The Performance Excellence Movement (PEM) is designed to increase student, practitioner, and public awareness of the application of sport and exercise psychology skills. PEM also serves to increase awareness, knowledge, and skill sets in relation to how sport and exercise psychology expertise can be effectively applied in a number of domains. The mission of PEM is to provide readers with interesting information about how some of our colleagues successfully apply their sport and exercise psychology techniques in their respective fields.

This year’s PEM Newsletter features three student articles, which focus on: on and off field issues faced by collegiate captains, the implementation of a mental skills training program in youth football, and exercise adherence in an adult population. Following each student article is an interview with an athlete, coach, or trainer. The purpose of each interview will be to provide readers with an insider’s perspective of sport and exercise psychology, as it relates to the performance domain of the accompanying article. The interviewee will offer their opinions of the psychology involved in performance, barriers faced, areas in which they would like to receive more information, and willingness to work with a sport psychology consultant. It is important to note that the information reported by each individual represents their own beliefs, and is in no way connected to the beliefs and mission of AASP.

Read on for exciting information!
The role of a team captain is dynamic, multidimensional and crucial for team performance (Murai & Inomata, 2010). Team captains have assigned non-formal roles, on and off the field, and assist the coach and staff members to promote cohesion and team related knowledge (e.g., game philosophy and strategy). Unique to the university setting is the college-athletes’ need to maintain high athletic performance, while concurrently fulfilling the rigorous academic demands needed to obtain a university degree (Kissinger & Miller, 2009; Whitner & Myers, 1986). Thus, given the balance between the high academic and athletic expectations needed to be a successful team captain, the purpose of this article is to identify and understand the experiences, behaviors and self-perceptions of college-athlete captains.

An idiographic perspective (i.e., an individual unit of analysis; case study design) was considered the most appropriate to guide this scientific-practitioner approach. Two female college-athlete team captains (i.e., soccer and volleyball), recognized by their coaches and teammates as leaders, participated in a season-long applied qualitative inquiry. Rapport was gained by consulting regularly with the athletes and trustworthiness was assured through triangulation of methods (i.e., semi-structured interviews, field observations, and documental analysis) and sources (i.e., coaching staff, players and consultants) (see Patton, 2002). Findings from the qualitative inquiry along with the consultants’ own experiences suggest applied sport psychologists can work with team leaders to (1) facilitate individual growth, positive attitude and balance in the athletic and academic settings, and (2) promote team cohesion, collective efficacy, and the development of shared mental models (SMM; e.g., team members shared knowledge on team tactics, norms and goals). These results, which form the basis of this report, are organized into two main sections. First, theoretical and applied implications pertaining to the individual level of analysis (e.g., behaviors related to team captains’ academic and athletic performance) are discussed. Next, the applied and conceptual guidelines regarding team level interactions (e.g., team cohesion, collective efficacy and SMM) are discussed. In each section, an overview of the lessons learned is offered, followed by applied implications that can be beneficial for facilitating individual and team performance.

**Individual Focus**

The purpose of this section is to discuss a team captain’s individual ability to perform, maintain a healthy lifestyle, and sustain a balanced and positive self-concept (e.g., positive self-perceptions, perceived confidence, effectiveness and ability to accomplish tasks) on and off the field (Marsh & Perry, 2005). Subsequently, applied implications on the potential impact of individual mental skills for individual performance are discussed.

**Lessons Learned**

The most pertinent theme that emerged from the data was the captains’ ability to balance between academics and athletics, as success in both domains was deemed crucial for their individual well-being. While each respective captain maintained high performance standards on and off the field, accomplishing this feat was not simple and required planning, goal setting and time-management skills. Additionally an in depth analysis revealed that maintaining a positive attitude (e.g., motivation and self-confidence) as well as the behaviors mentioned above (e.g., scheduling and goal setting) were not only reflected in athletics and academics, but were consistent in each captains approach to work, family, friends and free time.

A second theme that emerged was the players’ constant use of humor to cope with stressful situations. While each captain was considered motivated and a high achiever, understanding their limits and not taking themselves too seriously was a strategy used to decrease the stress brought on by the demands of being a collegiate sport captain. At times, it also became necessary to relax and put less effort into a task to avoid feelings of burnout (Gustafsson, Hassmen, Kentta & Johansson, 2008).

A final theme that emerged was the captains’ ability to focus on goals and resist temptations, specifically peer pressure. Each captain displayed a clear understanding of personal goals and the processes needed to achieve these goals. When confronted with a situation that was incongruent with their goals, the captains were able to say no. For example, captains would decline opportunities to go out with their teammates (e.g., movie, dinner, club) when they had an important assignment due the following day. The captains would not hesitate to inform teammates they needed to study and
focus on their academics. Self-statements such as, “I follow my dreams; if there is something I want, I will get it eventually; and, sport is a dream of mine and what I have done all my life,” were also deemed beneficial and assisted the athletes in accomplishing their goals.

