Running head: CONSULTING IN ELITE YOUTH SPORT

Reflections on Consulting in Elite Youth Male English Cricket and Soccer

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Abstract

This article shares a joint reflection of two psychoeducation programmes delivered to athletes aged 13 to 18 years at two professional academies – cricket and soccer. These season-long programmes followed a cognitive-developmental framework, changing and adapting cognitive-behavioural techniques to benefit elite youth athletes. Initial elements of the programme focused on the 5C's: commitment, communication, concentration, control, and confidence (Harwood, 2008) which also included team building sessions and one-to-one consultations. Feedback from players and academy directors revealed that the work was suitable and effective for their needs. We have reflected on the delivery of the programme and the challenges encountered especially: time, funding, specific youth sport psychological intervention frameworks, credibility, confidentiality, determining effectiveness, professional boundaries, and relationships. Finally, we offer future directions on how to integrate psychoeducation programmes for professional sport academies.

Keywords: Sport Psychology, Performance, Mental Skills, Reflection, Professional Practice, Youth Sport

Reflections on Consulting in Elite Youth Male English Cricket and Soccer

The field of applied sport psychology documents many sport psychologists' perceptions of working with elite adult athletes (e.g., Bull, 1995; Fifer, Henschen, Gould, & Ravizza, 2008; Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006; Gordon, 1990; Ravizza, 1990; Taylor, 2008); however, there are limited reflections on professional practice in youth sport (e.g., Orlick & McCaffrey, 1991; Sherman & Poczwardowski, 2005; Smith & Smoll, 2002; Weiss, 1991). Because there are fewer reflections of sport psychologists' experiences with young athletes, existing and aspiring sport psychologists might erroneously deduce that what works for adult athletes also works for child and adolescent athletes (Brustad, 1998). This imbalance in professional practice wisdom restricts our knowledge of the logistics of working with young athletes and discounts the psychosocial development and vicissitudes of life in youth sport (Weiss, 1991, 1995).

In this paper we present a season-long reflection from two sport psychologists working in cricket (first author) and soccer (second author) academies. The purpose of this reflection is to inform and guide others when delivering sport psychology services among elite youth athletes and to supplement the existing literature in applied pediatric sport psychology (e.g., Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007; Côté & Hay, 2002; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005; Weiss, 1995). This paper is organized as follows: First, we outline our philosophy for practice among boys in youth sport. Next, we explain the context and content of the services we delivered to the academies and reflect upon them, and finally, we discuss what directions sport psychologists may explore when working with youth elite athletes.

Philosophy for Practice

We adopted a cognitive-behavioural approach to our work with the young athletes (see Mace, 1990) based on our choice and professional training. We had undertaken postgraduate studies in sport psychology (i.e., MSc and PhD) and supervised experience programs to become accredited by the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES) and British Psychological Society (BPS). In our work, we recognized the athlete's personal demands (Andersen, 2006) and those from parents, coaches, and peers because this holistic approach features the client as a developing athlete interacting dynamically with the constraints of his social and physical environment (Keegan, Harwood, Spray, & Lavallee, 2009). In addition, we sought to understand the value of sport in the athlete's life (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1993). We also tried to include the coach and parents in the content of our one-to-one consultations so that the young athletes understood the roles they had in athlete development (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Our greatest challenge was to reduce the stigma associated with psychological support. To address this challenge, we highlighted the value of sport psychology among sport performers (Pain & Harwood, 2004) and we integrated and reinforced the mental skills we taught in the classroom into practice. We anticipated this process would afford athletes an opportunity to use these mental skills practically (Weinberg & Williams, 2006) and determine whether these skills have value for them. From the outset, we explained to the athletes that success in sport and life was their responsibility and we aimed to support them in that quest (Simons & Andersen, 1995).

Gaining Entry

The first and second authors were contacted by the third author about retaining the contracts with the two academies because of our knowledge (i.e., playing and

coaching experience of the two sports), professional training in sport and exercise psychology (i.e., BASES accreditation and BPS chartered status), and applied research publications. The contracts for each academy comprised 60-hours of psychological support across a 9-month period.

We met with the academy directors from the cricket and soccer clubs during their respective off-seasons and from these initial meetings it was clear they wanted us to help the athletes perform consistently as individuals and as teams. Gaining entry at the two clubs was eased because we were servicing existing contracts where both academy directors were knowledgeable and supportive of sport psychology. However, it was clear that they were both forthright and specifically interested in maximizing the potential of their athletes.

