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## Introduction

The chapters presented in this book provide a current overview of theory and research pertaining to coping and emotion in sport. The geographical diversity of the authors (Europe, United States of America, and Australia) testifies to the universality of the topic. The diversity of theoretical approaches employed also hints at a vibrant and complex area of study. Notwithstanding the diversity of the book's content, we believe that themes emerge which indicate future directions for the study of coping and emotion in sport. In the following pages we outline some of these themes, which are our current thoughts on the area having been involved in editing the book for some 18 months. We do not claim this to be an exhaustive list of areas for future work nor a summary of the research suggestions highlighted in each chapter, but rather a reflection of our own current interests and biases.

## Performance Issues

Understanding the relationship between emotion and sport performance is an important endeavour. However, many studies have considered the association between emotion and global sport performance (e.g., Jones, Mace, & Williams, 2000). Unfortunately such research is limited in that it does not tell us how emotions impact performance. Future research should focus specifically on the relationship between emotion and sub-components of performance and importantly the mechanisms by which this occurs. Research has explored the relationship between anxiety and sub-components of performance (e.g., Collins, Jones, Fairweather, Doolan, & Priestley, 2001; Jones & Cale, 1989; Parfitt, Hardy, & Pates, 1995; Parfitt & Pates, 1999), however, this needs to be done for a broad range of emotions. While anxiety is an emotion that many athletes have experienced, and some experience frequently, it is by no means the only one. What may be considered an overemphasis on anxiety is not

particular to sport psychology. Some 20 years ago, Lazarus, Coyne, and Folkman (1984) suggested that it seemed as if anxiety had become the prime emotion for all behavior in psychology research. With this in mind, a movement towards positive psychology (e.g., Seligman, 2003) and research which considers a broader range of emotions (e.g., Hanin & Syrjä, 1995a; 1995b) are developments to be welcomed.

Notwithstanding the need for more research into the emotion-performance relationship there is currently enough theoretical and research evidence to suggest that emotions can impact the performance levels of athletes (e.g., Hanin, 2000; Lazarus, 2000; Vallerand & Blanchard, 2000). It is hardly controversial to suggest that for nearly all athletes at some time, some emotions may have some impact, on some aspects of performance. Applied sport psychologists will therefore encounter athletes who experience debilitating emotions during competition and it is therefore essential to have a range of strategies that can be used for emotional control (e.g., Jones, 2003).

#### The Antecedents of Emotions and the Role of Coping

It is important for sport psychologists to be able to answer the question ‘why do athletes respond emotionally?’ Understanding how emotions arise has positive implications for the efficacy of emotional control strategies. Interventions that ‘stop’ an emotion occurring are likely to be more desirable than those which aim to deal with an emotion when it occurs. For example, because reappraising a stimulus stops the emotion occurring and requires less cognitive processing than strategies which suppress an emotion once it occurs (Richards & Gross, 2000) it may be considered a more advantageous strategy for athletes. Accordingly, research which untangles and clarifies the cognitive processes involved in emotion generation (e.g., Pensgaard & Duda, 2003; Vallerand, 1987) is to be welcomed.

In considering the cognitive processes involved in emotion generation it is necessary to consider the role of coping. It could be argued that distinguishing between coping and emotion is an artificial distinction that does not mirror what occurs in the 'real world'. It is an arbitrary distinction of which we are guilty in this volume – a quick glance at the index illustrates emotion and coping are dealt with separately in the section on theoretical perspectives. Yet, coping has been suggested to play a central role in the occurrence of emotions (e.g., Lazarus, 1999). Emotional experience depends not only on perceived coping ability but also on the coping strategies employed once an emotion occurs. Greater emphasis on the integration of coping and emotion as evidenced in some studies (e.g., Pensgaard & Duda, 2003; Ntoumanis & Biddle, 2000) and some chapters in this volume (e.g., Walker, Thatcher, Lavalley, & Golby, Chapter 6; Babkes & Partridge, Chapter 9) is both necessary and fitting.

