Sport Psychology Consulting: Guidelines from Behavioral Analysis

By G.L. Martin. Published 1997 by Sport Science Press, 43 Bright Oaks Bay, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R2M 1L9.

Behavioral Assessment Forms for Sport Psychology Consulting

By G.L. Martin, A. Toogood, & G. Tkachuk. Published 1997 by Sport Science Press, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

Reviewed by Ronald E. Smith, University of Washington, and Laura M. Little, University of New Mexico.

The field of applied behavior analysis has contributed methods of behavioral assessment, behavior change, and evaluation designs that are as applicable to sports as to the many other domains in which they have been successfully applied. There is no better presentation of these methods and their underlying theoretical rationales than these new contributions by sport psychologist Gany Martin and his colleagues. In Sport Psychology Consulting, Martin, co-author (with Joseph J. Pear) of the classic volume in Behavior Modification: What It Is and How to Do It (Prentice-Hall; currently in its 6th edition), provides a compelling presentation of the behavioral approach, showing how principles of operant and respondent conditioning can be used to understand, assess, and change both overt and covert behaviors within sport settings. Far from the “black box” stereotype that so often evokes a knee-jerk rejection of radical behaviorism, modern behavioral conceptions attend not only to externally observable, or overt, behaviors but also to covert behaviors, such as the images, appraisals, self-conceptions, confidence and efficacy expectancies, and other “cognitive” phenomena that are often the targets of change in sport psychology consultation. As Martin points out, much of what we do as sport consultants can be usefully conceived as attempts to either increase or decrease specific internal or external behaviors of athletes or coaches. He presents a methodology for identifying, defining, and measuring such behaviors with the precision demanded by behaviorists, for designing interventions to change the behaviors in the manner desired by the client, and for then assessing the efficacy of the intervention. In doing so, he brings to bear his wealth of experience as a sport consultant in settings ranging from youth sport to the professional level, describing many innovative techniques along with detailed examples. Specific techniques are presented for teaching new skills to both beginning and advanced athletes, decreasing persistent errors, motivating practice and training behaviors, facilitating transfer of training from practices to competitive settings, and building self-management skills ranging from stress reduction and energizing techniques to formulating competition plans and performance routines. Confidence and concentration
enhancement techniques are also described, all within an experientially specifiable behavior analytic framework.

The final four chapters of the book address practical issues of professional development, showing sport consultants how to enhance their own performance. Among the topics discussed in this section are guidelines for developing a sport consultation practice, how to manage time effectively, ethical principles for the sport consultant, and an outstanding chapter on designing single-subject “experiments” to assess the effectiveness of interventions. The consultant who reads this evaluation chapter will find it difficult to claim that an intuitive sense of “what works” satisfies standards of professional accountability, particularly when scientifically acceptable evaluation techniques are available even for consultations with individual athletes.

Any reluctance on the part of sport consultants to adopt a behavior analytic approach to their practice should be allayed by the carefully crafted companion volume by Martin, Toogood, and Tkachuk. The manual focuses on the identification and measurement of specific athlete and coaching behaviors targeted for improvement. The volume contains a wealth of self-report questionnaires in the form of behavioral checklists (for both overt and covert behaviors) that are individualized and sport specific. Athletes who complete these forms should find them both face valid and user-friendly. The questionnaires are formatted to include separate items for the target behaviors needing improvement during competition as opposed to practice. Completing the scales should prove useful not only in helping athletes become more self-aware but also for the setting of specific intervention goals by the athlete and sport consultant team. The behavioral checklists are written with the athlete in mind, providing clear, sport-specific examples of situations and behaviors. They are designed to be quite detailed yet capable of completion in 20 minutes or less. The checklists and rating scales can be used as is or modified by the sport consultant to meet specific assessment, evaluation, or research needs.

Every so often, an applied sport psychology work appears that is so thoughtfully conceived and practically useful for both sport psychology training and for the practicing consultant that it becomes a “must have” for one’s library. These new books by Martin and his colleagues certainly fall into that category. We recommend them with enthusiasm.

Athlete’s Guide to Career Planning: Keys to Success From the Playing Field to Professional Life

By A. Petitpas, D. Champagne, J. Chartrand, S. Danish, & S. Murphy. Published by Human Kinetics, PO Box 5076, Champaign, IL 61825-5076. Tel: 217/351-5076; fax: 217/351-2674. (U.S. $17.95, Canada $26.95)

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At first glance Athlete’s Guide to Career Planning seems to fill a void in the literature, as it aims specifically to prepare athletes for life after sport. Viewed by the authors as a dual-edged sword, sport can offer athletes a variety of learning opportunities, or it can be a vocation that so dominates athletes’ lives that they are