Service Delivery Outline

In each academy, our role was to assist the coaches in creating successful athletes and teams. Typically, our value depended largely on the coach or academy manager's perceptions about the role of sport psychology in athlete and team development (Pain & Harwood, 2004). Therefore, we altered and adapted traditional adult sport psychology frameworks (e.g., Andersen, 2000; Taylor & Wilson, 2005) to fit our work with the young athletes. At the time of our service delivery no specific youth sport consulting model existed in the literature and therefore we found it difficult to construct a psychological portrait of their lives in professional sport and an intervention scheme. However, we were especially sensitive to physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes in young athletes' lives because even within the same chronological age group, large individual differences in maturity, intelligence, reading and writing ability were likely to emerge (Malina & Bouchard, 1991). Developmental differences also would exist between children and adolescents and a child's

motivation, enjoyment, stress, and understanding of competition increases through developmental stages (e.g., McCarthy, Jones, & Clark-Carter, 2008; Nicholls, 1989). For example, at the cricket academy some of the younger boys anecdotally reported feeling more enjoyment than the older academy boys who typically experienced more stress due to an increased pressure to perform. Where possible we tried to acknowledge such points while developing our programme.

From our initial meetings, it was clear that both directors expected the 5C's model (e.g., commitment, communication, concentration, control, and confidence) of sport psychology to form the hub of the athlete psychoeducation (Harwood, 2005, 2008). The 5C's represent the key motivational, self-regulatory, and interpersonal attributes that form the spine of educational interventions. We also embedded mental toughness within the curricula because this concept is pertinent to both sports (Bull, Shambrook, James, & Brooks, 2005; Thelwell, Weston, & Greenlees, 2005), and is central to coach-education programmes produced by the Football Association (FA) and England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) for developing excellence. Overall, we developed an age-appropriate curriculum (recognizing developmental changes in language and maturity), which comprised psychoeducation (including team building), and one-to-one consultations for both academies, delivered in the off-season to the cricket academy and during the season for the soccer academy. We also arranged ad-hoc coaches' meetings, match day support, training camp support, and emergency one-to-one consultations in both academies. The programme integrated contact with the athletes once every three weeks over a 9-month period because this fitted within the constraints of the academies. Because consultation fees in applied sport psychology are contentious (Taylor, 2008), and because of our relative inexperience in delivering professional contracts, the consultation fees received from both

academies were negotiated by the third author to reflect our level of consulting experience, preparation, delivery time, and travel costs.

Throughout our service delivery we adopted an immersion approach to foster greater acceptance amongst the athletes (Bull, 1995, 1997). The directors at each academy requested we wear club kit, integrate as coaching staff and deliver general principles about psychological performance rather than operate as isolated consultants. We helped to organize training drills and attended meals, squad practice sessions, matches, training camps, and coaching staff meetings. Bull (1995) believed that when athletes recognize the sport psychologist within the coaching staff, they value the sport psychologist's role and psychological programmes more, which enhances rapport, intervention efficacy and adherence. Despite these benefits, we were cautious that being seen as part of the coaching staff may have created negative perceptions for the athletes (e.g., being seen as part of the selection and evaluation process) and thus may have influenced player disclosure. Therefore, in all of our sessions we continually reinforced that our role was to guide and support and that any information shared with us was confidential. We believe the immersion approach is most appropriate because the athletes understand the coaching model founded on loyalty, volunteering and effort (Simons & Andersen, 1995).

We may have been advantaged in our service delivery because we were competitive representative athletes and qualified coaches in cricket and soccer. We were confident in applying sport psychology principles to both sports and were comfortable working within the coaching sessions of cricket and soccer. We reflected that our playing and coaching knowledge was beneficial as it enhanced our ability to communicate technically with the coaches and athletes and this developed rapport and respect which was demonstrated by athletes asking questions about technique (Bull,

1995; Fifer et al., 2008; Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006; Taylor, 2008). We were, however, cautious of providing guidance on technique because this was not our role. To this end, when such questions arose we typically referred the athlete(s) to the coach. Further, understanding the demands of each sport helped us develop appropriate examples and suggestions to integrate mental skills into performance routines. Finally, we felt that by involving ourselves in practical sessions, the coaches and athletes accepted us and our service more easily (Bull, 1995).