**Applied Implications**

An important role of applied sport psychologists is to gain knowledge on the stressors and respective coping mechanisms used by a college-athlete captain. As one of the main sources of stress appears to be the various roles they are required to fulfill (i.e., athlete, student, leader and employee), a beneficial coping mechanism for successful captains is the ability to balance the various roles. Thus, by implementing workshops and consultation meetings focused on time management skills and goal setting strategies, team captains can develop capabilities to balance the different tasks they are required to fulfill and subsequently achieve success in all domains (see Figure 1).

Another coping technique utilized to relieve stress was maintaining a positive attitude and high-levels of motivation and self-esteem (Marsh, Chanal, & Sarrazin, 2006). These components, together with humor, may prevent captains from experiencing fatigue, burnout, or attrition. Workshops and interventions focused on positive self-talk and positive imagery scenarios, as well as planning fun days in the busy athletic schedule, are recommended to ameliorate stress and negative experiences in college captains. By developing these workshops, applied sport psychologists can help prevent the symptoms mentioned above and assist team leaders sustain a positive and healthy attitude.

Finally, although not directly stated by the athletes or coaches, it is recommended to assist the coaching staff, faculty and university personnel to design similar interventions. Thus, the focus of the workshops and interventions should not be solely based on the athletes, but rather, applied sport psychologists should also contact, communicate and work with surrounding personnel to address the problems college team captains might encounter.

**Team Focus**

The purpose of this section is to describe the behavioral, affective and cognitive role college captains play within their teams. The importance of team leaders in facilitating team cohesion, collective-efficacy and SMM is presented. Subsequently, applied implications on the potential impact of individual mental skills on team dynamics are discussed.

**Lesson Learned**

The importance of peer leaders in facilitating cohesion and promoting collective-efficacy and SMM in team sports has been extensively reported in both the theoretical and applied sport and exercise psychology literature (Carron, Hausenblas, & Eys, 2005). Specifically, team leaders have been found to facilitate the achievement of the team’s goals, motivate teammates, and serve as an example of work ethic and competent performance under pressure (see Murai & Inomata, 2010). In the current applied study, the importance of team leaders in promoting positive group interactions was also verified. Specifically, it was observed that team captains promote team cohesion and facilitate team coordination and performance.

At the behavioral level, captains were among the main communicators for their respective teams, being responsible for transmitting information on-and-off the field. Both players were “vocal” on the field, exhibited a positive attitude, and helped to promote a positive environment for enhanced cohesion and collective efficacy beliefs. For instance, one of the captains stated, “I just try to not be negative…Of course there are some moments that you need to say to your teammates…Come on you got pick it up! I know that you can do better than this! But…I don’t know I guess that I am the first one to give a compliment but I am also the first one to say come on let’s go.”

Additionally, each captain’s communication skills were important in facilitating team coordination and SMM by transmitting information from the

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**Figure 1**: Applied interventions geared toward college team captains.

Emerging Themes:

1. Balance academics and athletics
2. Use humor
3. Focus on goals, resist temptation
At the cognitive level, captains were important in organizing the defensive line-up of their teams. The volleyball player played as a libero (i.e., a defensive position in indoor volleyball) and the soccer captain played as a center-defender. Akin to trends in current research, these team leaders played centralized positions (playmakers, libero, center-back, and midfield) where player visibility tends to be maximized (Debanne & Fontayne, 2009). Additionally, both players were responsible for calling set-plays during the matches and had specific team-related roles such as defensive covering and coordination of moment to moment tactical information.

**Applied Implications**

Three major applied lessons emerged from this longitudinal applied study (see Figure 2). First, it is recommended that applied sport psychologists teach peer leaders how to communicate effectively. They should be instructed on the importance of mental skills, such as self-awareness, body language, listening skills, and eye contact in communicating efficiently (Weiss, 2011). As emphasized before, communication is a key variable in promoting cohesion, collective-efficacy beliefs, and SMM in team sports.

Second, team leaders should learn goal-setting strategies regarding both task and social team related goals. Shared team goals are essential in promoting cohesion, and consequently team performance. More specifically, team leaders should learn how to set individual and team related outcome, performance and process-oriented goals. Team goals and shared beliefs have been found to be positively related to team cohesiveness and collective-efficacy beliefs (Carron & Brawley, 2008).

Finally, applied interventions should emphasize situational awareness skills of team leaders in highly interactive sports. In fact, research has consistently shown that team leaders facilitate information sharing in team sports. Specifically, team leaders have been found to communicate effectively and show competent performance under pressure, thus facilitating information sharing and performance in team sports.

**Final Thoughts**

The unique role of a college team leader requires various responsibilities and interactions with teammates aimed to facilitate the overall performance of the self and the team. Findings from the current study indicate that successful captains have the ability to balance between academics and athletics, display a positive attitude towards both domains, and fulfill an essential behavioral, affective and cognitive role on their teams. Accordingly, applied sport psychologists might use interviews, observation and questionnaires to identify the specific needs of each team and corresponding team leaders. Therefore, it is recommended that interventions and workshops with team leaders should emphasize the development (a) of communication and self-awareness skills, (b) athletics and leadership roles, and (c) time management skills.

**References (Continued on Page 12)**


How long have you been a competing in sport?

