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Sport Psychology in a Broad Perspective

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In 1997 (November 13-15) the Scientific Sport Psychology Workshop (SSPW) was held in Amsterdam. The SSPW is a congress organized to bridge the relatively long period of four years between regular FEPSAC-congresses. The idea for these «in-between» scientific gatherings of European sport psychologists was proposed in Cologne in 1991 by the managing council of the FEPSAC. In addition to the scientific part, these gatherings also provide a nice opportunity for the managing council and the national representatives of the membership countries of the FEPSAC to meet. In 1993 Hanin and colleagues organized the first meeting of this kind in Jyväskylä, Finland. Amsterdam, 1997, hosted the second meeting in 1997.

The purpose of the workshop was to encourage exchange of ideas regarding themes in sport psychology and to discuss them profoundly. In Amsterdam were held six scientific meetings, each consisting of a target presentation and two commentaries. The target speaker presented his or her ideas concerning a topic in sport psychology after which there were two critical peer commentaries presenting alternative points of view, or different methodologies. After each of these three-part presentation ample time was left for discussion, time that was fully and enthusiastically used by the participants.

In this special issue, elaborations of the target presentations and commentaries are presented. The first topic, discussed by Starkes and her commentators van Rossum and Davids, concerns the question whether expertise in sport is solely the result of the number of practice hours as claimed by Ericsson in his theory of deliberate practice. Van Rossum shows that with about half the practice hours the Dutch field hockey team is far better than the Belgian team, suggesting that number of practice hours alone cannot provide a complete answer. Davids raises some additional statistical, methodological and theoretical concerns with the framework of deliberate practice.

Savelsbergh and van der Kamp illustrate with their work on visual constraints in one-handed catching that the learning process of picking up information from the environment shows parallels to Bernstein's ideas of motor learning concerning the freezing and freeing of degrees of freedom. In this they take an ecological approach to learning perception-action couplings. On the basis of this approach they argue for specificity of practice. Buekers discusses practical consequences of the approach taken by Savelsbergh and van der Kamp, while Scott discusses the implications for skill differences, future research in motor control and learning, and the specificity of practice hypothesis.

Seiler argues that making intentions explicit during the learning process will provide insight into skill acquisition. Mapping out the relations between momentary intentions and subsequent means to reach the intended goals might provide tools for teachers and instructors in sport settings. Davids and Button notice a one-sidedness in Seiler's approach and claim that intentionality is one of the many important constraints on perception and action. Temprado and Laurent see intention as part and parcel of action instead of as an external driving system as is proposed by Seiler.

Whereas Seiler's emphasis was on the explicit verbalizable knowledge base that is built up during learning, Masters makes a case for implicit learning, a way of learning that does not result in a build up of explicit knowledge. The advantage he claims is that cognition might not interfere with the performance of the athlete under pressure. Bennett, from a more practical point of view, makes clear that the intuitively appealing notion of implicit learning should be treated with caution. Beek completes the discussion with a theoretical framework, based on Bernstein's hierarchy of levels within the action system, in which there is room for both implicit and explicit learning.

Wylleman draws attention to the «uncharted territory» of interpersonal relationships in sport and how to chart it. He presents a methodology specifically developed to assess interpersonal relationships in sport among athletes, parents and coaches. Vanden Auweele and Rzewnicki endorse Wylleman's ideas and underscore the importance of research into relationships in sport. Although Vergeer values Wylleman's contribution to the research into the interpersonal relationships in sport, she feels that Wylleman's approach is too narrow. She argues that research on interpersonal relationships should be «broad and eclectic in perspective and methodology».

Finally, Stambulova discusses the dynamics of sport careers and the var-

ious transitions and crises athletes may go through. Empirical data from Russian athletes support the various stages and transitions that may occur during a sport career. Two possible psychological counselling techniques are presented that may be used when athletes are in a crisis. Both Moormann and Bar-Eli argue for a more integrative approach to crisis. Moormann points to the relevance of personal as well as situational factors and Bar-Eli stresses the probabilistic nature of athletes' crises.

The six topics discussed (deliberate practice, perceptual learning, intentions, implicit vs. explicit learning, interpersonal relationships, and crisis) are but a few of many factors involved in reaching a certain performance in sport. It is noteworthy that not all of the presented topics can be considered at the core of sport psychology; The contributions of Wylleman on interpersonal relationships and that of Stambulova on athletes' crises are good examples of this category. Some of the other contributions would normally fall under motor control and learning. Distinct examples of this latter category are Master's paper on implicit learning and Savelsbergh and van der Kamp's contribution on the role of perceptual learning in the domain of motor skills.

Historically, sport psychology and the field of motor control and learning are scientific domains that have developed relatively independent from each other. Both have their own journals, congresses and handbooks. Sport psychology journals only occasionally publish papers about motor control and learning. It is only rarely that motor control and learning journals publish articles on the role of anxiety, goal setting, or mental practice, to mention but a few of the core sport psychology issues. The separation of these domains is, however, far from self-evident.

Sport psychology is the scientific discipline studying behaviour in sport situations. A distinctive characteristic of almost all sport situations is movement behaviour. Theorizing about this behaviour is, to say the least, incomplete without taking into account principles explaining the organisation of movement behaviour. Like, Abernethy (1996), we believe that scientific insights in motor control and learning may eventually serve as a handle for sport psychological intervention. The presented topics of this special issue provide a variety of issues related to sport psychology and motor control and learning. We hope this will set the stage for future work in both sport psychology and motor control and learning.

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