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12   Understanding Team Resilience in the World's Best Athletes:

13   A Case Study of a Rugby Union World Cup Winning Team

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1   Abstract

2   *Objective:* Although team resilience research has identified the characteristics of elite sport

3   teams that positively adapt to adversity, further research is required to understand how

4   resilient teams function. The objective of this study, therefore, was to explore the

5   psychosocial processes underpinning team resilience in elite sport.

6   *Design and Method:* Narrative inquiry was employed to better understand team resilience.

7   The sample consisted of eight members of the 2003 England rugby union World Cup winning

8   team. The autobiographies of these team members were analysed using three types of

9   narrative analyses: holistic-content analysis, holistic-form analysis, and categorical-form

10   analysis.

11   *Results:* Findings revealed five main psychosocial processes underpinning team resilience:

12   transformational leadership, shared team leadership, team learning, social identity, and

13   positive emotions. An examination of narrative structure within the autobiographies revealed

14   a progressive narrative form characterized by a collective positive evaluation of setbacks.

15   *Conclusions:* This study extends previous team resilience research by going beyond the

16   identification of resilient characteristics to explaining underpinning psychosocial processes.

17   The team resilience processes are discussed in relation to previous research findings and in

18   terms of their implications for practising sport psychologists. It is anticipated that this study

19   will provide practitioners with a framework to develop team resilience at the highest levels of

20   sport.

21   *Keywords:* autobiographies, elite sport, excellence, group, narrative, psychosocial processes.

1   Understanding Team Resilience in the World's Best Athletes:

2   A Case Study of a Rugby Union World Cup Winning Team

3   Psychological resilience represents an important phenomenon that explains the

4   development of people who positively adapt to adverse events. Fletcher and Sarkar recently

5   defined psychological resilience as "the role of mental processes and behavior in promoting

6   personal assets and protecting an individual from the potential negative effect of stressors"

7   (2012, p 675; 2013, p. 16). In the context of the present study, resilience is required in

8   response to both adversity, defined as ". . . negative life circumstances that are known to be

9   statistically associated with adjustment difficulties" (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000, p. 858), and

10 stressors, defined as "the environmental demands (i.e., stimuli) encountered by an individual"

11 (Fletcher, Hanton, & Mellalieu, 2006, p. 359).

12   The ability of individuals and teams to withstand stressors is a prerequisite for

13 sporting excellence (Hardy, Jones, & Gould, 1996) and for this reason sport psychology

14 researchers have begun to investigate resilience in competitive athletes (see e.g., Fletcher &

15 Sarkar, 2012; Galli & Vealey, 2008; Gucciardi, Jackson, Coulter, & Mallett, 2011). In 2008,

16 Galli and Vealey explored individual athletes' perceptions and experiences of resilience. The

17 athletes reported that positive adaptation occurred gradually and often required numerous

18 shifts of thought. Moreover, the findings indicated that the resilience process (described as

19 'agitation' by the authors) operated over time and involved a variety of factors including

20 personal resources and sociocultural influences. More recently, Fletcher and Sarkar (2012)

21 interviewed twelve Olympic champions to explore and explain the relationship between

22 psychological resilience and optimal sport performance. The findings revealed that numerous

23 psychological factors (relating to a positive personality, motivation, confidence, focus, and

24 perceived social support) protected the world's best athletes from the potential negative effect

25 of stressors by influencing their challenge appraisal and meta-cognitions. These processes

1   promoted facilitative responses that preceded optimal sport performance. Resilience studies

2   in sport have tended to focus on individual resilience and, therefore, further research is

3   needed to better understand resilience at a group level.

4   Resilience researchers, in various subdisciplines of psychology, have lately turned

5   their focus to the group level (e.g., Carmeli, Friedman, & Tischler, 2013; Stephens, Heaphy,

6   Carmeli, Spreitzer, & Dutton, 2013). Within the sport psychology literature, Morgan,

7   Fletcher, and Sarkar (2013) conducted the first study of team resilience in sport. Employing

8   focus groups with members of five elite sport teams, a definition of team resilience was

9   developed and the resilient characteristics of elite sport teams were identified. Specifically,

10   team resilience was defined as a "dynamic, psychosocial process which protects a group of

11   individuals from the potential negative effect of the stressors they collectively encounter. It

12   comprises of processes whereby team members use their individual and collective resources

13   to positively adapt when experiencing adversity" (p. 552). Team resilience was described as a

14   dynamic phenomenon with participants stating that it was "dependent upon what time of

15   season it is" or "whether there is an injury in the team". In terms of its protective function, the

16   participants described team resilience as akin to "having a barrier round you" and "having a

17   thick skin". Furthermore, the participants emphasized that team resilience involved a shared

18   experience of stressors (e.g., team disruptions, low team morale) and this was revealed

19   through comments such as "we have been through so many setbacks together". Four resilient

20   characteristics of elite sport teams emerged from this study: group structure (i.e., conventions

21   that shape group norms and values), mastery approaches (i.e., shared attitudes and behaviors

22   that promote an emphasis on team improvement), social capital (i.e., the existence of high

23   quality interactions and caring relationships within the team), and collective efficacy (i.e., the

24   team's shared beliefs in its ability to perform a task).

25   Within the organizational psychology literature, group resilience has been conceived

1   as a dynamic process involving continuous anticipation and adjustment during challenging

2   conditions (see, e.g., Gittell, Cameron, Lim, & Rivas, 2006; Lengnick-Hall, Beck, &

3   Lengnick-Hall, 2011). Key psychosocial processes facilitate the ability of groups to

4   positively adapt to adversity. To illustrate, leadership processes have been to found to enable

5   pioneering non-profit organizations to survive and thrive over time (see Kimberlin, Schwartz,

6   & Austin, 2011). Specifically, these processes consisted of effective individual leadership,

7   entrepreneurial flexibility, and calculated risk-taking. Furthermore, connectivity to group

8   members has been identified as an important relational mechanism that allows top

9   management teams (TMTs) to respond innovatively to continuously changing environmental

10 demands (see Carmeli et al., 2013). Relational features of resilience have also been explored

11 in TMTs through a focus on emotional carrying capacity (ECC), a relationship's capacity to

12 express emotions constructively (cf. Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). For example, Stephens et al.

13 (2013) found that ECC mediated the relationship between trust and team resilience.

