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A Qualitative Exploration of Substitutes' Experiences in Soccer

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The purpose of this study was to conduct a qualitative exploration of the substitute role in an attempt to uncover detailed understanding of soccer players' experiences. Twenty soccer substitutes were individually interviewed. Inductive content analysis revealed that they experienced mainly negative organizational, person and competitive factors as substitutes, with fewer positive experiences. Organizational factors were: receiving short notice, segregation, poor coach communication, inactivity and restricted preparation. Person factors were: dissatisfaction with status, self-presentation and impression motivation concerns, reduced control over performance and coach's decisions, reduced motivation to prepare, negative emotions and elevated state anxiety. Positive responses were: role acceptance, remaining focused, enthusiastic and confident and performing well. Sport psychologists, team-mates and coaches should be aware of these experiences and how they can help substitutes cope with their role.

Within competitive team sports (such as soccer) the coach or manager selects a starting line-up for each match and names (usually five) substitute players for that match. These players observe the match from the team bench and may be substituted on to play for varying durations; equally though they may not play at all in the match for which they are a substitute. Not surprisingly, a number of authors have commented that the substitute role has diminished status, is disliked by players and often leads to players being thought of as redundant by coaches and team-mates (Dosil, 2006; Hansen, 2003; Holt & Hogg, 2002; Neu, 1995; Wang, Callaghan, & Goldfine, 2001).

Recently, Gilbourne and Richardson (2006, p. 331) provided a colorful and striking illustration of the response of one professional soccer player when named as substitute. They describe the player's immediate response to learning that he has been named as a substitute player as follows, "in the empty walkway he strides towards the exit screaming, kicking at thin air. The expletives echo around the long

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stark tunnel". These words support Rotella and Newburg's (1989, p. 331) belief that becoming a substitute player is a "crisis" that athletes, coaches, teams and consequently sport psychologists should be encouraged to understand. However, given the negative connotations of the substitute role cited above and the potential for substitutes to make a significant contribution toward the outcome of a game (see later anecdotal examples to illustrate this), it is surprising that little attention has been paid to this role in the sport psychology literature.

A recent literature search revealed only a handful of studies that have focused directly on non selection in team sports (Grove, Fish, & Eklund, 2004; Mandell, 1994; Munroe et al., 1999; Petrie, 1993; Simeone, 1983; Smith, 1983) or specifically on the psychology or experience of the substitute (Hansen, 2003; Kerth, 1995; Rotella & Newburg, 1989; Ryall, 2008; Teipel, 1988). However, other exploratory studies that examined stress and coping in sport reported that being a substitute player and de-selection emerged from their findings as sources of stress for athletes (Anshel, Kim, Kim, Chang, & Eom, 2001; Cresswell & Eklund, 2007; Holt & Hogg, 2002; Munroe, Albinson, & Hall, 1999; Wang et al., 2001; Woodman & Hardy, 2001). Therefore, despite a small body of literature that has investigated the substitute experience or identified findings concerning this role, it appears that there is support for the suggestion that becoming a substitute player is a source of stress for athletes.

Recently, Holt and Hogg (2002) reported that female national soccer players competing in the 1999 World Cup finals interpreted fear of getting dropped and coming off the bench as sources of stress. Even players who were reportedly usually confident in their abilities were concerned about whether they could make a significant impact on the game if they were selected as a substitute. In addition, other literature has reported a range of negative psychological responses associated with the substitute role. These included bitterness and rejection, reduced confidence and satisfaction with one's status and playing time, and, increased stress and anxiety, including higher trait anxiety in comparison with starting players (Cresswell & Eklund, 2007; Holt & Hogg; Neu, 1995; Rotella & Newburg, 1989; Smith, 1983; Teipel, 1988). This may be explained somewhat by a recent existential analysis of the substitute in sport, which reports the substitute's fate as one that is not freely chosen but decided by coaches and team selectors (Ryall, 2008). Furthermore, according to Wang et al. (2001) substitute players may become scapegoats allowing team members to place blame on them if they lose.

According to Rotella and Newburg (1989) such a negative psychological and emotional blow may cause substitutes to lose control over attaining their dreams, goals and aspirations. In fact, participants in Rotella and Newburg's study who were interviewed about their experiences of being a substitute reported that when not selected for the team they felt they had merely become 'benchwarmers', and to some degree lost their identity as athletes. This may be the case because team sport athletes measure themselves by playing time thus de-selection (i.e., player is not identified in the starting line-up) can cause a loss in identity in athletes who fail to cope with their coach's decision (Rotella & Newburg).

It has been suggested that in addition to a threat to personal identity, the image the substitute role projects to others may be a source of concern to a substitute player (Leary, 1992; Rotella & Newburg, 1989). This is supported by Hansen (2003) who found that professional soccer players experienced difficulties defending their identity as a 'good' soccer player once they had become a substitute. Therefore,

negative responses toward the substitute role (as outlined above) may stem from a loss of identity as well as pressure to prove one's ability (Hansen; Wang et al., 2001).

To overcome the potential threat to identity substitutes may attempt to control the impressions that others have of them in a process called self-presentation (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). This was evident in a study by Grove et al. (2004) who examined changes in athletic identity following team selection or de-selection. They found that athletes who were de-selected were more likely than those who were selected to realign themselves with a social rather than a task-centered group. Moreover, self-presentation motivation is heightened when: (a) impressions made on others lead to goal achievement, (b) the desired outcomes of these impressions are valued by the individual, and (c) discrepancy exists between the desired and current image of the individual (Leary & Kowalski). Potentially these are all features of the substitute's experience that may lead to self-presentation concerns, which have been shown by previous research to result in increased competitive anxiety (Anshel & Kaissidis, 1997; Dosil, 2006; Hudson & Williams, 2001; Wilson & Eklund, 1998).

