



# PERFORMANCE EXCELLENCE MOVEMENT

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## ASSOCIATION FOR APPLIED SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

### What is PEM all about?

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 hope 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 field and in other areas.

In this year's newsletter you will find three articles written by current students that take place in three very different contexts. First, students from Springfield College describe their experiences starting a marathon psyching team in "Mind over Miles: The Springfield College Running Psychology Team." Second, a student from the Université de Montréal explores how to incorporate cogni-

tive behavioral therapy interventions in sport in "New Ways to Implement Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Interventions in the Sport Setting." Finally, a student from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas writes about collegiate athlete stress, ways to measure stress, and intervention strategies in "Stress in Student-Athletes: A Review of Assessment and Intervention Strategies"

In addition to the student-written articles, three professionals in the field offer insights on a variety of topics including how they began in the field, skills students should be developing, and advice to students interested in being a professional member in the performance psychology field.

The editors of the PEM hope that you can learn from these experiences and begin to reflect on how you can improve or modify your own practices in the consulting world. We hope you enjoy!

**Do you have consulting or applied experience other students could benefit from learning about? Do you want to get experience in a peer review process? Then think about submitting to the PEM!**

We are always looking for students willing to share their experiences and help others improve their consulting expertise.

Please contact us if you are interested in submitting an article. We want you to be part of the process for the 2015 newsletter!



OCTOBER 15 - 18, 2014

**What is your background as it relates to sport psychology?**

My career was perhaps different from many academics in the sense that throughout my PhD work I was already working as a consultant. I have primarily worked with national level athletes, coaches, and teams. In addition, I was able to take the skills that we use in sport and apply them to the field of business. In this context I was able to implement various sport psychology skills (e.g., teambuilding and communication) in order to facilitate team dynamics and enhance decision-making and performance. Working in sport in Canada at the time did not offer substantial payment, therefore, working in business was my primary source of income. After working as a full-time consultant for more than 10 years, I had the opportunity to go back into academia.

While working as an academic I have been able to combine teaching graduate and undergraduate students in the field of sport psychology and consulting. This combination I would argue has informed both my research and my teaching. Currently I am the Dean of the Faculty of Kinesiology at the University of Calgary and continue to consult – albeit quite a bit less and am not able to travel as much. However, I keep my hand in because it is what I love to do!

**What is your sport psychology consulting philosophy?**

My philosophy is that what I am doing in working with coaches and athletes is very much a *self-discovery process*. So my job as a sport psychology consultant is to help an athlete (athlete/coach) to *figure out or discover* what is going to work for them. Wherever they want to start in the process – I am willing to start there. Often when they come to see me, it is because they need something, and we always start there.

**What skills do you suggest students need to work effectively in the field?**

Communication skills. To me communication skills are listening, talking, and intervening. Listening in sport psychology consulting is a *skill* where you must be *focused* and have energy. You are either attending to your client one-on-one, with a coach, or teaching a workshop - and it takes a great deal of energy and focus to do that. Second, you need to be able to state clearly and concisely what the skills are, and why you believe these skills will then help improve performance. Another important skill is to be able to *observe* athletes and coaches in their training and competition environment. This is a way to build relationships with athletes and coaches - it says you care. Finally, you need to be able to intervene when it is appropriate. Knowing when to intervene is a *skill* and it can only be used when you have developed a solid relationship with the coach and the athlete. The longer you have been with an individual or a team, the more effective you can be. You know the environment, you know the context, and you have the relationship. You need to take the time to develop a strong relationship because intervention is making a change and you can't do that without having been there for a while.

**What advice would offer a student who wants to be as a sport psychology consultant?**

First, if you can, seek out opportunities to work with, or shadow, good consultants in your field. Meet with them, ask them questions, and see if you can spend a day with them. I think that there are lots of consultants in the field of sport psychology that are more than willing to talk about what they do, why they do it, and how they do it. Ask! There may be opportunities where you can intern/apprentice with someone. Second, it is important to start with an education from a good school, preferably with an applied component. Develop a solid knowledge base both theoretically and from an applied perspective – learn to use theory as a base for your consulting.

Third, find a team/athlete/coach to work with, ask for regular feedback, and reflect weekly on what you have done and how you could have done it better. In the reflective process do your best to be honest with yourself and not judge – step back and reflect. In this case you are working to change your own behavior as a consultant – to be better as a consultant. In essence we are asking the athletes and coaches to do that, so we should also be doing that for ourselves.

Fourth, if it is an individual sport, when you can, work with the coach as well as the athlete. I strongly feel that we need to include coaches in this process. Coaches are key to performance and anything else is secondary to that. I've really tried – when I can and when the coach is willing – to work with the coach and the athlete together in developing the skills. You can still be effective working with just the athlete, but the coach plays a crucial role. It is important to recognize that. Furthermore, coaches can learn and use these skills for themselves in addition to implementing them with their athletes.



**Dr. Penny Werthner**  
Dean, Faculty  
of Kinesiology,  
University of  
Calgary

“Perhaps the biggest thing I have learned is that you have to *listen*, and you want to listen *non-judgmentally*. Early on, again perhaps because I was an elite athlete, I thought I knew everything and learned fairly quickly that I didn't! The longer I have stayed in this career the more I have had to concretely remind myself to continue to listen - because the more experienced you are the easier it is to jump to conclusions.”



UNIVERSITY OF  
CALGARY



## Mind over Miles: The Springfield College Running Psychology Team

By Erica Beachy and Dolores Christensen

There has been a recent increase in the number of 'Psyching Teams' across the United States. These teams serve to provide brief psychological support to long-distance runners, typically at marathons, before, during, and after races. The existing literature articulates three major goals for Psyching Teams: (1) to provide mental skills services to runners and support them before, during, and after the race; (2) to demystify sport psychology in a natural setting where interventions may have a direct effect on immediate experiences; and (3) to provide opportunity for Psyching Team members to engage in direct contact with a diverse array of individuals who may benefit from the applied knowledge of team members (Hays & Katchen, 2006). This article focuses on the establishment and unique structure of the Springfield College (SC) Running Psychology Team (RPT) founded in 2013 by Erica Beachy, Dolores Christensen, and Dr. Jasmin Hutchinson.

### How It All Began

The inspiration for the RPT came from the experience that the founders had while participating in the 2013 Toronto Marathon Psyching Team (for a complete reference see Hays & Katchen, 2006). Participation in the event enabled us to spend a weekend interacting and working with runners of all abilities from all over the world. After seeing the enthusiasm for the services that the Psyching Team offered first-hand, the idea of creating a team closer to home in Springfield, Massachusetts was born. We saw a need for psychological support during endurance events such as marathons, as there were no existing Psyching Teams in the nearby Hartford community. Further, we also knew we could tap into the large number of doctoral- and masters-level graduate students at SC. In fact, approximately ten doctoral students and 20 master's students in the Athletic Counseling and Sport Psychology programs volunteered their theoretical knowledge and specific training in sport psychology to become a part of the inaugural team. As practitioners in the field of sport psychology have commented, the primary purpose of a Psyching Team is an "opportunity to *do* sport psychology, not just talk about it" (Hays & Katchen, 2006, p. 121). Therefore this team would not only provide a service to the Hartford running community but also serve as an excellent way for SC graduate students to get hands-on experience in an applied setting.