14   The recent developments in resilience research have advanced psychologists'

15 knowledge of the nature, meaning, and scope of team resilience. In the sport psychology

16 literature, Morgan et al.'s (2013) study extended resilience research by providing greater

17 definitional clarity of resilience at the team level (i.e., what team resilience is) and proposing

18 a framework to profile the resilient characteristics of elite sport teams (i.e., what resilient

19 teams 'look' like). Although such knowledge provides descriptive information about the

20 factors that enable teams to withstand stressors, these characteristics do not explain how

21 resilient teams function. Importantly, Morgan et al. described team resilience as a "dynamic,

22 psychosocial process" (p. 552), which points to operational aspects of this construct and how

23 it changes over time. They went on to argue that "due to the contextual and temporal nature

24 of team resilience, future studies should aim to identify the processes that underpin the

25 resilience characteristics" (p. 558). The objective of this study was to address this gap in our

1   understanding of team resilience. It is hoped that this research will advance knowledge in this

2   area by developing the conceptual scaffold required to build this important team-level

3   phenomenon (cf. Chan, 1998; Morgeson & Hofmann, 1999). It is also anticipated that this

4   investigation will advance practitioners' knowledge and understanding of developing

5   excellence in elite sport teams. Specifically, practitioners will be provided with a framework

6   to enhance team resilience processes at the highest levels of sport and will be offered

7   practical ideas for working with team members and staff seeking to develop excellence.

8   Indeed, Yukelson and Rose (2014) argued that better knowledge and understanding of team

9   resilience is important for developing a culture of ongoing excellence in elite sport.

10   **Method**

11   **Research Design**

12   This study was an exploratory investigation of team resilience that aimed to elicit rich

13   information and hence, qualitative methods were adopted (Silverman, 2006). Ungar (2003)

14   proposed the use of such methods to extend the knowledge base of resilience as a scientific

15   construct. Specifically, he suggested that qualitative methods offer the potential to discover

16   "unnamed protective [resilience] processes" (p. 85). To better understand team resilience

17   processes in elite sport, the present study specifically employed narrative inquiry. The

18   premise of this approach is that individuals and groups structure their experience through a

19   "constructed form or template which people rely on to tell stories" (Smith & Sparkes, 2009,

20   p. 2). This "constructed form or template" refers to the patterns contained within stories that

21   make it possible to understand the way people create meaning in their lives. Proponents of

22   narrative inquiry also assert that examining a person's stories can help explain human

23   cognitions and behavior (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). Within the context of

24   elite sport, narrative inquiry has been used to examine the lives of athletes through their own

25   stories to understand the psychosocial factors that form their experiences (see, e.g., Carless &

1   Douglas, 2013). Smith and Sparkes (2009) proposed that narrative research encourages "a

2   focus on the ways relations between people shape, enable, and constrain lives, and the

3   manner in which such sporting practices like team development . . . arise through a storied

4   process of social interaction" (p. 6). Therefore, to further our understanding of team resilience

5   processes in elite sport, narrative inquiry is an appropriate method to explore team members'

6   interpretations of meaning during challenging situations that they collectively encounter (cf.

7   Morgan et al., 2013).

8   **Sample**

9   The 2003 England rugby union World Cup winning team was selected as an

10 appropriate case for a study of team resilience since the team positively adapted to numerous

11 adversities on their journey to success. Rugby union is an interactive, dynamic collision sport

12 comprising of 15 players in a team. Competing in rugby requires the coordination of various

13 positions and roles. The sport also involves players having to change frequently between

14 offensive and defensive situations and these structural and strategic aspects place numerous

15 demands on a team's resilience. The England side was a professional team of full-time

16 athletes with the team being re-selected every year and often re-selected during each season.

17 The players were selected from club teams that competed in the professional English league.

18 The team competed in the 1999 and 2003 Rugby Union World Cups, and participated

19 annually in a competition called the Six Nations (previously the Five Nations) involving six

20 European sides: England, France, Ireland, Italy, Scotland, and Wales. During the period in

21 question, England won the Six Nations in 2000, 2001, and 2003.

22   The sample consisted of eight members from the team, namely Clive Woodward

23 (Head Coach from 1997 to 2004), Martin Johnson (1993-2003, 84 England caps and Captain

24 from 1999), Lawrence Dallaglio (1995-2007, 85 England caps and Captain from 1997-1999),

25 Matt Dawson (1995-2006, 77 England caps and occasional captain during this period), Will

1   Greenwood (1997-2004, 55 England caps), Richard Hill (1997-2008, 71 England caps), Jason

2   Leonard (1990-2004, 114 England caps, and a record for the highest number of England

3   rugby union appearances), and Jonny Wilkinson (1998-2011, 91 England caps which is the

4   second highest number of England rugby union appearances; he is also currently the second

5   highest points scorer in international rugby union history). Each of the players were active

6   members of the team for all three phases under investigation in this study (1997/1998 to

7   1999/2000, 2000/2001 to 2001/2002, & 2002/2003 to 2003/2004). The seven players (i.e.,

8   excluding Clive Woodward) collectively attained 577 international England caps ($M = 82.2$,

9    $SD = 18.2$) with an average of 11.1 years' playing experience at international level. Clive

10   Woodward achieved 21 England caps as a player between 1980 and 1984 and in 1997, he

11   became England rugby's first full-time professional head coach following coaching roles at

12   various English clubs and England under 21's.

13   **Data Collection**

14   Team resilience was explored through the examination of eight published

15   autobiographies, one autobiography for each member of the sample (viz. Dallaglio, 2008;

16   Dawson, 2004; Greenwood, 2005; Hill, 2006; Johnson, 2004; Leonard, 2004; Wilkinson,

17   2006; Woodward, 2004). Autobiographies are documents that constitute descriptions of an

18   individual's life and typically provide rich information about psychosocial-related

19   phenomena (Plummer, 2001; Smith & Watson, 2001). As naturalistic life stories,

20   autobiographies provide insights into deep expressions of experience that offer researchers

21   and social scientists "a wonderful source for analysis" (Plummer, 2001, p. 28). To date, only

22   three studies within the sport literature have used autobiographies as a resource for analysis

23   (see Butryn & Masucci, 2003; Sparkes, 2004; Stewart, Smith, & Sparkes, 2011). Indeed,

24   Stewart et al. (2011) observed that "despite providing a potentially rich source of data within

25   the field of sports-related studies, published autobiographies have, to date, been a neglected

1   resource" (p. 582). Since autobiographies are intrinsically social by nature (Bjorkland, 1998),

2   they were considered to be an appropriate resource to shed light on the personal and shared

3   understandings of team resilience processes.

4   **Data Analysis**

5   Data from the autobiographies were analyzed using three types of narrative analyses:

6   holistic-content analysis, holistic-form (structural) analysis, and categorical-form analysis

7   (Lieblich et al., 1998; Riessman, 2008). Holistic-content analysis focused on the content of

8   the autobiographies to reveal the psychosocial processes underlying team resilience during

9   the course of the team's journey. In accordance with Lieblich et al. (1998), each

10   autobiography was read several times to initially form a general impression of the text and to

11   subsequently identify patterns and to enable the generation of central themes that captured

12   team resilience processes. These central themes were identified throughout the story, and

13   notes were made about when and where the themes appeared to provide an insight into

14   interpretations of the story (Lieblich et al., 1998).

