Special Issue of The Sport Psychologist
Case Studies in Sport Psychology
Introduction

The sport psychology literature contains several articles discussing the value of the case study approach (Rotella, Boyce, Allyson, & Savis, 1998; Smith, 1988; Vernacchia, 1998). Vernacchia (1998) provided an excellent discussion of case methodology and research design, with a comprehensive bibliography of case study literature. He wrote, “Case studies and reports can provide the sport psychology professional with valuable insights into the appropriateness and effectiveness regarding the influence of performance intervention and enhancement techniques or strategies” (p. 11). He also mentioned that, “The key component of the case study or report is the personal interview phase, which allows the athlete to reflect upon and describe his or her performance behaviors and outcomes.” (p. 12).

Smith (1998) commented, “High quality case studies can play an integral role in the accumulation of knowledge about psychological principles in the athletic environment, and can promote the development of intervention strategies for enhancing performance, health, and psychological well being” (p. 11). Rotella (1998) stated “Repeated experiences with a variety of cases involving different levels of sport competition, different sports, and various age groups can play an important role in ensuring the continued growth and success of applied sport psychology consultation” (p. vii).

Case studies allow for in-depth exploration of a variety of situations and issues. They can include unexpected occurrences, unique and innovative interventions, unusual circumstances, or typical experiences that illustrate important principles in consultation. The current Special Issue is designed to supplement the existing literature with a series of detailed descriptions and discussions of different approaches and perspectives to illustrate sport psychology interventions as applied to specific individuals, teams, or situations.

This issue begins with three papers that focus on practitioners and the practice of sport and exercise psychology. Herzog, Hays, and Brooks present four cases each of which raises challenging questions about when to offer counseling, mental skills training, or both, in what sequence; and whether services are provided by one or two practitioners. Martindale and Collins present a Professional Judgment and Decision Making (PJDM) model that is based on “reflection-in-action research” methodology (Schön, 1991) to highlight how sport psychology professionals think in action. Finally, Dzikus, Fisher, and Hays discuss a symposium on sexual transgressions in sport, responses to a symposium on the subject, and how such problematic circumstances at sport psychology conferences might be avoided in the future.

The second section of the issue includes case studies that focus on work with individuals. It begins with Heil’s study looking at the pain experience of a track
and field athlete, from the perspective of the sport psychology consultant and the athlete, both of whom are the author himself. Next, Rotheram, Maynard, Thomas, Bawden, and Francis describe the use of the Emotional Freedom Technique for an experienced golfer experiencing “yips” symptoms. The section concludes with Lorimer and Holland-Smith’s case study exploring various factors that lead an individual to become and remain a coach, and the manner in which these influences informed the coach’s identity and personal values.

Next, case studies related to teams are presented. The article by Rovio, Arvinen-Barrow, Weigand, Eskola, and Lintunen describes a year-long team building program, and emphasizes the importance of a multi-faceted team building approach. Voight then presents a detailed and thorough leadership development program that might serve as a model for training college (and other) team captains.

The Special Issue concludes with Thompson and Andersen’s case study that presents a blending of psychodynamic approaches with Buddhist psychotherapy, focusing on the relationships of the client athlete, the psychology practitioner and the supervisor.

We have mentioned several advantages of the case study approach. Flyvbjerg (2006) supplemented discussion of the advantages with a statement about the implications of not having enough case studies. He commented, “A scientific discipline without a large number of thoroughly executed case studies is a discipline without systematic production of exemplars, and a discipline without exemplars is an ineffective one” (p. 219).

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References


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