not married. I was trying to make her laugh and see the difference. I also brought up, how some things can be very subjective. Like how heavy something feels?*

*We also talked a lot about why she was afraid not to qualify (in her words). She talked a little about looking silly or bad if she didn't run faster than the others girls in her club. I brought up the fact that Lance Armstrong only trains to win the Tour de France. He doesn't care if he wins all the other smaller races because he knows he is training to peak for the big race. She relaxed a bit.*

*In terms of how effective I was? Well it is a very creative process. I bring up all sorts of odd points, facts, and funny stories. I admit she likes some of them better than others. We joked about TRANSITIONS ZONES IN LIFE. She is always training and can't really get away from triathlons. I told her about Terry's [Orlick] new CD and she really wanted to borrow it. I am not really sure where we are headed or where I think we should go. I think added value and enjoyment might be an interesting topic.*

*Lesson Learned- Enjoyment is a key part to the consulting process; it's a sign things are going well*

## **Karine – The Athlete Side**

### **How did it feel to be consulted?**

I must say that at the beginning, I was rather uncomfortable talking about my intimate thoughts and feelings. It was not easy to admit, for instance, that fearing that others may judge my performance was a sensitive issue for me. At one point, I decided to share this concern with Eric, who was pretty surprised! I think that when working with athletes new to sport psychology consulting, one must be understanding of an athlete's low comfort level at first.

One aspect of Eric's consulting that I liked particularly was that throughout the summer, he insisted repeatedly on specific ideas

that were important to him. He stayed true to his philosophy during the entire journey, and it comforted me to encounter consistent reactions. As an example, according to Eric, breathing can be very helpful in many situations where it can relax us and encourage us to take our time before trying to solve a problem. Instead of coming up with a new strategy each time we talked about something that had happened to me, Eric just asked me: "Did you remember to breathe?" To be reminded that the best way to deal with a hard situation is to first take a big breath, kind of reassured me because I knew I could do it.

### **How did the consultant help?**

I think it is essential for the athlete to stay open to the consultant's ideas and suggestions. Sometimes, at the outset I wasn't sure Eric's suggestions would lead me very far. But I kept thinking about our discussion after the meeting, and most of the time it produced good results. Often, someone outside of our own situation can see things in a different manner than we do, and this new perspective can generate a creative and accurate improvement strategy. The athlete should strive to be willing to try something before discarding it as ineffective.

*I just wanted to write to you about a major shift in perspective that I'm currently in the process of experiencing... You know that even if I don't seem to buy into what you tell me right away, I always think about it again and again. Because I sincerely believe that you have some kind of wisdom... where do you get it from?*

*In any event, I am slowly changing my vision of "It's gonna be hard" to "I will go fast". Because I really like to go fast, bike fast, run fast, pass people, feel the speed... that's what I train for in fact!*

*"Easy speed"... I am now beginning to understand it not only in theory but in the sometimes harsh reality of physical discomfort..."*

*[June 26, 2003]*

### **How did you know the consulting process and strategies were effective?**

You must try to believe! When I noticed that I was less anxious before a competition, when I saw that I could enjoy every training session, when I became aware of my best training and competing focus, and especially when I discovered that I could keep this best focus for the time I needed and consequently have a great race, I couldn't help but be convinced that sport psychology is indeed very effective!

On this point, I will add that I consider it absolutely important that the athlete have trust and confidence in his or her consultant. In order for the consulting process to be as effective as possible, the athlete must feel that the consultant really has the potential to provide help. To achieve this, beginning consultants should prepare well and strive to project confidence from the outset in their capacities and their ideas. It is vital that they avoid expressing doubts on the efficiency of a tip or strategy before the athlete even tries to implement it. It is certainly a challenge to be and appear very confident all the time, but the consultant can influence the athlete's perception of his or her proficiency by talking in a positive and supportive manner, for instance. In summary, to follow Professor Orlick's advice to 'Act as if you can' !

### **Did the consultant prove cooperative?**

Yes! Eric was always very open to my agenda, and he would accommodate my schedule whenever he could. He was also on time and mentally ready to meet, and he made me feel that his work with me was im-

portant, which I think is crucial for developing a trusting relationship with the athlete. Moreover, Eric was always willing to lend me tapes, books and other material that could help me, and he was interested by all aspects of my training.

### **What was working well?**

Eric showed great consulting qualities, like patience, creativity and positiveness. Patience, because it sometimes took me a long time before trying, not to say integrating, a new skill in my routine. Eric respected my rhythm and my priorities. But when something wasn't working very well, he didn't hesitate to suggest new ideas which were often very special and imaginative. Lastly, being positive is surely, in my opinion, the most important quality a consultant can demonstrate. After every single meeting with Eric, I felt excellent! A positive consultant can increase the athlete's confidence immensely just by using a positive outlook and a positive language.

I also liked when Eric provided me with materials. In my view they served two major purposes. First, they were a concrete way to witness my progress. Also, the papers, graphs, pictures, key words, etc. served as useful reminders of the strategies we were practicing.

Finally, I was especially thankful for Eric's speed in responding to my questions. My emails were answered in a very timely fashion, and this was something I appreciated a lot. We athletes always want a quick fix!

### **Less effective parts**

At one point during the summer, I competed in a race that served as a qualifier for the next one in my competition plan. When he saw the results, Eric thought (mistakenly in fact) that I hadn't qualified. He felt uncom-

fortable with this situation, and didn't know what to say. Because of that, he didn't email me after the race as he usually did. I felt very disappointed not to hear from him and not to be able to talk about what happened. It is possible that after a bad performance, some athletes may want some time before discussing the experience in detail, which the consultant should respect. However, feelings cannot be guessed, and after poorer performances, the continued care and interest the consultant shows can only do good to the athlete. Moreover, bad performances can happen to anyone, and I think it is a good idea to be prepared for this type of situation. It is a great opportunity to focus on the lessons learned, and to remind the athlete that overcoming obstacles is part of every meaningful journey.

[Actually, after we talked about this upon writing the article together, Eric told me that my interpretation of his not emailing me was not correct. In fact, he had assumed that I would be the one who would make the first contact after the competition, as he also preferred to talk in person rather than through the Internet. It would have been useful if this had been decided in advance. ]

One other thing that was not useful was the scientific articles Eric handed to me. Even if I consider myself well educated and keen on learning about sport psychology in general, I just didn't have the time and interest to read them. In my mind, I was working with Eric with the view that HE would figure out that literature and then pass on the relevant, practical parts to me. And the problem was, not having done the readings made me feel guilty at the next meeting.

### **Best parts**

I **loved** when Eric asked me to talk about the training sessions and races I competed in. For one, it is a good way to open up the

conversation and enter the subject. It is so pleasant for athletes just to have someone interested in hearing all the little details that are of crucial importance to us! Training and competing takes up a huge part of the athlete's life, and talking with the consultant is a nice opportunity to verbalize about what's going on. Moreover, telling our story out loud often reveals a powerful tool for self-awareness. A personal analysis usually takes place without a need for the consultant to bring the issues up. A consultant can advise the athlete that they will inquire about how a particular event went, and the athlete will look forward to discussing it in the next consulting session even more!