15   Holistic-form analysis involved assessing the formal structure of the narrative

16   contained within each autobiography to reveal participants' perceptions and meaning of team

17   resilience processes (cf. Lieblich et al., 1998). Riessman (2008) proposed that this type of

18   analysis "allows topics and voices to be included in qualitative research that might be missing

19   otherwise" (p. 80). The holistic-form analysis employed in the present study involved

20   analyzing the temporal order of the stories (i.e., the sequence and progression of events) to

21   reveal the critical "turning points" (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p.71) and mechanisms that

22   enabled the team to positively adapt during challenging situations. Interestingly, Coffey and

23   Atkinson (1996) suggested that "how the chronicle is told and how it is structured can . . .

24   provide information about the perspectives of the individual in relation to the wider social

25   grouping . . . to which that individual belongs" (p. 68). This analysis specifically involved an

1   assessment of progression narratives by plotting team resilience processes over time. Gergen

2   and Gergen (1986) described progression narratives as either progressive (i.e., the story

3   advances steadily), regressive (i.e., there is a course of decline), or stable (i.e., the plot is

4   steady).

5   Finally, categorical-form analysis involved assessing the metaphorical imagery that

6   supported the interpretation of the psychosocial context of team resilience (cf. Lieblich et al.,

7   1998). The meaning of resilience revealed through metaphor was examined through a

8   consideration of what the storyteller was trying to convey through the use of metaphor (cf.

9   Stewart et al., 2011). For all three types of analysis, a systematic approach was achieved

10   using Crossley's (2000) narrative research protocols. To illustrate, the first author carried out

11   the analysis using a structured framework comprising key sections such as the temporal phase

12   (e.g., life chapters), key events, progression narrative, significant people, and metaphorical

13   imagery.

14   **Methodological Quality**

15   The quality of the methodological approach was evaluated using four main criteria.

16   Firstly, purposive sampling was used in this study (cf. Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003) which

17   is often employed in narrative research to yield rich, relevant sources of information and

18   insights about a particular phenomenon (Riessman, 2008). Since this investigation involved a

19   case study of team resilience, a team was selected based on their ability to positively adapt to

20   adversity. In terms of positive adaptation, the team achieved the highest accolade in

21   professional rugby union, namely winning the Rugby World Cup. The team also consisted of

22   some of the world's best athletes in the sport. Importantly for resilience research, all of the

23   participants had also experienced (individual and collective) adversity during the period

24   under investigation. Examples of individual adversity included the death of close relatives

25   (e.g., Woodward, Greenwood), the death of a club team-mate (e.g., Leonard), and career

1   threatening injuries (e.g., Dawson, Wilkinson, Hill). Challenging situations that the team

2   collectively encountered included a player-led strike, significant defeats in major

3   international competitions, and various controversies resulting in Lawrence Dallaglio

4   resigning as captain. Secondly, the quality of the study was enhanced through the use of

5   consensual validation which is an important aspect of assessing narrative inquiry (Lieblich et

6   al., 1998). During the analysis, regular meetings were held with two 'critical friends', namely

7   the co-authors of this study, who were familiar with resilience research and narrative

8   analysis. Emerging findings were regularly presented to these peers to assist with

9   interpretations and to encourage a reflective approach (Sparkes & Partington, 2003). Thirdly,

10   the quality of this study was achieved through the development of "width and comprehensive

11   evidence" (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 173). Specifically, this investigation formed a relevant

12   case-study of resilience within the context of elite team sport with numerous quotations and

13   thick description provided for the reader's judgment. Fourthly, narrative research was partly

14   employed to offer readers a "pragmatic use" (Riessmann, 2008, p. 193). Indeed, the present

15   study is considered to be practically significant (cf. Tracy, 2010) for athletes, coaches and

16   support staff operating in elite sport.

17   **Results**

18   The results, representing the findings from the narrative analysis of the eight

19   autobiographies, present the psychosocial processes underlying team resilience in the 2003

20   England rugby union World Cup winning team. To illustrate the dynamic and temporal

21   nature of team resilience, the results are presented across three phases of the team's seven-

22   season history: early phase (1997/8 to 1999/2000), middle phase (2000/2001 to 2001/2002),

23   and later phase (2002/2003 to 2003/2004). The holistic content analysis yielded 40 initial

24   themes and five main team resilience processes: transformational leadership, shared team

25   leadership, team learning, social identity, and positive emotions. The holistic-form analysis

1   revealed a progressive narrative structure (cf. Gergen & Gergen, 1986). Specifically, the

2   findings illustrated collective positive evaluations from team members of setbacks, and a

3   desire to make forward progress to achieve the team's goals despite encountering numerous

4   stressors.

5   **Early Team Resilience Phase**

6   During the early phase, the Head Coach used a variety of inspirational methods to

7   positively influence the motivation, morale, and performance of team members. These

8   transformational leadership processes were specifically revealed through Clive Woodward's

9   strategic planning, by being "brave enough to think longer term" (Dallaglio, 2008, p. 209)

10   when faced with significant team disruption while preparing for a challenging overseas tour

11   in 1998, developing a collective vision and philosophy, and managing change effectively.

12   Illustrating the transformational aspects of Woodward's leadership, Matt Dawson highlighted

13   the "ambition Clive had for England . . . Here, I thought, was a man unafraid to speak his

14   mind" (p. 89). Woodward's development of the team's vision "challenged the norm" (Hill,

15   2006, p. 129) and, despite the team's 1999 Rugby World Cup failure, players recognized the

16   importance of Woodward's vision and the "much-needed changes being made" since they

17   believed that "before long, they would start to bear fruit" (Johnson, 2003, p. 156). Indeed, his

18   transformational leadership ensured that "everyone's noses pointed in the right direction"

19   (Woodward, 2004, p. 256). During challenging situations, such as the loss of a 'Grand Slam'

20   decider (i.e., playing the last game of the Six Nations tournament to finish undefeated), the

21   Head Coach helped players to make sense of setbacks by encouraging them to reflect on the

22   "bigger picture" (Dallaglio, 2008, p. 249) of what they were trying to achieve. The following

23   quote by Lawrence Dallaglio (2008) illustrates the impact of Clive Woodward's aspirations

24   and vision despite the team failing to win during the team's first series of matches in this

25   early phase:

1   After my first four matches as England captain [in 1997/1998] there was nothing in

2   the win column. I'd grown tired of congratulating the opposition . . . The reason why

3   things were not as bleak as the results suggested was Clive Woodward. His vision for

4   England was more ambitious than anything I'd known and he knew what was needed

5   to make us consistently competitive against every opposition. (p. 204)

6   Team resilience was also strengthened during the early phase by learning from the

7 shared experiences of team members. During setbacks, team members referred to the