### The Uniqueness of the RPT

In an effort to build on an established and successful model, the SC RPT was modeled closely after the Toronto team with two notable exceptions. First, while the Toronto course is a point-to-point course, the Hartford course is a loop course. This was advantageous because the SC RPT members stationed at the start of the course could also be available at the finish line. Compared to the point-to-point course in Toronto, the SC RPT did not have to drive through traffic that the race created, thus being available to the runners for a longer period of time. Secondly, the makeup of the SC RPT was comprised only of graduate students compared to Toronto's Psyching Teams which included members of the general psychology community.

**Member training.** The creation, implementation, training, and services provided by RPT members were reflective of our student status. An integral piece of the SC RPT was the member training provided to the graduate students who were new to the concept and practice of a Psyching Team. Team members were required to attend a three-hour training to ensure that all members were familiar with the goals and approaches of the SC RPT and uniformity would exist in the team's services and interventions delivered.

The SC RPT training program was created with the goal of implementing supportive and non-directive practices while incorporating evidence-based techniques. This approach focused on the uniqueness of each runner while at the same time drawing on previously established effective sport psychology techniques. The training topics were based on existing sport psychology literature that focuses on the characteristics of effective consulting relationships (Sharp & Hodge, 2011), ways to build these relationships quickly, and how to conduct brief sport psychology interventions (Giges & Petitpas, 2000). For example, most interactions between RPT members and runners lasted less than five minutes, so the team member had to be efficient at rapidly building rapport, conveying competency, and demonstrating knowledge. In addition, literature specific to running was also covered in order to educate team members on "running basics." For example, the SC RPT members reviewed the physiological and psychological characteristics of "hitting the wall" (Buman, Brewer, Cornelius, Van Raalte, & Petitpas, 2008) as well as the many different motivations that runners may have to participate in distance races (Newcomer, 2009; Ogles, & Masters, 2000). For example, the most important motivations for **train-**

### Beachy & Christensen Continued from page 3

ing and completing a marathon include a general health orientation, personal goal achievement, weight concern, self-esteem, and affiliation with the running community (Newcomer, 2009). However, it is also crucial to view each runner individually as demographics and previous experiences will play a role in the runner's motivations.



For example, older runners may be more motivated by a general health orientation, weight concern, life meaning, and affiliation, while other younger runners may be more motivated by personal goal achievement. This training specifically enabled the SC RPT members to maintain a humanistic, exploratory, and collaborative approach to best understand runners' true motivations and decide which interventions may help should runners struggle on race day.

In addition to learning about the literature and sport psychology techniques, we allotted time to role-play various scenarios for which the team members needed to be prepared. The use of role-plays was particularly effective at providing experiential learning opportunities for the SC RPT members to practice for potential interactions that might occur at any point during time spent with runners (e.g., a runner unsure of her fitness and ability to finish the marathon, a runner recently recovered from an ankle injury who was attempting the half-marathon). After each role play, members gave each other feedback on what they did well and what they could improve upon in order to provide opportunities for growth and development of their abilities.

A peer-mentoring model was used throughout the SC RPT training where less experienced students (e.g., first-year master's students) were matched with more advanced peers (e.g., doctoral students). This approach was chosen because peer-mentoring models have been shown to improve social connection, professional and personal growth, accountability, motivation, collaboration, mutual learning, support, diversity of thought, and the opportunity for discussions in a safe environment (Lord et al., 2012). In addition, mentoring pairs were encouraged to include a member from each graduate program (Athletic Counseling and Sport Psychology) in order to promote interdisciplinary service delivery. Students from both programs have foundational knowledge and skill sets regarding performance enhancement but may view similar issues and possible solutions through different field-specific perspectives. Thus, this model highlights the ability to learn from one another and celebrates the unique strengths that each member brings to the group. Establishing a sense of trust early as a sport psychology consulting team also set the foundation for collaboration and modeled the importance for RPT members to deliver a uniform message while incorporating their different strengths and working together to provide the most beneficial service to the runners. Group sport psychology consulting formats have been shown to be effective due to the ability to collaborate and provide peer consultation when a crisis arises (Cogan, Flowers, Haberl, McCann, & Borlabi, 2012). Throughout training, the expo, and race day, the RPT sought to function as a knowledgeable and effective unit in order to provide the best services possible to the runners.

### At the Hartford Marathon

The SC RPT's first connection with the community of marathon and half-marathon runners from all over New England was at the two-day pre-race expo in Hartford, CT. The expo was held in a convention center where runners pick up their race packets and could shop at multiple vendors that are marketable to the running community (i.e., running apparel, food/fuel, physical therapists, etc.). The SC RPT had a designated booth at the expo where members provided brief interventions and distributed sport psychology handouts relevant to distance running and overall support for interested runners. The handouts included information about physiological symptoms about "hitting the wall," association and dissociation strategies, and what kind of music to listen to during the race. Most interventions included conversations with runners aimed at getting to know them and their motivations for running in the Hartford Marathon. Other topics covered included the runner's running experience, training history, basic goal-strategies, what to expect at the start and finish, and what to expect on the course. We even spoke with supportive friends and family members and walked them through what to expect on race day as well.

"The use of role-plays was particularly effective at providing experiential learning opportunities for the SC RPT members to practice for potential interactions that might occur at any point during time spent with runners."



### Beachy & Christensen Continued from page 4

Often the runners would report feeling prepared for the race. However, if they reported any uncertainty or symptoms of anxiety, we went over appropriate mental strategies they could use. Examples of such strategies included: a) positive self-talk, b) relaxation techniques, c) anchor bracelets using finish line tape and cue words, d) reviewing their preference for association or dissociation strategies, and e) how to cope with a recurring injury during the race. We also handed out small pieces of bright orange finishing line tape after a similar intervention adopted from the Toronto Marathon Psyching Team (Hays & Katchen, 2006). We would ask the runner what the tape could represent for them and then discussed how attaching the tape to their race bib could remind them of that representation *during* their race. Runners often loved this intervention and commented that the tape reminded them of all the training they had done, the partner who had supported them throughout their progress, or as a tribute to the memory of a beloved family member. Sometimes we supported the runners just by listening to their stories. For example, one runner was motivated to qualify for Boston after the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings, another was attempting her first half-marathon ever, and a grandmother was running the half-marathon with her daughter and granddaughter.

“At the starting line, RPT members supported any runners with last-minute nerves and provided additional words of encouragement.”