Similarly, I **really appreciated** it when Eric came to see one of my races. I felt excited to show him many of the things we had talked about, and proud that he came to see me in action! Consultants should always try to go to their athletes' venue, not only to get a more in-depth knowledge of the particular sport environment, but to show their genuine interest and support toward their athletes.

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### **Karine – The Ironman Performance**

Obviously, the culminating point of our experience was when Karine actually completed the Ironman competition that we had both been focusing on during the lead-up time in the summer. She successfully finished in a little over 12 hours and was 4<sup>th</sup> in her age-group. Here is her post-race report, written a few days after the race:

#### **WHAT AN AMAZING EXPERIENCE!**

*The Ironman went very well. I did not complete it under 12 hours, as I was expecting, but in light of the conditions, my finishing time of 12h12 is very satisfying. It was so hot and humid (around 32 to*

*34°C / 90-94 f) that many participants had to drop out, including pros. It was really hard to eat, not to mention to stay hydrated, because the heat made us nauseous. I also had stomach problems on the bike (like almost everybody else) which added to the difficulty of drinking and eating. Because of that, the time and run splits were longer than expected. I am satisfied with the fact that I did all I could, so I am very proud of my accomplishment!*

*I finished fourth in my age category, and I had to place second to qualify for Hawaii. I am not too disappointed though, because I am not even sure whether I would have liked to do it... An Ironman is soooooo much harder than we can imagine if we don't actually do it... Even I slightly underestimated the challenge, and I had trained hard this summer and was really well prepared. I still don't understand how the pros can call that their jobs... I will be glad enough to go to Hawaii only to try to figure that out!*

### **Chronological account**

*I woke up at 3:30 a.m. and had breakfast, even though I wasn't hungry. I felt nervous, but it was more like a good excitement that it was finally the big day. I arrived in the transition zone around 5:00 a.m., to do the last preparation on my bike. There, it was still dark, the morning was calm and quiet, but the people were all nervous... They were playing smooth songs like Enya, and the commentator was instructing us on not to forget to do this and that, etc. I had a couple of tears, because it was so intense... I managed to keep calm, but I was still anticipating a huge day. All my gear was ready, I was there in advance, so I had the time to put on sunscreen,*

*and things like that in a quiet place, near the bathroom. I was happy to finally be there and all ready, but a little bit sad at the same time that the journey was about to be over...*

*The sun had not rose yet and it was time for me to get near the water. (The transition zone, where all the bikes were, was at the top of a big building) I was feeling anxious. Not overly so, but I could tell my body was preparing for the challenge to come. There were approximately 1,800 people at the start, so it's pretty impressive to be among all of them... Even our supporters were crying... It's something to see. I was happy to find my boyfriend, so we kissed good luck.*

*As soon as I entered the water, my anxiety stopped. I was feeling very good in the lake, like a known territory, my body moving well through the small waves. I did a quick warm-up swim and took the time to chat with other triathletes and admire the mass of spectators gathered to cheer for us. It was so impressive! I felt very blessed to be happy and to be part of an extraordinary adventure like that! So many folks in the water at the same time, and it was wonderful with the sun still pink behind us...*

*I waited patiently for the cannon to give the starting signal, but after!!! Oh my God! It was my first mass start, and I must admit that I didn't think it was so hectic. I had to battle for close to 3 km (out of 3.8km...). I was kicked in the face, my lip was cut, people were grasping me and passing OVER me! I could barely swim, I was just trying to breathe at the right moment. I didn't panic though, because I knew it would happen, it was just worse than expected.*

*I focused on drafting the fastest swimmers I could follow, and I finished my swim in 1h07! This was an accomplishment in itself, since I was officially aiming between 1h15 and 1h20, and 1h12 in my heart. At least that's the positive aspect of having hundreds of people creating waves around you!*

*I had a pretty good transition, and I was off onto my bike. The course was splendid, in the countryside. Right from the beginning, however, I experienced cramps, which slowed me down a little. Also, in order not to get a drafting penalty, I had to slow down each time I was passed... And this was often, because there are a lot of strong guys that do not swim very fast but pass everybody on the bike. Because of the heat, I really really had to make a big effort to eat, and I wanted to throw up with each mouthful. I drank only water for a little while, and then resumed on Gatorade when my stomach was settled (because I know that drinking water only can lead to hyponatremia). I was a little discouraged when I saw that I wasn't going to have a fast bike split (from my odometer), but told myself that everybody was facing the same conditions.*

I just continued and continued biking, keeping a focus on having a high cadence and saving my legs for the run. I had a good bike leg mentally, I was in the moment and focused, until maybe the 160-km mark. After that, until 180km, I was pretty fed up with cycling, I just wanted to arrive. I was tired, hot, humid, nauseous... So after 6h38, I finally entered the transition zone for the second time.

Here again, pretty good. After a quick stop at the bathroom, I was heading out for the marathon. A flash in my head: "I

still have to run an entire marathon, darn!" I had to quickly change that thought, or I would have called it a day right there.

This summer, I had worked a lot on my mental preparation for the run. Running is always the hardest part, because it is the hardest sport on the body, and it is at the end of the competition and you're already tired, not to say dead in the case of an Ironman. So Eric helped me a lot to find my best running focus, and I practiced it a lot in training, so I was ready. I therefore just let my body run, and run, and run... I walked the aid stations (it was a mental break so... refreshing...) at the beginning, and walked the up hills in the middle section, and towards the end I added walking everywhere there was a so-called reason to do so (eg. "this turn is too sharp" (yeah right...)). Anyway, in between I had a very good pace, and I was soooooooooo thankful to have done the necessary training!!! It was a two-loop course, and it is somewhat discouraging to be so near the finish line and still have a half-marathon to run... but I just didn't think too much, and let myself run and run and run. I saw my boyfriend twice on the course, I was glad to see he was doing ok.

I finally arrived at the finish line and was very happy. I had however anticipated that I would be ecstatic and I would cry, but no. I don't think I was actually happier than finishing any other triathlon I did. I just felt as if I had let my body do what it had to do that day. But I did it well, and I am feeling good about that!!!

## The Aftermath

*I knew I was dehydrated right from the beginning of the run. I was light-headed and dizzy, and eventually felt nauseous and sometimes had a little difficulty breathing. This summer, with the help of Eric, I learned to acknowledge the pain and suffering and to let it go. That's exactly what I did, I didn't care about not feeling well (it wasn't that bad during the run though) and just ran. I even managed to get the fastest run split (marathon) of my age group! I ran only 12 minutes slower than my boyfriend (who finished in 10h41), in the top 10% of all participants!!!*

*But thanks to Eric's great consulting skills (hahaha), I ended up at the hospital! After I crossed the finish line, I started feeling very weak and more nauseous than usual. Volunteers brought me in the medical tent, where they weighed me (they also had our pre-competition weight) and checked me quickly. I was not feeling great at that point.*

*Around 10 p.m., they told me I better go to the hospital, because they couldn't do much more for me, since I was vomiting everything I was trying to take in. The ambulance brought me to the closest hospital, where doctors and nurses were both competent and very attentive. At the hospital, I received more IV's and sodium. X-Rays showed I had some liquid in the lungs, and thus my blood oxygen rate was very low (~60% as opposed to >92%). Fortunately, my boyfriend was there to comfort me the whole time.*

