

A Reflective Case Study of Sport Psychology Support at the Lacrosse World Cup

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The purpose of this paper is to share and reflect on personal experiences of providing sport psychology support to an international lacrosse squad during their World Cup participation. Based on the needs analysis assessments from observation reports and informal communications, key areas of support included: (1) creating structure and routine, (2) facilitating team reflections, (3) goal setting, (4) game preparation, and (5) providing off-field support. Working with this team exposed the dynamic nature of sport psychology consultancy, and the unpredictability of what is required from a team in a high-performance setting. Individual consultancy through informal communications with players signaled the importance of supporting the person beyond their role as an athlete. Team-level support via group workshop sessions was predominantly performance-related, and required the adoption of solution-focused approaches given the time pressure on strategies to be effective. The support facilitated team organization and preparation, which enabled players to be both mentally and physically ready for each game. Establishing stable routines, game plans, and clear goals, and having adequate reflection and feedback time were reported by the players as important facets of their World Cup experience and success.

Keywords: applied practice, reflection, team sport, performance setting

Sport psychology support at a major championship event demands a degree of flexibility, adaptability, and innovation. Practitioners working in high-level sport need to be prepared to deal with issues that they may not have anticipated would fall under their working remit. Some of the fundamental lessons obtained from this applied work were developing the ability to be comfortable being uncomfortable, being prepared to use the expertise of those you work with, and making psychology accessible and usable (Ravizza, 2002). This case study presents a practical and retrospective account of the consultancy work of an early career practitioner with an international lacrosse squad during their participation in the World Cup. To express accounts and experiences, this paper will be

written in the first person, from the perspective of the first author, with key areas of the consultancy process at the World Cup shared and reflected upon. Although support was also provided to the coaching and support staff, this case study will purely focus on the work with the players. This included maintaining a robust and cohesive unit as well as providing additional one-to-one support to players regarding both performance and nonperformance issues.

Underpinning Philosophy

Conceptualizing beliefs and values as an applied practitioner has been strongly advocated, given that they inform the philosophical approach driving the consultancy

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process (Poczwadowski, Sherman, & Ravizza, 2004). My philosophical standpoint when working with this team was influenced by a combination of humanistic (Rogers, 1951) and cognitive behavioral therapy (Beck, 1995; CBT) principles. I value the notion that each athlete is unique, as well as the importance of recognizing the complex nature of person–situation interactions. Therefore, without converting solely to either, I drew from each of these philosophical perspectives (cf. Keegan, 2010). CBT considers the importance of changing maladaptive behaviors and dysfunctional thoughts, which are undesirable and irrational (Woolfe, Dryden, & Strawbridge, 2003). Humanistic principles highlight the value in having a broader conceptualization of the person, beyond their role as an athlete (Poczwadowski et al., 2004). The quality of interaction between the athlete and practitioner is emphasized by both CBT and humanistic approaches, thus both highlight the value of adopting a client-centered practice and the importance of empowering the athlete (Katz & Hemmings, 2009). While it is acknowledged that some practitioners may have reservations about adopting multiple philosophical underpinnings, I sought to prioritize the needs of those I worked with, and be flexible in my underpinning philosophy (Anderson, Knowles, & Gilbourne, 2004).

The above philosophical approach, in turn, fed into specific techniques I adopted during the World Cup. As my work with the team progressed I came to realize that, in high-performance sport, training time was precious. Therefore, I needed simple, quick, yet effective, strategies to match the demands of working with this World Cup squad (Høigaard & Johasen, 2004). One technique that enabled this type of delivery, and which aligned with my humanistic practicing philosophy, was the brief solution-focused approach (Giges & Petitpas, 2000). This approach offered a technique that was collaborative, personalized, and strengths-focused (Høigaard & Johasen, 2004). It places emphasis on the details of the solutions through developing action plans based on what the athlete can do—rather than the problem and what they cannot do. Using an athlete-centered philosophy paired with solution-focused techniques, I aimed to facilitate logical processes and guided players to view their situation with more rational thought. I encouraged the athletes to identify examples where they had successfully managed challenges before (exception seeking), explored their desired outcomes in the current situation (keeping questions future focused), and provided specific evidenced-based feedback (Høigaard & Johasen, 2004).

