

Building on the Positives: Two Tennis Players' Experiences with Sport Psychology

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Abstract

There are a limited number of qualitative studies examining athletes' experiences with sport psychology and mental training. The current study was an attempt to shed more light on athletes' personal experiences with mental training and sport psychology consulting. Two elite tennis players were interviewed to gain valuable insight into their experiences with sport psychology. Several themes that highlight these tennis players' experiences were identified. They included having a present focus, happiness, building on positives, burnout, sport psychology techniques, and relationship with the sport psychology consultant. Developing a present focus was very important to both of these athletes. A present focus allowed them to perform at a very high level during competition. Both athletes were seeking joy within their sport and performed their best when they were happy and comfortable on the court. These players' experiences with sport psychology were characterized by a focus on the positives rather than negatives and both felt it was important to have a positive, personal relationship with a sport psychology consultant.

Introduction

In Issue 9 of the *Journal of Excellence*, Gentner (2004) conducted an interview with former professional tennis player Chris Woodruff. That interview was part of a larger study investigating two elite tennis players' experiences with sport psychology. This article presents the background, findings, and discussion of the larger project.

As of 1999, there were over 200 published studies examining the relationship between certain components of mental training and sport performance (Martin, Moritz, & Hall, 1999). Almost all of these studies have been quantitative in nature, basically looking at numbers and not individual experiences behind the numbers. For example, while

there are studies showing the positive effects of imagery, (see Daw & Burton, 1994; Hall & Erffmeyer, 1983; Lee & Hewitt, 1987; Ming & Martin, 1996; Mumford & Hall, 1985; Noel, 1980; Wrisberg & Anshel, 1989 for a review), little qualitative work has been done investigating athletes' experiences with imagery and how each individual athlete responds to it.

Sport psychology consultants have the incredible opportunity to help athletes reach their full potential in sport and in life. However, in order to do this, consultants must first understand that each athlete will respond differently to a variety of interventions. Therefore, it is critical for sport psychology professionals to begin to focus

on understanding individual athletes and how they can best be served. To do this they must gain a better understanding of what athletes want from a sport psychology consultant through investigations of athletes' experiences with sport psychology. There is currently a need for more carefully conducted applied research, qualitative research, exploring athletes' personal experiences with sport psychology.

Review of Literature

Client Expectations

While the field of sport psychology has grown tremendously in recent years, it has not lost its connection to another profession: counseling. Despite many differences, professionals in these two fields share a connection. That is, they both serve clients in an attempt to improve some aspect of their lives. Sport psychology consultants generally focus on performance enhancement and some (the better ones) also focus on life enhancement. Counselors often focus on interpersonal relationships or helping clients deal with other problems or disorders. When exploring athletes' expectations for consulting it is important to identify expectations of clients as is often done when clients enter traditional counseling.

Counseling Expectations

“Both theoreticians and practicing counselors have long been in agreement that clients bring expectations and beliefs to counseling situations. It is believed that these expectancies can influence both the counseling process and its outcome” (Tinsley & Harris, 1976, p. 175). This statement lends credence to the belief that clients' expectations should be explored in order to provide optimal services. When discussing clients' expectations one should consider both the expectations and their effect on the outcome of counseling. Understanding both of these components can be an essential part of effective

counseling. As Subich and Coursol (1985) posit, “it is important to know about expectancies for counseling, even if one does not intend to fulfill those expectancies.” (p. 245)

According to Tinsley and Harris (1976) clients hold the strongest expectancies about their own attitudes and behaviors, the counselor's attitudes and behaviors, and the counselor's ability and effectiveness. With regards to clients' expectations about their counselor's attitudes and behaviors, previous research has shown that clients expect their counselors to have a genuine interest in their clients, to be properly trained, to possess useful knowledge, and to be confident in their helping abilities (Tinsley & Harris). In addition, clients expect their counselors to be problem-centered, extremely prepared for sessions, comfortable with their client and the presenting problem, and to abide by the ethics of confidentiality (Tinsley & Harris). It is clear that clients hold several expectations regarding the counselors upon entering treatment (Subich & Coursol, 1985; Tinsley, Brown, & de St. Aubin, 1984).