I have competed in sports all my life, starting with soccer in kindergarten. I started participating in cross country/track in seventh grade and continued to do so through college. I just recently graduated in May but I am still running and competing in road races.

Do you feel psychology is important to your performance as an athlete?

Most definitely. Running is 90 percent mental, 10 percent physical. Whenever I was not mentally confident or stable in my running abilities, I never ran well. If I ever over thought it, I wouldn’t run well. Whenever I was calm and confident I ran well. If I thought through the situation logically, I ran much better than if I looked at my race irrationally. Being able to find my identity, not just in running, was crucial to my overall success. If I put too much pressure on my success in running, I ended up racing poorly.

Do you utilize psychological skills training?

Yes. Meditation and actually mentally running the race in my head before it happens. By visualizing myself doing what I want to do, I handle the actual race day much more smoothly. I also utilize race plans that I create the night before so I know exactly what to expect and have no surprises.

Where do you receive your information on the psychology of performance?

I took a college course for my coaching minor that dealt all with the psychology of sports and through friends who have also taken these types of classes.

What are some of the psychological barriers that you see in your sport?

Running is painful. Running is a sport where it is extremely common to freak yourself out mentally and then physically feel the affects.

Are there any psychological topics you would like to know more about, or see more research on?

More ways or methods to help out my future athletes and their own psychological barriers.

Would you ever consider hiring a sport psychology consultant?

Yes. The advice I would give a sport psychology consultant would be the barriers my athletes were facing, their actual abilities, and how I have been handling it on my own. I would look for someone who is personable, knows what they are talking about, but also knows how to translate what they are saying so athletes can understand it as well. A person who is energetic, positive and confident in themselves and my athletes.
Mental skills training with a group of seventh-grade football players: The experiences of graduate student mental trainers and suggestions for future youth-sport programs

Angela Coppola, Eric Martin, Megan Byrd, Caiti Bergman, & Terra Erway
Miami University

A mid-western high school in the United States reported that nearly 50% of seventh grade football players showed at least one failing grade on last year’s first quarter report card. According to the school principal, failing grades have forced students to dropout of sport and have led to school dropout later in the students’ high school career. In an attempt to reduce failing grades and maintain sport participation, sport psychology students, in their second year of master’s training, implemented a mental skills training (MST) program. Specifically, the program targeted academics and sport performance with incoming seventh-grade football players (ages 12 to 13). During the program, the mental skills trainers were under the supervision of a Certified Consultant, Association for Applied Sport Psychology (CC-AASP). The participants consisted of approximately 35 football players in their first year at the high school (grades 7 to 12).

The CC-AASP, who organized the program, worked closely with the principal and athletic director of the school. The consultant also met with coaches and parents of student-athletes to discuss the rationale and implementation of the program. The mental trainers, who had multiple classes in sport psychology, including a class on implementing sport interventions, were supervised by the CC-AASP throughout the program. Trainers were given a manual to guide them through assessment meetings. Trainers also reported written notes for each individual session and were given feedback on reports from the CC-AASP. The primary purpose of the program, as targeted by the principal, was to decrease failing grades and sport dropout among the seventh-grade football student-athletes. A secondary purpose was to teach mental toughness in the classroom as well as on the football field by specifically targeting four pillars of mental toughness: concentration, confidence, motivation, and dealing with pressure (Weinberg, 2010).

To achieve the goals listed above, eight sport psychology mental trainers were assigned three to five athletes and conducted approximately 7 to 10, 30-minute sessions with each athlete (~250 total meetings) throughout the four-month season. Mental trainers conducted an initial assessment, based on the four pillars of mental toughness, to identify each individual athlete’s needs. Therefore, each student-athlete had an individualized training program for sport and academics.

As each student-athlete had an individualized training program, it was noted that each trainer had specific experiences and implemented several different strategies with athletes. Subjective consulting experiences of professional sport psychology consultants have been discussed in previous literature to share and provide ideas to other consultants (Fifer, Henschen, Gould, & Ravizza, 2008); therefore, it may be beneficial for mental trainers to discuss subjective experiences of implementing a youth-sport MST program. As such, the following section will discuss trainer participation in the program, including specific strategies for implementing mental skills, to increase awareness of the psychological skills and strategies utilized in youth football. Finally, suggestions for implementing a mental training program with a group of youth-athletes are provided.

Trainers’ MST Program Experiences

Goal-Setting. The trainers and players spent a large portion of time discussing goal-setting as a tool for improving academic performance. For example, many players expressed concern with the Latin class they were required to take during their first year at the high school. To help students create achievable steps towards a passing grade, the trainers worked with the students to create outcome goals, performance goals, and process goals (Gould, 2010). Specifically, students set a process goal of attending the after-school Latin program for extra help on class assignments. Encouraging communication with parents regarding after-school transportation, as well as teaching time management skills helped students accomplish this goal.

A second issue involved hesitation to speak with the coach about ways in which the athlete could improve. Therefore, athletes were encouraged to think about the benefits of opening a line of communication with their coach and setting up meetings with coaches during or after practice. After meeting with the coach, one athlete reported that he and the coach established additional process goals to achieve his ultimate goal of communicating effectively with his teammates. Therefore, while youth-athletes may be shy or intimidated by the coach, it is important to encourage individual communication between the coach and athlete (Yukelson, 2010).