Psychological Education

In the soccer academy, psychoeducation sessions were organized for two groups: players aged 13 to 15 and aged 16 to 18. The cricketers were aged 13 to 16. We taught them basic psychological skills associated with the 5C's and peak performance using a psychological skills training approach (Hardy, Jones, & Gould, 1996). This approach allowed athletes to understand specific psychological skills and integrate them into practice and competition (Tonn & Harmison, 2004). We wanted the athletes to understand how psychological factors influence sport performance and how to become more mentally prepared for elite sport (Hardy et al., 1996). To achieve this goal, we adopted the "what" and "how" teaching approach of psychological skills. We included an education phase because by educating athletes about the value of psychological skills we could reduce sport psychology stereotypes and misconceptions (e.g., Pain & Harwood, 2004), enhance adherence to mental skills (e.g., Bull, 1991), and develop rapport (Bull, 1995). Following the education we aimed to conduct one-to-one sessions to develop the mental skills into practice and competition.

Consistent with previous research (e.g., Harwood, 2008), psychoeducation involved interactive presentations to reinforce achievable behaviours associated with

each of the 5C's in practice and match situations. For example, confidence referred to self-efficacy behaviours (see Bandura, 1997) such as physical effort, persistence, and body language. Each presentation used real-life sporting examples, video clips (where appropriate), group discussion and group activities. To gain athlete support, we encouraged the coaches to attend education sessions, reinforce the key points in practice, and match situations (Harwood, 2008); however, it was often difficult to get the coaches to consistently attend due to other coaching-related commitments. We also primed the athletes about psychological skills to prepare and perform well, so goal-setting, self-talk, reflection, relaxation, imagery, and concentration control were included in the 5C sessions to strengthen psychological preparation for performance (Hardy et al., 1996). The 60-minute education workshops used an adapted protocol from Harwood (2008). To illustrate, each C was presented and media examples of the C offered (e.g., quotes, sport or movie clips). Next, we educated the athletes about the theoretical principles behind each C and the attributes related to each C. Then, free flow athlete-sport psychologist-coach discussion (where appropriate) of the C ensued. To illustrate, this discussion typically included exchanges about how the C would affect performance, how it might feel, and how certain training drills could be used to bring about meaningful developments. After the discussion, we explored mental skills related to the C, with group and individual practice. Finally, athletes reflected on the learning outcomes from the session and were then encouraged to practice the relevant mental skill in physical training contexts.

On most occasions 60-minute practical sessions followed the education workshops where the sport psychologist organized physical drills for athletes to practice each C. Athletes practiced mental skills in a low stress condition followed by structured challenging scenarios (e.g., small-sided games, net scenarios). Free flow

athlete-sport psychologist-coach discussions of each session followed with time for reflection and take-home messages concluded each practice. We checked whether the athletes understood the mental skills and if they had any other issues to discuss. We also asked the coaches to reinforce the qualities outlined in Table 1 in trainings and matches so that they felt involved in the sport psychology service. Table 1 represents the order and summary content of the five workshops. Finally, the older cricket and soccer athletes also received workshops following a similar format to that of the 5C sessions on emotional control, stress and coping, developing responsibility, preventing and recovering from injury and career transitions.

Team Building

Team building sessions also formed part of the psychoeducation and were introduced to explore the behaviours of successful teams, role clarity, athlete communication, and understanding of teammates (Eys, Burke, Carron, & Dennis, 2006; Yukelson, 1997). To this end, athletes were asked to identify the specific behaviours successful teams engage in and to explore how they could modify their existing behaviours through the development of a code of conduct. Typically, this code included providing support following a mistake, positive verbal persuasion, collective celebration, and positive non-verbal communication. To enhance athlete communication and understanding of each other, personal-disclosure mutual-sharing sessions (PDMS; Holt & Dunn, 2006; Pain & Harwood, 2009; Windsor, Barker, & McCarthy, 2011) were conducted with each academy. PDMS originates from counselling psychology (Olarte, 2003), and is suggested to promote athletes' respect of others' values, beliefs, attitudes, and personal motives (Holt & Dunn, 2006). Athletes from both academies had two-weeks to prepare a 5-minute speech to answer three questions. First, they had to describe a personal story/situation that would help

