Group Dynamics in Sport (3rd ed.)

By Albert V. Carron, Heather A. Hausenblas, and Mark A. Eys. Copyright 2005 by Fitness Information Technology ($49 USD), 262 Coliseum, WVU-PE, PO Box 6116, Morgantown, WV 26506

Reviewed by Noah Gentner, Ithaca College, Department of Exercise and Sport Sciences, Ithaca, NY 14850

In the third edition of Group Dynamics in Sport (377 pages), Albert Carron, Heather Hausenblas, and Mark Eys provide the most comprehensive review of group dynamics literature in our field. As such, the authors have successfully achieved their purpose of, “review(ing) what is currently understood about group dynamics in sport teams” (p. xi). This text extends the discussion of group dynamics well beyond the traditional dialogue offered in most general sport psychology texts (e.g., Weinberg and Gould’s, 2003 Foundations of Sport and Exercise Psychology; Williams, 2006 Applied Sport Psychology: Personal Growth to Peak Performance, etc.) and provides an invaluable resource for researchers interested in this topic. However, despite the excellence of the theory presented in this text, as an educator and applied consultant, I wonder about its utility in the classroom and applied settings.

Without question the greatest strength of Group Dynamics in Sport is the relevant and comprehensive theoretical knowledge it provides. The authors offer an extremely thorough overview of group dynamics theory. In fact, this book could very easily serve as the “go-to” resource for researchers investigating any aspects of group dynamics in sport. While most sport psychology texts offer little more than lip service to group dynamics in the form of one chapter, Group Dynamics in Sport addresses every key issue related to the subject matter. Such a comprehensive review provides the reader with a truly in-depth look at group dynamics that has previously been unavailable in other sport psychology texts. In fact, to find a comparable text within our literature, one would have to refer back to the second edition of this same book published in 1998. Fortunately, the authors have used this third edition as an opportunity to integrate recent group dynamics research into the already strong content of the previous incarnation of this text. Thus, readers familiar with the second edition will be pleased to see the inclusion of more recent research as well as the reorganization of several sections contained in the third edition. This manifests itself in the strengthening of several sections including those dealing with home field advantage, group roles, the effects of cohesion on performance, and team building. One additional difference in this most recent edition is the omission of several sections discussing the dynamics of exercise groups. This decision has allowed the authors to stay true to their stated purpose and provide a more thorough review of group dynamics literature in sport. However, those looking for a review of the literature dealing with exercise groups might be best served looking elsewhere.

112
In addition to the comprehensive review of theory and literature provided in the book, unlike many theory based texts, this book is organized in an extremely reader-friendly format. The writing is clear and the authors’ use of diagrams and charts supplement the text quite well. Further enhancing the readability and flow of the text is the conceptual framework used to organize the book’s structure. In the first chapter, the authors outline a conceptual framework for sport teams consisting of seven components: member attributes, group environment, group structure, group cohesion, group processes, individual outcomes, and team outcomes. These components serve as the basis for the seven sections of the book. This provides an excellent structure through which the reader can become familiar with each component of group dynamics in a logical manner. In addition, this structure allows the authors to present a large quantity of research and theory in a comprehensive yet accessible manner.

An additional strength of the book is the inclusion of several meaningful sport examples throughout the text, which are used to illustrate the predominant theoretical concepts. Several quotes and stories from well-known coaches and athletes including Phil Jackson, John Wooden, Chamique Holdsclaw, John Smoltz, and Mark Messier allow the reader to see how the theoretical concepts discussed manifest themselves in real life settings. These stories also serve to enhance the readability of the book as they provide a welcome respite from the in-depth theoretical discussions.

While *Group Dynamics in Sport* provides an exceptional and comprehensive review of theory and literature, as I completed each chapter I found myself asking the question, “Now what?” Despite the thorough review of theory and sport examples, this text is noticeably devoid of suggestions for coaches and sport psychology practitioners looking to put group dynamics theory into practice. Though the purpose of the book was only to review what is known in the literature about group dynamics in sport, I felt that the text would be greatly enhanced with the addition of some discussion of practical applications. In their discussion of group position, the authors provide some valuable suggestions regarding locker room assignments; such information can be valuable for coaches, trainers, sport psychologists, and athletes as it provides a bridge linking theory and practice. However, this represents one of the authors’ few attempts to provide this type of information; additional efforts to offer applied information would be welcomed throughout the text. For example, the authors provide a comprehensive review of turnover in group membership and the effects of home field advantage, group roles, leadership, and cohesion on performance. These sections might be enhanced by a brief discussion of how coaches and practitioners might use this information to improve performance or satisfaction.

In conclusion, *Group Dynamics in Sport* provides the most comprehensive review of group dynamics theory in our field. As a resource for researchers in the area of group dynamics in sport, this book is peerless. However, despite its usefulness to researchers, the text’s marketability may be slightly hindered by its narrow topical focus (i.e., group dynamics theory in sport) and scant applied suggestions. Despite the excellence of the theory presented in this text, as an educator I wonder about its utility in the classroom. Save for a specific course on group dynamics, this text might be best served as a reference or optional reading for a class. In addition, this book provides little for coaches, athletes, and applied consultants.