Recognizing the Controllable and Uncontrollable Aspects of Performance. Many athletes reported that recognizing controllable and uncontrollable aspects of performance helped improved both academic and football performance. For example, one athlete had trouble focusing in math...
class. The mental trainer and athlete created a list of common distractions in class that made focusing difficult for the athlete, and discussed whether or not the distraction was controllable. Individual training plans (e.g., self-talk statements, imagery scripts) were also created and rehearsed in an effort to eliminate or overcome controllable distractions. The athlete was able to quickly re-engage in class and focus on parts of class that he could control (e.g., his attention and being prepared for class) instead of things that were out of his control (e.g., heat of room, noise of construction). When the athlete recognized the uncontrollable and controllable aspects of performing well in the classroom, it helped him perceive control over his attention and increase his ability to focus in the classroom.

Identity Statements. The identity statement, as reported in the 10-Minute Toughness mental training program (Selk, 2009), was a tool used in individualized training programs. The statement has two parts that the athlete must identify: (1) a strength they currently possess that proves they can achieve greatness, and (2) a goal they hope to achieve in sport. The two parts are combined to form one identity statement. For example, “I am a great leader. I am going to be a great quarterback,” was an identity statement used by one of the athletes. The athletes wrote their personalized identity statement on paper luggage tags that hung on football bags or lockers that were frequently used. Each athlete had the same prompt for their identity statement but the prompts for each athlete were geared toward enhancing a different mental skill (e.g., confidence on defensive line, focus in the classroom). In general, the athletes’ process of creating statements and putting them in visible areas were an effective tool to improve confidence in their abilities.

Relaxation Techniques & Self-Talk. Progressive relaxation techniques were introduced to athletes as a modality to recognize the differences in feelings of tension and relaxation in both the academic and athletic environment (Williams, 2010). With consistent practice, athletes were able to use quick body scans as a way to experience momentary muscle relaxation. In general, it was important for the athletes to know that it is normal to feel frustrated and to develop creative ways to cope with this frustration.

All athletes used self-talk but most did not recognize this skill in such terms. Learning proper self-talk techniques, such as stopping negative thoughts and creating positive instructive internal dialogues, allows the athlete to regulate thoughts, arousal, focus, and one’s ability to cope with difficulties (Zinsser, Bunker, & Williams, 2010). The technique that was most useful for athletes was thought-stopping with physical and verbal triggers. The process of thought-stopping has an athlete recall past situations in which negative thoughts occurred and develop strategies to stop and reframe these thoughts (Zinsser et al., 2010). For example, one athlete had trouble keeping negative thoughts out of his mind right before making a tackle. Prior to each play, his physical trigger was to pound his fist once on the left side of his chest where the Nike Swoosh was on his jersey and say to himself, “Just do it.”

Result of the Program
The implementation of the mental skills training program resulted in achievement of both the primary and secondary goals of the program. In the fall of 2010, only 12.5% of players had a failing grade compared to 50% the previous year. The secondary purpose of teaching athletes mental toughness in football was also achieved. Specifically, the football team won its respective league title and coaches attributed the success, in part, to the collaborative efforts to increase mental toughness.

General Challenges and Suggestions for Future Programs with Youth-Athletes
Although the specific strategies and challenges may differ among youth-athlete MST programs, support from coaches or the athletic and academic institution, as well as athletes, is critical. For the current program, the coaches played an integral role by allotting practice time for meetings. Establishing coach and athlete roles for contributing to the success of the MST program is suggested. Specifically, it is important to devise a system of communication between coaches, administrators and trainers in case last minute changes to practice and mental training schedules are made. Communication and building rapport was also important for the trainer-athlete relationship. In the current MST program, building rapport with some players was a challenge. A factor that helped in establishing rapport with one particularly shy athlete was discussing topics outside of football and academics. Furthermore, contacting the athlete once a week, even if unable to meet with him, helped build trust and showed that the mental trainer cared about the athlete’s sport and academic progress.

Based on the trainers’ experiences, it is suggested that trainers also consider encouraging scheduled phone or in-person meetings outside of practice. During the season, we met with four to five students, for 30 minutes, each during a two-hour practice. Coaches were flexible with practice
drills because athletes were transitioned in and out of a mental skills training meetings every half hour. Ideally, it would be beneficial for mental trainers to meet with athletes outside of practice (i.e., during study hall or before practice) to maximize time spent practicing as a unit.

Athlete dropout was considered a challenge for a number of trainers and is likely to occur in any youth-sport MST program. For instance, one athlete in the program dropped out because he was overwhelmed from learning a new sport while simultaneously keeping up with homework demands. He quit the team early in the season after only meeting twice with a mental trainer. Working with a mental trainer to develop skills might have changed his decision to quit football and helped him manage schoolwork. Creating an academic mental skills plan, by email or phone, for athletes who have dropped out of sport should be considered in future MST programs.