Many clients also have expectations about their counselor's ability and the effectiveness of counseling. These expectations are extremely important because they may affect the clients' decision to seek counseling as well as client retention. In fact, expectations about counseling can affect clients' decisions about where to go for help (Snyder, Hill, & Derksen, 1972), their desire to continue counseling after the initial session (Heilbrun, 1970), and the overall effectiveness of counseling (Goldstein, 1962). The effect that client expectations have on counseling may be seen most dramatically in Tinsley and Harris' (1976) study of college students in which they found that most students believe that counseling can be helpful to others but not for them thus, raising the belief that many students refuse to seek

counseling because they do not believe it will be helpful to them.

Often clients who do seek counseling base their counselor selection upon their perceptions of counselor abilities (Tinsley, Brown, & de St. Aubin, 1984). In fact, Tinsley et al. (1984) suggest that the type of problem a student is facing may have an impact on their counselor selection. Students experiencing personal problems are more likely to seek out counselors than are students experiencing career difficulties (Tinsley et al.). Thus, it appears that clients attempt to select counselors who have an expertise in dealing with the problem the client is experiencing. However, if these expectations about competency are not met, it can have detrimental effects on the counseling process.

One of the mitigating factors in the relationship between expectations and effectiveness is clients' belief that they will meet with an experienced counselor and not a counselor in training or a graduate student (Tinsley & Harris, 1976). Unfortunately much of the counseling work done (particularly on college campuses) is conducted by interns and practicum students. Therefore, as suggested by Tinsley and Harris, many clients have one of their strongest expectations violated very early in the counseling process. Such a violation may lead to clients' desire to discontinue services or to complications with further treatment. While this information does not seem fortuitous for counselors in training, further investigations by Tinsley and Harris revealed that as college students become older their expectations about meeting with an experienced counselor decrease.

Upon entering counseling, clients hold many expectations regarding their counselor and the counseling process. These expectations seem to play a role in clients' selection of a

counselor, their desire to remain with that counselor, and the effectiveness of treatment. This correlation in the counseling literature, points to a need to investigate athletes' expectations regarding sport psychology consultation.

Prior to looking at athletes' expectations regarding sport psychology, it is important to undergo an initial examination of any differences between athletes and nonathletes expectations about counseling. As the previous review suggest, nonathletes have a considerable amount of expectations regarding counseling and according to Miller and Moore (1993) athletes have similar expectations about counseling. However, these findings are contradictory to several previous studies which found differences in athletes and nonathletes expectations (see Behrman, 1967; Coakley, 1978; Wittmer et al., 1981). Taken together, the results of these studies seem equivocal. In addition, Miller and Moore suggest that their results may be limited by a small sample size ($N = 50$) that was chosen from one university. Despite these contradictions and limitations, one can still presuppose that athletes harbor expectations regarding counseling. However, such suppositions should be cautiously suggested until further investigations regarding athletes' expectations regarding counseling are undertaken.

Expectations About Sport Psychology Consultation

While the previous discussion of athletes' expectations about counseling provides a valuable groundwork, the present study is more concerned with their expectations regarding sport psychology. The first factor that may influence athletes' expectations of sport psychology consultants is the identifying term used by the consultant. Sport psychology consultant, sport psychologist, mental training consultant, and performance

consultant are just a few of the terms used to describe sport psychology practitioners. While professionals working under these titles may provide the same services, the identifying term used can lead to differences in athletes' expectations. As outlined by Van Raalte, Brewer, Linder, and DeLange (1990) the title used by sport psychology practitioners can have a marked effect on athletes' expectations regarding services.