*By around 8 a.m., I was already feeling much better. I was obviously very tired, but otherwise I was fine. They did blood tests to be sure, and they let me check out at 1 p.m. Hey, the food is good in private hospitals! And the nurses and*

*doctors are all so nice and attentive, the difference is striking.*

*Even if I had qualified for Hawaii, my boyfriend said he would have let me choose between him and doing Hawaiï, he had had enough. We have to admit that it's pushing the limits a little... Anyway, I am more than OK now, ready to go again! Curiously, I am not very sore (I was so well-trained) and I would be able theoretically to do another Ironman soon, whereas my boyfriend and our friends can't even hear the word. Especially during the run portion, they concentrated so much on their pain and discomfort that they had thoughts like, I'll be so happy when I'm done, if I can just finish this stupid thing... This obviously made them sick, whereas I enjoyed just letting my body swim, bike and run... That's what the mental side of sport is about, isn't it?*

*For my thesis I am looking forward to interview all those Ironman pros to understand how it is they are so good at it and love it so much... because it's seriously hard!!!*

*Thanks so much to our sport psychology grad class 2003 for all your support, I thought about the cake for the whole bike section, and it gave me wings (or legs)! I hope to see you soon, and wish you the best in all your new adventures. Live fully !*

Karine

## Summary

**Eric**

I was rather new in the consulting world when I started working with Karine. I knew I was probably going to make some mistakes, though I wasn't sure what they would be. It's amazing how the little things can be really important. I learned that you really need to decide in advance how to contact each other and how to decide when to meet after an event. You can never really know what an athlete is thinking unless you ask. I also learned that you should never underestimate how busy an athlete is, and must realize that if they choose to meet with you, this is a sign that you're doing something well.

In terms of the outcome of the consultation, it can only really be seen on race day. I knew it would be pretty tough to qualify for Hawaii, but I think I still expected to her to. When she didn't, I was disappointed for her. However, after I heard what actually happened during the race, I was excited and really amazed at how tough she was that day. I think in the end, what occurred was that she helped me and I helped her "get better faster". You can't know Karine without believing that she will accomplish the things she wants to do. I think she would tell you it's all in the details. If you want to get better you've got to prepare as well as you can. I think that is true of consulting too, you have to be prepared to be at your best.

For me, it really is a creative, cooperative process. You start somewhere together and where you end up depends on how well you work together.

**Karine**

For me too, the experience was totally awesome! This summer, I learned more about myself than I did in the last five years. Most importantly, thanks to Eric, I love triathlon more than ever before. I appreciate my body

working well and hard, as well as the different environmental conditions I train and race in. Moreover, my pre-race stress level has diminished incredibly, and this contributes to me feeling so good doing triathlon. I had the chance, this summer, to experience first hand the difference a good sport psychology consultant can make in an athlete's life. We have the opportunity to help our athletes feel so much better, and in the same process, perform better. It is up to us to be very attentive to their individual needs and desires so that we can work together to go where their dreams will carry them!

## **An Analysis of a Children's Relaxation/Stress Control Skills Program in an Alternative Elementary School**

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Terry Orlick had the pleasure of serving as Shaunna's thesis supervisor while she was pursuing her Master's Degree at the University of Ottawa. Terry is the father of three wonderfully spirited girls, and in his spare time works as a Professor, applied researcher, writer and consultant. He has devoted much of his life to enhancing the lives of children and high level performers.

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### **Abstract**

The findings of this study clearly showed that the elementary school children who took part in this Relaxation/Stress Control Skills program learned to relax and successfully implemented the stress control strategies taught in the program in a variety of real world situations. The classroom teachers who taught the program made adaptations along the way to meet the specific needs of their students. The children and the teachers enjoyed the program activities and felt that it affected them in positive ways. Suggestions are provided for anyone who wants to introduce a positive living skills program to elementary school aged children.

### **Introduction**

The world seems to have become a more complex, demanding, and uncertain place for children and adults alike. Stress in children has become a major concern for teachers, parents, sport psychologists and child psychologists. The intensity and frequency of childhood stress has accompanied the increased pace of change in society. Single parent homes, bullying, violence, feelings of exclusion or uncertainty, and the trend to push children to excel at younger ages is on

the rise. In short, life seems to have become more complex and more stressful for children and adults alike, for a variety of reasons (Orlick 2001, 2002b; Elkind, 1988; Brenner, 1984).

Studies have been conducted to identify stressors in school children and to find out what coping strategies were commonly used by the children to deal with stress. These studies indicate that children felt stress from a wide variety of sources and unfortunately did not possess adequate coping skills to

deal effectively with this stress. A lack of effective coping strategies for ongoing stress can have profound negative physical, psychological, social, behavioural and learning effects on children and adults (Orlick, 2002b, 2001, 1995; Dickey & Henderson, 1989; Ryan, 1989; Blom, Cheney & Snoddy, 1986; Chandler, 1985).

Various attempts have been made to teach children to identify stress and develop effective coping strategies through relaxation, but most of these interventions were not designed in a "child-like" or "playful" manner, and were not specifically created for children (Kraft & McNeil, 1987; Marley, 1984; Martin, 1988; Smith & Womack, 1987; Stroebel, Stroebel & Holland, 1980).

In an attempt to rectify this problem, Orlick (1993, 1996, 1998, 2001, 2002a) spent many years creating a Positive Living Skills (PLS) program for children which utilized a playful, joyful or game-like approach as a key element to keep the children interested and motivated. Imagination and creativity were used in creating the activities and imagination and creativity is nurtured when children are participating in the activities. The goal of the program is to teach children valuable coping and life skills that can be used in real-world situations, both in and outside the classroom. Orlick believes that by teaching children Positive Living Skills, we provide them with the essential tools for quality living. We do this by developing their confidence, improving their focus, helping them to maintain a positive perspective within themselves and with others, teaching them how to relax and deal constructively with stress, conflicts or setbacks (Orlick, 2001, 2002a, 2002b).

In the first major study testing the effectiveness of Orlick's program for teaching relaxation and stress control skills to elementary school children (Cox & Orlick, 1996), it was found that the children who participated

in the program learned to relax and successfully implemented the relaxation/stress control strategies in a variety of real world situations. Children in control groups who were not exposed to the program made no improvements in their abilities to relax or cope effectively with stress.

Orlick's Positive Living Skills (PLS) program for elementary school children was initially delivered to the children by Orlick and his graduate students who he had trained to deliver the program. These programs achieved significant results. (Cox & Orlick, 1996; St. Denis & Orlick, 1996). In subsequent studies, the regular classroom teachers delivered the PLS program themselves, after participating in a 3 hour workshop and being provided with the program materials which included, Orlick's book, *Feeling Great : Teaching Children to Excel at Living*, a teacher's guide and audio tape or audio CD activities for the children. Teachers are the logical choice for successfully delivering a PLS program within a school context, and they have the advantage of being able to integrate the application of skills learned into the daily school schedule (Gilbert & Orlick, 1996).

## **Mental Skills Training for School Children**

### ***Stress Control***

The philosophy underlying the PLS program for Children was the belief that if children were taught these mental skills at an early age, they would benefit from the opportunity to utilize, refine and practice these skills as they matured and grew into adults. Selye (1956) in a ground-breaking study on children and stress, expressed support for this philosophy when he wrote that it was vital that children begin to learn coping strategies for their stressors at an early age because "all codes of behavior sink in best if a tradition is established" (p. 5).