The program provided evidence that mental skills, such as self-talk, relaxation, and goal setting, were useful tools for youth-athletes. More interestingly, a variety of techniques seemed to be favored or deemed more effective for certain athletes, underscoring the importance of individualizing mental training. However, it was noted that mental trainers must make meetings both interesting and understandable for the athlete or the key messages will be lost. We suggest that mental trainers seek feedback from athletes about topics for upcoming meetings. Athletes may be more likely to engage in subsequent meetings if they are interested in working on a certain tool that will help them achieve their goals. Athlete feedback about useful MST techniques could be a potential homework assignment. With this being said, assigning homework was considered a challenge due to the fact that the longer the time between meetings the less likely the player was to complete assignments. Homework assignments that are not written (e.g., think about an imagery script for sport) are recommended, especially if you will not be meeting with them within a one-week time frame.

It should be noted that this was an ambitious and innovative pilot program showing encouraging results as well as pointing out several limitations. In general, it is evident that a MST program targeting mental toughness in the classroom and in athletics is feasible and useful for adolescent football players. It is our hope that the previously discussed MST strategies, techniques, and suggestions will be useful in the development and implementation of future youth-athlete programs.

References
Opinions From the Field: A High School Football Coach’s Perspective

Luke Ethington
Head Football Coach, McDonough High School

How long have you been a high school football coach?
I have been coaching for going on eight years. Seven as a head coach.

Do you feel psychology is important to the performance and well being of your athletes?
I strongly believe in the development of the psychology in athletes. Many people feel that psychology can attribute to as much as 80% of an athlete’s development. Based on that premise, the McDonough football program spends a great deal of time discussing and formulating our mental game plan.

Do you utilize psychological skills training with yourself and/or your athletes?
We utilize a few different approaches when preparing mentally. One of the mental skills we use is a positive thinking exercise. I will have players write fictional headlines or articles to an upcoming game. The idea is that if they prepare properly, they will have a role in the outcome of the contest. The article should have a positive outcome for our team (i.e. ‘Williams scores three TD’s in Bears victory’). Players will often put down the stats that they would like to see themselves accomplish. It is also interesting that many players show some type of adversity that they had to overcome to win the game. This shows their ability to see things realistically and a desire to succeed in spite of the circumstances. Another technique that we use is visualization. The night before a game I will have them put their heads down on a desk and relax. I will guide them through walking on to the field and smelling fresh cut grass and feeling sweat run down their back. We will go into the game and the first few plays. I want them to think about their assignments and each step they take. I tell them to run what they see in their minds in slow motion. We will go through other aspects of the game leading to a positive outcome. I will end with having them visualize our celebration, or raising a trophy, or something of that nature. We do set goals, both personal and team goals. I have them put down measurable and specific personal goals. (i.e. I want to squat 400lb. by August; I want 100 tackles and 15 sacks). Team goals are set up in the same manner. On occasion we will brainstorm on various topics. For example, one exercise we do it called “Controllables/Uncontrollables”. If we’re struggling with focus/concentration, we will start listing things during our preparation that we can control (diet, rest, effort, film study, etc.) and cannot control (refs, opponents, weather, field conditions, etc.). I will also show movie clips to enhance the point or theme for the week. On one occasion I was able to show a clip from the movie “Men of Honor”. There is a scene where the lead character Donald Brashear played by Cuba Gooding, Jr. was challenged by his superior. He was asked, "Why do you want this so bad?" His response was, "Because they said I couldn't have it." The theme for us that week was to beat a team that was superior to us in almost all aspects. They were certain that we would not win on based on their intimidation alone. We won the game because we were tired of that feeling and were not going to be denied simply because they said we couldn't have it.

Where do you receive your information on the psychology of performance?
I’ve received my psychology from mentor coaches such as my father, Clyde Ethington, who coached basketball for over 30 years as well as reading publications. I do look for online material, but I mainly rely on publications that interview college and professional coaches that talk about developing psychology within their own programs.

What are some of the psychological barriers that you see with your athletes?
The psychological barriers that my athletes face are a lack of confidence or low self identity. A lack of team identity as a whole has been an issue when I first took over certain programs as well.

Are there any psychological topics you would like to know more about, or see more research on?
I personally would like to see more methods of the use of psychology in athletes and teams.

Would you ever consider hiring a sport psychology consultant for yourself, your team, or your clients?
I would definitely hire a sports psychologist/consultant if my budget allowed. I would like that person to improve the overall climate within the program and keep things on a positive level. I would also want that person to reflect the personality of the head coach or at least the themes that the team is trying to emulate. It would be important for that person to have a prior background in sports and be family oriented. Having kids would not be required, but it would be nice.
PERFORMANCE EXCELLENCE MOVEMENT

Student Article

Exercise Adherence Consulting with Sedentary Adults

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Rationale for Program Development

The field of sport and exercise psychology has traditionally given primacy to research and professional practice aimed at improving sport performance (Buckworth & Dishman, 2002). However, national obesity rates have reached 33.8% (Ogden & Carroll, 2010), causing a concurrent rise in the economic cost of health care due to inactivity. Research has shown the annual cost of inactivity/obesity in the United States to be $147 billion (Finkelstein, Trogdon, Cohen, & Dietz, 2009). Therefore the application of psychological principals to increase physical activity is a viable outlet for sport psychology students and professionals (Weinberg & Gould, 2006).