Case Overview

I had worked with the lacrosse players for 9 months leading up to their World Cup, thus my attendance at the championships was part of my ongoing support. The coaches and captains initially set me the remit of maintaining a robust, cohesive unit throughout the World Cup and providing additional one-to-one support for the team. It was important that the coaches, players, and I were in agreement and understood my role on the team. These discussions enabled me to clarify my professional boundaries with the team and be clear in regard to what I could (i.e., welfare and performance support) and could not (i.e., clinical related issues) help with (Ravizza, 2002). That is, I had to ensure that I could arrange for appropriate support and referrals to be made if necessary, to act in the best interests of the players. Off the back of some previous work, I had a clinical referral contact that I could use if required. It was made clear to the squad during an initial ‘this is me’ introductory presentation that my work would be centered on player well-being and performance. With clinical issues being outside my professional competency boundaries, I highlighted that these would always be referred to another professional, to serve players appropriately with the support they required. Establishing these boundaries was difficult, in the sense that players did ask if they could speak about their more ‘clinical’ issues, but not necessarily expect help or advice with these from me. In response to this, I agreed that players could use me as a ‘sounding board’ to talk to about clinical-related issues, but that I would always ensure I conducted myself in a way that would only bring credit to my specialist area of support, which was performance. I therefore acted empathetically, but did not advise at all costs and purely listened when the player needed an ear.

It was important that I outlined the boundaries of my professional competencies, and the limitations of my expertise, which prevented my service provision from being misinterpreted (adhering with British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences ethical code of conduct). I ensured that I was open and transparent in regard to my qualifications, as well as with my role and obligations to the team with respect to their privacy and confidentiality in the work conducted. The squad consisted of 18 players aged 28.1 ± 5.7 years with international experience ranging from 8.75 ± 4.98 years. To maintain confidentiality, no reference will be made to the team name, location, individual identities, World Cup group, or performance

data. Each athlete was informed about the nature and purpose of the support provision and had the opportunity to ask any questions, which I answered.

Needs Analysis

The needs analysis of the team at the World Cup was an ongoing process across the championship. Daily assessment strategies involved collating evidence by utilizing observations of training and warm-up games, and the World Cup games once the championship started. I traveled to and from events with the team and remained pitch-side during sessions/games, taking notes on my mobile phone or tablet device. Observations were then accompanied by informal communications with players, in an attempt to gain a comprehensive understanding of the team's needs. Conversations with players took place in airports, on long-haul flights, traveling to and from games, pitch-side during games, during team talks and time outs, at meal times, and during rest periods/downtime. These conversations were informal and relaxed. They would often start around nonperformance content and were initiated by both the players and myself at differing times. Should the players have directed content toward performance discussions, I would then probe and question accordingly. Conducting the needs analyses in this fragmented way enabled rich, well-situated, and highly-contextualized assessment information to be obtained.

Observations

Observations were my primary assessment tool during the tournament. Before the World Cup I had used observations as an opportunity to put in 'face-time' with the players and learn about the sport (Ravizza, 2002). Back then I had also worried about formalizing my observations through taking notes or using a checklist when I was pitch-side. I worried that this might create unease with the players and potentially add to the stereotypical views that are often associated with psychology around secrecy and uncertainty. Furthermore, I was concerned that players would be dubious about what was being observed, recorded, and then potentially fed back to the coaches. To help overcome my anxiety around using this assessment tool, I took time to explain to the team that my observations aimed to give an alternative perspective and assist them in developing a more accurate view of their performances (Watson II & Shannon, 2010). Through discussions with my supervisor, I agreed that I needed to start formally recording my observations to

help with recall accuracy, given that the purpose of these at the World Cup was to facilitate performance. However, although training time at the tournament afforded me to take notes, matches did not. During matches, as well as being on hand to fill up water bottles and have energy gels and ice cold flannels at the ready, I often found myself being so wrapped up in the game and simply supporting the players that note taking became unrealistic and impossible to do. However, to supplement my lack of in situ note taking, following each game and once back at the accommodation, I made sure to note my match observations in my journal.

To help ensure that my observations and supplementary actions were relevant and met the needs of the team, I encouraged players and staff to share their self-assessments and observations during team meetings. These comparisons facilitated discussions about performances and enabled a more complete impression of performance to be established. The observations conducted at the World Cup were naturalistic and examined occurrences and behaviors of the team in an unobtrusive way (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 2007). Notes were made on: (a) the similarities and differences in the behavior of those being observed; (b) any noteworthy occurrences; and (c) situations that linked with previous discussions, team talks, coaches' feedback, preparation, performance, or recovery.