8 importance of being able to "learn from it and move on" (Leonard, 2004, p. 182). Team

9 learning processes facilitated a collective mindset that enabled players to "thrive on all the

10 criticism" (Woodward, 2004, p. 251), "confront their failures head-on" (p. 252), and "learn

11 from experiences" (Dallaglio, 2004, p. 244). The following quote by Martin Johnson (2004)

12 shows how the team learnt from their failure at the 1999 Rugby World Cup by changing their

13 approach:

14   The [1999] World Cup was undeniably a failure from England's point of view. We

15   should have done better than reaching the quarter-final. However, it did mark an

16   important turning point for us. The tournament became too heavy, too big in our

17   minds. We were talking about it from five or six months out. Any mistake you made

18   in training seemed to be greeted with, 'If this was the World Cup final . . .' The

19   pressure on us became so great . . . that it had an effect on our rugby. Clive and the

20   management learned from that and they have tended to back off a little since [the

21   1999 World Cup thereby] creating a new England team in the process. (p. 157)

22   During the latter part of the early phase, the formation of close group attachments

23 enhanced team resilience as "the team bonding process was taken a stage further . . . [and]

24 this kind of coming together happened throughout the squad (Dallaglio, 2008, p. 255).

25 Individual members of the team aligned their thoughts and actions to those of the group with

1 the team's emerging social identity illustrated in this phase through the recognition that "Club

2 England was born" (Dallaglio, 2008, p. 255). A salient social identity was constructed

3 through the use of mottos, imagery, and symbolic linguistic references such as, "Teamship"

4 (Woodward, 2004, p 210), "War room" (p. 242), and codes of conduct created within the

5 team's "Black Book" (p. 215). The following quote by Clive Woodward (2004) reveals the

6 importance given to the team's social identity following a series of setbacks (e.g., losing the

7 final match of the Five Nations Grand Slam against Wales in the last minute) and how this

8 process was underpinned by a collective attachment to the team:

9   So when in my darkest moment the players started voicing their support for me, as a

10   coach, it was one of the proudest moments of my life . . . Most of the top players had

11   newspaper columns, and they were speaking openly about what the new England set-

12   up meant to them. They weighed in with their full support, and I think that tipped the

13   balance in my favour. Even if I had been removed, with their comments I would have

14   considered my time in the England set-up a success. The player's support was positive

15   proof that we were finally coming together as one. (p. 255)

16   Holistic-form analysis revealed team members' anticipation of change and the notion

17 of a long journey ahead: "as we strapped in, gripped the armrests and braced ourselves"

18 (Greenwood, 2005, p. 133). The use of imagery in this phase included references to "a

19 voyage of discovery" (Dawson, 2004, p. 91), "a breath of fresh air" (Leonard, 2004, p. 176),

20 and "the start of something special" (Hill, 2006, p. 164). A progressive narrative form

21 captured team resilience during this early phase with a recurring theme of "getting

22 somewhere" (Woodward, 2004, p. 180), "moving forward" (Dallaglio, 2008, p. 261), and

23 where "the line on the graph pointed steadily up" (Hill, 2006, p. 139) regardless of

24 adversities. This narrative tone of forward progress despite setbacks was captured by

25 Lawrence Dallaglio (2008) in the following quote:

1   After our exit in the 1999 World Cup quarter-final, Clive Woodward talked about the

2   team moving on and progressing from good to great. Teams change slowly though,

3   and it can be hard to pinpoint any one moment and say, 'There, that's when it

4   happened.' But there was one such moment for me, when it was obvious that

5   something happened and that we had moved up a notch. I was standing in the South

6   African changing room [June, 2000] . . .We had lost a tight test match and yet what I

7   saw in that Springbok changing room convinced me that everything was shifting . . .

8   With that thought came the certainty that we were no longer the old England. (p. 245)

9   **Middle Team Resilience Phase**

10   During the middle phase, the team lost several key matches and also decided to strike

11 over their pay. Clive Woodward (2004) commented on how the media portrayed this latter

12 episode as "England's darkest day" where "the wheels nearly fell off" (p. 292). Although he

13 recognized that the strike "was a disaster waiting to happen" where "nobody would win"

14 (Woodward, 2004, p. 292), Woodward worked with his players, despite his own frustrations,

15 to enable the team to continue its progress. Holistic content analysis showed that social

16 identity processes further underpinned the development of team resilience in this middle

17 phase. For example, within the different areas of the team, Richard Hill (2006) began to

18 recognize that some members were "taking on the identity of a trio" and "thinking as a unit"

19 (p. 162). Social identity processes were further illustrated by the team's collective decision to

20 strike. During this event, the team "were all of one mind, . . . were all friends, [and] all

21 believed in one another" (Dawson, 2004, p. 126). Moreover, the team "were brave and stood

22 firm in the face of all the pressure" (Johnson, 2004, p. 184) which "pulled us together even

23 tighter as a squad" (Hill, 2006, p. 170). The team's strengthening social identity in this

24 middle phase was characterized by caring relationships and a realization that team members

25 were becoming emotionally bound to each other through their shared difficult experiences.

1   For example, after the death of his first child, Will Greenwood (2005) returned to training

2   and the following quote by him highlights the importance of the team's emotional attachment

3   after the experience of this traumatic event:

4   On Monday I was back in training with England doing fitness tests [following the

5   death of his first child] . . . It was good to be distracted, to do something physical as

6   well as something reassuring in its familiarity . . . Although not much was said, I felt

7   comfortable back in the company of my team-mates . . . The odd shake of a hand, a

8   pat on the back and the occasional look here and there was all that was needed to let

9   me know people were looking out for me. Others in the England squad had suffered

10   tragedy too. (p. 239)

11   Team resilience was facilitated in the middle phase by individual members of the

12   team leading each other. Shared team leadership ensured that the aim was "not just to have

13   one leader in a team of followers, but to have an exceptional leader in a team of great

14   leaders" (Woodward, 2004, p. 308). This was further reinforced by the players repeated use

15   of the phrase "teamship" (p. 360) to symbolize how team members collectively set their own

16   high standards in difficult times. The role of shared team leadership was evident through the

17   way players took individual and collective responsibility in challenging situations as shown

18   in the following quote by Clive Woodward (2004):

19   Perhaps the most significant example of leadership in relation to the England One

20   Team may be seen when things go wrong – and clearly in the course of our

21   development they have gone wrong in major ways on several occasions . . . when

22   things go right, that's the time to look through the window and praise those around

23   you. But when things go wrong, then it's the time to look in the mirror, shoulder the

24   responsibility and not blame others. When the England team experience setbacks, all

25   the people in the organization now hold themselves accountable. (p. 309)

1   Team learning processes continued to facilitate team resilience during the middle

2   phase. Specifically, it helped the team to "pull back from the abyss" (Woodward, 2004, p.