Furthermore, recent research by Cresswell and Eklund (2007) reported that the substitute role may be associated with athletic burnout in professional rugby. While this needs to be investigated further in substitutes this research does emphasize the potential for extreme dissatisfaction associated with the substitute role. Such dissatisfaction appears to have been apparent for David Fairclough, who was probably the first professional soccer player to become famous for being a 'Super Sub' in the 1970s (the substitute player who comes on late in the game and scores or makes the winning goal, play or clearance for his/her team). Fairclough reported being a 'Super Sub' as a negative experience, "It definitely did not help my career that I came off the bench and scored so often, and from 1977 onwards I made it clear I wanted to leave irrespective of the success Liverpool were enjoying at the time" (The Independent, 12th April 2001).

In contrast, research has also revealed that some athletes may perceive the substitute role more positively, for instance, believing their role on the bench as valuable which may lead to a sense of accomplishment (Cresswell & Eklund, 2007; Rotella & Newburg, 1989). An obvious example of this is the Manchester United F.C. player Ole Gunnar Solskjaer who earned the title, 'The substitute from hell' from his coach Alex Ferguson because of his ability to come off the bench and score goals (Ferguson, 2000). However, for players across all standards of competition, the role of substitute is not always cast in such a glamorous and heroic light. Therefore, the substitute experience may be encouraging and motivating for some athletes but may be a stressor that could potentially involve self-presentation concerns, anxiety or burnout for others.

Current evidence pertaining to this role is limited, for example, findings from Rotella and Newburg's (1989) research was based on the reports of three substitute players who were asked to recall events that occurred three years previously and Hansen's (2003) study included a sample of only four professional players. Furthermore, existing research does not give detailed descriptions as to why substitutes may or may not perceive their status as stressful. Therefore, given both the paucity and limitations of studies directly investigating the substitute role, the purpose of this study was to conduct a qualitative exploration of the substitute role in an attempt to uncover detailed understanding of soccer players' experiences. In addition, the study explores both negative and functional experiences of substitute players in soccer.

Soccer is the most popular professional and mass participation sport in the UK, and, unlike some team sports (e.g., field hockey), soccer players cannot be substituted on and off the field of play more than once in a game. Therefore players named as substitutes in soccer may be less likely to play than those in sports where such "roll-on roll-off" substitutions are permitted. This results in a relatively more permanent status for that match and less likelihood of being directly involved in the match. By initially investigating this role we hope to offer suggestions for future research to explore to further develop our understanding of the role. Importantly, given the potential negative impact of this role and the likelihood that many team sport players will experience this role, we aim to present our data as the basis for preliminary suggestions of how best athletes can be helped to deal with this role.

Method

Participants

Participants were 20 UK soccer players who had been a substitute within three months before their involvement in the study. Fifteen of the twenty substitutes were semiprofessional athletes (12 males; 3 females) and the remaining five were male professional athletes. These levels of competition were chosen to ensure that the players took their involvement in soccer seriously and viewed playing in the starting line up as important to them. Participants ranged in age from 16 to 34 years ($M = 22.4$, $SD = 4.10$).

In soccer in the UK 11 players comprise the starting team and each team is permitted to have five substitutes on the bench although only three players can be substituted into the game. Furthermore, players can be de-selected from the starting team at any time for a range of reasons (e.g., returning from injury, team strategy, player's poor form, promotion from a lower standard team). Therefore, for this study, participants were purposefully selected using clearly defined inclusion criteria so that an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon could be achieved (Patton, 2002). The operational definition of 'substitute' used in this study was a player who was named as a substitute at the start of the game (i.e., in the squad for that game but not in the starting line-up) for any reason other than recovery from illness or injury (e.g., based on tactical or current form). Players returning from injury or illness were excluded from this study because they were not de-selected on the basis of a coaching decision. For this study we were only interested in players who were fit and eligible to play, but who were not selected by their coach. In this study some substitutes were called on to play during a match whereas others were not. This provides ecological validity to the operational definition used here as the player's status as a substitute is dynamic, changing from match to match and within specific matches.

Procedures

Participant Recruitment.   This study used purposeful sampling whereby only substitutes who fulfilled key criteria (as outlined previously) were invited to take part in the study (Patton, 2002; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). To do this the first author contacted local semiprofessional and professional soccer clubs and invited suitable

substitute players to participate. Sampling of participants continued until no new themes emerged from interview responses; a process known as data saturation (Biddle, Markland, Gilbourne, & Chatzisarantis, 2001; Ritchie & Lewis), resulting in a sample size of 20 participants. Côté, Salmela, Baria, and Russell (1993) stress that collecting too much data for qualitative analysis increases the risk of error. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and its approval by the University Ethics Committee and provided written, informed consent indicating their willingness to participate.

Development of Interview Schedule.   Questions were initially devised based on the first author's (the interviewer in this study) personal experience in soccer (10 years playing and 5 years coaching experience). Following this she was interviewed in a bracketing interview by an experienced qualitative researcher who was not involved in the study (see later discussion of trustworthiness measures).

Interviews.   Interviews were semistructured, lasted between 25 and 45 min and were conducted at participants' training grounds on nonmatch days. Topics raised by respondents that were not included in the interview guide were discussed and followed up in detail, as were those that were originally included in the interview schedule. For all responses, appropriate probing questions were used to ensure complete understanding of respondents' comments. The interview guide is included as an appendix although readers should note that this served as a guide and not a prescriptive list of questions to be addressed in interviews. With the participants' consent, all interviews were tape recorded.

Data Analysis.   All interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using inductive content analysis that is data driven and therefore results in an interpretation of the data that is grounded in the respondents' experiences (Scanlan, Ravizza, & Stein, 1989). Content analysis is a term used to describe the process of analyzing data and reducing them into meaningful themes or categories (Côté et al., 1993).