One of my main observations was that players appeared unorganized in the training sessions and friendly games leading up to the World Cup. Players were late for meetings, meals, travel arrangements, and treatment sessions, due to not knowing the schedule of events. Having worked with the team for 9 months before the World Cup, it was clear that the players would benefit from having a specific plan and schedule. Further, we developed the hypothesis that developing a clear game-day routine would assist players' prematch preparations and organization. It was also observed that although team goals were being discussed before each friendly game, this was almost exclusively in the team talks, which took place only minutes before the game began. Discussing this with the team, players believed that this did not leave them enough time to think about their own action plans in relation to contributing to the team goals. The matter was subsequently brought up at the staff meeting where we discussed when and how the team's prematch preparation could be improved.

Given the fast pace of international tournaments and the urgency to address issues that could impact

performance, I was very direct in my approach to feeding back player thoughts to the coaches and support staff. Although this approach was outside my comfort zone with regard to communicating with others, I understood the need in this environment to be action-orientated, direct, and performance-focused. Therefore, to ensure efficiency and help speed up decision-making, I prepared for the staff meeting and arrived with a suggestion as to how we might change things to meet players' needs. I recommended allocating time in the team meeting the night before games to discuss team goals, leaving time afterward for players to reflect and link to their own game plans before game day arrived. Coaches and players agreed this may help solve the problem, and we piloted the idea the following night.

Informal Communications

My observations then facilitated follow-up informal communications with players, enabling me to further solidify existing relationships and build enhanced understanding of individual player needs (cf. Fifer, Henschen, Gould, & Ravizza, 2008). Creating opportunities for one-on-one time with players was difficult due to the tight time schedule set by the organizers. There was a time slot for everything—from arrival to departure times, warm-up to game times, and eating to laundry times—and the rule was that if you missed your slot, you missed out. Despite reducing the formality of gathering information, the risk of misunderstanding the players' idiosyncrasies was counteracted by the amount of time spent observing players on and off the pitch. These brief communications were often when the team was in transit between venues, in the common room, during physiotherapy treatment, or in the team's meeting room. Although essentially part of my assessment procedure, the conversations often (unintentionally) acted as brief interventions themselves (cf. Giges & Petitpas, 2000). That is, occasionally players simply needed to get things off their chest, vent to someone, or have a sounding board to bounce their thoughts off. In addition, the conversations could also spark new insights for players through the use of stimulating questions, and the challenges posed toward their current thinking, perspectives, or assumptions. In line with the humanistic and solution-focused approach, players were encouraged to take lead in these conversations, and urged to seek out their own solutions.

In this support work, informal communications became a means of talking with the players about their psychological game day requirements with minimal

intrusion and interruption. This was achieved through encouraging players to reminisce over their preparation leading up to the World Cup. We also talked about what was going to be required pregame for them to be in the best position possible (i.e., before picking up a stick or beginning the warm-up, what needed to be achieved?). These conversations indicated the importance of creating a positive and confident mindset for players before each game. Players often spoke about the work, effort, and sacrifices they made to get to the World Cup and how by being reminded of this could reinforce the belief that the team deserved to be there. Furthermore, as the championship progressed, many of the players spoke about how intense and draining it was simply being at a World Cup, in that most conversations were about one thing: lacrosse.

Case Formulation

To delineate the main areas of support required by the team, we made reference to the framework offered by Birrer, Wetzel, Schmid, and Morgan (2012). They categorized four intervention-issue dimensions: (1) general performance issues; (2) specific event performance issues; (3) organizational issues; and (4) personal issues—for sport psychology support at major championships. Although categorization systems have been criticized due to their generalizing properties, most of the intervention decisions were based on commonalities that manifested at a team level. By accepting the complex, uncertain, and unpredictable nature of professional practice, we were able to develop new strategies extending beyond traditional mental skills (Winter & Collins, 2015). Given the athlete-centered philosophical approach I was pursuing, I was deliberately seeking to avoid falling back to my 'default' usage of more structured and familiar methods. There were times, however, where it seemed appropriate to adopt recognized techniques both at the team (general performance issues) and individual (personal performance issues) levels. The following text aims to navigate the reader through several key decisions made in this case study, based on the documented needs analysis and guiding case formulation framework.