According to Van Raalte et al. (1990) professionals using the title "sport psychologist" are viewed by college students in a similar fashion to mental health professionals. In fact, despite the word "sport" in their title, sport psychologists are seen as experts in mental and nonsport issues. In a similar study Linder, Brewer, Van Raalte, and DeLange (1991) found similar results. In the Linder et al. study sport psychologists were seen as experts in mental issues, however contradictory to Van Raalte et al.'s results, they were seen as effective for both sport and nonsport issues. As suggested by Van Raalte et al. this view may be in stark contrast to the views that sport psychologists hold about themselves which may fall more along the lines of an expertise in mental training and sport issues. As for practitioners who work under the title "performance consultant," Van Raalte et al. found that those professionals are viewed as experts in physical and sport issues. Linder et al. suggested that performance consultants are viewed as experts in both physical and mental, sport issues. Despite some minor differences both of these studies show that practitioners working under the title "sport psychologist" are seen in a different light than those who use the term "performance consultant". Thus, it appears that the title that one chooses plays an important role in client expectations. Consequently, practitioners should be careful to choose a title that is not

only ethically responsible but also one that aptly describes the services they will offer.

According to Ravizza (1988) misunderstandings and negative connotations regarding the term sport psychology present two of the major problems for consultants who are attempting to work with a team or individuals. "Like it or not, the average athlete views a sport psychologist with a degree of apprehension due to the perception that psychology is associated with problems" (p. 244). In order to combat these negative connotations, Ravizza suggests using the terms "mental training" or "mental toughness" instead of "sport psychology". Furthermore, he suggests clarifying the services one will provide in order to clear up any misunderstandings and eliminate some of the stigma related to the term sport psychology.

In addition to the practitioner's title there are several other important factors that can influence clients' expectations and subsequent treatment. The most often cited factors include client characteristics, consultant characteristics, the presenting problem, the intervention used, and the relationship between the counselor and client (Dorfman, 1990; Gentner, Fisher, & Wrisberg, 2004; Hanks, 1996; Sexton & Whitson, 1994; Smith, 1989; Strong & Dixon, 1971). Each of these factors can affect a client's decision to seek treatment and the likelihood of termination of treatment (Martin et al., 2001). Martin et al. found further evidence supporting the notion that perceptions of the sport psychology consulting process or the type of intervention used can have an effect on athletes' expectations about consulting.

Uncertainty about the field of sport psychology can also play a role in client expectations and consulting outcomes. As Bull (1995) suggests many athletes are unsure about the effectiveness of sport psychology

and therefore, often chose not to seek this service. Such perceptions of sport psychology cannot only affect athletes' decision to seek therapy (Martin, Wrisberg, Beitel, & Lounsbury, 1997) but also the likelihood that they will continue to employ mental skills in the future (Bull). Moreover, Ravizza (1988) has suggested that many athletes are apprehensive about seeing a sport psychology consultant because they view them as counselors for people with psychological problems instead of performance issues. Thus, it appears important to understand athletes' expectations regarding sport psychology and the services a consultant may provide prior to consulting in order to offer the most beneficial services to athletes.

Influential Others' Expectations

While it is clear that athletes have expectations about sport psychology that may affect their decision to seek consulting, there are many other people who have expectations that may influence the decision. Martin et al. (2001) suggest that those close to the athlete may have expectations or ideas about consulting which may have a significant affect on the athlete's decisions about consulting. Linder et al. (1989) suggest that athletes who work with a sport psychologist may be alienated by others. Further support for this idea was found by Linder et al. who surveyed 139 college students asking them to rate how strongly they would recommend drafting various fictitious football players. The players were all given similar performance descriptions in addition to a statement regarding their use of a sport psychology consultant. As a whole, the students issued lower draft ratings for players who had worked with a sport psychologist (Linder et al.). In a more recent study, Linder et al. used a similar procedure by surveying 207 college students and asking them to rate fictitious football, basketball, and baseball