Based on the procedural template initially proposed by Scanlan et al. (1989), Biddle et al. (2001) outlined a structure to the process of inductive content analysis. Current data analysis followed this process and can be summarized as follows: identification of raw data themes (based on quotations that clearly identify subjective experience; these are the basic unit of analysis); clustering quotations with similar meanings (and distinguishing between those with different meanings) into lower order themes; and clustering lower order themes into higher order themes using the same contrast and comparison process until all similarities between themes are saturated and no further higher order themes can be determined (at this stage the final themes are general dimensions).

Establishing Trustworthiness.   The following measures were employed to optimize the trustworthiness of data collection and analysis: pilot investigation; bracketing; triangulation, and, respondent verification. Before the pilot study a bracketing interview was conducted where the study interviewer was interviewed by an independent interviewer with five years of qualitative research experience, using the questions intended to be used with the study participants. It is essential that the researcher sets aside all preconceived notions in the bracketing process so that reduction of interview transcripts can reveal an unbiased picture of the

experience (Creswell, 1998). This bracketing process allows the researcher to become more aware of his/her presuppositions about the phenomenon being studied in an attempt to set these aside to present an untarnished view of the phenomenon to better understand the informants' perspective (Field & Morse, 1985; Osborne, 1994).

The bracketing interview lasted approximately 45 min and was recorded and transcribed verbatim. At the time of conducting the study, the study interviewer had 10 years of competitive soccer experience, during which time she was predominantly a starting player, and was currently playing for an amateur team. During this time her impression of the substitute role was mainly a negative one. However, pilot interview analysis and the bracketing interview were used to ensure that interview questions and themes identified from the final data were not biased by the analyst's own experience and presuppositions.

Secondary analysis of the data were carried out by the second author who has 10 years experience of qualitative research but only limited experience of the phenomenon being studied. The secondary analyst completed checks for themes and dimensions and, where discrepancies existed with the first analyst's classifications and labeling, a process of discussion and negotiation continued until both parties agreed on titles, interpretation and organization of themes.

Respondents were also provided with a copy of their results, following analysis, and a summary of findings for their interpretation and confirmation that they were a true and accurate reflection of their response to being a substitute. This process is referred to as respondent verification or member checks (Malterud, 2001).

Results

Data reflecting soccer players' experiences of the substitute role were inductively organized into three overarching general dimensions: organizational factors, person factors and competitive factors. Organizational factors represent environmental and organizational aspects that participants reported to be unique to their experience as a substitute player, thus different from when they were a starting player. Competitive factors represent aspects within the game that participants reported to be different in comparison with their experiences when they typically start a game. Person factors represent substitutes' perceptions and emotional responses (both positive and negative) to organizational and competitive factors.

All respondents discussed their experience of being a substitute as mainly a negative one. However, a minority of respondents did make some comments that could be classified as positive. Initial analysis also revealed that organizational, competitive and person factors were discussed in relation to three distinct time periods; these are explained in the sections below relating to each time period. Each section identifies the higher order themes subsumed within each dimension and provides an illustrative quotation for each lower order theme.

Pregame Phase

We defined the pregame phase as the period between when the player was informed that they were a substitute and the start of the game. This operational definition precluded the precompetition period before participants were informed that they

were a substitute as this period was not discussed by participants in their interview responses, suggesting that they did not perceive this as part of the substitute experience per se. In addition until they were actually informed of the fact, participants were not yet deemed to be substitutes.

Organizational Factors.   The general dimension pregame organizational factors (see Figure 1) reveals that participants experienced restricted preparation. This often began with short notice from the coach that they would begin the match as a substitute, mostly an hour before the game, and in one case as little as 30 min before the game began: ". . . on the match day . . . the team was announced half an hour before kick off".

Some substitutes reported that they had little interaction with team mates and coaches before the game commencing: "The eleven that are starting come back in (from warm up) and he talks to them while we are still out warming up and whatever. So we don't actually go". In addition substitutes' preparation was restricted as players received little explanation from the coach concerning why they were chosen as a substitute or when they might be called on to perform: "He [coach] doesn't say anything. You're sub [sic] and that's it. He'll call you when he decides to. It could be five minutes into the game or it could be five minutes to go, or whenever he decides*"*.

Person Factors.   In addition to experiencing differences in organizational factors during the pregame phase, substitutes also reported differences in personal experiences compared with when they were a starting player (see Figure 1). These are identified by the higher order themes dissatisfaction, self-presentation concerns and some positive responses to substitute status. Not surprisingly, as many respondents had expected to start the game and felt confident in their own ability they were dissatisfied with their status as a substitute. Dissatisfaction was reflected in respondents' reports that they experienced negative emotions, reduced perceived control, reduced motivation and reduced perceived importance of the game when they were a substitute player. For example, one player expressed his dissatisfaction at being a substitute player by stating: *"*Well it [being a substitute] wasn't great to tell you the truth. I was pissed off. I couldn't believe what he was saying. I respect him as the manager but sometimes it is difficult to see his reasoning."

Further negative emotions such as anger and disappointment were also prevalent:

". . . there was a mixture of feelings really, maybe a little bit of anger but mostly disappointment and a little bit of resentment".

Even on rare occasions when substitutes were provided with an explanation for their status, some were still dissatisfied as they felt they had little control over the coach or manager's decision: "I didn't make any mistakes or I haven't been playing badly. I would prefer to play midfield. But there is not a lot I can do about where I play. That's the manager's decision."

Dissatisfaction was also evident in participants' reports of reduced motivation to prepare for the game and reduced perceived importance of the game given their status as a substitute: *"*I wasn't one hundred percent looking forward to it because I knew I wasn't starting.*"* In fact, one player reported that they would prefer not to be involved at all than be a substitute: "I was gutted really I just hate it, I don't like watching football [soccer] at all . . . I'd rather just not be involved than be a sub [sic]".