World championship events generate increased demands, both physically and mentally, for those who compete in them (Fifer et al., 2008). In this case study, the primary goal was performance-related, which in turn fell within Birrer and colleagues' (2012) taxonomy under general performance issues. This category of service delivery describes the development of skills likely to

facilitate team performance in relation to self-regulation, pre-event mental preparation, expectations, and goal issues. Skills such as team goal-setting and reflection were chosen to target the observed lack of organization and poor game focus/goals, and to help players to achieve a positive and confident mindset. These target areas were decided following the development of specific knowledge and contextual intelligence (Winter & Collins, 2015) of the World Cup environment and the players on the team. In the preliminary warm-up games, the team's performances were inconsistent. The coaches emphasized the need for consistently strong performances if the team were to progress through the tournament. In pursuit of achieving greater consistency when it mattered, establishing a routine (Fifer et al., 2008), engaging in team reflections (Yukelson, 2001), setting team goals (Widmeyer & Ducharme, 1997), and using videos to create successful mindsets (Rymal, Martini, & Ste-Marie, 2010) have been recommended.

In addition, it became clear that we needed to manage the pressures created by being at the World Cup. Observations and informal chats suggested that off-field personal issues were negatively affecting some players. In response, opportunities for individual sessions, where players could discuss both lacrosse and nonlacrosse topics, were created. Retrospectively, this linked with the conception made by Birrer et al. (2012) that athletes use sport psychology services for reasons that exceed performance issues. Similarly, in the multileveled classification system for sport psychologists (MCS-SP), Gardner and Moore (2004) highlighted the need to support athletes' emotional functioning and acknowledge the interpersonal and intrapersonal challenges they are faced with. More recently, Terry and Si (2015) depicted social and interpersonal occurrences at major championships to significantly impact players' emotional equilibrium, which, in turn, had the potential to impact performance outcomes. These frustrations and intense challenges were considered (by practitioner and supervisor) to most accurately fit within the personal and organizational categories (Birrer et al., 2012). From the perspective on individual players, performance improvement was a secondary goal, with psychological counseling appearing to be the most appropriate primary intervention choice. Providing players with an opportunity to offload, vent, and have 'someone to talk to' throughout the championship was considered important to humanize the experience. That is, this service provision ensured support for the players as people, as well as performers.

Intervention Strategies

Creating Structure and Routine

The importance of players having consistent routines was established before World Cup games began. The principal of helping players get into a normal routine assists them in coping more effectively and staying as relaxed as possible during such an exciting, prestigious event (Arnold & Sarkar, 2015). For the players on this team, creating pre-performance routines meant trying to establish familiarity with the World Cup environment and providing structure and organization for game days. To assist with this, the first action involved arranging a tour of the stadium and pitches where the games would be played. Fifer et al. (2008) recommended this as a useful technique at a major event, including acclimatizing players to the competition venue, warm-up pitches, changing/restrooms rooms, and playing fields. Following the tour and during the team meeting that night, players reported the benefit of being able to visit the venue, locating key places, and feeling more comfortable ahead of their first game. They also fed back how visiting the venue and seeing the pitches gave them a buzz of excitement ahead of the championship starting: "Seeing it all made it very real and got the adrenaline pumping... but mainly it put a lot of us at ease by seeing it before the first game to help us get our bearings...knowing where the loos are is always a team priority."

In conjunction with creating familiarity, another important issue to address was the lack of organization on game days. Before the World Cup, I learned that the players responded well to having a schedule. From pre-World Cup squad residential weekends, giving players the plan facilitated their organization and eased the pressure for players who liked to be 'in the know' with what was going on. Observations of pre-World Cup games suggested that the lack of structure and routine was causing players to be unsettled and created a disorganized appearance. Therefore, to help create structure, each night a schedule was drawn up for the following day. Each schedule highlighted meeting, departure, and arrival times for the day ahead. Coaches and captains also helped to develop a structure for team meetings, consisting of a review of the day, video analysis/scouting report of the next game, agreement on team goals, and ending with a pregame video clip (further detail on each is provided in the following sections). I also highlighted to coaches that it was important that all game preparation was consistent, and that no opposition team be awarded special attention (cf. Redwood-Brown, Bussell, & Bharaj, 2012).