An early study conducted in the Swedish school system provided support for the notion that children and youth benefit from mental skills training (Setterlind and Patriksson, 1982). Eighty percent of the children aged 12 to 18 who took part in the six week intervention program found it easy to learn to relax, and 90% felt more confident, relaxed and happy following the intervention sessions. Other longer term effects were also recorded, such as a decrease in sleep difficulties and headaches. A more recent ten weeks intervention study testing the effectiveness of Orlick's PLS program for children indicated that younger children who took part in the intervention increased their ability to reduce their heart rates at will, increased the frequency of their highlights, and were able to employ stress control strategies in a wide variety of real world situations (Gilbert and Orlick, 1996).

### **Highlights**

The successful use of highlights as an approach to teaching positive perspectives was discussed by Orlick (1993) and Siccone and Canfield (1993). Highlights have been defined as simple pleasures, joys, positive feelings, meaningful contact or anything that improves the quality of that day for that person (Orlick, 2001). Orlick suggested that if children are taught to search for and identify their daily highlights, they will experience them more often.

In a study focusing on highlights (St. Denis & Orlick, 1996), children participated in a number activities designed to nurture positive perspectives and were encouraged to discuss and record their highlights in a special highlight logbook. The results of this study showed that children could be taught to look for and identify their highlights, and that the frequency of their highlights increased significantly, as was illustrated by an analysis of their logbooks. A subsequent study by Gilbert and Orlick (1996) sup-

ported the positive and significant results of teaching highlights to children.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the present study was to assess the effectiveness of Orlick's Positive Living Skills (PLS) program with children in an alternative elementary school. More specifically, this study investigated: the extent to which children in the program increased their skills at relaxation and stress control, how classroom teachers adapted the PLS program to suit their own unique classroom environments, and whether teachers felt they were personally affected through their participation in the program.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

Students attending an alternative or open school were selected to participate in this study. Alternative schools are organized so that students of many different ages and backgrounds learn and play together. Alternative schools use multi-aged groupings and encourage the participation of family and friends in the classroom learning process (Crichton, 1994). The alternative or open school concept has both the teacher and child participating in a two-way flow of sharing information and ideas about how the day's curriculum will proceed.

Teachers in the alternative school environment make considerable adaptations to conventional curricula, to make it "fit" their particular student population. Children are encouraged to express what "works" for them and what does not work. It is precisely for this reason that it was expected that the alternative school teachers and students participating in this study would provide valuable feedback and recommendations for further improvements to the intervention program.

Four elementary school teachers from the same alternative elementary school served as participants for the study, along with their students, averaging 25 students per class. Each teacher participant taught a different grade level, ranging from grades 1 through six, with 3 out of 4 classes being classes of two grades combined: 1/2 split, 2/3 split, 4/5 split and 6.

The students in each class served as student participants. The main goal of this study was to learn from each of these teachers and their students.

## **Data Collection Procedures**

### ***Relaxation/stress control***

The Heart Rate Monitor (DT 1000) was used to measure the extent to which the children learned to relax. The DT 1000 monitor gives digital heart rate readout within a few seconds. It has a reliability rate of 97%, when validated against the Vantage XL - Polar sport tester (Cox & Orlick, 1996). Prior to the intervention pre-testing, the researchers conducted a reliability check on a separate class of children. Two researchers recorded the same child's heart rate at the same time prior to the relaxation attempt. The same procedure was carried out 60 seconds after the child was instructed to relax. The inter-recorder reliability rate was 99%

To record heart rate data, the researchers found a quiet spot in the classroom, away from the rest of the class, to conduct the testing. Each child was then fitted with a heart rate monitor and a baseline heart rate was established. Twenty seconds after a heart rate appeared on the monitor, the researcher recorded the child's heart rate. This 20 second delay ensured that the digital heart rate readout had stabilized, in order to provide an accurate heart rate measure. A team of three researchers conducted the pre- and post-testing, all of whom had training in

using the heart rate monitor, thus ensuring reliable recordings.

The researcher then gave the following instructions to the children: "I'd like you to try to relax the best way that you know how for one minute". After exactly one minute, the researcher recorded the heart rate monitor's digital readout, while the children were still trying to relax.

### ***Student logbooks***

Each child participating in the intervention was given his/her own logbook. Logbooks were used to identify and record: (1) stressful experiences, (2) coping or relaxation techniques attempted, (3) how the student felt both before and after the stressful experience, and (4) heart rates before and after a number of relaxation attempts during the program.

At the conclusion of the intervention program, the logbooks were collected and analyzed. A content analysis was performed to assess the extent to which the children had applied the relaxation and stress control activities that they had learned, in their daily lives.

### ***Teacher curriculum guides***

Each teacher participating in the intervention program was given a curriculum guide which gave session by session instructions on how to conduct the intervention program. All teachers were instructed to make notes in their curriculum guides after each intervention session. Problems, adaptations, suggestions or positive feedback pertaining to each individual session could be recorded here. At the conclusion of the intervention program, the curriculum guides were collected and a content analysis of all session notes and any program changes was conducted.

### ***Interview***

Both structured and unstructured interviews were used in this study. From the onset of the program, the researcher met with the teachers on a weekly basis for casual and unstructured interview sessions. Any concerns, suggestions or insights the teachers had were discussed during these sessions and the researcher kept a logbook and recorded all key points. Structured interviews were held with each of the teachers at the end of the study. These interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed for analysis.

All student participants were interviewed at the conclusion of the intervention program. They were asked to honestly express their feelings about the program. They were asked whether or not they had learned anything from the intervention, whether or not they had used any of the strategies, whether or not they felt that they would continue to practice the program's activities on their own and whether or not they enjoyed taking part in the program.

Qualitative methods were used to explore the teacher and student feedback. The research design was constructed to suit the unique constraints and parameters of the study, using quantitative and qualitative methods. The teachers' perceptions of the program changes made were taken directly from the teachers' logbooks, notes, questionnaires and interview transcripts. The teachers were given free rein to be as flexible and creative in their delivery of the intervention program as they deemed necessary and beneficial. The first author recorded the teachers' reflections, consulted extensively with the teachers, and after many hours of "deliberate reading," wrote their stories in a manner similar to Partington's (1995) study with musicians.

An attempt was made to capture the overall meaning and values underlying the teacher's reflections, notes and conversational responses, to learn from their expertise.

### ***Questionnaires***

After the first week and mid-way point of the intervention program, a questionnaire was given to the teachers to assess their perceptions of the program. They were asked if they felt that they were affected in any way by the program, what adaptations they might have made to the program contents and how they perceived the program's effects on their students. Teachers were also asked to provide recommendations for improving the program for the future. All of the teacher interviews and questionnaires were administered by the first author.

### ***Final feedback session***

Once all the data had been collected and a preliminary analysis had been completed, the researchers presented these findings to the school. The audience consisted of a group of teachers, student-teachers, parents and the principal. A question and answer session took place at the end of the session, giving parents and teachers a chance to give feedback. The school principal concluded the session with an overview of how the program was perceived by the school administration and notes were taken by the researcher.