The initial contacts established at the pre-race convention were further strengthened during the second part of the SC RPT experience on race-day: at the starting line, on-course, and at the finish line. At the starting line, RPT members supported any runners with last-minute nerves and provided additional words of encouragement. We also handed out more finishing line tape for those who requested it—in fact, we gave out so much tape, we ran out of finishing line tape at the starting line! On the race course, “Psychs on the Run” and “Psychlists” (RPT members who biked along the course in order to provide greater and faster race-coverage) ran and pedaled along the marathon and half-marathon courses to provide psychological strategies or more encouragement to the runners. Some members stood half a mile away from a water station and cheered on runners to let them know water was close. Other RPT members ran or walked alongside runners and talked with them about the race, their goals, and what the team member could do to assist the runner—most of the time simply talking to another person was enough for the runner. At the finish line SC RPT members were available for post-race debrief sessions. Runners crossed the finish line with a wide range of moods and physical states and therefore, SC RPT members needed to maintain an awareness of each runner’s state and be ready to be adaptable in the services they provided. Members listened empathically to disappointed runners who had not met their goals and were able to provide support, reframe the outcome, or use positive psychology techniques to help the runners process the race in a more beneficial way. Members who saw runners that needed medical attention provided encouragement or comfort as they guided them to the medical tent. From longer debrief conversations to a simple “high five” and “Way to go!” for the excited and exhausted runners, SC RPT members sought to provide what each individual runner needed.



### Evaluation

A program evaluation, in the form of an online survey, was completed post-event by all members of the SC RPT to ensure the continuous growth and improvement of the event and to gauge overall satisfaction of the team members. In the future, we hope to not only gain feedback from team members but also from the runners. The following section explains the surveys developed for both populations.

**Member Evaluation.** The member survey aimed to evaluate the members’ overall experience of being part of the RPT and specifically, the strengths and weaknesses of the team during the training, race expo, and race day. Likert scale items included: “The training was helpful” and “I felt fully prepared after the training,” and the open-ended questions included: “What did you like/dislike about the expo?” and “Do you have any suggestions for the expo for next year?” The goal of having these items was to explore what was beneficial or positive and what could be improved upon throughout all of the events in which RPT members were involved. Further, to reiterate appreciation for ideas and communication among team members, the survey encouraged team members to share new thoughts and suggestions for improvement.

## Beachy & Christensen Continued from page 5

**Runner Evaluation.** Though we were unable to gather “official” runner data via this survey in our inaugural year, we received many emails from runners who found the various SC RPT members helpful, supportive, and sometimes even essential, in helping them finish the race. The runner survey will be a new addition for the 2014 year and will be sent to all participating runners in the marathon and half-marathon races aiming to quickly assess the visibility, impact, and effectiveness of the RPT.

## Start Your Own Psyching Team!

We have been thrilled about the reception of the SC RPT in Hartford and on the Springfield College campus. This excitement has been matched by other universities and races all across North America—and beyond—who have also sought ways to develop their own versions of Psyching Teams. Given our positive experience and our desire to see more graduate programs adopt Psyching Team opportunities, below is a brief “how to” guide for fellow graduate students on the creation and development of a Psyching Team within their own communities:

**Volunteer at a Psyching Team near you.** We learned a tremendous amount from going through the Psyching Team experience ourselves before we started plans to create one of our own. The interactive map on the Psyching Teams website ([www.psychingteams.com/p/find-psyching-team-near-you.html](http://www.psychingteams.com/p/find-psyching-team-near-you.html)) is a great place to start in order to get connected with already established Psyching Teams.

**Look around.** Identify and explore possible events in your community that may be open to hosting a Psyching Team. Maybe you or someone you know ran a local event that you believe could benefit from the addition of a Psyching Team. Perhaps there is a long-standing race associated with your university. Also, don't limit yourself! There is no reason that you could not provide these type of supportive services within different event formats.

**Recruit your team!** Identify and define what your team makeup, culture, and process will be. Will your team members consist of fellow graduate students in your program, other programs on campus or would you want to recruit professionals from your surrounding area? Think outside the box! Psyching Teams are a great way to look at other disciplines and branch out to other universities in a partnership that benefits everyone. It is also an efficient way to set up a peer-mentoring model, which can be extremely helpful for students and others new to the running world. Finally, look around your university or community to faculty members or sport psychology practitioners who could mentor your Psyching Team and help generate and evaluate ideas. We cannot emphasize enough the importance of an excited and supportive faculty mentor—we would not have been able to do what we did nor ensure sustainability of the RPT without Dr. Hutchinson's help!

**Use the Psyching Team website.** The Psyching Team website ([www.psychingteams.com](http://www.psychingteams.com)) has been designed to provide a place for students and professionals to get connected with existing Psyching Teams and for Psyching Team members to pool ideas, share suggestions, and ask questions to individuals who run current teams. It is a great place to get started and receive support throughout your planning process.

**Investigate support from AASP.** The Community Outreach Grant is an excellent way to receive financial support from AASP to get your Psyching Team off the ground ([www.appliedsportpsych.org/members/grant-forms/community-outreach-grant/](http://www.appliedsportpsych.org/members/grant-forms/community-outreach-grant/)) and ensure that it is done the right way

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**Dr. Alex Cohen**  
Senior Sport  
Psychologist with  
the United States  
Olympic  
Committee

**“Understanding how to work within multilayer systems is a key area of competence for professionals. This includes consulting and organizational psychology skills as well as multicultural competence.”**



### **What is your background as it relates to sport and exercise psychology?**

I have interdisciplinary training in sport psychology and counseling psychology. I initially became interested in sport psychology as an undergrad at Texas A&M, where I played lacrosse and earned a bachelor's degree in psychology with a minor in kinesiology. I later completed a master's in sport psychology and Ph.D. in counseling psychology from Florida State University, including a pre-doctoral internship with a specialization in sport psychology at Kansas State University. I also completed a clinical post-doctoral fellowship specializing in sport psychology at the University of Georgia.

### **In what ways do you use sport psychology in your professional life?**

I am currently a Senior Sport Psychologist with the United States Olympic Committee. Working primarily with winter sports, I provide consultation and counseling for national teams, athletes and coaches at the Olympic Training Centers in Colorado Springs, Colo., and Lake Placid, N.Y., as well as providing service at various National Governing Body training sites and at national and international competitions. As a licensed psychologist and AASP-certified sport psychology consultant, I assist coaches in creating elite performance environments that promote psychological and physical skill acquisition and execution. I work directly with athletes to strengthen and sustain competitive identity and consistently utilize psychological skills under pressure, helping them focus on the right things, at the right time, every time.

### **How did you find your current professional position/ how did you get started in your current field?**

Being an AASP member since 1998 has been critical in my professional development. In many ways, AASP is my professional “home” and the AASP conferences provided the opportunity to develop friends and colleagues in the field. AASP has been invaluable for networking and personal interactions with key professionals in the field. To be considered for my current position, I needed to demonstrate value and experience in multiple areas, not only in terms of credentials/license and sport psychology skills, but also in being able to navigate the politics of multiple organizations. In addition to supporting athletes directly with sport psychology and counseling skills, I work closely with coaches, athletic directors, high performance directors, and key high performance staff (nutritionists, physiologists, technologists, strength and conditioning coaches, sports medicine staff, etc.). Competence is an ongoing process, and I continually work to update my skills in sport psychology, counseling and consulting so that I can provide value to the USOC and the NGB's we partner with to create sustained performance excellence.

