

Association for Applied Sport Psychology Serves a Growing Audience *The Field of Sport and Exercise Psychology Expands Beyond the Elite Athlete*

A prima ballerina, a fitness-minded woman with diabetes, members of a military bomb detonation unit, and a world record-setting ocean rower: What do they have in common? Each has benefitted from a consultant in the field of sport and exercise psychology.

“In growing numbers of cases, professionals are applying the principles of traditional sport and exercise psychology to nontraditional areas, including entertainment, business, and the military,” said Amanda J. Visek, Ph.D., CC-AASP, assistant professor with the Department of Exercise Science at The George Washington University.

“We are all in performance mode at some time in our lives, whether you’re a professional athlete, a middle-aged marathon runner, a student making a class presentation, or a PTO member giving a talk to her peers,” said Jack J. Lesyk, Ph.D., CC-AASP, AASP Past President and director of the Ohio Center for Sport Psychology.

Increasingly, consultants in the field of sport and exercise psychology address issues that include, but are not limited to:

- Performance challenges, such as anxiety and concentration problems
- Relationships with coaches, team members, and other support systems
- Sustaining motivation
- Injuries
- Substance abuse and eating disorders
- Goal-setting
- Career transitions

Consider the sport and exercise consultants behind the examples above. Dr. Sharon Chirban consults with the Boston Ballet. Carrie Cheadle runs a mental skills training program and camp for active adults with diabetes. Dr. Nate Zinsser is the director of the Performance Enhancement Program at the U.S. Military Academy. And Dr. Lesyk coached ocean rower Katie Spotz in techniques for coping with the mental challenges she faced on her record-setting 70-day, 3,038-mile solo Atlantic crossing.

Today’s Goals Go Beyond Winning

American sport and exercise psychology traces its roots to the 1920s, when Coleman Griffith, an assistant professor of educational psychology at the University of Illinois, published two seminal books: *The Psychology of Coaching* and *The Psychology of Athletics*. In 1965, the first World Congress of Sport Psychology was held in Rome. The U.S. Olympic Committee developed a Sport Psychology Advisory Board in 1980 and later held its first Conference on Sport Psychology. The Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) was founded in 1986.

In the early years, the field of sport and exercise psychology focused on outcomes. By the 1980s, practitioners began to recognize that personal skill building deserved equal attention. “Sport and exercise psychology consultants are dedicated to helping individuals make the most of sport, exercise, and physical activity to enhance their personal development and well being,” said Dr. Lesyk, who leads workshops for professionals seeking to enter the field.

Recent AASP-member research supports this assertion. “We found that NCAA collegiate athletes and coaches are highly receptive to the addition of mental skills training and performance consulting,” said Craig Wrisberg, Ph.D., CC-AASP, professor of sport psychology at the University of Tennessee. “The field is headed toward a level of acceptance that will be evidenced by the addition of staff in the field of sport and exercise psychology to public and private organizations that seek to provide participants with the highest-quality experiences.”

Societal Trends Spur Growth

As the field of sport and exercise psychology moves beyond the realm of the elite athlete, more practitioners are entering the field. According to Dr. Visek, membership in AASP has grown from 138 charter members to over 1,600 members in 2012, with current members representing 39 countries.

“We are seeing the growth of our profession and of the AASP,” said Dr. Visek. “Increasingly youth sport organizations are turning to AASP and to Certified Consultants of AASP to provide insight and applied services to enhance the experiences of younger sport participants, their parents, and their coaches.”

Visek alluded to another societal trend fueling the profession’s growth. “Positive sport experiences help keep our youth active, which is essential to addressing the increasing prevalence of chronic diseases, such as overweight and obesity, type 2 Diabetes, and other cardiometabolic consequences of inactivity,” she said. “The field of sport and exercise psychology has greatly contributed to understanding not only how to achieve maximal performance through mental preparation, but also how to sustain motivation in sport and exercise. These are considerable contributions to public health.”

The Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) promotes ethical practice, science and advocacy in the field of sport and exercise psychology. Founded in 1986, AASP is an international, multidisciplinary, professional organization that offers certification to qualified professionals in the field of sport and exercise psychology. With more than 1,600 members in 39 countries, AASP is a worldwide leader, sharing research and resources with the public via its website, www.appliedsportpsych.org.

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