3   296) by adopting an approach whereby the team agreed to move on following setbacks (e.g.,

4   harsh criticism in the media after losing another Grand Slam decider in 2001, a significant

5   defeat to France in 2002, and the player strike controversy). Learning from adversity was

6   regarded as "the making of England" (Wilkinson, 2006, p. 208) where "setbacks played a

7   significant part in making the team strong" (Dallaglio, 2008, p. 262). Team resilience in this

8   phase involved the squad understanding the perceived benefits of engaging in continuous

9   learning during setbacks and applying this knowledge in the future as described by Richard

10   Hill (2006):

11   Personally, I never doubted myself or the team. On top of that, we always felt we

12   learnt something from each of our losses. It may sound strange, but I really think each

13   one [loss] helped us. There are always little details that you picked up on and stored in

14   the memory bank. That Lansdowne defeat [the final match against Ireland at the

15   Dublin-based stadium to win the Six Nations title] definitely influenced our

16   preparations for the next time we played there. (p. 176)

17   Holistic-form analysis revealed an underlying progressive narrative illustrated by

18   frequent positive evaluations of critical incidents which enabled the team to "go from

19   strength to strength" (Greenwood, 2005, p. 222). The following quote by Clive Woodward

20   (2004) shows how team members recognized the fluctuating process of team resilience

21   during a period of improvement towards their eventual goal despite the experience of

22   setbacks:

23   The team were gathering momentum and then, once again, due to influences for

24   which I wasn't prepared, we suffered a crushing defeat. England were going well,

25   sometimes very well, but not in a straight line and the huge highs and lows were like a

1 roller-coaster. We would fight our way back, but the difference for England by the

2 time of the Ireland match [in 2001] was that our setbacks were infrequent enough to

3 make huge news. It was as if the ceiling had fallen in. We got piled by everyone. The

4 lessons over the loss to Ireland were many, and building success from this major

5 setback would be the final springboard to the glory everyone deserved. (p. 303)

6 **Later Team Resilience Phase**

7 During the later phase, the England team became the top ranked side in the world

8 (International Rugby Board, 2014) and won the Rugby World Cup in 2003. Social identity

9 processes remained a pivotal aspect of team resilience. Players reflected on how their

10 individual and collective adversities "pulled us closer together . . . [and] we owed it to each

11 other to win" (Hill, 2006, p. 257). For example, having consistently underperformed in the

12 initial stages of the World Cup, Will Greenwood (2005) remarked that "we may not have

13 been the most talented rugby team at the World Cup, but nobody could touch us for

14 camaraderie and looking around us, I just knew that was going to carry us over the finishing

15 line" (p. 241). Furthermore, despite the adversities he had experienced (e.g., frequent injuries,

16 fatigue, performance slumps) Jonny Wilkinson (2004) stated that "I had such faith in the men

17 around me that I felt like I could face my fear [of failure in the 2003 World Cup]" (p. 40).

18 The importance of social identity during setbacks was highlighted by team members who

19 commented on the team's "character and grit" (Hill, 2006, p. 269) and a group bound

20 together with a "band of brothers" (Greenwood, 2005, p. 320) mentality. Metaphor further

21 reinforced this close bond through phrases such as "all-for-one, one for all" (Greenwood,

22 2005, p. 304) and "I'll put my head in where it hurts for him" (p. 320). Towards the later

23 phase of the team's journey, the presence of salient social identity processes – characterized

24 by shared experiences of adversity and a deep emotional attachment to each other – was best

25 illustrated in the following quote by Will Greenwood (2005):

1   It's almost time to head out [to the World Cup final] and Johnno [Martin Johnson, the

2   captain] calls us together into the center of the dressing room for his team talk. There

3   is nothing tactical and technical in what he says – the coaches have done all that.

4   'We've taken some shit, but there is no other band of lads I'd rather walk out into a

5   World Cup final than you lot . . .' I know he isn't just talking about throwing away

6   Grand Slam matches or tough tours or criticism in the press – he is talking about all

7   the shit which we have been through as human beings. For me it means Freddie [his

8   child who died at birth], for Lawrence it may have meant the death of his sister, for

9   Ben Cohen it may have been his dad who was murdered in 2000, for Mike Catt, it

10   may have been his daughter who was very ill at birth, for all of us it was Nicky

11   Duncombe [a playing colleague who died playing rugby]. There is a great electric

12   charge in Johnno's words . . . it speaks directly to all of us. We are bonding very

13   tightly at this moment. (p. 314)

14   During the later phase, positive emotions were particularly important in underpinning

15 team resilience. For example, Wilkinson (2004) remarked that "playing international rugby is

16 a serious business but the tension which surrounds it needs a release and often laughter is the

17 answer" (p. 201). Metaphorical imagery highlighted the importance of humor in the build-up

18 to the 2003 World Cup, with players reflecting that, during their social outings on their

19 summer tour of 2003, they behaved like "naughty schoolboys [who] needed to let off steam"

20 (Greenwood, 2005, p. 261). Richard Hill commented that players engaged in "non-stop

21 chatter" (p. 141) where there was "plenty of sledging [verbal abuse with other players]" (p.

22 141). The expression of banter amongst team members is highlighted in the following quote

23 by Richard Hill (2006) on his return to training after a serious injury:

24   Bizarrely and as if by magic, the leg felt 100 per cent the next day. They held the

25   daily management meeting and Barney [the team's physio] reported that I seemed to

1   have turned the corner. Shortly after the Wales game, I rejoined the squad training and

2   was greeted with universal abuse. 'What are you doing here? 'Who are you, who's the

3   new kid?' 'Holiday's over is it?' Got bored of smoking cigars? [The banter] was great

4   to hear. (p. 246)

5   In this later phase, holistic-form analysis highlighted how team resilience was

6   facilitated through a progressive narrative form. This particular narrative structure revealed

7   comments about how the team was succeeding despite frequently performing below their

8   expectations. This was illustrated through phrases such as "it hadn't been a brilliant

9   performance but a job well done", "we just did what we had to do" (Dallaglio, 2008, p. 299 &

10   312), the team often managed to "edge home" (Hill, 2006, p. 241) and, "perhaps the ability to

11   win when not playing well said something about the side?" (Dallaglio, 2008, p. 299). The

12   progressive nature of team resilience was illustrated through references to learning processes.