players. Again, each player's performance accomplishments were similar with the only difference being their choice to meet with a sport psychologist or not. Consistent with previous findings Linder et al. (1991) found that players who had met with a sport psychologist received lower draft ratings than others. In a second study Linder et al. found that players who worked solely with their coaches received higher draft ratings than athletes who met with a sport psychologist. Such negative treatment may lead athletes to think twice about seeking mental training from a sport psychologist. According to Linder et al. much of this negativity is due to a belief that athletes who work with a consultant are deviating from the norm. Essentially, there is a belief that athletes who seek help from a consultant are less likely to relate well to other players and will have difficulty fitting in with management (Linder et al.).

Fortunately when we move beyond college students perceptions of athletes who work with a sport psychology consultant the findings are not all negative. In a study similar to Linder et al. (1989) and Linder et al. (1991), Van Raalte et al. (1992) asked 111 college football players to rate the draft possibilities for two quarterbacks with identical descriptions save for one statement disclosing whether or not the quarterback was working with a sport psychologist. Contrary to previous findings Van Raalte et al. found no differences in draft ratings for athletes who had worked with a sport psychologist. Furthermore, it has been suggested that for many athletes a sport psychologist is seen as a valuable asset for improved performance (Van Raalte et al.). Thus, for certain types of people (like athletes) and in certain situations it seems that people hold positive expectations regarding consultants. It is interesting that Van Raalte et al. surveyed athletes while Linder et al.

(1989) and Linder et al. (1991) surveyed nonathletes. Looking at the contradictory results of these studies one can posit that athletes may have more knowledge and higher expectations of sport psychologists and have less negative feelings about athletes who work with a consultant than nonathletes.

While it is unclear whether athletes are aware of the negative connotations that non athlete college students associate with meeting with a sport psychologist (Linder et al., 1991), Ravizza (1988) has clearly mentioned the practitioners' awareness of such negativity, at least as it existed in the late 1980's. In an effort to eliminate problems, Ravizza and Dorfman (1990) both suggested working very hard at gaining credibility prior to service provision. Ravizza recommends spending considerable time with the team prior to consultation. Furthermore, he suggests gathering as much information about the sport as possible, in order to increase sport-specific knowledge.

Conclusions on working with or through client expectations

Examining literature in both counseling and sport psychology provides valuable insight into clients' expectations about counseling and sport psychology consulting and the effects those expectations can have on the counseling or consulting process. The practitioner's title and level of experience may play a role in a person's decision to seek counseling and to adhere to counseling techniques in the future. Clients may also be affected by other significant individuals' perceptions and expectations regarding counseling. In summary, counselors and consultants should be aware of the fact that clients enter into counseling with presuppositions and these expectations can have a major effect on the effectiveness of counseling. In order to provide optimal services

one must be aware of the expectations and work to debunk any falsely negative connotations regarding counseling or consulting; in doing this counselors and consultants can increase their effectiveness and ability to work with clients.

Data Collection

There were two co-researchers in the current study (Dale, 1996). Both co-researchers were elite male tennis players. One (Chris) was thirty years old, Caucasian, and had been playing tennis for twenty-two years, mostly as a professional. He was recently retired from the professional circuit and had been using sport psychology services for six years (see Gentner, 2004, for a complete transcript of the interview with Chris). The second co-researcher (Brian) was twenty-two years old, Hispanic, and had been playing tennis for fifteen years. He was an NCAA Division I All-American who recently exhausted his eligibility. He had been using sport psychology services for 3 years.

Phenomenological interviews were the data collection method of choice for the study. Phenomenological interviews allow the researcher to "reveal the real essence of human experience" (Hatch, 2002 p. 30). All interviews began with demographic questions before the central phenomenological question was asked. The phenomenological question used was: "When you think about your experience with sport psychology, tell me what stands out for you?"