### ***Intervention Procedures***

Before the intervention began, the teachers participated in a 3 hour workshop which explained the rationale behind the program, how to run the activities, how to use the logbook and allowed them to listen to a sampling of the audio-taped exercises. During the course of the study, the first author met with the teachers on a weekly basis to answer any questions or concerns.

All students participated in pre- and post-testing as well as weekly intervention sessions for 10 consecutive weeks. The duration of each session varied from class to class. It was suggested that the teachers conduct the program three or four times weekly for approximately 15-20 minutes per ses-

sion, but were given license to adapt this time frame however they saw fit.

The intervention program consisted of activities from Orlick's PLS program for children (Orlick, 1996, 2001), which were taught through the use of standardized audio-tapes. The students were taught a series of relaxation and stress control activities, as well as the basic concepts about stress and relaxation. They were also introduced to what highlights are and how to recognize them. A typical intervention session would begin with an introduction by the teacher, a relaxation audio-taped activity or a highlight activity and a short discussion about the activity and/or mental skill being used or taught that session. If time allowed, a session would sometimes end with a logbook activity pertaining to the mental skill being discussed.

All of the intervention sessions were conducted by the classroom teacher, through the aid of a curriculum guide and the PLS audio-tapes (Orlick, 2001). Each teacher was encouraged to review the curriculum guide and adapt it in whatever way they felt would best serve their class. This varied from following the guide completely, to making minor or major modifications in how the program was delivered.

## Results

The results from this study were encouraging and significant. The students successfully implemented the relaxation and stress control strategies in their daily lives (as indicated by student logbooks and student interviews), and an analysis of relaxation heart rate scores on pre- and post-tests showed a significant increase in their capacity to lower their heart rates by the end of the 10-week program. Teachers also made modifications to the intervention program and provided valuable suggestions for program improvement.

### *Relaxation Pre- and post-test heart rate scores*

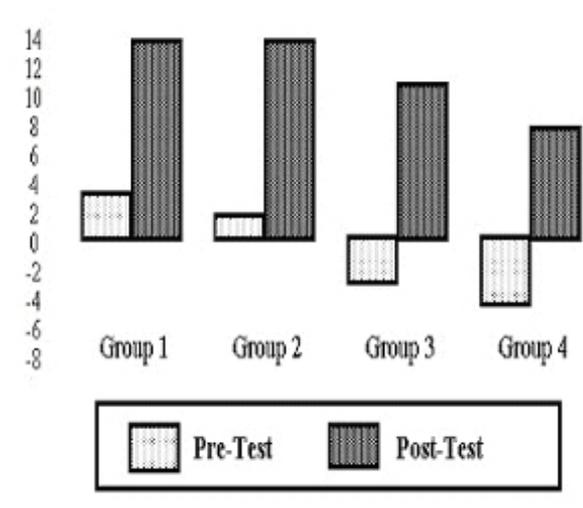
Heart rate (HR) difference scores were used to assess the extent to which children learned to relax themselves at will during the intervention program. Results demonstrated that every group was able to decrease their heart rate after participating in the intervention program. When asked to relax for a period of 60 seconds before the intervention began, on average, Grade 6 students reduced their HR by 2.6 beats, Grade 4/5 students reduced their HR by 1.7 beats, Grade 2/3 students increased their HR by 2.1 beats, and Grade 1/2 students increased their HR by 3.7 beats.

When asked to relax for a period of 60 seconds at the conclusion of the intervention program, on average, Grade 6 students reduced their HR by 12.6 beats, Grade 4/5 students reduced their HR by 13.2 beats, Grade 2/3 students reduced their HR by 9.9 beats and Grade 1/2 students reduced their HR by 7.7 beats (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 shows the extent to which children could lower their heart rates by relaxing for 60 seconds on the «pre-test before the intervention program, and on the post-test after the intervention program.

An attempt was made to assess the extent to which the children used the relaxation and stress control strategies they had been taught, in their daily lives, both inside and outside the classroom. This was done through a qualitative analysis of the children's logbooks, and was further validated through interviews with the children and their respective teachers.

### Average Beats per Minute Children Lowered Their Heart Rate on Pre-test and Post-test.



### Logbook Analysis of Implementation of Relaxation/Stress Control Strategies

An analysis of the children's logbooks and interviews revealed that 81 out of the 85 children (95%) who took part in the study, successfully used relaxation/stress control strategies that were taught in the intervention program in situations outside of the intervention sessions. More specifically, all of the children in Grade one/two (19 out of 19), 19 out of 21 children in Grade two/three, 28 out of 29 children in Grade four/five and , 15 out of 16 children in Grade six provided specific examples of successfully using the intervention skills outside of the intervention context.

Some commonly cited circumstances where they used using the relaxation/ stress control strategies included at home when they had difficulty falling asleep, during conflicts with siblings or friends, when playing games or sports, while doing schoolwork/ homework, and when they were scared or hurt.

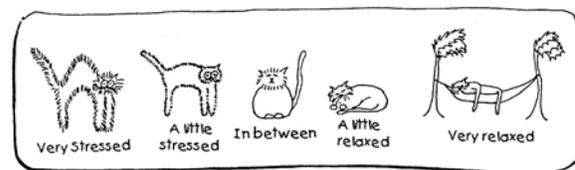
To meet the criteria for successfully implementing a relaxation/stress control strategy in their daily lives, a child had to report spe-

cific examples of successfully using the strategies in his or her logbook. To assess the extent to which children were successfully applying various relaxation/ stress control strategies, they were requested to answer the following questions in their logbooks:

1. Did anything stressful happen yesterday or today? Yes or No

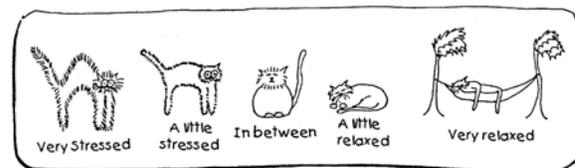
If yes, what happened?

How did you feel when this happened?



2. Did you do anything to feel less stressed? Yes or No  
If yes, what did you do?

How did you feel after doing this?



The children rated their level of stress using the pictorial "cat scale", which was first developed by Orlick, for the Cox and Orlick (1996) study. The scale consisted of a five-point scale ranging from very stressed (5), to very relaxed (1). They rated how they felt initially when faced with the stressful situation or event and then how they felt after using a stress control strategy from the intervention program. The following examples of the children's responses were taken directly from their logbooks and the children's spelling was retained.