Raw data themes | Lower order themes | Higher order themes | General Dimensions

Raw data themes
1 hour notice
2 hours notice
30 mins notice

Left out of team talk
Segregated warm up
Warmed up goalkeeper
Feels left out

No explanation
Not told if would play

Expected to start
Confident in ability
Dissatisfied being sub
Dissatisfied with explanation
Disappointed
Forced acceptance
Resents coach's decision

Reduced confidence in ability
Annoyed
Angry
Frustrated
Upset
Withdrawn
Shocked

No/reduced control over coach decision

Not listening in team talk
Reduced effort in warm up
Reduced focus in warm up

Rather not play than be a substitute
Reduced importance of status when substitute

Concerned what family and friends think
Concerned what team-mates think
Concerned with how coach perceives ability

Received an explanation
Accepted decision

Focused

Lower order themes
Received short notice

Segregated from team-mates

Poor coach/player communication

Dissatisfied with status as a substitute

Negative emotions experienced

Reduced perceived control over coach's decisions

Reduced motivation to prepare for game

Reduced perceived importance of the game when substitute

Self-presentation concerns

Accepting of substitute status

Focused

Higher order themes
Restricted preparation

Dissatisfaction with status as a substitute

Self-presentation concerns

Positive response to substitute status

General Dimensions
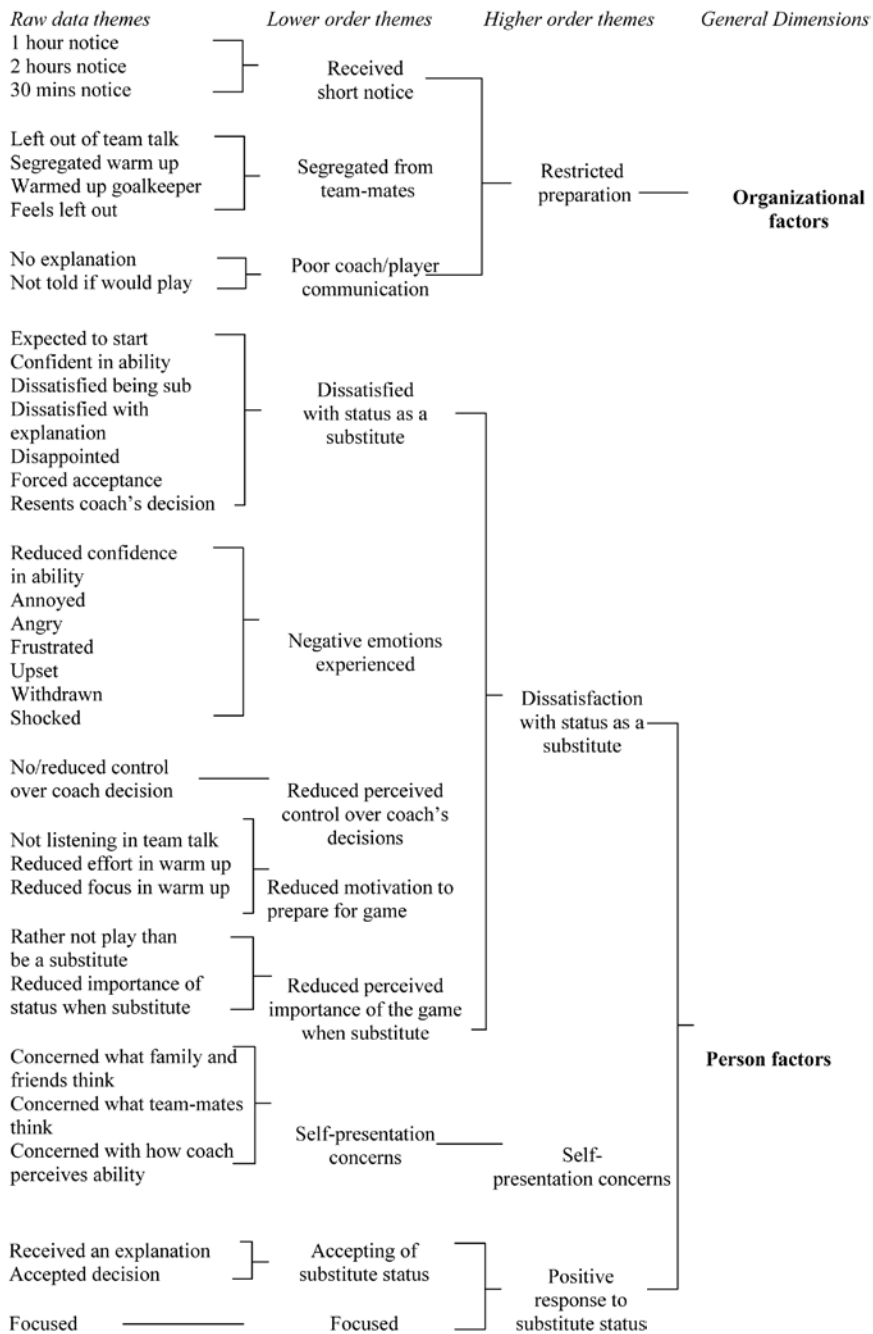Organizational factors

Person factors

Figure 1 — Substitutes' experiences during the pregame phase.

In addition to dissatisfaction, being a substitute prompted self-presentation concerns in some athletes, reflecting the negative perception which they had of this role. Some players were concerned about how the coach viewed them: "I was gutted and hate not playing but it doesn't make me think any worse of myself. But in a way it makes me think, what does the boss think of me?" Other players expressed concern about the image they would present to family and friends or team-mates:

> I sort of felt embarrassed to be honest. I had to go into the changing room where the girls were putting on shirts and because they were trying to figure out what numbers to wear whilst waiting for the manager, they asked who the subs were. I was gutted because I had to say it out loud that I was a sub. That was weird because I didn't want to say it, because I suppose I was embarrassed and disappointed.

Although the majority of personal experiences reported were negative, some players reported a more positive response. This is not to say that they were happy with their role, they just chose to accept their status as a substitute: "I don't suppose he needs to give a reason" or remained focused on their preparation before the game, "I sort of do the same sort of things. Just make sure I am stretched and just focused on the game even though I am not playing I still make sure that I am prepared."