### **What should current students be doing to prepare themselves in finding a job/being a professional in your field?**

Knowing the type of setting in which one wants to work certainly helps in making educational and training decisions. Regardless of the setting, if the goal is to be an applied professional, then I believe it is critical to continually develop competence in three main areas: performance excellence, counseling psychology, and consulting/organizational psychology. Seek out formal and informal mentors to develop your professional competencies. Competent, ethical practice rests on a solid foundation of knowledge and theory as well as supervision of applied experiences. For both early-career consultants and seasoned practitioners, ongoing peer-consultation is critical for personal and professional development.

### **What is the best piece of advice you have ever received in regards to performance psychology?**

I received some great advice while in my master's program in sport psychology. Since I knew that I wanted to be proficient in applied sport psychology, regardless of the type of work settings I might be in after graduation, I was encouraged to gain further training that would lead to interdisciplinary competency and credentials. In practical terms, this meant going on to a doctoral program in counseling psychology. The knowledge, and particularly the supervision, that I received in this training program, combined with continued development and specialization in sport psychology, allowed me to obtain AASP certification as well as licensure in psychology. Ironically, in some respects this may have limited career opportunities. At the time of my graduation, the vast majority of sport psychology academic programs were typically located in physical education or kinesiology colleges, meaning that employment as a new assistant professor was contingent upon having a doctorate in sport science. At the same time, there were and are very few counseling or clinical psychology departments with a program specialization in sport/performance psychology. I often wonder if, by seeking training to become competent (by my definition) in applied sport psychology, I made myself less eligible for traditional academic positions in either kinesiology/sport science or psychology departments. However, I would definitely not have been eligible for my present position at the USOC without the competencies and credentials I obtained. Having a sense of the type of meaningful work I wished to do after my graduate training certainly helped in navigating through the various educational paths available. Ideally, future graduate students would have the option to obtain competencies and qualifications in a much more streamlined fashion, so that they will have the interdisciplinary training and credentials to provide value across a number of different settings.



## New Ways to Implement Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Interventions in Sport

By Véronique Richard

Originally developed to help people coping with mental health illness such as depression, anxiety disorders, and Borderline Personality Disorder, interventions based on a cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) approach are now frequently used to help healthy populations optimize their performance (Marlow, 2009; Trip, Vernon, & McMahon, 2007). Based on the assumption that cognitive activity affects behavior and that this cognitive activity may be monitored and altered, the goal of this approach is to help achieve lasting behavioral and cognitive change (Dobson & Dozois, 2010). CBT allows individuals to explore the relationship between their thoughts, emotions, and actions in order to optimize their life experiences.

In the sport psychology literature, the CBT approach is one of the most employed and referenced intervention strategies (McArdle & Moore, 2012). In fact, many researchers have suggested that CBT interventions are effective in altering self-statements, regulating athletes' psychological states, and enhancing performance (Neil, Hanton, & Mellalieu, 2013). More specifically, according to Andersen (2009), the five most used cognitive behavioral techniques in the sport setting are self-talk, relaxation, imagery, goal setting and concentration.

Additionally, the CBT approach can be useful in helping athletes positively change their cognitive appraisal of a stressful situation (Dobson & Dozois, 2010), and thus reduce performance anxiety, which, in turn, positively influences performance (Neil et al., 2013; Turner & Barker, 2013). Unfortunately, few published works have outlined how to implement effective CBT interventions to help athletes cope with stressful situations (McArdle & Moore, 2012; Turner, Slater, & Barker, 2013). Thus, the aim of this review is to highlight practical ways to effectively implement CBT techniques to positively influence the cognition, emotion, and behavior of an athlete.

### Two predominant CBT techniques to help athletes cope with stressful situations

To help athletes deal with their emotions, two predominant CBT techniques have most often been used in sport, namely Rational-Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) and Cognitive Therapy (CT) (Marlow, 2009; Turner & Barker, 2013). According to both techniques, individual emotional disturbances are caused by specific irrational beliefs called cognitive distortions. These irrational beliefs are often described as a shift from using an "I want to" to an "I have to" perspective which stems from the pressure of competing, obsession with results, or a perceived relationship between success and self-worth. For instance, a statement such as "I absolutely have to win this competition" or "I should be exceptional all the time" can be considered irrational beliefs. Thus, irrational beliefs can lead athletes to experience negative emotions such as debilitating anxiety which, in turn, can negatively affect performance (Turner & Barker, 2013).

**"The CBT approach can be useful in helping athletes positively change their cognitive appraisal of a stressful situation, and thus reduce performance anxiety, which, in turn, positively influences performance."**

Accordingly, the goal of REBT is to identify and challenge the irrational beliefs and thereby reduce the emotional disturbance that can lead to anxiety (Dryden, David, & Ellis, 2010). Similarly, the main goal of CT is to help individuals to have a more objective examination of the situation by distancing themselves from irrational thoughts. If athletes consider their thoughts as a hypothesis rather than fact, it allows them to realize the cognitive errors they often make and restructure thoughts if needed (DeRubeis, Webb, Tang, & Beck, 2010). The next section presents tools inspired from both techniques to help practitioners properly implement CBT intervention.

**ABC(DE) framework.** The ABC(DE) framework represents a practical way to structure a CBT intervention and is a key component of REBT. When using this framework, the practitioner, in collaboration with athletes, first identifies the activating event (A) that induces the irrational belief (B) which, in turn, leads to negative consequences such as dysfunctional emotions and behaviors (C). Once the irrational belief is identified, the practitioner encourages athletes to dispute (D) the irrational belief and replace it with a more efficient and rational belief (E) (Marlow, 2009; Turner & Barker, 2013).

**Using Socratic questioning to identify irrational beliefs.** To illustrate concretely the use of the ABC(DE) framework in the sport setting, take the example of athletes who truly believe that they absolutely have to win every competition. The Socratic method of questioning can be especially useful in identifying the irrational beliefs that are activated during competitions. In the Socratic method of questioning, the practitioner asks open ended questions to stimulate reflection and guide athletes through the exploration of their thought process (McArdle & Moore, 2012). In fact, the art of Socratic questioning is to walk the line between leading athletes where the practitioner would like them to go and allowing the athletes to create their own association between their own thoughts, emotions, and behavior (DeRubeis et al., 2010). The practitioner must be patient and help athletes become progressively aware of their cognitive errors.

Using this method, athletes can slowly realize that the presence of some irrational thoughts (e.g., winning is the only way I can prove I am worthy of competing, the best athletes never make mistakes, if I lose I will disappoint all my peers, etc.) during competition have negative consequences on their emotions, physiological feelings, and behaviors. For



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instance, athletes can become aware that when these irrational beliefs are activated, they worry about other's performance, which causes increased anxiety making them more tense and prone to make mistakes while performing (Marlow, 2009).