their teammates to understand them better. Then, they had to tell the group why they played their sport and what they thought they could bring to the team. Finally, they disclosed a personal story that they would want everyone to know about them. Their stories could relate to any event that had taken place in their personal or sporting lives and offer examples that defined their *character*, *motives*, and *desires*. Athletes were instructed to be honest throughout, and that the information disclosed would be done so in strict confidence. Where appropriate athletes were supported to help them develop their speeches before this session (Holt & Dunn, 2006). The sessions lasted just over two hours with every player delivering a speech, including the consultants who delivered the first speech. Before each session, assent and informed consent (parental consent where appropriate) was obtained from each athlete.

One-to-One Consultations

During one-to-one sessions, we listened carefully to the athletes' theories of their world hoping to understand their personal constructs of a life in elite sport. For example, we were interested in their motives, expectations, challenges, and attributions of success and failure (Giges & Petitpas, 2000). We consulted with all athletes from both academies to develop a basic understanding of their psychological needs. Initially, all athletes completed the performance profile to allow us to understand their self-perceptions and areas for improvement along with providing us a catalyst for discussion (Butler & Hardy, 1992). We adopted a client-centred approach anchored in previous research in sport psychology (Danish et al., 1993; Ray, Terrell, & Hough, 1993). In these 20-minute sessions we reinforced the confidentiality agreement, explored key psychological performance related issues, presented a brief intervention (where applicable), based on Anshel's (1990) Control emotions, Organize information, Plan a response, and Execute (COPE) model, and provided a

session summary. About 70% of sessions were either specific to an issue which the athlete, sport psychologist, or coach identified, and in about 30% we discussed a topical media issue about professional cricket or soccer. To illustrate, where no issue was identified media articles on career termination, long-term injury, drug testing, illegal technique, performance slumps, performance success, positive and negative media attention, de-selection, or poor on-field discipline were presented. Typically, we encouraged athletes to discuss the coping strategies they could or would use in these situations.

Evaluation of Services

Based on suggestions from previous research (Anderson, Miles, Mahoney, & Robinson, 2002), a commitment to accountability in professional practice (Smith, 1989), and recognition of consultant reflective practice (Anderson, Knowles, & Gilbourne, 2004; Cropley, Miles, Hanton, & Niven, 2007; Knowles, Gilbourne, Tomlinson, & Anderson, 2007), evaluation of the programme and our own practice was obtained via a number of processes. Where appropriate informed consent and or parental consent was obtained from each athlete.

1. The Consultant Evaluation Form (CEF; Partington & Orlick, 1987) was administered on two separate occasions during the nine-month programme (i.e., one at the end of formal education sessions and one at the end of the one-to-one sessions).
2. On-going informal feedback from athletes and coaches through general comments after the sessions, during training, and one-to-one sessions.
3. A formal evaluation interview conducted after delivery of the programme with each academy director, which included the topics of quality, effectiveness, and

development of the service delivery, consultant rapport and integration, and communication style(s).

4. A qualitative social validation questionnaire exploring the athletes' perceptions and feelings about the PDMS session and its procedures, along with the perceived benefits was developed based upon previous research (Barker, McCarthy, Jones, & Moran, 2011). Questionnaires were administered to the athletes immediately after the PDMS and contained six questions which were printed onto two sides of an A4 sheet to allow ample space for responses.
5. The completion of consultant reflective diaries throughout the programme and reflective discussion (between the first and second authors and a mentor) after each session (Cropley et al., 2007; Knowles et al., 2007).

Effectiveness and Reflections of our Service Delivery

Psychological Education

Although it is difficult to judge a consultant's value in applied settings; we made attempts to evaluate ourselves using markers from previous research (e.g., Tonn & Harmison, 2004). For instance, we examined the athletes' receptive nonverbal behaviour (e.g., body language, eye contact), the interaction between athletes and ourselves during workshops, and feedback we received from the athletes and coaches after each session. Discussions with the athletes followed most workshops and one-to-one consultations in the following weeks. According to concurrent feedback received from the players after each workshop the sessions were enjoyable, and stimulated interest and value in sport psychology, thus we were satisfied with what we achieved. In addition, feedback from the academy directors at the end of the programme reinforced the enjoyment and application of the sessions, although both imagined that the education sessions could use a less formal classroom style to deliver the material.