**Example #1 (Girl, Grade 4/5)**

**Q.** Did anything stressful happen?

**A.** Yes

**Q.** If yes, what happened?

**A.** I was mad at a player on my ringete (ringette) team.

**Q.** How did you feel when this happened?

**A.** Rating = 1, very stressed.

**Q.** Did you do anything to feel less stressed?

**A.** Yes

**Q.** If yes, what did you do?

**A.** 1 Breath Relaxation. (One Breath Relaxation)

**Q.** How did you feel after doing this?

**A.** Rating = 5, very relaxed.

**Example #2 (Boy, Grade 2/3)**

**Q.** Did anything stressful happen?

**A.** Yes

**Q.** If yes, what happened?

**A.** When I can't (can't) sleep, sometimes.

**Q.** How did you feel when this happened?

**A.** Rating = 2, a little stressed.

**Q.** Did you do anything to feel less stressed?

**A.** Yes

**Q.** If yes, what did you do?

**A.** Special Place Relaxation (Special Place Relaxation).

**Q.** How did you feel after doing this?

**A.** Rating = 5, very relaxed.

**Example #3 (Girl, Grade 6)**

**Q.** Did anything stressful happen?

**A.** Yes

**Q.** If yes, what happened?

**A.** I was tired and worried because (because) my book report was due the next day!

**Q.** How did you feel when this happened?

**A.** Rating = 1, very stressed.

**Q.** Did you do anything to feel less stressed?

**A.** Yes

**Q.** If yes, what did you do?

**A.** Tree-it, so I would get to work! (on my book report).

**Q.** How did you feel after doing this?

**A.** Rating = 5, very relaxed.

**Example #4 (Boy, Grade 1/2)**

**Q.** Did anything stressful happen?

**A.** Yes

**Q.** If yes, what happened?

**A.** Morgan (my brother) was teasing (teasing) me.

**Q.** How did you feel when this happened?

**A.** Rating = 1, very stressed.

**Q.** Did you do anything to feel less stressed?

**A.** Yes

**Q.** If yes, what did you do?

**A.** 1 Breath Relaxshum (One Breath Relaxation) and Change Channels (Changing Channels).

**Q.** How did you feel after doing this?

**A.** Rating = 5, very relaxed.

The four preceding responses provide typical examples of the successful implementation of the relaxation/stress control strategies

learned in the intervention program that were applied to the children's "real life" stressful situations. As in Cox and Orlick (1996) and Gilbert and Orlick's (1996) studies, a stress control strategy was deemed to have been "successful" if the student's feelings and ratings on the five-point cat scale moved from stressed to relaxed after implementing the strategy. Almost all children recorded successfully using the intervention program's strategies in their daily lives to relax and/or relieve stress.

The children's teachers also confirmed that a very large percentage of children discussed, recorded in their logbooks, and reported applying these strategies successfully outside of the intervention sessions.

### ***Student Post-Intervention Interviews***

An interview was conducted with each child participating in the study (n=85) following the intervention period. The purpose of these interviews was to assess the extent to which the children were using the relaxation/stress control program in "real life" situations, and to gain insight into their views and opinions regarding the intervention program. The interviews were conducted by a team of researchers possessing experience in interviewing and knowledge in the area of mental skills training and children.

When asked how they felt about the intervention program, 97% of the children reported that they liked it. Some representative responses were: "It was good and pretty fun", "It made me feel better", "I liked it!" When answering the question, "Did you like the program or not?", only two out of the eighty five children responded in a less than enthusiastic way with, "Not really," and "Not very much".

When asked whether or not they learned anything from the program, 97% of the children answered that they had learned the following strategies or concepts: (1) to relax

(e.g., "to calm down when I'm hyper", "I learned how to relax on my own"), (2) to feel better (e.g., "When I'm not feeling good, it helps me feel okay", "When I'm mad, I can change channels to feeling happier"), and (3) to cope with stress (e.g., "When I got the wind knocked out of me, I practiced my breathing to feel normal", "It helps me feel better when I'm nervous about things").

When asked if they had told or taught anyone about what they learned from program, 61% of the children said "yes". The people who they told or taught included family members, such as parents, siblings and cousins, or friends who had not participated in the program.

When asked whether they would continue to use the skills or concepts they had learned in the program, 89.4% said "yes" that they would use continue to use what they had learned in their daily lives. They cited a variety of specific situations where they felt they would continue to use the program strategies, such as for falling asleep at night, when they were being bothered by others, when playing sports, and when they felt "bad" (e.g., scared, sad, embarrassed or nervous). The fact that almost 90% of the students felt that the skills they had learned were valuable enough to continue to use in the future, and cited specific examples of where they could use them in their daily lives, is promising.

### ***Teachers Modifications Intervention Program***

One of the goals of this study was to examine the extent to which the teachers modified the PLS intervention program to meet their students' needs, and whether this modified program had comparable positive results on the children's ability to relax and cope positively with stress (Cox & Orlick, 1996; Gilbert & Orlick, 1996). A qualitative analysis of session notes kept by each of the four teachers, combined with weekly field notes

taken by the first author and post-intervention interviews, clearly showed that each teacher had made modifications to the intervention program.

### **Teacher 1 grade 6**

This teacher played several taped exercises, one after the other, at least once a week, as compared to one prescribed taped exercise in the curriculum guide. She felt that this really got the children immersed in the relaxation process.

*I really like to play one whole tape side for twenty minutes, let them sit at their desks or lie down and just do it and relax, get into it, so they could get to know it. This is not a written program where they have a little card and they say, "Okay I'm going to change channels now". They have to have this really internalized, and know what they're doing. Which is why I like to actually just do a couple, and review. Because sometimes I get down there with them and for 20 minutes it is total silence. The tapes are excellent.*

She found that splitting up the boys and girls during relaxation sessions on the carpet eliminated fidgeting and lack of focus on the exercises.

*Being down there on the carpet can get to be like one big sleepover, (in grade six) they're much more hormonal than the grade one's, two's, three's and four's...This environment is for learning and relaxation. We have girl days on the carpet and boy days, carpet days and non-carpet days in here.*

In the question period, she tried to let the children lead the discussion, as she felt that they were entering a time in their development when it is very awkward to share very personal information.

*Not too much probing if they seem shy or embarrassed. It's awkward in grade six. They're really trying to grow up and be individuals. I think the relaxation has really worked.*

She cut down on the times she did the logbooks and put an emphasis on the taped exercises and relaxation (testing the pulse every session).

*Do the exercises, and compliment with the logbooks every so often. Let the kids lead you. Then they'll enjoy it. They know what they want, what they like, what works for them. I let them do the exercises. I see them relaxing. They tell me it works.*

### **Teacher 2 grade 4/5**

This teacher added more "physical" exercises to illustrate the concrete physical differences between a relaxed versus a tense state. She added some of her own martial arts inspired exercises and stretching exercises to the intervention sessions.

*I think there should be more of a physical component to it. A physically active component to it. Not necessarily all the time, but at different points ... I concentrated on incorporating something new. I also combined a physical or breathing exercise with the taped exercises.*

Instead of the recommended 15-20 minute sessions, at a frequency of 3 or 4 times a week, she conducted a 45 to 55 minute session, once or twice a week.

*I also think that there is room for making the sessions longer. I know some might argue that for the grade one's and two's the shorter sessions are better. Shorter sessions go with shorter attention spans, but I think that the longer sessions for the older kids at a lower frequency per week allows them to really get into it.*

*I understand that everything at this point is kept really short, 15 to 20 minutes, to introduce it. But I think to really be effective, each and every one of those exercises can be expanded a lot longer. I think the children should be able to go beyond a 2-5 minute taped exercise to up to 15 minutes of relaxation, and feedback, as well ... I have really lengthened my sessions to one or two per week for the better part of the afternoon each time.*

*I really like to stress that they should be the demonstrators, so that they are learning from each other as well. I tied in the breathing exercises and relaxation with the no smoking campaign. The kids came up with their own visualizations of breathing - a visualization story of how the lungs were working for them. There are so many things you can do with it. Next year I will continue and I hope to do even more.*

### **Teacher 3 grade 2/3**

This teacher alternated doing logbook exercises and taped exercise sessions, so that the children could spend more time with each.