**Using three main arguments to dispute irrational beliefs.** After having identified irrational thoughts and the consequences of having them, it is essential to help athletes realize that victory is not the only thing that matters. To do so, the practitioner can dispute the irrational belief by using three main arguments: Empirical (Is the belief true or false?), logical (Is the belief logical?), and pragmatic (Is the belief helpful?). By questioning athletes this way, athletes can understand that winning is not the only thing that matters. Performance satisfaction, pleasure, and team spirit are only a few examples of what are also important components of competition. In addition, if athletes realize that winning is not always 100% under their control, they may realize that it is not logical to put emphasis on this aspect of the competition. Through this process, athletes can begin to understand that having this belief is not helpful because it contributes to feelings of anxiety which is, in turn, detrimental to their performance.

Once the irrational beliefs have been successfully disputed (rendered false, illogical, and unhelpful), rational alternatives are exposed to the same disputation process but are rendered true, logical, and helpful (Dryden, 2009). For instance, "I want to win, but having fun while playing is the most important thing" can be considered a more rational alternative than an athlete's initial thoughts.

**The badness scale to prevent "awfulizing".** Irrational thoughts can also lead athletes to "awfulizing" situations which means that they rate an event as being more than 100% bad and/or the worst thing that could possibly happen (Dryden et al., 2010). In a study examining the effect of a 60-minute REBT intervention on the irrational thoughts of 15 elite soccer players (Turner et al., 2013), practitioners used the badness scale (Ellis, Gordon, Neenan, & Palmer, 1997) to help athletes deal with their cognitive pattern of catastrophizing. This tool asks individuals to rate a number of life and sport events on a scale from 0% (not at all bad) to 100% (worst thing possible). Following this exercise, most athletes rated events like being deselected or underperforming in an important game at around 50% mark on the scale. Yet, those events were at first described as being catastrophic. The use of this scale has been found to be very effective, because it allows athletes to understand that using awful or terrible descriptions for events that are, in fact, not the end of the world can potentially increase their level of anxiety which, in turn, can negatively affect their performance (Turner, et al., 2013).

**The 3Ps of optimistic thinking to reflect on event**

Another technique to help athletes rationally reflect on different situations is the "3Ps of optimistic thinking". This technique consists of asking athletes to reflect on the permanence, pervasiveness, and personalization of the cause of different negative events. More precisely, athletes are asked to question the permanence aspect of the situation (i.e., how stable is the cause of an event?), the pervasiveness of the situation (i.e. how much of their life is affected by the negative event?), and finally the personalization of the situation's outcome (i.e., are the events attributed to internal or external forces?). This procedure allows the athletes to take a rational look at their defeats. For instance, after a defeat in an important competition, the practitioner can ask athletes if the defeat means that they will always lose in important competitions, if it will negatively affect their school or family life, and if they made a conscious effort to control everything that they could during the competition. By questioning them this way, athletes realize that, unless they give too much importance to the defeat, this event doesn't influence the result of the next competition, it has no impact on their performance outside of sport, and that a part of the defeat could be attributed to uncontrollable factors such as competitors' performance or the environment.

**Three phases of CBT program grounded to sport**

Inspired by many CBT techniques, Neil and his colleagues (2013) developed a program in three phases to help golfers better manage their emotions and improve their performance during competitions.

**Phase 1: Monitoring.**

To help practitioners better understand an athlete's thoughts and emotions in a specific situation, the use of a thought recording technique can be useful. This technique is often presented as homework in which individuals are asked to record any situations where they had negative thoughts and experienced negative emotions (DeRubeis et al., 2010). For instance, in the study by Neil and his colleagues (2013), golfers were asked to bring an 18-page booklet with them every time they played a round of golf to record the objective performance variables (e.g., fairways and greens hit, number of putts, etc.) and to write a brief narrative of negative thoughts, emotions, and behaviors if they experienced any. The booklet provided more concrete information to the practitioner to adapt the intervention to the athlete's specific needs (Turner & Barker, 2013). In sum, this monitoring process provides athletes with heightened *awareness* of their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors and also leads to personal ownership of the program designed to improve their thinking, feeling, and performances.

***"A practitioner can dispute an irrational belief by using three main arguments: Empirical (Is the belief true or false?), logical (Is the belief logical?), and pragmatic (Is the belief helpful?)."***

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### Phase 2: Education and Acquisition - ARC Technique

Once information related to thoughts, emotions, and behaviors is collected, it is time to help athletes modify habits. As CBT interventions are based on an educational model (Dobson & Dozois, 2010), Neil and his colleagues (2013) developed the ARC (Acknowledge, Rationalize, Change) technique which teaches athletes how to make thought adjustments.

**Acknowledge.** First, athletes are instructed to *acknowledge* what they were initially thinking and consequently feeling in a situation. At this stage, importance is placed on the individual addressing, recognizing, and gaining awareness of what they are experiencing during different situations so they can more effectively manage their thoughts and feelings.

**Rationalize: Using metaphors.** In the second step of the intervention, athletes *rationalize* the thoughts and emotions experienced. Athletes are taught that a certain level of emotion is needed to perform at a high level and that they have to accept that this is normal. In collaboration with the practitioner, athletes turn negative thoughts into positive ones by incorporating thoughts related to previous successful performances.

Metaphors may be a powerful construct in influencing change in an individual. It is important to note that certain procedures need to be followed in order to ensure metaphors are effective. In particular, it is important to conduct a thorough exploration of the metaphors and images originally used by the athlete. Then, the practitioner can progress in establishing metaphors by asking athletes what they see, hear, and feel before, during, and after a specific situation in order to really understand the athletes' perception. If the metaphors and images are negative, it is necessary to help athletes modify them. The use of metaphors works best when athletes are using their own words to ensure that the metaphor is meaningful to athletes and not only to the practitioner. For a skater, releasing pressure from their shoulders and applying that pressure to the ice is an example of a useful metaphor that can be used to help skaters change their perception of a stressful situation and skate with more speed and fluidity.

"Studies conducted with figure skaters and swimmers show that using a keyword routine significantly increased the performance of athletes during competition, because they were more focused on the task"

**Change: Use keywords to focus on the task at hand.** In the last stage of the education and acquisition phase, athletes are asked to change their thoughts to a more structured task-focus. More precisely, the performers are asked to focus on what they could actually do and control during the situation. The use of keywords can be a very useful tool for the implementation of a suitable routine. In fact, studies conducted with figure skaters (Ming & Martin, 1996) and swimmers (Hatzigeorgiadis, Galanis, Zourbanos, & Theodorakis, 2014) show that using a keyword routine significantly increased the performance of athletes during competition, because they were more focused on the task. To ensure this technique is effective, some rules need to be considered. According to Landin and Hebert (1999), the keywords used by athletes should be short and simple, phonetically and logically associated with the task, and consistent with the pace of the task. For instance, a study on the effect of key words on the consistency of a javelin throw showed that athletes who were singing the rhythm of the step during the throw were more consistent than athletes who were more focused on technique (MacPherson, Collins, & Morriss, 2008). The rhythm of the key words provided a holistic movement guide for the athletes.