Data Analysis

At the completion of the interviews, data were transcribed by the researcher. Data were analyzed through interpretive analysis. According to Hatch (2002), "Interpretation is about giving meaning to the data" (p. 180). Throughout the analysis the steps of interpretive analysis as outlined by Hatch

were followed. Each transcript was treated as its own case study and described in detail the lived experience of that individual. Steps of interpretive analysis were conducted on each individual transcript. The researcher then compared each co-researcher's experience attempting to find commonalities (Dale, 1996). After reviewing the memos and summaries, themes or "meaning units" were developed from significant entries (Coté, Salmela, Baria, & Russell, 1993). These formulated meanings were then put into clusters of themes or categories. It is believed that presenting major themes is a more reader-friendly method of reporting results. Therefore, themes are used as the major method of reporting the results of the current study.

Results

Introduction

The two elite tennis players' experiences with sport psychology seemed to be characterized by several main themes. These included having a present focus, happiness, building on positives, burnout, sport psychology techniques, and relationship with sport psychology consultant. Within the "present focus" theme, a sub-theme of dealing with distractions emerged. Another sub-theme, confidence, appeared under the major theme of "building on positives". A final sub-theme was identified under the major theme of "sport psychology techniques"; that sub-theme was visualization.

Present Focus

It appears that both players were consistently working toward achieving a present focus during matches. Both players spoke to the importance of focusing on the time or task at hand and playing the match one point at a time.

Once I was able to meet with Dr. W. and we were able to talk about it a

little more, I think I was able to focus on the time at hand, focus on closing out the match, I think that was the most important thing for me (Brian).

Chris echoed these sentiments regarding the need for a present focus while abating all thoughts about outcomes or winning and losing.

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 (Chris) (Gentner, 2004, p. 73).

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 (Chris) (Gentner, 2004, p. 77).

One of the most important aspects of maintaining this present focus seemed to be the need to eliminate distractions on the court. Eliminating distractions appeared to be a key component to establishing a present focus.

I think it's those people who can play the points one at a time, block out all, 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 block out what is important and what isn't important and I think that's ultimately how you succeed in life, you have the ability to focus (Chris) (Gentner, 2004, p. 78).

There also seemed to be a need to ignore any distractions related to an opponent's

ranking or record. Eliminating such thoughts proved to be another way to increase their focus on the present.

One thing that I was able to learn was not focusing on the player but mainly focusing on their weaknesses and what I can do to, take their weaknesses and try to use them as my strengths. That's mainly just playing at that time, you know, playing at that time at hand and trying to do things where I can exploit their weaknesses more than everything else and not think about ranking or not think about how good they are (Brian).

In summary, the ability to develop a present focus appeared to be quite salient to the players' experiences. Such focus allowed them to play their matches one point at a time, thus increasing their effectiveness. In order to maintain this present focus the players needed to eliminate distractions. These distractions included thoughts about winning and losing as well as thoughts about the ranking or record of the opponent. Overall, implementing a present focus into their competition seemed to be very important for both athletes.

Happiness

Happiness was another theme that emerged from the players' experiences of sport psychology. Both players sought out the services of sport psychology consultants in some hope of becoming happier with their sport and their performance. They realized that in order to be effective they needed to really enjoy their sport.

So we just tried to work on looking at it on a more positive outlook rather than, it's something, no so much it's something I have to do but it's

something I want to do and I think it's a big distinction between the two and it showed me that when you have a job you need to make sure you enjoy it cause if you have a job you don't enjoy you can run into those mental barriers (Chris) (Gentner, 2004, p. 74).

One of the methods used to improve satisfaction was the use of happy thoughts.

One thing I was able to learn was how to use that positive energy and try to be a little more happy or think about something where I'm in a happier place (Brian).

An additional method was focusing on the positive aspects of sport participation. To accomplish this, Chris focused on the positives of being a professional athlete.