Team Reflections and Mutual Sharing

Reviewing the day from a performance perspective was imperative for both coaches and players. Coaches' communication and feedback was highly sought after by the players, thus they would always start the meeting by each giving their reflections (Loughead, Hardy, & Eys, 2006). Coaches would then open the discussion, allowing players the opportunity to feedback to each other and reciprocally share their thoughts, feelings, and ideas. A personal-disclosure mutual sharing (PDMS) approach enabled athletes to understand their own and their team's needs, roles, views, and values. The team appreciated having a voice and sharing their thoughts and feelings. It was therefore encouraged as a form of reflection-on-action, which was reported to assist players in making sense of difficult and complex situations through creating links between their knowledge and experiences (Cromptley, Hanton, Miles, & Niven, 2010). However, adopting a PDMS approach with a group of individuals with strong views and diverse opinions was challenging. There was often a battle for 'air-time' between the players, with everyone wanting to be heard. This was very challenging for me to manage, given that I did not want to come across like the 'class teacher' telling people to 'hush' and 'one person at a time to speak'. These were grown women with opinions and feedback they wanted to voice. Off the back of what can only be described as a disastrous first attempt, I requested players to discuss as a small group first, and nominate one group member to feedback on the group's collective discussion points. This strategy proved far more effective and facilitated a much smoother and calmer team meeting.

Team Goal Setting

Following from the discussions in the team reflection sessions, a scouting report based on footage of the opposition was then used in preparation for the next game. Coaches would systematically run through key aspects of play that players would need to be aware of and then, as a team, coaches and players would agree on goals for the up and coming game (cf. Widmeyer & Ducharme, 1997). Involving athletes and coaches in this process made both parties active agents in developing the goals and, from an athlete perspective, contributed to increased levels of commitment (Weinberg, 2010). For each of the playing units (attack, midfield, and defense) coaches set one goal and the players in that unit set a second. All of the goals were then written up on a sheet of A2 paper, put up in the changing room before the game, and then reviewed later

in the team meeting. Game footage, statistical information (i.e., goal, shot, assist, draw control, draw possession, ground ball, save, foul etc.), and player feedback were used to review the goals.

Widmeyer and Ducharme (1997) highlighted the importance of team goals in relation to the functioning of the team and their role in minimizing the disturbances in performance at a team level. Before the World Cup, the team had received psychology workshops covering the basic principles of goal setting. The knowledge from these informed the setting of team goals, both process goals (e.g., to hold a strong and solid defensive position with arms; to attack every ground ball with force and determination) and performance goals (e.g., to win 80% of the draws; to generate 30–50 shots on target). These goals were identified from the game statistics that were given to every team following each game, as well as using information from video analysis sessions and coach–player discussions within the team meetings. Performance and process goals were specifically related to the task aspect of performance, giving players greater levels of control (i.e., both process and performance goals were linked to things the players could directly impact through their actions), as well as subsequently contributing to team outcomes by increasing their effectiveness and improving their playing conditions (Paradis & Martin, 2012).

Pregame Videos

Before the World Cup, pregame video clips for each match were created using previous game and training footage, still images of player action shots, and music from the team's play list (Tracey, 2011). The clips were specifically designed to strengthen and maintain players' confidence for the up and coming games, and thus the content was underpinned by Vealey, Hayashi, Garner-Holman, and Giacobbi's (1998) integrated model of sport confidence, specifically targeting the sources of self-confidence. Video clips showed either individual athletes or the team mastering skills (e.g., the center draw, checks, dodging, goals); demonstrating their ability (and superiority) over their opposition (e.g., winning games); appearing physically and mentally ready (e.g., positive body language); and looking in sound physical shape (e.g., demonstration of speed, strength, and conditioning). The videos also included motivational statements in writing and in song lyrics (verbal persuasion); illustrations of the team's resilience and strength when faced with unfavorable playing conditions (situational favorableness and environmental comfort); the team values; and the

off-pitch strength and closeness of the squad. Previous research has highlighted the use of video as a tool to enhance athletes' success (Rymal et al., 2010).

Off-Pitch Support

My support at a one-to-one level differed from any of my previous consultancy experiences, with players more often than not wanting to discuss nonperformance-related issues (e.g., missing family, rooming issues, life after the World Cup). I was therefore required to see the athlete as a person outside of their sporting role (Friesen & Orlick, 2010). An example of this service delivery was when a player revealed how the intensity and focus on lacrosse was becoming draining. I was immediately able to empathize with the player in regard to the intensity of the trip, as it was something I also had inadequately prepared for. Following my own reflection, I realized I had been naïve to the working hours and demand for support that would be required by a team at a major championship. Despite experiencing empathy for the player, I was consciously aware of not wanting to blur the professional boundaries with this player and I attempted to keep our working relationship at the forefront of our discussions. Arnold and Sarkar (2015) conveyed the importance of retaining your professional identity to maintain credibility with the team you work with. I was not a friend or teammate; thus to prevent any confusion, my degree of self-disclosure and authenticity was kept to a minimum, keeping the conversation centered on the athlete.