To this end, graduate students from a Midwestern university implemented an exercise adherence intervention with adults in the local community. The “Couch to 5k” program included approximately 30 participants who answered a flyer posted around the university campus. The goals of the program were to educate individuals on issues pertaining to exercise adherence, as well as provide an avenue for social support (Christensen, Schmidt, Budtz-Jorgensen, & Avlund, 2006). Thus, the role of the exercise adherence consultants consisted of teaching skills that would help each individual reach his or her goals and facilitating communication between individuals in the intervention.

Description of Program

The intervention included seven, one-hour sessions over an eight week period. Each session covered a different topic, which included:

- Introduction to exercise psychology
- Navigating barriers
- Goal-setting
- Relaxation
- Self-talk
- Motivation
- Support systems

During each session a physical component of exercise (e.g., nutrition, weather, types of equipment) and a psychological component of exercise adherence (e.g., goal setting) was introduced to the participants. The physical component was discussed first and lasted approximately 10-15 minutes. The majority of each session, approximately 30 minutes, was dedicated to the presentation of a psychological skill and discussion between consultants and participants. The participants then split into small groups following the discussion to allow for the remainder of time (15-20 minutes) to be spent on interpersonal interaction.

Prior to the first session, participants were sent an information packet, which included the following measures:

- Stage of Change for Exercise Questionnaire (Marcus, Rossi, Selby, Niaura, & Abrams, 1992).
- Barriers-Efficacy Scale (McAuley & Mihalko, 1998)
- Temptation to Not Exercise Questionnaire (Hausenblas et al., 2001)
- Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (National Institute of Mental Health)

Upon beginning the program, participants were divided into groups according to their scores on the Stage of Change for Exercise Questionnaire. This questionnaire was developed using the theoretical constructs of the Transtheoretical Model (TTM). The TTM is based on the premise that behavior change is a process that typically goes through five hierarchical stages: pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance (Prochaska & Marcus, 1995). This model was chosen as it provides a theoretical framework to assess an individual’s readiness to change. Additionally, self-efficacy is thought to increase as an individual progress through each stage. Thus, stage identification may provide an approximate level of self-efficacy towards a new behavior. Given this, the consultants hypothesized that by grouping people by stage of change would increase relatedness and promote social support within the group.
Student Articles Cont’d

Difficulties in Program Delivery and Lessons Learned

The group sessions provided a positive experience for both the clients and the consultants, yet were not without several limitations. One such limitation was the exercise adherence consultant’s ability to fully engage with the participants. Specifically, the group format made it difficult to pursue an individualized approach to each participant’s needs. Furthermore, the structure of the group sessions often placed participants in a passive role. While the consultants asked questions to reinforce important points and maintain attention, a more collaborative approach may have provided individuals an opportunity to evoke their own reasons for change (Miller & Rollnick, 2002).

A second limitation was participant’s frustration with what appeared to be a lack of organization. Although the exercise adherence consultants prepared for each session in advance, a large amount of trial and error occurred, as this was a novel experience to each consultant. Additionally, the varying array of facilitators seemed to confuse and frustrate some of the participants. Specifically, the intervention was implemented by five consultants, however due to varying schedules, the consultants attending the intervention rotated from week-to-week.

Finally, most of the individuals that attended the first session were seeking support in the physical aspect of exercise, rather than the emotional or psychological aspects of exercise adherence. Upon learning this was not the service we were providing, many participants chose not to attend the program following the initial session. Given this, it may be beneficial to meet with each participant prior to the first session and answer questions related to the exercise adherence program.

Implications for Students

As mentioned above, the “Couch to 5k” exercise adherence program presented new challenges as the consultants had not had any prior experience with this population. The following paragraphs provide recommendations for students based on the experiences and lessons learned from the current intervention.

**Implications:**

1. **Encourage communication.**
   - First, session planning was difficult as there was a lack of consistency in attendance each week. To ameliorate this potential problem in the future, it is recommended that students encourage communication between participants, and between consultants and participants. Ideally, this would increase accountability within the group. For group members, providing better social networks and outside meetings dates would allow them to keep in touch with others in the program. One example of this might be to create an area on the university wellness website in which participants could interact. Additionally, communication between participants and consultants could have been improved by assigning a consultant to a small group for the duration of the program rather than randomly assigning groups each session.

2. **Encourage interaction.**
   - The level of interaction between participants was minimal at times, especially during the large group setting. As mentioned previously, communication issues could have contributed to lessened interaction between participants and between participants and consultants. However, interactions could be encouraged with more group exercises and open-ended questions to members of the group. Interactions between participants could be developed by establishing workout buddies for social support during the initial session.