At the start of the programme (and primarily based on our roles in academia) we used an academic format to structure our sessions (e.g., a reliance on PowerPoint and lecture style of information delivery). Whilst this approach helped to bring structure to the sessions it also brought a very formal tone which potentially contributed to a lack of engagement by some athletes. Therefore, as the programme evolved (and our confidence increased) we began to trust our knowledge and move away from a formal to a more informal style of delivery whilst still using the 5C framework (Harwood, 2008). This informal style typically relied less on the use of PowerPoint and more on anecdotal examples (e.g., the use of video-clips and quotes) to structure our sessions. In addition, we also delivered sessions in more practical environments (e.g., indoor training facilities) to reduce the perception of formal education.

We feel that this change in style helped to reduce the 'teaching' associations present in our early work and thus facilitated rapport and engagement with the athletes. Furthermore, whilst we tried to deliver practical sessions to emphasize the key elements of the 5C's this was often difficult to fulfil because of busy training schedules, room/hall availability, and athlete availability. Upon reflection we feel that we should have negotiated more firmly with the coaches in making the practical sessions an integral part of the programme.

Finally, we encouraged the athletes to practice the psychological skills (introduced in the sessions) in their own time, although we speculated their adherence would vary. Indeed, most did not adhere from the feedback we obtained during re-cap phases of each education session. This lack of adherence supports previous research showing that athletes invest little time in psychological skills even after education (Bull, 1991). We aimed to increase adherence to psychological skills by introducing the athletes to the use of reflective diaries (Anderson et al., 2004) and getting the

coaches through sending email reminders to reinforce the psychological skills in our absence. It is difficult to know whether these strategies were effective because we did not formally police these atrategies or assess adherence. To this end, SMS-text alerts may have been one way where we could have at least formally and consistently reminded players about their psychological skills training.

Team Building

Social validation data (see Barker et al., 2011) highlighted the effectiveness of the PDMS session in developing the communication and cohesion of the group. For example, some athletes explained, "We have a better understanding of each other, and have bonded well as an academy". The players also thought differently about their teammates. For example, "I think there are some people in the group who told emotional stories and it takes guts to do that which I am grateful for, so respect is the main thing". The directors of both academies were delighted with the effect of the session, and reported that athletes had spoken positively to them about their experiences. The directors were therefore enthusiastic to run this session again because PDMS was seen as being effective while causing little disruption to athlete routines. Overall, we were pleased with the athletes' maturity to prepare and deliver their speeches because it was an unfamiliar and peer-threatening situation. However, we invested a large amount of time (which was not factored into our contracts) assisting the athletes in developing their speeches and alleviating their concerns. In future sessions it may be appropriate to encourage the coaches to support the athletes following initial guidance from the sport psychologists.

The feedback received about the PDMS allowed us to recognize the value of team interventions in professional sport. However, the context of delivering the intervention the way we did also contradicted somewhat with our typical approach to

applied research where we were inclined to draw upon single-case research methods and go through a structured process of measuring target behaviours, establishing baselines, and implementing a detailed and lengthy intervention programme (Barker et al., 2011). Therefore, although we tried to adopt formal scientific evaluation methods in our work we quickly recognized that one must be flexible and innovative in the methods used along with being considerate to the requests and demands of professional sports academies when looking to implement interventions (e.g., Andersen, Van Raalte, & Brewer, 2001).

One-to-One Consultations

Informal feedback from athletes and coaches suggested that the one-to-one sessions were viewed as enjoyable and valuable for performance. Comments illustrated that we communicated in an accessible manner, challenged the ways in which athletes thought about and mentally prepared for sport, and gave them the opportunity to explore and gain feedback on personal performance issues.