13   For example, Jonny Wilkinson (2004) remarked that "all the time we were learning, filing

14   away the knowledge gained from disappointment and setbacks" (p. 23). The progressive

15   narrative form highlighted how team resilience was evident through players feeling that their

16   journey was destined towards a successful outcome despite setbacks as the following quote

17   by Jonny Wilkinson (2004) illustrates:

18   . . . the way in which we reacted in the quarter-final underlined to me that we had

19   within us what it would take to win the [2003] World Cup . . . The matches to come

20   and everything which surrounded them would be colossal but I just felt that we had

21   been through too much at the tournament to fail. The game in Brisbane against the

22   Welsh added another coating of steel around us and I don't think we looked back after

23   that. When the critics judged another narrow squeak as a sign of fallibility, they

24   misread the tealeaves. The more important fact was this: we had come through the

25   examination – our third towering challenge of the tournament – intact and were still

1   afloat, heading for the semi-finals. (p. 36)

2   Shared team leadership processes were a recurring feature of team resilience in this

3   later phase with players reflecting on their growing ability to take collective responsibility.

4   Metaphorical imagery reinforced the presence of shared leadership since players were "able

5   to cut the umbilical cord" (Dallaglio, 2008, p. 324) from relying on coaches. This was also

6   highlighted by players describing how their ability to share responsibility enabled the team to

7   withstand stressors through "a triumph of self-discipline, which is something we had been

8   working on for years" (Greenwood, 2005, p. 247). The following quote by Richard Hill

9   (2006) shows that effective shared team leadership meant that the players were able to take

10   complete responsibility prior to extra-time in the 2003 World Cup final:

11   As the whistle went for full time, it dawned on me that we hadn't scored a single point

12   in the second half. I honestly think that a lot of teams might have panicked. Instead,

13   Johnno called us around in a huddle. Eddie Jones [the opposing Head Coach] had

14   come down to address his team, but when Clive [Woodward] arrived Jonno told him

15   to leave everything to him and the players. 'Clive, no problem, we know what we are

16   doing' he said. Clive was an organizer, a facilitator and an original thinker . . . by

17   putting together a side full of key players and leaders . . . Clive had made himself

18   redundant as a leader. (p. 260)

19   **Discussion**

20   Using narrative analyses of autobiographies, we explored the underlying psychosocial

21   processes of team resilience in the 2003 England rugby union World Cup winning team.

22   Extending previous research that presented a definition of team resilience and identified the

23   resilient characteristics of elite sport teams (Morgan et al., 2013), the findings of the present

24   study provide an insight into the mechanisms that explain how a resilient team functions

25   particularly illustrating how resilience processes were essential for the development of

1   excellence at the highest level of sport. Specifically, the findings revealed five main

2   psychosocial processes that underpinned team resilience in the England team between 1997/8

3   and 2003/4: transformational leadership, shared team leadership, team learning, social

4   identity, and positive emotions. The results indicated that these processes enabled the

5   England rugby team to effectively utilize their cognitive, affective, and relational resources to

6   act as leverage points for team resilience when facing stressors. Furthermore, the findings of

7   this study revealed that team resilience was illuminated through a progressive narrative form.

8   This was portrayed by team members evaluating stressors in a positive fashion and focusing

9   on moving forward as a team despite setbacks.

10   **Transformational Leadership**

11   Transformational leadership involves the building of relationships between leaders

12   and followers based on personal, emotional, and inspirational exchanges, with the aim of

13   creating an environment in which followers can achieve their optimal potential (Bass, 1985).

14   The findings showed that transformational leadership emerged as a pivotal team resilience

15   process. Specifically, transformational leadership enabled the England team to withstand the

16   setbacks that they collectively encountered, particularly during the early phase, through

17   collective vision development and inspiring players to "start thinking differently and play

18   differently" (Leonard, 2004, p. 179). A possible explanation for this finding is that

19   transformational leaders enable teams to be "more confident in their ability to deal with

20   failure . . . [and] encourage [them] to take risks and to pursue innovative and creative

21   activities" (Peterson, O'Walumbwa, Byron, & Myrowitz, 2009 p. 353). Transformational

22   leadership may have also underpinned the team's resilience through the construction of a

23   facilitative collective climate (cf. Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006). This refers to a shared

24   understanding of the group environment and perceptions about the strategic direction of the

25   team (e.g., the England rugby team recognized that they needed to be innovative and creative

1   to be the top-ranked team in the world). Specifically, the results of our study suggested that

2   transformational leadership influences team resilience through the leader's frequent

3   reinforcement of the team's strategic priorities. Kozlowski and Ilgen (2006) suggested that

4   this process operates through "perceptual filtering" (p. 84) whereby people take in new

5   information and interpret it, according to prior experiences, to reduce uncertainty about new

6   experiences. In the present study, this process positively influenced team members' collective

7   interpretations of adverse events (e.g., after losing a Six Nations Championship, Clive

8   Woodward reminded the team that their mission was to become the best team in the world,

9   not the best team in Europe). Collectively, these findings appear to resonate with Hodge,

10   Henry, and Smith's (2014) study that found that transformational leadership was important

11   for the 2011 Rugby World Cup champion team (see also Hodge & Smith, in press).

12   Specifically, after two critical turning points (i.e., negative incidents) in 2004 and 2007, the

13   New Zealand All Blacks rugby team used several transformational leadership approaches

14   including the employment of a dual-management model, the development of a leadership

15   group, the transference of responsibility to players, and the expectation of excellence.

16   **Shared Team Leadership**

17   The salience of the theme of leadership was further evident through the identification

18   of shared team leadership as an underlying team resilience process. Contrasting with more

19   conventional "vertical" forms of leadership (Ensley, Hmieleski, & Pearce, 2006), shared team

20   leadership refers to the spread of leadership amongst numerous team members (Carson,

21   Tesluck, & Marrone, 2007). The findings of this study suggest that shared team leadership

22   leveraged the team's resilience by influencing group members to positively adjust their

23   efforts to achieve team tasks during challenging situations. Moreover, shared leadership

24   appeared to improve coordination when encountering stressors by promoting greater

25   implementation of roles and responsibilities for team members' performance (cf. Burke,

1   Stagl, Salas, Pierce, & Kendall, 2006; Yeatts & Hyten, 1998). To illustrate, the phrase

2   "teamship" was used to reinforce the team's commitment to collective accountability and

3   action. The results also highlighted the team's enhanced coordination through the progressive

4   narrative form when evaluating setbacks (e.g., "we just did what we had to do", "able to cut

5   the umbilical cord). Subsequently, shared leadership appeared to facilitate the team's

6   resilience through members positively influencing each other to perform for the benefit of the

7   wider team (cf. Fransen et al., in press; Fransen, Vanbeselaere, De Cuyper, B., Vande Broek,

8   & Boen, in press; Van der Kleij, Molenaar, & Schraagen, 2011). Interestingly, the findings of

9   the present study illustrate that two specific approaches to leadership (i.e., transformational

10   and shared team leadership) underpinned the team's resilience. The role of both these

11   leadership processes should be evaluated in relation to the stage of a team's development. For

12   example, the role of transformational leadership seemed to be particularly important during

13   the team's early phase due to the significant organizational changes which occurred.