Preperformance Phase

We defined the preperformance phase as the period between the game beginning and the substitute being informed that they are going on to play. As in the pregame phase, substitutes' experiences during the preperformance phase were categorized into organizational and personal factors.

Organizational Factors.   This general dimension was underpinned by the higher order theme *restricted preparation* (see Figure 2). Physical preparation was restricted during this phase as respondents reported spending most of their time inactive on the substitutes' bench:

> You are in the dugout and you are sitting in the back row . . . Every fifteen minutes, well I mean there are five subs and only three are allowed to warm up at a time . . . You tend to let the first three warm up and sit there as long as you can as you are a bit lazy and still got the hump [sic].

Furthermore, when called on to play, substitutes' warm up was restricted by both limited notice regarding when he/she might be brought into the match and limited physical space within which to warm-up:

> There are a limited number of things to do because it is so close to the pitch and it is a small place, you can't go onto the pitch. It is basically a few short sprints and stretching. You can't really get the balls out.

During this time (preperformance phase) players reported that coach/substitute communication was poor and substitutes may be exposed to critical comments from the coach or manager:
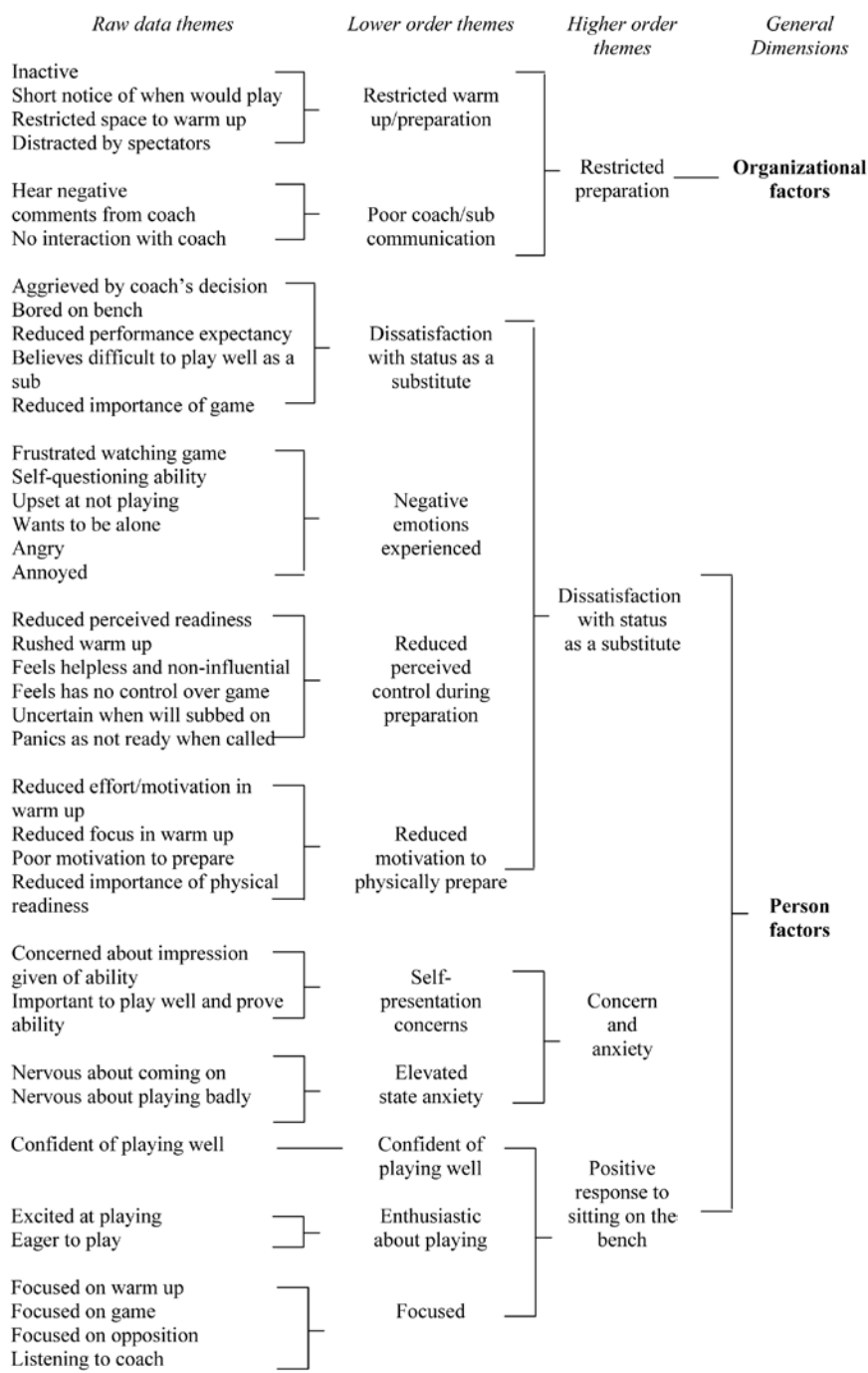
Raw data themes | Lower order themes | Higher order themes | General Dimensions

Inactive
Short notice of when would play
Restricted space to warm up
Distracted by spectators

Restricted warm up/preparation

Hear negative comments from coach
No interaction with coach

Poor coach/sub communication

Restricted preparation — **Organizational factors**

Aggrieved by coach's decision
Bored on bench
Reduced performance expectancy
Believes difficult to play well as a sub
Reduced importance of game

Dissatisfaction with status as a substitute

Frustrated watching game
Self-questioning ability
Upset at not playing
Wants to be alone
Angry
Annoyed

Negative emotions experienced

Reduced perceived readiness
Rushed warm up
Feels helpless and non-influential
Feels has no control over game
Uncertain when will subbed on
Panics as not ready when called

Reduced perceived control during preparation

Dissatisfaction with status as a substitute

Reduced effort/motivation in warm up
Reduced focus in warm up
Poor motivation to prepare
Reduced importance of physical readiness

Reduced motivation to physically prepare

Person factors

Concerned about impression given of ability
Important to play well and prove ability

Self-presentation concerns

Nervous about coming on
Nervous about playing badly

Elevated state anxiety

Concern and anxiety

Confident of playing well

Confident of playing well

Excited at playing
Eager to play

Enthusiastic about playing

Positive response to sitting on the bench

Focused on warm up
Focused on game
Focused on opposition
Listening to coach

Focused

Figure 2 — Substitutes' experiences during the preperformance phase

Coach is usually shouting or whatever and the subs [sic] just sit there . . . he is just telling them [players on the pitch] what to do or if he doesn't think they are doing enough he shouts at them and has a go at them and tells them to work harder.