Initially, we both started the one-to-one sessions believing that we perhaps had special knowledge or powers to save the athletes from their issues and thus had a real 'saviour complex' when working with the athletes. We wanted to work effectively with all of them in every session and this led to poor time management on occasions. In addition, we initially became frustrated that whilst we identified genuine performance related issues in some athletes, others attended because they had been encouraged to do so by the coaches and thus told us what they thought we wanted to hear. We also noted that because of our keenness to work effectively most of the time and the amount of one-to-one sessions we were doing back-to-back we often found ourselves feeling mentally drained and exhausted. Overall, from our experiences of the one-to-ones we have changed as practitioners on a number of levels. First, we

realized sport psychologists do not 'fix' athletes, but provide support and guidance. To this end, when consulting with athletes we are now keen to establish that our main aims in one-to-one work are to develop self- awareness and –reflection. Second, we now recognize that our enthusiasm for sport psychology is not shared by everyone and for whatever reasons some athletes do not respond with open arms. We now respect athletes' views more so and try not to transfer our beliefs onto them unduly. For example, we recommend follow-up sessions rather than enforce these on the athletes. Finally, doing sport psychology work well is indeed hard work and with this in mind we are now more structured in our scheduling of sessions by providing ourselves with regular breaks to gather our thoughts.

General Reflections about our Service Delivery

In addition to the reflections offered previously in each specific aspect of the programme, we offer some general reflections about our work. Before we started the programme both of us had concerns about our ability to deliver an effective programme and meet our own, the athletes', and the coaches' expectations. Indeed, it was comforting to note that even more experienced consultants had detailed similar feelings before the delivery of their consultancy (e.g., Fifer et al., 2008; Katz, 2006). Therefore, to increase our confidence we valued the opportunity to regularly discuss issues and solve problems about our consultancy (Simons & Andersen, 1995). For example, we typically met as a triad after each session with a mentor (a work colleague) and thus reflected on the challenges we had experienced and how we could overcome them. Given his background in applied sport psychology he was quick to reassure us that he had experienced similar challenges during his early career. In addition, both of us found the keeping of a reflective diary to be an effective aspect of our consultancy discussions (Cropley et al., 2007; Katz, 2006). The diaries were

reminders of what we had done and how we felt at the time of the sessions and thus were helpful in stimulating discussion with our mentor.

In the early stages of the programme we were initially anxious and consequently indecisive in dealing with the coaches and academy directors given our relative inexperience of them and their environments. We quickly realized that speculative responses was not something they particularly liked and thus we refined our communication to be more confident and decisive when conversing about our service, skills, and outcomes. We recognized that as the programme developed and we became more experienced so we began to trust our knowledge which then allowed us to be more decisive with the coaches and directors.

Because the coaches had previously been educated on the 5C's by the third author and appreciated the value of sport psychology, it was difficult for us to re-negotiate our roles at the clubs. To illustrate, we often found ourselves making suggestions about how we wanted to do our consultancy, only to be confronted with the response "…well that's not how we've done it in the past". It is possible that re-negotiating of roles is likely to occur once a consultant has become established with a club or organization (e.g., Bull, 1995).

Establishing relationships is a key aspect of being a successful sport psychologist (Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006; Tonn & Harmison, 2004). Therefore, throughout the consultancy we tried to develop relationships with the coaching staff, academy director, and athletes. One strategy involved staying at residential training camps, dinner and breakfast meetings, walking the field with the coaches and athletes, attending training, email and telephone contact with coaches, and attending coaching staff meetings. Another strategy involved taking every opportunity we could to talk with the coaches and athletes about their sport, training aims, and on occasions the

application of sport psychology. Typically, we were hoping these ad-hoc conversations would facilitate rapport.

Maintaining professional boundaries was also a challenge for us in our work (Andersen et al., 2001; Stevens & Anderson, 2007). For example, because we had not been decisive enough in negotiating and establishing professional boundaries prior to the start of our work at the residential training camps coaching staff regularly consumed alcohol with their dinner and encouraged us to do the same. Also, following some one-to-one consultations, members of the coaching staff inquired about what the athletes had discussed. Therefore, in our current practice we are now very clear about outlining confidentiality agreements with our clients and stakeholders so as to avoid difficult situations in the future regarding information boundaries.

After delivering the programme we cannot claim that our philosophy or delivery of applied sport psychology is the right one for other sport psychologists; however, our employers and athletes were generally pleased with our work and wanted us to return. We realize that we have to change some of our delivery to communicate more effectively to help athletes perform better. For example, we felt that the athletes were reluctant to contact us by telephone. Thus we aim to use other means of contact, electronic media (e.g., SMS messages and email), to encourage players to contact us if they choose (Zizzi & Perna, 2002). In addition, many athletes requested solutions during our sessions particularly when they were experiencing a performance slump. This approach is typical of a “customer type relationship” (Høigaard & Johansen, 2004), and we want to include more brief contact interventions because they are powerful in practice (Giges & Petitpas, 2000). We hope that our education sessions will help the athletes to realize that they have the tools to support themselves in a