In brief, the ARC technique emphasizes that athletes must first be aware of and understand the implications of what they are thinking and feeling before they attempt to change their evaluations and their focus (Neil et al., 2013). When this is done, metaphor and keywords can be useful tools to help athletes rationalize and change their thoughts to more rational and task-oriented.

### Phase 3: Integration of Technique.

In the final stage of the intervention, athletes integrate the technique by using cue cards that act as a reminder when negative thoughts or emotions are experienced. To make the cue card become even more accessible for the athletes, it can be presented as a recipe with different statements as the ingredients (Neil, et al., 2013). For instance, after a bad experience on the ice, a hockey player's recipe can contain breathing (behavior), keywords such as "learn from it" and "move on" (cognitive), and a metaphor such as "bounce back" or "next shift" (emotional). It is also important to mention that as in a recipe, the ingredients have to be applied in the right order to make it taste good. With practice, athletes will get to a point when they will know the recipe by heart (Neil et al., 2013).

### Future Directions

To conclude, whatever the type of CBT approach you decide to use, it is important to remember that the goal of these interventions is to change overt behaviors by altering thoughts, interpretations, assumptions, and strategies of responding (Dobson & Dozois, 2010). This review presented interventions derived from the two most popular approaches in CBT but there are many more types of CBT interventions that have not been studied in the sport setting. For example, the use of Problem-Solving Therapy and Self-Control Treatment are two CBT interventions used in other domains that may hold promise for the sport domain. By studying new types of CBT interventions applied to sport, results could provide more empirically-based interventions which are needed to help the field of applied sport psychology continue to grow.

Full references can be found on page 15



**Dr. Charlie Brown**  
Get Your Head  
in the Game  
Consulting

"Anytime a person invites you into their life, it is a privilege. What you know is not nearly as important as what that person is going to *do* with what you know. There are all sorts of techniques and skills, but they are all secondary to having a fundamental respect for the other person, respect for what you know, and respect for what you don't know. Walk tall; but be humble. The moment you think that you understand everything, I will guarantee that is when you've got it wrong and you're not taking something under consideration."

### **What is your background as it relates to sport and exercise psychology?**

People usually come to sport psychology from one of two areas: either exercise and sport sciences or psychology. I came from the psychology side. My decision to go into the sport and performance field was a very mindful and intentional decision. I worked in the mental health system in the early 70's when you could be employed with an undergraduate degree. I went back to graduate school in my mid 20s, got my doctorate when I turned 30, started working in the mental health system and ever since 1980, I have been in independent practice, essentially a small business owner. In 1995 I did a presentation at APA on the impact of training for triathlons on relationships. Turns out it was one of the first studies that actually interviewed spouses and partners of athletes rather than just the athletes on the topic. It was well-received at APA and I had a number of folks from Division 47 say, "You really should come check out sport psychology... you have a good background for this and you'd be a really good fit." That experience set the stage for mindfully making a career change to sport psychology. My wife and I routinely have personal retreats to make certain we are living our lives mindfully and intentionally. Our ideal was a career that could support an active lifestyle and allow travel. While my practice was booming and lucrative, a clinical practice is essentially an hourly wage where you always have to be present to earn income. Sport psychology, however, could allow travel, remote consulting and provide the lifestyle we wanted. It would be a major change; but was clearly a better fit for our ultimate dream. I wanted to study with the person I thought was the best, and Dan Gould kept coming up on everyone's radar. It turned out Dan was in Greensboro at the time, and so in the late 90s I cut back my private practice by a third, and started taking classes at UNC-G. I took courses equivalent to getting a second masters where I could become AASP Certified. My practice has gradually morphed into more and more performance consulting where I stopped taking clinical referrals in 2004. Since 2004 it has been entirely performance consulting.

### **In what ways do you use sport psychology in your professional life?**

I have been fortunate to work with some great athletes, and those at the London Olympics did exceptionally well. I worked with SwimMAC of the Carolinas (an elite swim team) here in Charlotte, and the SwimMAC swimmers just kicked butt. Post-London I have focused more on performance areas other than sport. I coach a number of business executives, consult with the North Carolina Dance Theatre, and my big project this past year has been designing a curriculum for surgeons that is based on the mental skills training models from the USOC and the US Army Centers of Excellence.

### **What should current students be doing to prepare themselves to be productive members in the performance psychology field?**

Always begin with the end in mind. Think about what you really want to be doing. When I hear graduate students say, "I want to be a sports psychologist" – I always ask why. What is it you want to be doing with your life as far as how you spend your time, energy and efforts? The other thing is to develop contextual intelligence. Every work setting has its own culture – it's norms, what people value, and the "currency" by which people gain prestige. The culture of an academic setting is very different from that of an applied work institution, and it's very, very different from the free market culture. The culture of performance consulting is also quite different to the culture of psychotherapy. To the degree you can develop cultural sensitivity for your work setting, it will help you succeed. Being in private practice is great, but there are a lot of headaches and tradeoffs. If private practice is your dream, you need to learn how to run a business. You need to understand business practices, bids, and contracts. If you want to consult as a hobby or for fun, fine; but if you want to earn a living consulting, it is a business and business principles need to guide your decisions.

### **Where can you gain those business skills? I don't think most students know where to find that. Is it mostly trial and error, in classes or somewhere else?**

It can be a combination of ways. First, start by getting good resources. One of the best books that I have found is *Getting started in personal and executive coaching* (Fairley & Stout., 2003). It's a little paperback book that is chocked full of nuts and bolts. Second, find a mentor that has a business; and third, take courses and workshops.

### **What is one piece of advice you would offer a student who wants to practice sport/exercise psychology as a given career?**

Enjoy the ride. And for those looking to go into private practice – you need to be prepared to tell your prospective client why they should hire you instead of me. I'm available; but there are reasons why they should hire you instead. Know what your strengths are. Have your elevator speech down. If you are considering working on your own, you need to be very good at doing job interviews because every time you meet a person, every time you meet a client for the first time, you're interviewing for a job.

### **What is the best piece of advice you have ever received in regards to performance psychology?**

Everything that you're learning, apply it to yourself just like you're going to be an Olympic athlete.



## Stress in Student-Athletes: A Review of Assessment and Intervention Strategies

By Travis Loughran

The life of a student-athlete is a stressful one; filled with unique stressors and responsibilities that put student-athletes at risk for psychological and behavioral concerns that often warrant clinical attention (Ford, 2007). Student-athletes are a unique sub-population in that they experience the academic, relationship, time-management, and financial demands common to any college student, but must manage these stressors along with the pressure to perform, the physical toll of training and competition, and the travel demands that are associated with inter-collegiate sport (Humphrey, Yow, & Bowden, 2000). With the additional stressors athletes face, the experience of stress, defined as “a negative experience that is associated with threat, harm, or demand” (Baum, 1990, p. 660) may be inevitable. The impact of stress occurs on a holistic level causing physiological, emotional, and behavioral changes within the individual (Baum, 1990). The external world provides many different sources of stress, but one thing that all stressors have in common is that they require adjustment by the individual in some way.