Person Factors.   Similar to the pregame phase the sense of dissatisfaction with the substitute status persisted and was underpinned by a similar range of negative emotions to those experienced during the pregame phase. Players still reported being upset and frustrated at not playing:

It is just frustrating. I can't stand watching football [soccer]. I don't mind watching live men's games or things like that, that is a bit different. But to go and watch your team-mates playing when you are fully fit, that's frustrating.

Reduced perceived control over players' preparation to perform was also evident in this phase: "I suppose I wasn't really warming up properly because I wasn't sure when I was going to be playing." This reduced control appeared somewhat linked to reduced motivation to prepare. That is, the substitutes reported that they were de-motivated in comparison with how they would feel normally when preparing as a starting player. For example, one player reported the following:

I thought I can't be bothered so when he says you are going on I'm not really ready. But if I am starting all I think about is the game and I am really up for it. But if I'm not then I am just totally the opposite really.

Some players reported self-presentation concerns, employing impression management behaviors to address these: "I was just messing about with a ball because I didn't want people watching to think she is a sub [sic] and so is crap. In a weird way I was trying to show them that I was good."

Just over half of the participants reported experiencing elevated anxiety immediately before being substituted into the game:

[Before being told that they will be substituted on] I have nothing to be nervous about because I am not playing. It's when the manager calls you over that you might get a bit nervous. I think then 'come on you have to play well' and I suppose I put myself under some pressure to really play well in a short amount of time. So I get nervous that I might mess up or won't stand out.

Despite this, some players reported a positive response, maintaining their confidence: "I had the confidence whether it was wrongly or rightly that if I went on the pitch I could change that round [team's performance], perform well and make the team play better" and their enthusiasm for playing:

I get excited like all whooa, proper like boyish stuff. I will if I've been told I will be like smiling and slam on my shin pads and stuff and go for a run and be like really busy. If it has been three minutes I'm like 'what number is it where are the numbers?' [referring to numbers that the officials hold up to communicate that a substitution is being made] I know it is not my job to do that. So I just can't wait to get on.

Some maintained their focus, either on the warm-up, on the game itself, on the coach's feedback to players on the pitch or on their own performance when brought on to play:

> I was just on the bench along with other subs [sic] the manager and physio [sic] and people like that, that were on the bench. And usually just watch the first ten minutes of the game, watching the opposition and checking out where your opponents are playing. So concentrating on how your opponents play and getting a head start before you go onto the pitch.

Performance Phase

We defined the performance phase as the period of time during which substitutes are actively involved in the game and no longer sitting on the bench, therefore, competitive factors emerge during this phase.
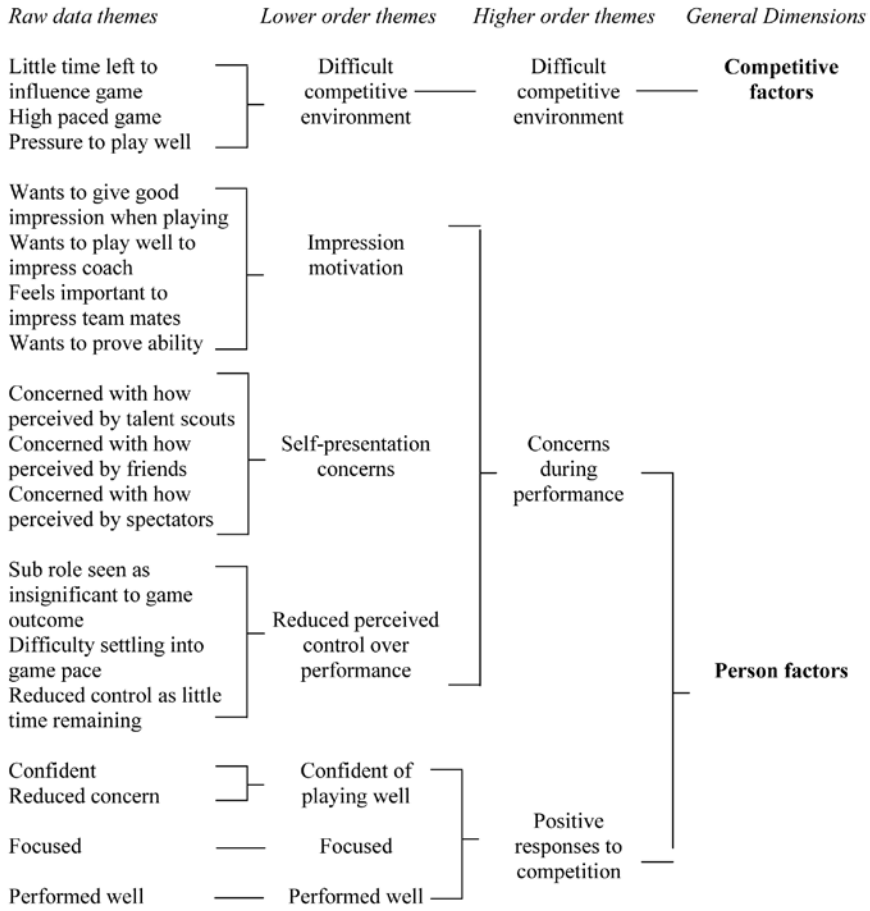
Figure 3 — Substitutes' experiences during the performance phase.