3. **Individualize programs.**
   - The wide range of participant knowledge and interests made it difficult to tailor sessions to individualized needs. Therefore, it is recommended that students implementing a similar group intervention separate participants based on past experience and awareness of exercise, as well as a measure of behavior change. Also, it is recommended that students collaborate with wellness coaches or trainers to develop an integrative approach to exercise adherence.

4. **Clarify roles.**
   - Finally, role confusion may have contributed to attrition following the first week of the program. Given that the physical aspects of exercise are more salient than the psychological aspects of exercise, it may have been unrealistic to assume participants would be able to delineate between a physical and a psychological exercise help program. It is recommended that future consultants discuss expectations and roles in their one-on-one and small group sessions throughout the program.
Student Articles Cont’d

Final Thoughts

While the aforementioned strategies may provide useful tools for students attempting to implement an exercise adherence program, it is also necessary that students become grounded in behavior change theory (see Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997; Miller & Rollnick, 2002), as this will allow the consultant to make informed theoretical decisions when implementing a behavioral intervention.

Despite the previous sections focus on the limitations of the current program, it is important to note that the participants reported a high level of enjoyment with the exercise adherence program. Participants were able to utilize the skills and strategies presented in sessions throughout the week, which increased self-efficacy beliefs. This feedback encouraged the exercise adherence consultants, and suggests similar programs may be successful given careful planning and implementation.

References


References Continued from Page 4

How long have you been a personal trainer?

I’ve been a personal trainer and athletic conditioning coach for 16 years. As an athlete I was a competitive synchronized swimmer and a figure skater. I teach swimming to children and adults and cross train my clients with swimming, skating, and other sports to develop core strength and balance skills.

Do you feel psychology is important to the performance and well being of your clients?

I do believe that psychological skills training benefits all of my professional athletes and my fitness clients alike. Obviously, with professional athletes, their mind must be in the game at a much higher level than the average person. That is what separates them. Physical talent is only part of the sport. When an athlete has a clear cut goal set in his mind, he has an edge. To know exactly what he wants to accomplish and to have the confidence to carry that out is serious work. It takes him to a whole new level. We’ve all seen it – Kerry Skrug in 1996 Olympics landing a vault jump on a broken ankle, Kobe Bryant playing in his High School playoffs with the flu so bad that he could barely stand. When it was his time to play, he’d throw the towel off of his head onto the bench and go out to give an incredible performance. Larry Bird was raised and supported by his mother, his father was a drunk. He vowed never to be like his dad. Every game he played, he played for his mom. These athletes went beyond the physical. Their minds took over at the point that their bodies would have given out. A lot of them had role models and some of them developed specific tools to focus and visualize helping them get to the next level.

Do you utilize psychological skills training with yourself and/or your clients?

Yes. “Visualization” is a powerful tool that I use personally and with all of my clients at different levels. With amateur and professional athletes, we run mental drills where they see themselves performing the act over and over again, in varying scenarios and from different angles. In the lead, coming from behind, and overcoming possible obstacles during the competition or game. They develop a strong sense of accomplishment and this boosts their confidence level. They run plays and moves over and over without hesitation. When it comes time to play the game, they have no doubt that they will succeed. They’ve seen it played over a hundred times in their head. Seeing, is believing.

With fitness clients who have different goals, I have them visualize how they want themselves to look and feel. We work on several smaller goals. As each one is attained, the client is rewarded with the satisfaction of accomplishment. To imagine that you already have it – that is, to act and feel as though you are already there is a powerful tool. The brain believes this and your behaviors will change to accommodate this “new you.” A person is more likely to treat his/her body differently when he/she has ultimate respect for it. As they “achieve” the goals they have set for themselves and “act” as though they are fit and healthy, they will begin eating better, staying on their workout schedule better, and generally taking better care of themselves. The self-loathing ends, the happiness sets in and then their goals are now within reach.

Another powerful tool is the “support group.” Whether it is family or friend(s), we all need supporters, people to cheer us on when we feel like caving. Those with the strongest support have the best success. When others believed in us, we feel powerful. The constant re-affirmation that we will succeed develops into a potent dose of psychological power.

Where do you receive your information on the psychology of performance?

I find helpful articles from industry publications like IDEA Fitness Journal and ACE Certified News which I read regularly. I renew my certification every two years and the CEC’s I choose will often fall under the psychology category. Books like “Body, Mind, Sport” by John Douillard are great for demonstrating how to integrate the mind with the body during performance.

My mother is a huge source of information for me with regard to coaching. She’s been a professional Figure Skating coach for over 50 years. Her wealth of knowledge has given me access to some of the best techniques around. She and I share a common clientele in that we both train children as well as adults. That is an eye-opener. There isn’t much difference between the two when you peel away the social layers. Coach a client who is 5 or 85 and you will use many of the same techniques.
Opinions From the Field: A Personal Trainer’s Perspective Cont.

What are some of the psychological barriers that you see with your clients?

The barrier I see most often in my clients is that they lose sight of their goals. Sometimes the work seems too hard, or their work or social life gets in the way and they question why they are doing it. They have forgotten about the reward part of the deal. I have had experience with younger athletes at a very high level of competition who were doing this because their parents wanted them to. They rarely follow through. The child athlete will ultimately fail, just to punish the parent for putting them through this.