While understanding how emotions arise is an important endeavour it is also a difficult one. First, athletes may not be able to articulate why they respond emotionally because they lack the linguistic ability to do so. Second, athletes may not be aware why they respond emotionally. In a recent paper, Jones (2003) suggested that understanding the role of conscious and unconscious processing in emotion generation is an important avenue for sport psychologists, and cites an example provided by Lazarus (1991) to illustrate this point. Lazarus outlined that although most people know that flying is the safest form of travel (statistically at least), it does not stop the same people being very anxious when they fly. The appraisal of stimuli at different levels may help explain why cognitive-behavioral modification techniques do not always work as they may change the conscious appraisal of a situation but do little to alter the sub-conscious appraisal of the stimulus that might determine the

emotional reaction (Jones, 2003). For example, a soccer player recovering from a broken leg may believe when the bone is healed it will be as strong as it was before the break and therefore no more likely to break in subsequent challenges than it was before. Yet the same player may still feel anxious and reticent about engaging in challenges on his/her return to competition. Although clearly a difficult area future work may wish to consider how unconscious processing of stimuli may influence behavior and emotion in sport. For example, would a rugby player who injured a specific shoulder unconsciously 'protect' that shoulder by tackling with the non-injured shoulder more frequently? In this example, the rugby player may be increasing the likelihood of injury by tackling disproportionately with one shoulder and from an emotion perspective may also increase the likelihood of injury by becoming tense when having to tackle with the previously injured shoulder (Williams & Andersen, 1998). See Kihlstrom, Mulvaney, Tobias, and Tobis (2000) for a detailed discussion of conscious and unconscious processing in emotion.

### Neglected Populations

As with many other areas of psychology our understanding of coping and emotion in sport is based mostly on data collected from university populations. There are populations not covered in this book, or in sufficient detail in the extant literature, where there is the potential for future work.

One such population is children and young athletes. Understanding children and young athletes' affective responses to sport is an area of increasing research interest. Enjoyment is reported to be one of the most important predictors of sport commitment in youth athletes (Babkes & Partridge, Chapter 9; Carpenter, Scanlan, Simons, & Lobel, 1993; Scanlan, Carpenter, Schmidt, Simons, & Keeler, 1993). The use of psychological techniques such as attribution training (e.g., Sinnott & Biddle,

1998) may help children and young athletes cope with competition in a way that increases the likelihood of a positive affective response (e.g., enjoyment) which may have substantial benefits in increasing commitment and adherence to sport. This is clearly important, not only in sport, but also in exercise settings, given growing concerns over the sedentary nature of the population in industrialized countries (Biddle & Mutrie, 2001). Further work, which considers the development of coping skills in children and young athletes, is also apt. Understanding how coping develops in children and young athletes and what coping strategies are effective at varying stages of development would provide valuable information for applied sport psychologists working with this specific population.

Sport officials can often have a substantial impact on competition outcome, and have to deal with a number of stressors. While research has outlined that a range of factors may impact the decisions made by officials (e.g., Frank & Gilovich, 1988; Jones, Paull, & Erskine, 2002; Plessner, 1999) there is little work outlining how officials cope with the stress of competition, the emotions experienced, and their consequences. One exception has been Rainey's work on burnout and sources of stress in officials (e.g., Rainey & Hardy, 1999). Similar to sport officials, coaches can clearly have a substantial impact on competition outcome and also have to deal with a number of stressors yet coping and emotion research in this population is equally scant.

Sport not only impacts individuals directly involved in the competition such as athletes, coaches and officials but it also impacts those who have an emotional investment in the athletes or teams involved, for example, fans, or the family and friends of the athlete. Some research has focused on fans emotional responses to success and failure (e.g., Banyard & Shevlin, 2001), and involvement with a team

(e.g., Wann, Inman, Ensor, Gates, & Caldwell, 1999) however in general these specific populations remain underrepresented in the coping and emotion research in sport.