This one-to-one consultancy drew on the counseling skills I had developed during my master's degree, including active listening and being supportive, sensitive, and understanding (Woolfe et al., 2003). Arnold and Sarkar (2015) reported developing one's skills and delivery as a practitioner through additional qualifications, training, and reading. Nevertheless, I could not help but feel a lack of confidence around this type of consultancy. This experience then stimulated discussions with my supervisor after the World Cup, during which it was recommended that I enroll in a professional counseling course (advanced counselor and psychotherapist level 4). This decision has been invaluable to my consultancy, boosting my confidence and ability to provide more client-centered support to the athletes I work with beyond performance enhancement.

Evaluation of Interventions

It was important to evaluate the extent to which each of the intervention approaches impacted the core aims of

maintaining a robust, cohesive unit throughout the World Cup. Previous intervention researchers have employed social validation procedures to determine participant satisfaction with the intervention they received (Page & Thelwell, 2013). Social validation data helps us to understand, evaluate, and document the impact the intervention has had on participants and their performance, as well as assisting applied researchers to document the effectiveness of their work (Anderson, Miles, Mahoney, & Robinson, 2004).

Social validation methods used in this case study were player feedback forms (amended from the Consultant Evaluation Form [CEF]; Partington & Orlick, 1987), coach feedback meetings, and my own personal reflections. Triangulating these evaluation methods allowed me to cross-reference client feedback and evaluation scores with my own personal reflections, establishing a more accurate view of my effectiveness in my role. Overall, given this was my first major tournament traveling with an international team, I feel confident in saying that, although I have a lot to develop in regard to my professional practice, the service provision I provided can be deemed effective. In that, the core aims set out for me by the coaches and captains of the squad were successfully accomplished. The discussions below outline specific evaluation content in further detail.

To help establish greater familiarity with the World Cup environment and provide better structure and organization on game days, tours of the venue and more structured game day routines were developed. Allocating time for familiarization was helpful in soothing the rollercoaster of emotions being experienced. As one player reported: "I was all over the place, I didn't know what I was...excited, nervous, terrified. But just having the opportunity to have a wander around was kind of soothing for whatever it was I was feeling." The tour of the venue also helped start conversations about players' thoughts and feelings about the upcoming tournament. "As we walked around I remember just thinking out aloud to the girls and that response of '...yeah me too' was so comforting", reflected one of the players. Through informally sharing what they were thinking, players were able to normalize their experiences by hearing the similarities they had with others in the group.

The game day schedules were rated as 5/5 (helped a lot) on the CEFs. Coaches fed back that this process facilitated player accountability for being where they needed to be when they needed to be there. While the meeting content was rated as 'helping a lot', there were

also areas we could improve. For example: “They just went on too long. After playing in the heat you were already tired. I sometimes struggled to take everything in”; and “It was just too much to take in...I don’t have a better solution as to when or how we do this but it was like information overload!” Nonetheless, players did like the consistency of what was discussed: “The meetings were great and I loved that no team got special attention, we went through the same structure each time, in the past some teams always got that little bit more.” Moving forward with practices like this, it could be useful to get feedback on processes in-action to be able to make necessary adjustments. Leaving the evaluation of one’s service provision until the end of the intervention could prevent opportunities to be effective when it matters most (at the tournament). Although my aims and remit were well-met, delivery of the strategies could have been improved to work better for the players.

Setting up the team reflections and mutual sharing was designed to help the players understand their own and their team’s needs, roles, views, and values. From my reflections, this was one of the most challenging intervention strategies to manage once it was under way. Given the number of players who contributed and the depth and detail that was discussed, this often resulted in the length of the team meeting extending substantially. I found it difficult to manage these discussions, or to know when it was appropriate to stop coaches and/or players. Although it was important that the team members were given the opportunity to reflect and share their experiences, discussions were often dominated and/or dictated by the more vocal members of the team. Again, I found it difficult to get multiple views, especially from the players. Upon reflection, I could have facilitated these sessions better by explicitly offering quieter players the opportunity to speak, rather than opening it up to the floor. Having the confidence to take more of a leading organizational role in team reflection sessions is something I will endeavor to develop as my applied experience continues.