When an individual makes extreme or maladaptive adjustments in response to stressors, the opportunity for negative consequences is increased (Baum, 1990). Compared to non-athletes, student-athletes experience lower levels of overall wellness which may be the result of the additional stressors including that are associated with the student-athlete lifestyle (Watson & Kissinger, 2007). In addition, stress can have a negative impact on sport performance, often by increasing levels of tension and anxiety associated with performance (Humphrey et al., 2000). Lastly, stress causes deleterious effects on mental health, physical health, and academic performance (Humphrey et al., 2000).

“Given the broad social and psychological stressors that occur in and out of sport, it is imperative that clinicians make efforts to fully understand how these experiences influence student-athletes.”

Given the broad social and psychological stressors that occur in and out of sport, it is imperative that clinicians make efforts to fully understand how these experiences influence student-athletes. To this end, psychometrically validated assessment measures that integrate the influence of life stressors may be especially useful with the student-athlete population. An example of such a measure is the Sport Interference Checklist (SIC; Donohue, Silver, Dickens, Covassin, & Lancer, 2007). The SIC is designed to assess the cognitive and behavioral factors that interfere with athlete sport performance in training and competition. This tool provides information regarding problems in sport, as well as life stressors that bleed into sport.

Items on the SIC assess time management, academic functioning, social support, finances, and general stress. Information gathered from the SIC allows a natural transition towards goal development with the student-athlete. For example, when a student-athlete identifies difficulties with time management, specific goals and solutions can be set that encourage behaviors consistent with building time management skills. The clinician can work with the athlete to identify effective methods of time management they have used in the past, brainstorm new methods of time management that are relevant to the student-athlete, review available resources that may assist in organization, and model skills such as the use of day planners, cell phone reminders, and to-do lists.

Another assessment measure that targets common sources of stress for student-athletes is the Student Athlete Relationship Instrument (SARI; Donohue, Miller, Crammer, Cross, & Covassin, 2007). Rather than obtaining a broad assessment of “relationships,” the SARI takes a holistic approach in examining how relationship problems with teammates, coaches, family, and peers independently influence the student-athlete’s sport performance. Some student-athletes often struggle with managing relationships. Understanding relationship concerns allows for focused interventions. For example, if information is gleaned from the SARI that shows a student-athlete is experiencing sport performance issues related to the expectations of their coach, possible interventions could include focusing on the development of communication skills to facilitate discussion. Example interventions include identifying honest, respectful, and directive statements and requests the athlete can share with the coach, as well as role-playing scenarios between the athlete and coach. Developing and practicing skills that allow positive interaction between athletes and a coach specifically targets the coach-athlete relationship that may be creating a performance deficit. Building skills specific to interacting with a coach is imperative, as communication styles for a teammate-teammate or friend-friend interaction may not be appropriate when talking to a coach. In addition to assessment measures that specifically explore problems in sport, more comprehensive measures for psychological and behavioral concerns may be warranted. For example, if a volleyball player seeks services for anxiety before games, it will be important to explore the onset, frequency, severity, and duration of the symptoms, as well as how these symptoms are impacting other areas of the athlete’s life. If the symptoms are pervasive in other domains, include abnormal emotional reactions, and/or are unresponsive to traditional sport psychology interventions, then further assessment for clinical concerns may be appropriate.

Measurement tools that are available to assist in the assessment of more complicated clinical concerns include the Symptom Checklist 90-Revised (SCL90-R; Derogatis, 1994). The SCL90-R is an example of a global measure of mental health symptomology. The SCL90-R provides information on three levels. The SCL90-R includes an overall score indicat-



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ing psychiatric functioning on the global level, subscale scores measuring functioning in nine unique mental health dimensions including, depression, anxiety, somatization, and hostility, as well as, individual items which provide information at the symptom level. An elevated score in a specific dimension provides evidence of distress that warrants more in-depth evaluation and provides direction for future intervention. The advantage of the SCL90-R is that it is easy to administer and relatively shorter (12-15 minutes), both of which are ideal qualities for any instrument being used with student-athletes. A briefer 54-item scale and an 18-item version that only focuses on depression, anxiety, and somatization symptoms are also available when a more focused assessment is applicable. An added bonus of the SCL90-R is that it has been used in previous research conducted with student-athletes (Donohue, Silver, et al., 2007).

The synergy between assessment and intervention is a common theme in clinical work. Just as it is essential to implement appropriate assessments when working with student-athletes, it is also critical that appropriate interventions are used. There is a vast array of theoretical and clinical orientations that can be used when providing services to any population, and ideally, sport psychologists and mental health professionals working with student-athletes will have the versatility to provide interventions that address both the sport-specific stressors and mental health concerns student-athletes face.

An example of a treatment modality that has been shown to be effective in both mental health and sport-performance domains is cognitive-behavior therapy (CBT). At the core of CBT is the cognitive-behavioral model of psychological problems, which focuses on the interaction between a person's thoughts (cognitions), behaviors, and emotions. This model functions as a guide for the clinician to conceptualize the presenting problem as well as lay the groundwork for treatment planning and intervention (Wright, Basco, & Thase, 2006). CBT incorporates both cognitive and behavioral based interventions. Cognitive interventions focus on identifying, challenging, and modifying irrational or unproductive thought patterns (Wright et al., 2006). Behavioral interventions focus on helping break unproductive patterns of avoidance or helplessness, build skills to cope with distress, confront fears, and reduce levels of arousal (Wright et al., 2006). The nature of CBT makes it appropriate for both sport-related and general psychological concerns.

A specific example of a CBT intervention technique is the thought change record. The thought change record is an activity designed to track the emotions and behaviors associated with unproductive thoughts. The overall purpose of the thought change record is threefold. First, it is designed to help clients become self-aware by identifying their unproductive thoughts, as well as the emotions and behaviors that are linked to these thoughts. Second, the thought change record aims to challenge the unproductive thought which can be done in a variety of ways including examining the contradictory evidence of the thought or identifying productive alternative thoughts. Lastly, the thought change record seeks to help the client acknowledge the improvements in outcomes associated with an alternative way of thinking (Wright et al., 2006).

The thought change record typically consists of three to five columns with each column serving a unique purpose. The first column is used to identify the event that triggered the unproductive thought, the second column is used to identify and record the unproductive thought, the third column is used to identify the emotions linked to the thought, the fourth column is used to identify rational alternatives to the thought, and the fifth column is used for identifying the outcomes associated with making changes to their unproductive thinking whether it be emotional or behavioral changes (Wright, et al., 2006). It is often useful to initiate this intervention with just the first three columns to help familiarize the client with the process of identifying their thoughts and connecting them to their emotions and behaviors. As the client gets more comfortable with the experience, the activity can be expanded to include the fourth and fifth columns. The thought change record has inherent flexibility in that it can be used for any unproductive or irrational thought, making it ideal for thoughts that are closely tied to sport performance. The thought change record can also be used to identify thoughts that are linked to the other stressors student-athletes face such as anxiety, depression, or substance use.