### Coping with Positive Experiences

Research has typically focused on athletes' abilities to cope with, and the consequences of, negative events. Yet understanding the emotions experienced following positive events and how to cope with positive emotions and positive events is both an interesting and applicable topic (Jackson, Mayocchi, & Dover, 1998; Kreiner-Phillips & Orlick, 1993). As Reid (Chapter 11) outlined even following successful events athletes may experience feelings of loss. A negative impact of a positive event, in this case becoming World Snooker Champion, is illustrated in the following quote by Mark Williams:

“After that win [World Championships 2000], I went downhill – rapidly. I was still getting to a few finals but I wasn't practicing at all. I was taking things for granted. I was also going a bit wild off the table then, to be fair. I was having some good drinking sessions regularly, which I never used to do. It caught up with me in the end and I didn't win a tournament for about two-and-a-half years.” (Reported by Nick Townsend in the Independent on Sunday, 2004, p.10)

In one regard, sport provides a unique environment to investigate the way in which individuals cope with positive emotions and events. Positive events and positive emotions are experienced by most, if not all, athletes, and often very frequently. Yet athletes do report that positive emotions are associated with performance decrements (Hanin, 2000) and that sources of stress may result from positive events (Gould, Jackson, & Finch, 1993). While for many of us positive

events and positive emotions are to be 'enjoyed', the reality for athletes, particularly during competition, may be different.

### Social and Cultural Issues

The social and cultural environment of the athlete has an important role to play in the emotions experienced and the ways in which athletes cope (for examples, see Babkes & Partridge, Chapter 9; Richards, Chapter, 3; Clarke, Chapter, 14). One topic that would appear to be particularly relevant to sport settings is emotional contagion. Coaches, fans, officials, team-mates and opponents may engage in overt displays of emotion that could increase the likelihood of an athlete experiencing that emotion. While some research has been conducted in this area (e.g., Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994; Totterdell, 2000) a more detailed understanding of this phenomenon would appear to have clear implications for the way in which significant others, such as coaches and officials, interact with athletes. The role of significant others in helping athletes cope with emotions is also of interest and current research in the area of social support by Rees and colleagues is relevant in this regard (e.g., Rees, Smith, & Sparks, 2003; Rees & Hardy, 2000).

The culture, or ethos, of the sport which defines acceptable and appropriate behavior may also have a significant impact on the emotions experienced by athletes and the way in which they cope. It may be interesting to investigate whether venting, which some sports are more open to, impacts the emotions experienced and/or the coping strategies employed by athletes. For example, researchers may wish to contrast sports such as soccer, where displays of verbal dissent to referees and opponents are commonplace with sports such as rugby in which overt displays of verbal dissent to officials and opponents are comparatively less common. Similarly, examining differences in coping and emotion between contact sports such as rugby,

which provide players with an opportunity to exorcise their emotions in a physical manner, with sports such as cricket or baseball may be illuminating. The differing cultures and ethoi of sports may contribute to sport-specific antecedents of emotions. An example of this may be sport-specific self-presentation issues. Sports such as ice hockey, rugby union, rugby league, American football and Australian rules football are contact (in some cases collision) sports in which demonstrating physical dominance over an opponent is often considered to be an integral part of the game. Being seen to be dominated physically by an opponent may give rise to self-presentation concerns resulting in negative emotions (e.g., embarrassment, shame). Different self-presentation issues may give rise to different emotions (e. g., anxiety) in subjectively scored sports such as ice-skating.

### Measurement Issues

As Lane (chapter 15) has outlined developing valid and reliable instruments is crucial in order to advance research on both theoretical and applied levels. Given the limitations of current measures outlined by Lane the challenge for researchers is evident. There is a need for a valid sport-specific measure that assesses a broader range of emotions than we currently have. In contrast Lane argues that the reliability of coping measures used in sport have yet to be satisfactorily determined and this issue needs to be addressed.

The study of coping and emotion in sport is not only an important theoretical pursuit but also one that has substantial application. While it is an area that has already seen exciting development and advance, as an identifiable area of scholarship it is still in its infancy. The rate of progress is increasing rapidly, however, and we anticipate that this will continue over the coming years. It is our hope that this volume makes a contribution to this process.

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