14   Thereafter, team resilience appeared to develop through "a continuous ebb and flow" (Ensley

15   et al., 2006, p, 227) between transformational and shared leadership.

16   **Team Learning**

17   The findings of this study also revealed that team learning processes underpinned the

18   team's resilience. Team members referred to their ability to "file away the knowledge"

19   (Wilkinson, 2004, p. 23) following setbacks and to apply their learning to future challenges.

20   An explanation for this finding is that team mental models may have influenced the team's

21   resilience through harnessing collective sense making during adverse situations (cf. Weick,

22   1993). Team mental models refer to shared knowledge structures relevant to the team's task

23   environment (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006). According to Lim and Klein (2006), they improve

24   team performance by enabling team members to anticipate one another's actions and to

25   coordinate their behaviors especially under demanding circumstances. Our results suggested

1   that the team's resilience involved members of the team organizing their knowledge about

2   how to act during challenging situations (e.g., identifying specific information from

3   significant defeats, such as the 2001 Grand Slam decider, to positively influence their future

4   preparations). The findings reported in this study also suggested that team learning

5   underpinned the team's resilience through the psychological phenomenon of transactive

6   memory (cf. Wegner, 1995). At the team-level, this refers to networked information

7   processing comprising individual memory systems and combined knowledge with a common

8   awareness of such knowledge (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006). To illustrate, during 'extra-time' in

9   the 2003 Rugby World Cup final, players described knowing what to do in particular

10   challenging situations, such as the last two minutes of play, where they "used every last bit of

11   that combined knowledge" (Wilkinson, 2006, p. 35). Transactive memory appears to explain

12   how both individual and collective knowledge facilitates team members' understanding of

13   how and when to apply this knowledge in adverse situations. Overall, therefore, team

14   learning appears to be an important team-level resilience process that yields the specific

15   cognitive resources and networked knowledge required during difficult circumstances.

16   **Social Identity**

17   Social identity was an important underlying process of team resilience for the England

18   rugby union team. Social identity is a process where groups engage in collective action to

19   develop a picture of what the group represents (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Hogg, Abrams,

20   Otten, & Hinkle, 2004). To illustrate, social identity was characterized in this team through

21   the presence of deep collective emotional bonds. Moreover, the use of imagery such as "Club

22   England" and "Teamship" symbolized the importance of their shared and distinct team

23   identity which was often recalled by team members during setbacks. In this group setting

24   personal identity ("I") appeared to give way to social identity ("we") where team members

25   adjusted their self-concept, thoughts, and behavior to be aligned with those defined by the

1   group (cf. Turner, 1991). In the present study, an example of this can be seen when the team

2   collectively decided to strike over pay despite several individual athletes disagreeing. An

3   explanation for social identity processes facilitating the team's resilience is the role of strong

4   emotional attachments during adversity (Gittell et al., 2006). Specifically, this may operate

5   through affective commitment (cf. Dimmock, Grove, & Eklund, 2005) whereby high-quality

6   relations and emotional intensity positively influence the ability of a team to take effective

7   action during adversity. This might explain why the participants in the present study felt that

8   their individual and shared experiences of adversity created such strong affective attachments

9   and a "band of brothers" mentality. Another possible explanation is that the team's distinctive

10   social identity provided a psychological basis for receiving – and gaining benefits from – the

11   social support of team members (Haslam, O'Brien, Jetten, Vormedal, & Penna, 2005).

12   Interestingly, Rees et al. (2013) recently proposed that a salient group identity has the

13   potential to act as a psychosocial process which alleviates "performance downward spirals"

14   (p. 400). Collectively, the results of the present study appear to indicate the importance of

15   social identity processes to harness affective and relational psychosocial resources to promote

16   team resilience.

17   **Positive Emotions**

18   This study identified positive emotions as an important team resilience process for the

19   England rugby team. Resilience researchers have proposed that positive emotions are

20   associated with individual resilience (see, e.g., Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). The findings of

21   the present study suggested that team resilience is harnessed by group-level positive

22   emotionswhich are salient during challenging situations. For example, Kaplan, Laport, and

23   Waller (2013) proposed that positive emotions, such as vigor and joy, may be pivotal for

24   team effectiveness during crises. The results in the present study also showed that the

25   England team often used humor (e.g., sledging, banter) following setbacks. For example, on

1   returning to the 2003 World Cup team following serious injury, Richard Hill was greeted by

2   team members directing putdown humor at him. This was paradoxically a sign of the team's

3   appreciation of their colleague's return following a challenging period of the 2003

4   tournament. Putdown humor may have influenced team resilience by stimulating positive

5   mutual exchanges and interpersonal bonds (cf. Terrien & Ashforth, 2002). Furthermore, the

6   experience of positivity during adversity has been found to build a durable psychosocial

7   emotional space conducive for team resilience (cf. Losada & Heaphy, 2004). Another

8   possible explanation is that positive emotions produce amplifying and buffering effects which

9   enhances a team's ability to withstand stressors (cf. Cameron, Mora, Leutscher, & Carlarco,

10   2011). Positive team practices (e.g., "behaving like naughty schoolboys") amplified and

11   reinforced the effects of positive emotions by strengthening social capital and high quality

12   relations during setbacks. Positive emotions also seemed to buffer the team from the potential

13   negative effects of stressors by enabling the team to absorb threat and possible harm

14   (Cameron et al., 2011), and by facilitating the expression of latent tensions (Hatch, 1997).

15   **Strengths and Limitations**

16   When employing qualitative methods it is important to consider some of the strengths

17   and limitations of the approach adopted. A notable strength of this investigation was the

18   appropriateness of the selected team for a study on team resilience. Firstly, the participants

19   were part of a team which remain the only England side to win the Rugby World Cup.

20   Secondly, the participants' experiences of both individual and collective adversity provided

21   an authentic representation of team resilience. Another strength of this investigation was that

22   the data gleaned from the analysis of the autobiographies contained a wealth of narratives.

23   Douglas and Carless (2009) suggested that narratives can "illuminate psychological processes

24   in socio-cultural contexts" (p. 213). In this study, a key approach for elucidating the team

25   resilience processes was the collection of tacit knowledge that "transcends the immediate

1   surface of speech, texts, or discursive materials" (Tracy, 2010, p. 843). We feel that the

2   narrative analysis strategies employed in this study enabled the researchers to go beneath the

3   'surface' of the stories contained within the autobiographies to reveal a profound insight into

4   team resilience processes. Notwithstanding these strengths, it is important to acknowledge

5   that although autobiographies contain expressions of personal lives, researchers should

6   recognize that the recall of past experiences will likely be reinterpreted through memory and

7   language. Taking this point into consideration, we analyzed the autobiographies of eight

8   members from the same team which helped to identify any differences in their recall of

9   shared critical incidents. It should also be acknowledged that the findings in this study

10   represent just one interpretation of team resilience and that narrative researchers should

11   recognize that 'truth' is constructed through the researcher's values and beliefs (Smith, 2010).