Competitive Factors.   Players discussed their difficulties entering late into the game and coping with its pace:

> It is very, very difficult particularly for a defender to come in if the game is at a high pace then it is difficult to get into it. It is never really good to come in as a defender because you can't pick up the pace of the game when you are just coming straight on, particularly in the latter stages of the game.

Person Factors.   Substitutes' difficulties entering late into the game seemed to be related to concerns during performance (see Figure 3) which were overwhelmingly underpinned by impression management and self-presentation concerns. The majority of respondents reported elevated motivation to manage impressions targeted at a range of individuals: "I feel that some of the girls don't really respect me as a player and don't think she's any good [talking about herself]. So I've just got a lot to prove really". This reflected their persistent self-presentation concerns: "I felt like I had a point to prove . . . I just wanted to go out there and prove to him [coach] that he shouldn't leave me out". These concerns were linked to players' perceptions of reduced control over their performance:

> The thing is about coming on is it takes so bloody long to get into the game. The other lads have been playing for a lot longer so are into the game and the pace is set. Coming on from cold is not easy and as much as you prepare it always takes time to get into the game.

More positively, one player was confident that he could perform well if brought into the match: "I felt good and I went on and I felt like I could change it" and another remained focused: "I went out there and I was sharp, I was focused." For one participant, this resulted in a good performance: "I settled in straight away, I think I scored after about two minutes . . . I went out there and I was sharp, I was focused."

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to conduct a qualitative exploration of the substitute role in an attempt to uncover detailed understanding of soccer players' experiences. Results revealed that aside from some positive experiences, athletes in this study overwhelmingly described their experiences in negative terms. These findings support claims made previously that the substitute experience may be stressful (Cresswell & Eklund, 2007; Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006; Holt & Hogg, 2002; Prapavessis & Carron, 1996; Newburg, 1989) and fulfill the calls for research to focus directly on the substitute role (Dosil, 2006; Hansen, 2003; Morgan, 1980; Passer, 1983; Ryall, 2008; Smith, 1983). Specifically, this study has identified that substitute players experience different organizational and personal factors in comparison with when they are a starting player. Such differences were interpreted as being stressful more often than not, therefore, these findings provide a valuable insight into substitutes' experiences and one which sport psychologists and coaches can use to help substitutes to deal with this role.

With regards to organizational factors, substitutes' preparation to play was restricted by poor communication with the coach. Failure of coaches to notify players of their status in good time before the match or indeed at all in some cases, led

to misunderstanding and dissatisfaction on the part of the substitute players. While this finding provides support for previous proposals that coaches would initiate less interpersonal communication with substitutes (Teipel, 1988; Wang et al., 2001) and research that has identified a link between poor communication and poor shared understanding between coaches and their athletes (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Wang et al.), it also offers an explanation to as to why substitutes in Rotella and Newburg's (1989) study reported feeling isolated, redundant and rejected. That is, a poor coach-athlete relationship may lead to decreased athlete satisfaction and role ambiguity (Shelly & Sherman, 1997), demotivation (Mageau & Vallerand), poor team cohesion and resentment of the coach (Wang et al.). And since all respondents in the current study were dissatisfied with their status as a substitute, leading to a range of negative emotional responses and reflecting results offered by previous authors (e.g., Cresswell & Eklund, 2007; Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006) it appears that communication, which was clearly limited in the experiences reported by the substitutes in this study, has important implications for substitute players in team sports. It could be suggested that poor communication appears to be the catalyst for poor relationships between coaches and substitutes and dissatisfaction on the part of the substitute players. Therefore, poor communication is something that needs to be addressed by coaches and sport psychologists when involved in team selection decisions.

However, in addition to a perceived lack of control over selection, dissatisfaction also stemmed from match preparation and performance if called on to play. Substitutes reported that they experienced an inhibited warm up routine thus physical preparation while sitting on the bench. Jones (1995) identified that such reduced perceived control over the environment and themselves will result in the athlete having negative expectancies of coping and goal attainment. Respondents' comments reflected this proposed relationship as their perceived lack of control left them unsure if they would achieve their goal of playing in the match and ill prepared to cope with the game if substituted on to play. These findings appear to explain why female international football players in Holt and Hogg's (2002) study reported that despite being confident in their ability, they were concerned about whether they could make a significant impact on the game if they were selected as a substitute. Therefore, the current findings suggest that reduced perceived control over preparation and performance in substitute players may lead to negative expectancies of coping, goal attainment and debilitative anxiety (Jones, 1995). However, despite experiencing a restricted environment that was out of their control, substitutes also made decisions to reduce their physical effort during their warm up. This may be explained by the fact that emotions may have cognitive, physical and emotional effects on the athlete (Jones & Uphill, 2004) and participants' responses suggest that negative emotions associated with dissatisfaction were also associated with reduced physical effort in the warm-up, reduced motivation and perceived importance of the game. Consequently, it could be suggested that substitute players could regain some control over their preparation by maintaining effort and focus during this time.

Wang et al. (2001) stated that substitutes tend to experience negative emotions when they feel under pressure to prove their ability, a factor evident in our participants' experiences (see later comments). Precompetition emotions are associated with subsequent athletic performance (Prapavessis, 2000). Therefore, the emotions experienced by substitutes in this study may be associated with detriments

to performance, however, performance was not measured in this current study, therefore research that examines the associations between precompetition emotion and performance in substitute players would appear worthwhile.