It was much more positive way of thinking, you know, 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 know you would never make this money shy of being a CEO or bigshot in a company. And 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 (Chris) (Gentner, 2004, p. 74).

In conclusion, the search for happiness within sport was a major theme of the athletes' experience. One purpose of seeking out a sport psychology consultant appeared to be an effort to discover, or rediscover, happiness within the sport of tennis. Enjoying the sport was an important element of effective performance for both athletes. Sev-

eral methods were employed to increase satisfaction. These included thinking about happy things and focusing on the positive aspects of being a professional athlete.

Building on Positives

The process of building on positives seemed to play an important role in both players' experience. Positive performances were built upon to provide the framework for future performances.

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 apply them. We could take those positives and use them as a model for the whole match and use those same up-beat emotions that, staying in the present, one point at a time, we could use that as the standard model (Chris) (Gentner, 2004, p. 76).

Positive experiences and feelings were also used to build confidence. As previous successes were used to gain confidence for future competitions.

The first time that I was able to do that, it was at NCAA's when I won probably one of the biggest matches that I could have ever won but, once you win those matches, or when you win a match like that, you know, the confidence is gonna be there, its' always gonna be there no matter what. You tell yourself, "I've won a big match you know I can do it again." And I think that's the most important thing for me just getting over that hump, I was able to get a lot more confidence (Brian).

Positive performances were also used to help the players get through tough matches.

Identifying the positive feelings that led to effective performances allowed the athletes to recreate those feelings during tough matches.

And build on the positives and kind of forget about the negative things, and we tried to focus on what I was feeling when I won this or what I was, 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 (Chris) (Gentner, 2004, p. 76).

Positive experiences were extremely important for both players. Throughout their experiences with sport psychology they focused on positive experiences and built on them to aid future performances. In addition, positive experiences in the past were used to develop confidence and to help the players get through tough matches. In summary, a positive focus was an extremely salient part of their experience of sport psychology. This positive focus helped them prepare for future events as well as build confidence for future matches.

Burnout

Both players mentioned burnout as a major component of their experience. Being highly competitive, they were under extreme pressure to practice and perform at a high level. This seemed to be one reason for burnout.

It got to a point where I just hit a wall, I was training hard, you know, I was playing six hours a day. I just was not feeling comfortable playing it anymore. I didn't want to have to do it, I didn't want to have to grind day in and day out, I didn't want to have to do the work ethic (Brian).

Burnout was also characterized by a loss of interest and enjoyment in the sport.

And ultimately, I mean, there came a time when I just lost interest. I don't blame that on sport psychology I think there is such a thing as burnout when you're playing so hard (Chris) (Gentner, 2004, p. 77).

The loss of enjoyment seemed to be accompanied by a feeling of discomfort with the sport and with oneself.

I didn't feel comfortable with myself, I didn't feel like I was in my element and I think that was something I didn't enjoy. It was a span of about three years where I didn't really enjoy it at all. And at that time, I mainly hit a wall. I pretty much said, "Ok, I just want to stop playing tennis" (Brian).

In summary, both athletes experienced burnout at some point in their careers. This burnout was manifested through a lack of desire to continue playing and a lack of enjoyment of the sport. Both players cited long practice hours as a major factor in the development of burnout. Finally, in Brian's experience, sport psychology appeared to help him in his recovery from burnout while Chris noted that he felt his burnout was inevitable and sport psychology played no role in his decision to discontinue his professional career.

Sport Psychology Techniques

As might be predicted, both players spoke about the use of sport psychology techniques in their experiences. The use of simple, well-explained techniques was important and desired.

We tried to use different techniques, very simple almost child-like techniques, I just remember Doc as being, they were always very simple. For example, 1997, the year I was playing some really good tennis, we used what was called a toolbox, and the analogy behind that was, 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 read that on my wristband, something to trigger my head (Chris) (Gentner, 2004, p. 72).