*To start, I took them out of the classroom for every session. Every day, that was the routine, to go out of the class into the auditorium. By the time I would get them there, do the tape or exercise, re-group, post-discussion, logbook, back to class, it was very time-consuming. I spoke to (Grade the 1/2 Teacher) and she was doing one or the other, either a tape and discussion, or logbook and discussion. That was what I started doing as well. I understand that for the first 5 lessons or so, it is important that the kids get a holistic look at the whole thing, how it all fits in, but after that, I was able to break it up a bit into more manageable sessions. I would give some examples (for application) from my own*

*life, and there was more of a consensus-type feedback sometimes. Over the course of time they would open up with more specifics about application. As it went along, I was getting spontaneous answers like, "I used it for this, at this time, etc." One common thing was when I would ask, "Does anyone have trouble falling asleep" Oh yes. yes. Those kinds of things the kids really opened up to. The kids would point out favourite techniques they did use that worked for them, floating on clouds, special place. They loved drawing their special place in their logbook*

### **Teacher 4 grade 1/2**

This teacher modified the suggestion for including both a audio taped activity and a logbook activity in one session because she felt it was taking too much time for the younger children to get fully engaged in both. She also initially introduced the audio taped activities by reading the scripts the children herself.

*They have difficulty writing and it takes an awfully long time to get the logbook activities organized. They always want to come up to me and show me everything and they always want to finish everything. Twenty minutes turns into an hour and it's really just too much for a grade 1/2 day to get it all in...We're taking it much more slowly. I'm only doing one-half a lesson at a time (an audio tape or a logbook activity). That's really working out.*

*Initially, I didn't use the tapes. Instead, I read the text so that it could be paced and they would have a familiar voice on which to focus. Once they had the routine down, I introduced the tapes. I felt this was a worthwhile transition.*

*(For some of the logbook activities) I had them sit at their desks and open*

*their logbooks to the day they were supposed to do. I made a little game of it. I asked them to set their heads on the logbooks so all those good thoughts from the last day would flow back into their heads.*

*When they got up from imagining their special place, (I would tell them) they will pick up their heads and the special place will be right there on the page, ready for them to trace it out. It worked out really well and by doing it at their desks we saved time, so we were able to do the relaxation and the logbook that day. It was nice.*

She began letting the children use a highlight jar at any time of the day. The highlight jar became a regular fixture in the class, and was used whenever the teacher or students felt someone needed it.

*We also are using a highlight jar a lot. They are often asking if they can go and pull out a highlight! It will happen at any time of the day, not just relaxation time.*

*(We played old favourites more often or on request by the end of the intervention). We took a class vote, and spaghetti toes and jelly belly were the first two favourites. They were also the favourites from the onset of the program near the beginning. They still really like them. And Star Track, too.*

*For this age group it would be nice to have 10 solid ones (taped activities) that would be very different from one another and that they could really get to know. I really believe that if we had 10 very distinct relaxations to work on, rather than having more, that they will learn them and they can become part of them, rather than have 20 or more that they don't know all that well.*

Each teacher used her own modified approach to deliver the PLS program to the children and each approach was successful in meeting the programs objectives. The important point here seems to be that as long as the children listen to the content on the audio taped exercises and these skills and exercises are repeated, and reinforced with respect to application in real world situations, the program has a very high probability of being successful.

### ***Teacher's Perceptions about the Intervention Program***

The teachers in this program were asked to reflect on whether the PLS program had personally affected them. All four teachers came into the program with varying levels of skepticism. They were all interested in seeing how their students would respond to the intervention program. Prior to its commencement Teacher 1 expressed a feeling of being anxious to "get the program over with", as she was feeling overwhelmed, with an already heavy workload.

All four teachers personally participated in the intervention exercises with the children in their classes, when circumstances allowed. They reported using the intervention sessions as a break for themselves, as well as their students. Teacher 3 expressed that she personally enjoyed taking part in the exercises with her students, and felt that her students as well as their families benefited from the intervention program. Many her students told her they liked to use the taped activities before they went to bed. Teacher 2 indicated that being a part of this study had rekindled her interest in relaxation techniques and had inspired her to become more involved in stress control with her class, her family and on her own.

All four teachers reported enjoying the activities and being pleased with the positive results they witnessed in their students. They all reported seeing an increase in the chil-

dren's abilities to focus on tasks, an increased awareness of what makes them happiest, a better understanding of what stresses them and what works best for them in dealing with stress.

### ***Teacher Recommendations***

The teachers in this school were accustomed to making adaptations to most conventional curricula on an ongoing basis in order to best meet the needs of their classroom populations. Our intervention program also underwent a number of adaptations. The teachers encouraged their students to express their opinions towards the intervention activities. This helped them to better understand what worked best and what did not work best for these children. Open dialogue meant the teachers and students could consult with one another in order to shape and refine the intervention program and how it was being applied in their lives.

The teachers highlighted the following recommendations for others who intend to implement the Positive Living Skills Program with elementary school children.

**Focus on one element at a time.** For younger children concentrate on one taped activity or one logbook activity for each session, giving adequate time to the activity and discussion about the applications for the activity. The point here is to guard against overloading the session or the students to the point where children are feeling rushed or stressed to get things completed.

**Let the children lead the discussions whenever possible.** Involve the children fully with respect to asking questions, sharing answers, and discussing options for applying what they are learning.

**Get to know a reasonable number of relevant activities very well.** For the younger children, choose a reasonable number of taped activities that are best suited to

the needs of those children. In certain instances with very young children, it might be of value for the teacher to read the audio taped scripts for the first few sessions.

**Repeat sessions/lessons until they are learned.** Sessions that are disrupted due to extraneous circumstances should be repeated to ensure the children have an opportunity to learn the concept presented that day. Repetition of all taped activities is important.

**Seize opportunities to show applicability.** Use the program concepts or exercises at any time of the day to show their applicability to real issues or "real life" situations. Children learn best by experiencing concepts and by seeing how those concepts or skills can be applied. Where possible tie in application of skills learned to ongoing school activities and campaigns, and into any situations where it would be helpful to control distractions.

**Increase the frequency or duration of the intervention session whenever possible or deemed of value.** More time with learning and applying relevant activities can increase the chances of children living these skills and perspectives.

**Consider adding physical activities and/or other positive living skills strategies.** Additional activities that serve to compliment the basic concepts taught in the relaxation/stress control program can be of value.

**Maintain flexibility.** Maintaining a sense of openness and flexibility within program activities is important to the overall success of the program. For example, Teacher 4 allowed her children to whisper their highlights to each other after the taped exercises were completed, because the children in her class liked sharing secrets. Teacher 3 provided the time for children to have a longer logbook session on the first day after Spring

Break, as the children had an abundance of experiences they wanted to record.

### ***Post-Study Feedback Session***

Parents of the participating children were invited to an information session offered prior to the intervention program and were also invited to the post-intervention session. At post intervention session, many parents shared positive comments regarding the impact the program had on their children. They provided concrete examples of how the program was being used by their children at home and in other contexts. It was suggested that parents be more involved in the program, and that the design of the program be modified to more actively include the parents and the home environment.

