Applying Sport Psychology: Four Perspectives.

Edited by Jim Taylor and Gregory Wilson. Copyright 2005 by Human Kinetics, PO Box 5076, Champaign, IL 61825-5076.

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Just shortly after returning from the 2005 AAASP conference in Vancouver, I was presented with the opportunity to review Applying Sport Psychology: Four Perspectives ($49, 310 pp.). This invitation was well-timed, as I was fresh with the voice of Rainer Marten’s spirited keynote address, calling for better application of the science of sport psychology to the real world. (For those of you in attendance, recall the story about the men digging and refilling holes in the dirt . . . ). Given that this book was published by Human Kinetics, I eagerly read the text with an eye toward the distinction between information and knowledge (the application of the information) in the service of moving sport psychology from a discipline to a profession.

In the spirit of Martens’ call, the editors’ purpose was to bridge the gap between those who study sport psychology (i.e., researchers and consultants) and those who have conducted their own “research” through experience on how to maximize performance (i.e., coaches and athletes). Each chapter aimed “to integrate the views of researchers, consultants, coaches, and athletes in a wide-ranging and in-depth exploration of the essential mental areas that influence sport performance.” The book hopes to satisfy “a diverse audience” of those in academia, practitioners of sport psychology, coaches, and athletes.

On the basis of the authors’ aims, this book delivers what it intends. Each chapter begins with up-to-date research on the topic and then weaves in the perspective of an athlete, coach, and consultant. In that sense, there is something for everyone, and the links on the chain clearly connect topical research to application. Comparing this sport psychology text to excellent compilations currently available (e.g., Van Raalte & Brewer’s Exploring Sport and Exercise Psychology, 2002; Murphy’s Sport Psychology Interventions, 1995), this one moves beyond the theoretical case study examples to provide the opinions and experiences of successful athletes and coaches. Similar to other edited books with a broad range of topics, each chapter is written by those with expertise in that area. While the benefits of this approach are obvious, the challenges of chapter consistency are evident in varying degrees of ease of readability, depth of information, and attention devoted to each of the four perspectives.

In terms of organization, the book is divided into four parts, with fifteen chapters in total: (I) Psychological Factors in Athletic Performance, (II) Enhancing Athletic Performance, (III) Psychology and the Coach, and (IV) Psychological Problems of Athletes. The ordering of the chapters in the first two sections flows nicely in that the topics progress from broader, foundational skills to more specific interventions.
Notable in the beginning of Part II is an ambitious chapter on assessment. Part III offers two chapters on the role of the coach, nicely divided into one on the individual coach-athlete relationship and the second on the role of these relationships in the context of team dynamics. The last part of the book provides an overview of four of the most serious psychological problems athletes face. Although I appreciate the inclusion of clinical issues affecting performance, the counseling psychologist in me found several of the four chapters focused on defining psychopathology from a medical perspective when it also seemed possible and perhaps even preferable to address these issues from a preventative, developmental, and strengths-based approach.

In general, I found the chapters to be strong on content related to definitions, areas of research, and specific applied sport psychology interventions. I was, however, surprised that there was no chapter on ethical issues and limited mention of ethical challenges incorporated into each chapter. I envision this text being used primarily in an academic setting and by those pursuing careers in the coaching and sport sciences fields. From my lens as a licensed psychologist and applied sport psychology consultant, however, I consistently found myself longing for more information on the role of the consultant and specific insights regarding the process of applying these techniques. Just as the quotes from athletes and coaches offered real world perspectives, it seems like the inclusion of the consultants’ experiences of the process of applying sport psychology techniques (the hardest thing to teach and learn) would make this book even more useful in meeting the one of the touted benefits of this text, “to be a successful sport psychologist.”

A note on the quotes from the athletes—several chapters into the book I realized that the picture of the athlete found at the beginning of each chapter did not always correspond with the athlete providing commentary in the chapter. Although a biography of each of the contributors is included in the last section of the book, it might have been even more helpful for a brief description of the athletes and coaches to be provided at the beginning of each chapter.

In my transition from student to professional, one of my biggest insights was an understanding that none of the topic areas in sport psychology are individual entities operating in isolation. People are complex, and rarely is it easy to tease out one specific skill deficit from the total experience of the athlete in the larger context of their sport experiences and lives. Although this text is broken down by chapters with a specific focus, I appreciated the numerous linkages of related topics from one chapter to another, notably in the first two parts of the book.

Overall, my review of this text is quite positive, but I would be remiss if I did not include a suggestion to make this text more appealing to the “diverse audience” it aims to reach. From my multicultural lens, I was surprised that discussions of issues related to gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and class were largely omitted (with the exception of the chapter on career transitions). When researchers dismiss multicultural influences, consultants are less equipped to provide relevant information and understand diverse populations, which ultimately limits their effectiveness with the athletes and coaches with whom they work.

While no text can be everything to everyone, this text does live up to its aim of presenting multiple perspectives on sport psychology topics from those involved in the study, provision, and utilization of sport psychology. Its strengths include good