The benefit must always outweigh the risk. For many, the risk (effort) is too great. Giving up foods they love, even though it may be temporary, or putting forth huge effort to place themselves at the next level may seem like too much work. Some have come to realize that they just didn’t want it that badly in the first place. The most successful people I’ve worked with were the ones that put their priorities in order and their athletic/fitness goals came first. They were excited about it at every level, we involved their whole family as a team and this insured their success.

With team training we must involve a “Common mind” within each player’s head. As one team member may prop another up, one can also drag another down. A great comparison is a football team and the military. It is said that playing on a football team is the closest thing a man can be to battle without handling a weapon. This “one mind” approach has a huge effect on the athlete in a team situation. A game like football is extremely violent with the hardest hits, yet the most subtle moves will help to assure a win. One player cannot achieve success without the effort and synchronization of the entire team - mind, body and soul. Each player must be clear his own personal goals and then the common goal of the team must be as strong. Teamwork, like the Military, is a brotherhood. The training is specific to these two needs.

I’ve seen and experienced the same mindset in a Hot Yoga class I take regularly. The room is about 110 degrees and everyone is feeling the heat. We are in the standing pose series and it’s very difficult. Some days I’ll feel like taking 5 and hitting the floor but the energy in the room is strong and nobody drops to the floor to rest, therefore we are all propping each other up. On certain days, someone caves and lies down. Before you know it, a few others have landed. They give each other permission to quit. That’s when the psychology of sport kicks in. You see them dropping all around you and you are suddenly aware of how hot it is and how difficult the pose is. You have 30 more seconds to hold a very difficult position and you begin to see spots. What are you going to do? Your mind must not only keep you in the game but it must override the negative energy of others. This is the power of psychology in sport. This is when you draw on your training, use your tools, talk to yourself and what will shut them down.

Are there any psychological topics you would like to know more about, or see more research on?

There is a subject that I am interested in. Controlling the deep rooted behaviors that our brain develops over time, the subconscious reactions that our body will display when the brain dictates a move that is counter-productive to the move we may need at that moment. Coming from the athlete’s perspective, I experienced this while running a 10k race. There were two separate moments when I felt my body overriding my directive in a negative fashion. The first was repeating a part of the route. In training, I ran the same street as the race but I ran farther south and then back to the start. During the race, we ran a loop, so a portion of the road was repeated. This messed with my mind severely. “Why am I running this part again”? “I just did this”. It was really hard to get past that. The second obstacle was seeing the finish line. About a quarter of a mile from the finish line my eyes caught sight of the sign, “FINISH”. Suddenly, my legs felt as though they were running through mud. My brain saw the sign signifying the end and it told my body to stop. No matter what I did, it was such a struggle to keep running. I was performing better than I thought I was. My body was moving just fine and my time was very good, but it felt like such a struggle I was sure I would stop at any moment. Some runners will see the sign and find it motivating, I saw it and subconsciously my body wanted to stop. How to train athletes to meet their specific needs while controlling basic subconscious reactions is a challenge. I’d like to learn how to assess an athlete to find what motivates them and what will shut them down.

Would you ever consider hiring a sport psychology consultant for yourself, your team, or your clients?

Yes, I believe in sports psychology very much and would hire someone if my client had issues in an area that I didn’t feel comfortable handling. I probably wouldn’t advise them if I was bringing them in to handle something I wasn’t qualified to deal with. I would look for a consultant who is confident and qualified, but doesn’t take the fun out of sports and/or exercise.
**A note from the editors**

Dear Readers,

As editors of this year’s PEM Newsletter, we first want to thank the students that have contributed their experience to this years newsletter. Additionally, we would also like to thank all others that have made the final product possible. These include the AASP Executive Board and Student Representatives, former PEM Initiative Leaders, and the individuals in the performance field who so willingly participated in this effort. The PEM Newsletter would not have been possible without your helpful contributions, guidance, and support, and for this we are grateful. We would also like to thank the AASP Executive Board and Student Representatives for the opportunity to serve as the editors of the PEM Newsletter. This has been an educational learning experience for us, beginning with the initial development and design phases and continuing on through the process of recruitment and editing.

We would also like to reinforce the thoughts shared by last year’s editing team. The current team of editors also believes that the PEM Newsletter is an excellent student publication that can increase student, practitioner, and public awareness of the application of sport and exercise psychology skills. Additionally, the PEM Newsletter has the potential to spread knowledge of the potential impact that the field of sport and exercise psychology can have on both sport and non-sport domains. We also believe it is essentially that AASP student members have a venue through which they may publish empirically-based applied articles. These articles, along with the contributions from individuals in the field, help to create a newsletter that provides readers with information about sport and exercise psychology techniques and best practices. As your editors, we have tried to create a final product that reaches these goals.

Please submit any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the newsletter by using the online feedback form available on the PEM Student Initiative page on the AASP Website (http://appliedsportpsych.org/students/pem). Looking to the future, we invite AASP student members to become more involved in the PEM Newsletter and to help this initiative grow!

Thank you,
- Will, Hillary, & David