The team goal setting intervention was aimed at facilitating the functioning of the team and minimizing the disturbances in performance by ensuring clarity of what the players had to do on the field. This process was familiar to the players and the staff as I had introduced it earlier in the year when out on our prechampionship tour. Feedback from the players scored an average rating of 3.9/5, and some of the qualitative comments were informative. Specifically, players wanted additional support/guidance on individual goals: “the unit goals were useful

but I still needed more on my individual specific goals in each game...this would have allowed me to assess if I’d done my job successfully”; “I knew what my role was generally but would have loved to be given something specific from coaches each game”; and “...I know individual meetings before every game are not possible...but could we have had individual goal info on a little note or in a text on top of the team goals?” Reviewing the goals in the team meeting was made easier by having access to game footage and statistics, enabling coaches to highlight ‘hard evidence’ of examples of goal achievements. The same procedures were employed when goals were not achieved, and discussions revolved around what would be done differently next time to achieve the desired result.

The pregame videos were designed to strengthen and maintain players’ confidence for the upcoming games. Before showing the players, they were always piloted with the coaching and support staff beforehand. The feedback was invariably very positive, highlighting how personal they were to the team but also the relevance they had to each opponent we played. A personal reflection on producing these videos was that they were very well received and appreciated, which was positive feedback for the invested effort (which I had severely underestimated). I am sure, if the guidance and help of an analyst had been available, the videos could have been produced in half the time and much more professionally. Unfortunately, that was not the case and I was ‘learning on job’. Although I would definitely use pregame videos again, factoring in the resource of time that has to go into producing them would be something I would have to seriously consider. The responses from players’ feedback were very positive. The average Likert rating was 5/5 and the comments indicated that the purpose—boosting confidence—was achieved: “always left the meetings feeling really positive”; “it’s always good to see yourself performing/competing against who you would have on the field the next day”; and “hard evidence that WE COULD do it!” Players also fed back on the motivational benefits the videos had: “loved the quotes...powerful words” and “the songs were off our team playlist, and everything was so ‘us’, it gave you a real buzz”.

The initial purpose of the one-to-one support was not specified other than to meet the needs of players who requested them. The CEF was modified to include questions around each of the intervention strategies used. It specifically asked: “How effective were the 1–2-1 sessions you had during your time away at the World Cup?” Each question had an 11-point Likert rating scale

(5 helped a lot, 0 did not help at all, and -5 hindered/interfered) as well as a box for additional comments (for which players were encouraged to write in). Out of the 13 players who had one-to-one sessions across the course of the championship, an average rating of 4.07 was given. Comments from players included: "...they helped me off load things I didn't feel comfortable speaking to the team or coaches about"; "...it was good to have someone to talk to about non-lacrosse stuff"; and "...sometimes I just needed to vent and these meetings allowed me to do that...I didn't need any answers or even for anyone to talk back. I just needed someone to be there and listen." My practitioner reflections frequently alluded to feeling like I was not actually doing anything in these one-to-ones. Initially and instinctively, I found myself trying to make a performance link to feel I had given the players something to go away with. Very quickly, however, it became apparent that to be effective, helpful, and successful in this support I needed to listen and empathize. My learning from this consulting has developed the beliefs that you need to have solid people skills (genuine, approachable, empathetic), be able to build trusting working relationships (knowing the fine line between being able to have 'banter' and operating professionally), and be comfortable not necessarily offering tangible solutions or strategies.

Further Reflections and Discussion

This was my first experience of working with elite senior women as well as my first time traveling with a team to a major championship. Without detracting from the positive contribution this had on my learning, development, and practice, it was the most challenging applied work thus far in my career. At times, I felt both mentally and physically drained, which is not an advisable state for practitioners to consult in, but a reflection of working in high-performance sport. I was tired and emotional. Physically, things seemed to demand far more energy than usual. At times my body seemed to be in slow motion mode. Waumsley, Hemmings, and Payne (2010) highlighted fatigue as a common occurrence at major competitions due to the intensity of applied work required. In their interviews with sport psychologists attending Olympic events, Arnold and Sarkar (2015) also highlighted the importance of taking care of yourself at a major championship. They argued that practitioner fatigue can undermine the quality of work that you do and result in burnout.

Despite the inclusion of 'downtime' in the schedule, I still found it difficult to fully switch off my 'professional face' and switch on my 'personal-face'. Downtime often included players and staff being in the communal lounge, which definitely had more of a social rather than performance atmosphere. However, I still felt that my presence in there was always purposeful, in regard to simply being around the players and appearing physically visible should any of them wish to grab me for a one-to-one. This may have well been due to this being my first major sporting event with a team and not really understanding how and when to switch off my professional role. The intensity of my World Cup experience was something I subsequently reflected on with my applied practice support group. This group consisted of qualified practitioners and their supervisees who were all completing their BASES Supervised Experience or British Psychological Society Stage two training.