Visualization was one of the major sport psychology topics discussed by both players. Visualization was used to prepare for future events, travel and opponents.

Another concept that we worked on was I would tell the 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 gonna be like. I had played all these tournaments before so I could elaborate to him on what the environment was gonna be like and sometimes I even knew who

I was gonna play so we could visualize that and get kind of, so when I showed up for the tournament I had some idea on what I was gonna try to focus on that week (Chris) (Gentner, 2004, p. 72).

Increased confidence was another benefit of visualization.

On thing that I was able to work on with Dr. W. was using just a lot of visualization, you know closing my eyes and thinking about a match that I finished or that I played well throughout the whole match. I think it played a big role because any time I just went off and I thought about these matches, I felt like I was completely there (Brian).

In conclusion, the athletes preferred simple, easily understood techniques. Visualization seemed to be a technique that was common to both players. Visualization was used to build confidence as well as to prepare for future events.

Relationship with Sport Psychology Consultant

One final theme that appeared to be very salient for Chris was having a positive and effective relationship with your sport psychology consultant. Although this was not mentioned by Brian it was extremely important for Chris' experience. Chris mentioned the importance of developing a personal relationship with a consultant, allowing both parties to become familiar with each other on a personal level.

I think it's important for the person you're talking to to know how you feel when you have a sense of balance and how you feel when you, when you're down and so those two things are very important and I think

it's very important that the 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 (Chris) (Gentner, 2004, p. 71).

He went on to discuss the importance of knowing your sport psychology consultant and finding someone who is a good fit for your personality.

You have to get to know their personality and whether or not it's a fit. With me I was, you know I'm 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 was always very, 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 (Chris) (Gentner, 2004, p. 78).

In summary, having a positive and personal relationship with a consultant was a major part of Chris' experience of sport psychology. He stressed the importance of getting to know the consultant on a personal level as well as allowing him or her to learn about you. He suggested the need for a balance between athlete and consultant for effective consulting.

Conclusion

There are several factors that seem to characterize these athletes' experience of Sport Psychology. First, developing a present fo-

cus appeared to be very important to both athletes. This present focus allowed them to perform at a very high level during competition. A present focus was also very important for their ability to limit distractions. Playing each match one point at a time helped the players maintain their focus while limiting their distractions on the court.

The athletes also seemed to be searching for happiness within their sport. In both cases, their decision to seek consulting was in some small part due to their unsuccessful search for happiness. Both players realized that they performed at their best when they were happy and comfortable on the court.

The players' experience with sport psychology also seemed to be characterized by a focus on the positives rather than negatives. Positive performances were used as the basis for future performance preparation. In addition, the players used their previous positive performances to build confidence and help them get through tough matches.

One of the negative components of their experience was the concept of burnout. Both players acknowledged experiencing burnout at some point in their careers. This burnout was generally characterized by a lack of desire to put in the work needed to excel and a loss of comfort on the tennis court. For one competitor, Brian, sport psychology was

able to help him deal with his burnout in a positive manner. Chris, on the other hand, was unable to eliminate his burnout and retired from competitive tennis.

The use of sport psychology techniques was another salient concept that related to the players' experience of sport psychology. Simple, well-explained techniques were the most desirable. Chris, offered the example of a toolbox as a simple, easily-understood technique which he employed. Visualization seemed to be the most common technique used by the athletes. Visualization was used for, tournament, travel, opponent, and match preparation as well as to build confidence and comfort on the court.

The final theme that seemed to characterize the players' experience was having a positive, personal relationship with a consultant. In order to work most effectively, the athlete and consultant must become very familiar with each other's personalities. Personal knowledge of the other person is very important for both athlete and consultant. In addition, the athlete's and consultant's personalities must complement each other if the consultation process is to be effective. In summary, these tennis players' experiences with sport psychology were characterized by several main themes. Each of these played an important role in their experiences

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