performance slump and that developing the appropriate mind-set for competition is a skill that must be learnt and developed. Furthermore, we recognize that cricketers or soccer players do not function within a vacuum and parents, peers and coaches could be involved in this therapeutic alliance (Harwood, 2008). Within the football academy, for example, some one-to-one consultations involved parents and/or coaches; however, this practice depended mostly on coaches, rather than parents, being available and willing to attend sessions with the sport psychologist. Indeed, parental support is likely to augment any brief contact intervention by supporting young athletes in their social interactions emphasising their personal control and responsibility.

Recommendations

On the basis of our experiences and reflections in this paper we offer suggestions to other practitioners working in professional sport academies. First, we now understand the value in educating coaches and parents to help them recognize the stresses athletes encounter during their careers and how they can reinforce elements of the psychological strategies taught to athletes to augment our service. To illustrate, currently at the cricket academy a sport psychology coach and parent education programme exists where education sessions are provided on enjoyment, motivation, confidence, and concentration. In these sessions, information is presented to provide an understanding of theory and intervention. In sum, we now very much view the coaches and parents as allies and not aliens in our quest for developing mentally prepared athletes. Second, we now see the value in concretising sport psychology education for the athlete by integrating their new abstract knowledge into training sessions (Sinclair & Sinclair, 1994; Weiss & Williams, 2004). To this end, much of our current work still relies on the classroom, however we have worked hard at

developing practical drills and sessions which illustrate and challenge each of the 5C's at both academies. Third, whilst we would encourage the use of curricula which focuses on developing the core themes essential for athlete development (e.g., the 5C's), we noticed that when education and training sessions are enjoyable, players are more committed (e.g., Carpenter & Scanlan, 1998). Fourth, from our experiences, depending on the needs of the players, we think that reflection and PDMS within education programmes might be valuable because these techniques offer the potential for sustainable increases in self-awareness, communication, and group cohesion. Finally, when we delivered our work in the academies we did not have a psychological skills education framework to draw upon; since then, however, Visek, Harris, and Blom (2009) introduced the Youth Sport Consulting Model (YSCM) which serves as an educational framework for guiding and supporting sport psychology practitioners in the implementation and delivery of sport psychology services. Accordingly, this framework coupled with our experience has assisted us greatly in the development of a sport psychology programme in youth equestrian. Future applied research may wish to explore the effectiveness of the YSCM in developing young athletes' psychological understanding and skills.

Our parting concern from our applied experience at the academies is that the rationale for several aspects of our delivery lacked empirical qualification. Our concerns typically relate to the guiding literature and its apparent stagnation on gaining entry, the immersion approach, psychological skills tailored to youth athletes' developmental needs, and indicators of value regarding psychological services. Therefore, we hope that future applied practice research will explore the efficacy and effectiveness of the underlying aspects of our delivery (Seligman, 1995). In particular, which approach works best to gain entry to teams and why? Is there sufficient

evidence to support the rationale for the immersion approach? Are traditional programmes for delivering psychological skills training effective for youth athletes? Finally, is improved performance the most important variable when working with youth athletes when developmental research suggests that factors such as enjoyment and perceived competence facilitate performance and sport commitment (McCarthy et al., 2008). These are some of the challenges to advance sport psychology delivery and increase the credibility of sport psychologists working in professional sport.

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Table 1.

5C Workshop Content

Workshop Theme	Content	Mental Skills Associated with Theme	Schedule in Soccer Academy	Schedule in Cricket Academy
Commitment	Intrinsic motivation Task/mastery goals Approach goals Effort and persistence	Goal-setting	August- September*	November
Communication	Peer praise and encouragement Listening Acknowledging Giving feedback Positive non-verbal behaviour	Reflection and self-talk	September – October*	December
Concentration	Broad or narrow attention style Focussing on task relevant cues Coping with distractions	Concentration control (routines)	October – November*	January
Control	Emotional awareness and control Relaxation strategies Positive body language Recovery from errors	Relaxation, self-talk, and imagery	November – December*	February
Confidence	Full involvement No fear of errors Positive presence Accepting challenge Effort and persistence	Self-talk and imagery	December – January*	March

* The Five C's were repeated from January to May