Sharing experiences and having a consultant support network is something that has been widely recommended within professional practice literature, with practitioners of all levels advised to identify their 'go to' people for advice and guidance (Tod & Bond, 2010). Engaging in this reflection session enabled me to voice the difficulties I faced at the World Cup and release the emotion I had experienced around these difficulties. In addition, I was able to share the decisions I made in regard to my intervention choices and receive feedback on these from my supervisor and other training practitioners. Having a mentor gives you someone to talk to and someone who, at times, is able to put things into perspective. For other early career practitioners, I would highly recommend becoming part of or setting up a professional practice group (with your supervisor, other supervisors, and supervisees) that meets once a month to discuss practice, research, and continued professional development (CPD) type activities.

One of my biggest take home messages from the World Cup was that knowledge base alone does not determine effectiveness. It is the ability to use that knowledge, through showing creativity, that will enhance levels of professional practice and display expertise (Martindale & Collins, 2013). That is, given the complex dynamics of working in the world of sport and the fact that athlete well-being is becoming an expanding area of sport psychology service provision, sport psychologists may need to think outside the box in relation to their support strategies (Collins, Evans-Jones, & O'Connor, 2013). Being in a situation that forced me to do this has developed both my confidence and creativity in the strategies I use

with clients. Learning to trust my judgment and intuition through realizing that I had to believe in what I was doing before I could expect the players to (Ravizza, 2002) unquestionably assisted my effectiveness. To be clear, though, this judgment and intuition was simply natural and inborn. In line with Martindale and Collins (2013), my professional judgment was trained and developed through regular reflective practice, supervision meetings, and accumulation of diverse experiences. Furthermore, accepting that my professional judgment would enhance through my successes and failures was also important for me to accept.

Adopting new techniques aligned with a brief solution-focused approach (Giges & Petitpas, 2000) enabled me to meet the needs of the client and demands of the sport to ensure effective service provision (Waumsley et al., 2010). Kleinert et al. (2012) highlighted the need to acknowledge the difference in the role of a sport psychologist when working with senior teams, which required greater emphasis on optimizing interpersonal skills, renationalizing perceptions, and looking at social structures and behaviors. This was particularly pertinent advice given that much of my applied work outside of lacrosse was with youth athletes where the focus was on education and foundational development of psychological skills. More often than not with this squad, simply asking a thought provoking question and providing key points to remember was all the athletes needed (Fifer et al., 2008), given their enhanced levels of self-awareness and intelligence. Working with such high-level performers also taught me a valuable lesson in the importance of using the athletes' experience and knowledge to facilitate solutions to their presenting issues.

The Birrer et al. (2012) framework facilitated the development of a case formulation to decide upon the intervention goals, strategies, and techniques employed. In spite of this, given the context of this applied work being focused on support at a major championship, the case formulation was not as developed as it might otherwise have been. That is, there was little use in conducting a pre-World Cup needs analysis and trying to preempt events that might occur at the World Cup, as the dynamic and somewhat volatile environment of high-performance sport is unpredictable. This, therefore, supported the necessity of factoring the environment into the case formulation procedures (Jones, Gittins, & Hardy, 2009). Thus, this case study was conceptualized once the team had arrived at the World Cup, which potentially meant reduced time for more thorough formulation procedures.

Nonetheless, the case formulation undertaken was supplemented by the work done with the team 9 months before the World Cup, as well as the use of ongoing assessment throughout the championship. If more time had been available, the case formulation could have been extended through consideration of other models and approaches (e.g., Collins & Cruickshank, 2015; Gardner & Moore, 2004; Jones et al., 2009). This detailed analysis would have provided a comprehensive evaluation of the athletes' needs, ensuring the most appropriate type and level of service was delivered. In addition, it would have given great clarity and transparency in bridging the gap from the needs analysis to the intervention strategies used.

As a final point from my lacrosse World Cup journey, it remains imperative to remember that each consulting experience has a life of its own. That is, each program delivered must be tailored specifically to the needs of that group (Kleinert et al., 2012). Thus, it is important to acknowledge that there is a career-long need to continuously develop skills and levels of creativity as a sport psychology practitioner (Fifer et al., 2008).

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