Family Behavior Therapy (FBT; Azrin, et al., 1994) is a behaviorally based intervention that holds promise with student-athletes. FBT is a unique and innovative treatment approach that involves the support of others in skill building, facilitating environmental change, and optimizing interpersonal relationships. These relationships are meant to serve as a buffer against problems caused by undesired behavior as well as promoting the positive consequences of the absence of the undesired behavior (Donohue, Pitts, Gavrilova, Ayarza, & Cintron, 2013). When implementing FBT with student-athletes, supportive others can include coaches, teammates, family members, friends, and romantic partners. FBT has been found to be effective for a variety of psychological concerns in both adolescents and adults through the use of a variety of intervention components. These components include a formal program orientation (Orientation), collaborative treatment planning techniques (Treatment Planning), the development of athlete specific goals and the development of rewards provided by supportive others for accomplishment of those goals (Goals and



"Behavioral interventions focus on helping break unproductive patterns of avoidance or helplessness, build skills to cope with distress, confront fears, and reduce levels of arousal"

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Rewards), techniques to reduce exposure to goal incompatible stimuli (Environmental Control), cognitive control methods to manage impulses (Self-Control), communication skills training in making effective and positive requests of others (Positive Request), and communication skills training in fostering positive interpersonal relationships (Reciprocity Awareness). The variety of interventions FBT offers makes it an effective modality in addressing psychological concerns, as well as, helping to improve academic performance and reducing substance use, which are common stressors to student-athletes (Azrin et al., 1994). The involvement of family members in FBT parallels the cultural environment of collegiate athletics where close-knit relationships between teammates and coaches mimic the dynamics of family. Currently, a randomized controlled trial is underway examining FBT's efficacy with a student-athlete population.

Therapeutic modalities emphasizing mindfulness and acceptance are other examples of interventions that are used to address student-athlete stress. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT; Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999) is one such modality. Within the ACT framework, psychological problems are conceptualized through exploring the relationship that literal language and thoughts have with the experience of everyday life, and how this relationship can lead to psychological inflexibility that interferes with long-term goal accomplishment (Luoma, Hayes, & Walser, 2007). The therapeutic focus of ACT is to untether the client's thoughts from literal language and increase psychological flexibility so the client can move towards a values-driven life. This is done through six core processes which include acceptance, cognitive defusion, being present, distinguishing self as context, defining valued directions, and committed action (Luoma et al., 2007).

"The therapeutic focus of ACT is to untether the client's thoughts from literal language and increase psychological flexibility so the client can move towards a values-driven life."

The core process of acceptance focuses on developing self-awareness to one's own personal experiences without making attempts to alter or change these experiences. Rather than battle against painful thoughts and emotions, acceptance encourages athletes to fully experience them. Cognitive defusion aims to break apart the literal connection that athletes make with their thoughts to allow clients to see the thinking process as ongoing and fluid (Luoma, et al., 2007). The process of being present is consistent with mindfulness techniques that work towards building awareness of the present moment and connecting with the environment and activities that are occurring in the present. The core process of distinguishing self as context focuses on separating the conceptualized self, which can be described as athletes defining themselves by their personal experiences, from self as context which can be described as a stable sense of self independent of any one event or label. The process of defining valued directions is designed to identify and strengthen the connection between individuals and their own core goals and values. Lastly, the process of committed action focuses on developing patterns of action that are consistent with the individual's goals and values. The process of committed action is ongoing and often involves many traditional cognitive-behavioral methods such as exposure, goal setting, shaping, and skill building (Luoma, et al., 2007). ACT is primed for student-athlete implementation as their patterns of language are often consistent with cognitive inflexibility. For example, a basketball player who reports stress associated with a hectic travel schedule, a heavy course-load, and a recent break-up might have the thought "I can't handle all this!" The keyword "can't" is inherently tied to the concepts of failure and lack of ability. So in addition to his other stressors, the content of this thought puts even more pressure on him as it is one more thing that must be "handled." Defining oneself by this thought will likely initiate feelings of frustration, anger, and sadness. This puts the student-athlete at risk to engage in negative coping strategies such as avoidance or drug and alcohol use. This is an ideal situation to use the core ACT process of distinguishing self as context. The goal is to help the student-athlete separate himself from the rigid content of his thought and to achieve a sense of himself as a stable and flexible individual. While he does experience the thought "I can't handle all this," the thought does not define him, allowing for more productive thoughts to occur in the future.

One of the fundamental interventions of the ACT framework is the use of metaphors. Metaphors function as concise and powerful alternatives to providing the long and cumbersome descriptions of the core processes mentioned above (Luoma, et al., 2007). Metaphors are easy to understand and help to connect the client with the core therapeutic concept. Sports metaphors may be especially powerful when working with student-athletes as they are already a popular method within the ACT framework when working with non-athletes.

In addition to its applicability to clinical concerns associated with student-athlete stress, the principles of ACT have also been adapted for use in performance enhancement with athletes. However, some research suggests that the mindfulness and acceptance approach is only effective in enhancing athletic performance with student-athletes devoid of psychological symptoms (Wolanin & Schwanhauser, 2010). While this modality calls for further research with student-athletes who are experiencing psychological symptoms, it provides further evidence for the advantage of having versatility as a clinician to provide appropriate treatment as needed.

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The life of a student-athlete is filled with many stressors that may be associated with unique risks and consequences which makes it crucial that clinicians tailor their methods of assessment and intervention to fit the needs of the individual. Assessment can be focused on sport specific problems and stressors with the use of instruments like the SIC and SARI, or the general mental health of student-athletes with instruments like the SCL90-R. Similarly, interventions can focus on either sport-related or mental health concerns. Intervention strategies that have the flexibility to address the diversity of stressors faced by student-athletes are preferable. Cognitive behavioral therapy, Family Behavior Therapy, and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy are three examples of treatment modalities that can be adapted to address the wide variety of stressors and concerns experienced by athletes. The use of these intervention and assessment tools will help to provide a thorough conceptualization of student-athletes across all life domains and will help to develop a synergistic approach to the treatment of both the performance enhancement issues and psychological concerns that are faced by student-athletes.

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# PERFORMANCE EXCELLENCE MOVEMENT

## ASSOCIATION FOR APPLIED SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

**Interested in writing a student article?**

**Have ideas to share for a future newsletter?**

**Please contact us, we will point you in the right direction!**

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### **A note from the editors**

*As editors of the 2014 PEM Newsletter, we first want to thank the students that have contributed their experience to this year's newsletter. Additionally, we would also like to thank all others that have made the final product possible. This includes 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 a 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 the past editing teams. 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 possible impact that the field of sport and exercise psychology can have on both sport and non-sport domains. We also believe it is essential that AASP student members have a venue through which they may publish articles regarding applied sport and exercise psychology. These articles 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-center/initiatives/performance-excellence-movement-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,  
- The PEM Team