In addition to dissatisfaction and reduced effort, players expressed concerns and anxiety which appeared to be largely underpinned by self-presentation concern. This supports Leary's (1992) contention that the substitute role is a potential source of self-presentation concern. Some players reported motivation to impression manage, largely to reduce the discrepancy that existed between how they wanted others to perceive them and how they felt they were perceived in the substitute role, a key antecedent of impression motivation (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Although a somewhat speculative suggestion, it is likely that combined, self-presentation concerns, reduced perceptions of control, restricted preparation and a difficult competitive environment led to a low level of self-presentation efficacy, that is, the subjective probability that one can present a particular image to others (Leary, 1983).

As previously discussed, players also discussed some factors within their control, for example, lack of motivation and effort to physically warm-up and their decreased focus on the game which may also affect the athlete's self-presentation to others. However, they did not seem to consider the self-presentational implications of preparing poorly or reduced focus on the game. Substitutes may benefit from an increased awareness of this given the importance placed on self-presentation when in the substitute role. Managing self-presentation concern may help to ameliorate nerves experienced by players as these can stem from these self-presentation concerns (e.g., Hudson & Williams, 2001; Wilson & Eklund, 1998). Future research that examines self-presentation in substitutes would evidently be worthwhile.

While all of our respondents were dissatisfied with their role as a substitute, some did report positive responses. As in previous work, this response was much less common than the negative responses discussed above (cf. Cresswell & Eklund, 2007). It is possible that players who responded positively had developed and made use of more effective coping strategies than those who did not respond positively. We did not directly address coping strategies but the mental and behavioral disengagement reported by some substitutes suggests that they may be using avoidance coping (e.g., Anshel, 1996). In contrast, players who remained focused and enthusiastic may have employed approach coping. It has been suggested that although avoidance coping may be effective when the stressor is uncontrollable and the source of stress is unclear, approach coping is most effective when the stressor is controllable and immediate action is required (e.g., Roth & Cohen, 1986). Dealing with the stress of being a substitute requires immediate attention from the athlete and includes some factors that are within the athlete's control (e.g., focus, effort exerted during warm-up) therefore approach coping may be a more effective coping strategy in this context. Future studies that examine the coping strategies and approaches used by substitutes, including those which are most effective for helping athletes to deal with this role, would evidently be useful.

This study does include some limitations. We did not examine the effects of the frequency of being a substitute on players' responses. The gender imbalance of our sample, although reflecting the imbalance between the numbers of males and females participating in soccer in the UK, particularly at the competitive levels on which we focused, meant that comparisons between males and females were not feasible. However, all themes were discussed by both males and females. To stan-

dardize the interview process all interviews were conducted by a female interviewer and male and female interviewees may respond differently to a female interviewer. However, this is unlikely as themes were cited by both male and female respondents. Nevertheless, future studies could account for these limitations to clarify the influence of these factors. The results of this study are also only applicable to other team sports with a similar system of substitution where players are named as substitutes before the game, may or may not subsequently be involved in the game and can only be substituted on and off the field of play once (e.g., rugby). In other sports, such as field hockey, where players can be substituted on and off the field of play more than once in a game, the substitute's experience may be considerably different from that presented here and therefore warrants the attention of researchers. Indeed, the extent to which current findings do generalize to other sports with similar substitution regulations needs to be established.

This study has revealed that, for these athletes at least, the substitute role is a stressor that has potentially negative consequences for the athlete's emotions, cognitions and behaviors. In addition to the suggestions made above, future research could investigate the situational (e.g., level of competition or type of sport) and personal (e.g., trait anxiety, self-esteem) factors that may influence the athlete's response to being a substitute. This study has made a number of initial contributions to the literature, first, by responding to the dearth of research into the substitute experience and identifying organizational and competitive factors that contribute to this experience. Second this study has highlighted that psychologists, coaches and athletes need to afford this role independent consideration. Third, athletes who are substitutes may benefit from increased support from a range of sources. Psychologists may offer self-regulation strategies to manage emotions and behaviors, team mates may be able to help substitutes' sense of team cohesion and coaches may help through improved communication. However, these suggestions require further investigation; therefore we hope this study will stimulate subsequent research to explore the issues raised here and thus increase our understanding of this neglected sports population.

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Appendix

Interview Guide

Being told you are a substitute. . .

Who told you that you were going to be a substitute?

When did you find out? Was it at training or on the match day?

Where you given a reason? If not why do you believe you are/were a substitute?

(If reason is related to ability) Do you feel that if given an opportunity to play you could fulfill coach's demands or expectations?

Where you given any indication that you might play?

If you were told before match day, i.e., training, did it affect your preparation?

Under what circumstances have you become a sub? Promotion to team from squad position, or dropped from the first team?

Could you explain your feelings on being told that you were a substitute?

On match day can you remember if you warmed up alone or with the team?

Do you decide when to warm-up or do you wait to be told when to warm up?

Is your warm up a controlled systematic process? Or rushed and unorganised?

Before the game did the manager or coach address you in the team talk?

How did your team-mates respond to you?

How did you feel just before the game started? Can you remember what you were doing just as the game started?

Where did you sit when the game starts?

Can you recall what you were doing while the game was in progress? Were you watching the game?

Were you watching anyone in particular? Do the crowd or spectators distract you?

How do/did you expect to perform if you do/were to get on to play?

Can you recall a situation when your team were winning, while you were on the bench? Can you remember how you felt? How would you feel to come on to play in this situation? Can you recall a time when you did?

Can you recall a situation when your team was losing? Can you remember how you felt? How would you feel to come on in this situation? Can you recall a time when you did?

What is the worst thing about not playing in both these situations?

Is there anything that could happen in the game that would make you feel like not playing?

Do the circumstances you go on to play affect you, e.g., replacing someone who has been injured or replacing someone not playing well?

If you do get an opportunity to go on and play what is your main aim or objective? Play well to gain place on team/impress manager or coach or team mates/to make a significant contribution toward success (score goal/make important save).

Are you instructed by your coach or manager of your exact role before you go on to play? Do you have a clearly defined role to fulfill?

How important is it for you to play well/make a significant contribution to the game?