12   By using narrative analysis strategies that paid particular attention to the chronology of

13   incidents, we attempted to be faithful to the stories and the subsequent interpretation of the

14   events (King, 2008).

15   **Future Research**

16   The findings of this study suggest that team resilience processes are likely to be a

17   promising area for future research. Although this study provided an initial insight into the

18   dynamic and temporal aspects of a team's resilience in elite sport, longitudinal research is

19   required to further explore the resilience processes identified in this study. To illustrate,

20   Kimberlin et al. (2011) analyzed organizational histories spanning several decades to portray

21   organizational resilience processes. An important issue to consider when conducting this type

22   of research is the sociocultural context in which a team operates (cf. Xenikou & Furnham,

23   2012). More specifically, scholars need to be sensitive to the sociocultural factors that

24   contextualise how team resilience is manifested in different practices (cf. Ungar, 2008).

25   Future research efforts should explore the link between stress and group processes and how

1   they interact to influence team functioning and performance (cf. Levi, 2013; Franz, 2012).

2   Subsequently, researchers could investigate the specific role of each process and how each

3   team mechanism can be developed and maintained. For example, the results of the present

4   study highlight the need to more fully understand the ebb and flow of transformational and

5   shared leadership within teams (Carson et al., 2007) in facilitating and sustaining resilience.

6   Furthermore, creative qualitative approaches such as ethnography offer intriguing

7   possibilities to study 'first-hand' the underlying team resilience mechanisms reported in this

8   study and how they are developed. Prolonged immersion in a team setting, using participant

9   observation and a range of interviewing methods, could pave the path for a pre-intervention

10   evaluation of team resilience as a precursor for the development of a team resilience training

11   program (cf. Wagstaff, Fletcher, & Hanton, 2012; Wagstaff, Hanton, & Fletcher, 2013).

12   Finally, this research suggests that a resilient team is likely to be more than a collection of

13   resilient individuals (see also Morgan et al., 2013). For team resilience research and

14   measurement in sport, this indicates that team resilience should be operationalized and

15   assessed differently at different levels of analysis. Specifically, researchers should use

16   multilevel modelling to disaggregate individuals' perceptions of the team's resilience from

17   team-level resilience. Chan's (1998) typology of composition models provides an excellent

18   framework for organizing, evaluating, and developing constructs in multilevel research (e.g.,

19   to extend the assessment of individual-level resilience to the team-level).

20   **Practical Implications**

21   The findings of this study revealed five main psychosocial processes, underpinning

22   the resilience of a world champion team, that offer practitioners a framework to build team

23   resilience during the course of a team's journey. When developing team resilience,

24   practitioners should consider these processes in relation to the stressors that the team is

25   encountering. Moreover, due to the dynamic nature of team resilience, it is likely that the

1   relative emphasis and salience of these processes will vary over time due to changes in the

2   team environment (e.g., injury, selection decisions) and in accordance with the stage of a

3   team's existence. Indeed, teams are not static entities and the temporal nature of demands and

4   psychosocial processes is an important consideration when developing a culture of

5   sustainable excellence (cf. Yukelson & Rose, 2014). Although the results of this study are

6   based on one elite sport team which may limit the generalizability of the findings, the

7   knowledge generated through the qualitative methods can still transfer and be useful to

8   practitioners working with other populations (cf. Tracy, 2010; Ungar, 2003). During the early

9   years of team formation, our results suggest that transformational leadership strategies, such

10   as articulating and reinforcing a compelling team vision, are important to focus on to protect

11   groups of individuals from the potential negative consequences of stressors. During the

12   middle phase, it appears that the creation of a leadership group (i.e., shared team leadership)

13   becomes more of a priority to boost team resilience since it promotes connectivity, ensures

14   that players are 'on the same wavelength' during setbacks, and enforces accountability by

15   taking positive action. The facilitation of team learning also seems to be beneficial during this

16   phase. To expedite team learning, practitioners could hold meetings that require players to

17   reflect on the new knowledge and benefits gained from experiences of adversity (e.g.,

18   evaluate stressors as an opportunity for group development and mastery) and consider how

19   this information can be used in the future. During the latter period of a team's development,

20   our findings suggest that displays of positive emotions are important to emphasize. Coaches

21   should closely observe the behavior of athletes during training for signals that may indicate

22   lack of vitality. To stimulate humor, players could create a platform for banter through team

23   rituals (e.g., celebrating moments of resilience) and 'storytelling' to explain successes and

24   failures.

25   When developing excellence in teams, practitioners should consider utilizing the

1   framework proposed by Kleinert et al. (2012). Specifically, they suggest that three situational

2   components determine the procedure, approach, and trust building when working with teams:

3   the sport psychologist himself or herself, the given tasks and demands, and the social and

4   organizational structure. First, sport psychologists should reflect on the personal resources

5   they possess to intervene and perhaps most importantly, they should take time to develop

6   contextual intelligence so as to understand "what works with which persons in which

7   situations" (Brown, Gould, & Foster, 2005, p. 51). Second, the situational tasks and demands

8   are likely to determine how practitioners work with teams (cf. Kleinert et al., 2012; Paradis &

9   Martin, 2012). In the context of the present study, developing team resilience should be seen

10   as a proactive approach to managing stressors and as part of a team's long-term development

11   rather than a short-term plan to address a crisis. Third, the social and organizational structure

12   will influence the intervention approach, the method of gaining credibility and trust, and the

13   decisions made (cf. Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009). Importantly, when developing team

14   resilience, it may be easier for a sport psychologist to be accepted when, in team philosophy

15   and style, the practitioner has a recognized place in the team (e.g., because he or she has

16   already worked with the team during the season).

17   **Concluding Remarks**

18   This study's findings revealed five main team resilience processes based on a case-

19   study of a rugby union World Cup winning team. The psychosocial processes consisted of:

20   transformational leadership, shared team leadership, team learning, social identity, and

21   positive emotions. The underlying processes identified in this study explained how team

22   resilience involves the active mobilization of a team's individual and group resources to

23   withstand stressors in the pursuit of optimal sport performance. The importance of sport

24   teams being able to manage adversity over time is portrayed through the following quote by

25   England's former rugby union Head Coach, Clive Woodward: "Our success has not been a

1   continual series of victories. We have had a number of devastating setbacks; how these are

2   handled is the mark of a great team . . . It has been against all odds, but winning does not

3   happen in a straight line" (Woodward, 2004, xiii). To achieve success at the highest levels of

4   elite sport, the cultivation of team resilience processes appear to be pivotal over time in

5   protecting teams from negative consequences that may be encountered along the pathway to

6   sporting excellence.

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