At the post intervention feedback session, the principal of the school indicated that she was very supportive of the Positive Living Skills program and expressed this to the group of parents, teachers and researchers gathered together.

“I wholeheartedly advocate the inclusion of the (PLS) program in the regular curriculum of our school. If there are all sorts of extra things like feelings like anger ... coming into the school, it will adversely affect school climate. Children who have not yet developed self-discipline will behave appropriately because their teacher is present. We want the kids to be in control not because (the teacher) is in the room, but because they want to be in control”.

### **One Year Follow-up**

The researcher contacted the teachers and principal one year after the study took place. All four teachers were continuing to use the program, in varying capacities, and were using their own modified versions of the program. Because the alternative school system uses multi-aged groupings, some of the students remained with the same teachers in the following year. These "old tim-

ers", as Teacher 4 referred to them, were very helpful in demonstrating and teaching the activities and concepts to their new classmates:

*The old timers treated (the intervention exercises) like old friends, "Oh, I remember this one. I like it!" The new timers tended to fidget but slowly got the idea from the old timers' good modeling.*

Teachers 2 and 4 regularly used the program several times a week, and Teachers 1 and 3 implemented key activities once a week, and much more often in specific situations where they felt it would be particularly beneficial (like sharing highlights):

*I use the tapes periodically as a cool down in the gym. For sick tummies, red measles needles etc., I give them suggestions like Jelly Belly, or a Super Breath. I also tell them when I'm using some of the techniques. We often tell highlights at the end of the day as a "ticket out the door".*

Teacher 3 also planned to do a "refresher course" on the main intervention program concepts later in the year, as part of the school-wide personal safety program. The principal also expressed her continued support of the program, and felt that it was a valuable tool for her teachers and students.

### **Discussion**

This study showed that when children were taught relaxation and stress control skills, they could successfully apply these skills, both in the classroom and in their daily lives. This finding supports the findings of previous studies by Cox and Orlick (1996), and Gilbert and Orlick (1996). Some of the most commonly cited circumstances for using the stress control strategies in this study included: dealing with various stresses in the home, when they had difficulty falling asleep, when they had conflicts with siblings

or friends, when playing games or sports, when doing schoolwork and when they were scared or hurt. The same key stressors were identified in studies by Gilbert and Orlick (1996), Cox and Orlick (1996) and Setterlind and Patriksson (1982).

The student participants in the present study were not only able to identify stressors, but were successful at implementing the new skills they had learned to combat these stresses. Logbook analysis indicated a 95% success rate in children's recorded attempts at using relaxation/stress control techniques.

By the end of the intervention almost all the children in the present study were able to identify what stressed them, and had successfully implemented stress control strategies in their daily lives. This study, along with our previous studies with children, show that definite benefits can be accrued from teaching relaxation and stress control skills to children. These are skills that every child and every teacher can gain from.

An important finding in the present study was that after a 10 week intervention, 89.4% of the student participants said they would continue to use the skills and activities that they had learned through the intervention program. Gilbert and Orlick (1996) also found that a high percentage of students said they would to continue to use elements of the program (87.5%), and an even higher percentage of children (98%) reported the intention to continue using these skills in the Cox and Orlick (1996) study.

The children really enjoyed taking part in the Positive Living Skills program. Ninety-seven per cent of the student participants talked about enjoying the program. (e.g., "I liked it because it was fun!", "It had neat things to do."). The element of enjoyment is a huge factor in sustaining children's motivation long enough to learn the various skills and perspectives being taught. When

children learn through play or a playful medium and find the learning process enjoyable, there is a much better chance that they will learn, remember and apply what they have learned.

The inclusion of parents in reinforcing program activities could provide further support for learning and applying relevant skills. Cox and Orlick (1996) used a questionnaire to elicit parental feedback, with a 72% return rate (n=107) and found that a high percentage of these parents (96%) reported that their children had told them about the program or taught them program activities. Eighty seven percent of the parents who responded to the questionnaire cited specific examples of how their children had used and benefited from program activities.

Teachers in the present study were very supportive of the idea of including the parents and the children's home environments within the parameters of the program, and stressed the importance of the role of the parent in the stress control repertoire of children: One teacher commented, "The longer I teach, the more I think that what goes on after school is extremely important. I have the children for a small percentage of their lives. Not at breakfast, bed time, or the time their parents spend with them in the evenings and weekends. The children who spend a lot of time discussing these things with their parents, parents who really know them, have an easier time dealing with stress..." (Teacher 1, Grade 6).

Previous studies that examined teacher's perceptions of the overall value of the PLS program support the findings of this study. In the Gilbert and Orlick (1996) study, the grade 2 teacher delivering the program reported that she felt the children had learned to be more positive, their focus had improved and they were better at looking for the "good things" in life. In Cox and Orlick's (1996) study, teachers (kindergarten to grade

6) who were present during the intervention sessions responded positively to the program and noted specific examples where they had witnessed the children successfully using the program elements: "They (the students) learned to use visualization and their imagination." "The children learned how to relax facing tests." "The children demonstrated more control in difficult situations."

In a study by St. Denis and Orlick (1996), children were taught to develop and maintain a positive perspective through the concepts of "highlights" and positive thinking. The grade 4 teacher who was present for the intervention program responded: "It was very helpful to have the children think about the small pleasures in life, things that they take for granted. Students learned to focus on the bright side. Overall, the children seem to have more positive attitudes, especially those who were at a low level to begin with".

Our experience has demonstrated that the PLS program is highly versatile and the nature of its flexible structure makes it conducive to application in a wide variety of environments with a wide range of children (Orlick, 2002b; Gilbert & Orlick, 2002; Klingenberg & Orlick 2002; Koudys & Orlick, 2002).

A main finding coming from this study combined with previous studies on the PLS program is that regardless the context in which the program was delivered, or how it was adapted, or the length of each session, the program activities were effective in initiating significant positive changes in children's lives. Two main factors have been consistent for positive change to occur. Children are exposed to key PLS activities, including relaxation and stress control activities, positive perspective activities, and focusing exercises through a series of audiotapes a number of times, and children are encouraged to apply these skills in real

world situations. (Orlick, 2002b; Gilbert & Orlick, 2002; Klingenberg & Orlick 2002; Koudys & Orlick, 2002).

In future interventions designed to enhance positive living skills, it is important to keep in mind that children learn best when we present relevant skills and concepts in a meaningful and enjoyable way, and allow them experience and practice those skills in a repeated and meaningful manner. Introducing programs and resources that are flexible and engaging not only for children but for teachers and parents is essential, since they will be the ones teaching and living these positive life skills with their children. Positive living skills that we feel are important for children must given adequate attention if children are to learn and live these skills and perspectives in their daily lives, now and in the future.

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## 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 and quantitative research of an applied nature, including case studies, interventions, interview and narrative studies are welcomed. The Journal of Excellence also publishes personal accounts, short commentaries, individual 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.

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The Journal of Excellence is an English language journal; therefore articles must be submitted in English. In preparing manuscripts for publication, authors should review similar types of articles published in the Journal of Excellence and refer to 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:  
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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, affiliation(s) and current email address should accompany the article.

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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 2003 World Congress on Mental Training and Excellence was hosted by Pavel Bundzen 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, perspectives and positive life skills 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, positive living skills and ongoing learning.