

Thatcher, J., Jones, M., & Lavallee, D. (2004). Coping and emotion in sport: Introduction. In D. Lavallee, J. Thatcher, & M. Jones (Eds.), *Coping and emotion in sport* (pp. 1-6). New York: Nova Science.

*“Just before the fight, when the referee was giving us instructions, Liston was giving me that stare. And I wont lie I was scared. Sonny Liston was one of the greatest fighters of all time. He was one of the most scientific boxers who ever lived; he hit hard; and he was fixing to kill me. It frightened me, just knowing how hard he hit. But I was there; I didn’t have no choice but to go out and fight...Everyone predicted that Sonny Liston would destroy me. And he was scary. But it’s a lack of faith that makes people afraid of meeting challenges, and I believed in myself. I was confident I could whup him. So what I did was, I studied his style, I trained hard, and I watched Liston outside the ring. I went to his training camp and tried to understand what went on inside his head, so later on I could mess with his mind. And all the time, I was talking, talking. That way, I figured Liston would get so mad that, when the fight came, he’d try to kill me and forget everything he knew about boxing.”*

Muhammad Ali (Taken from Thomas Hauser, 1997, p. 74, Muhammad Ali.

London: Pan Books.)

It may come as a shock to some but possibly the most supremely confident athlete of modern times, Muhammad Ali, experienced emotions prior to competing that all of us can recognize. What is also apparent, given Ali’s legendary status as a sportsman, that he was able to cope with these emotions, clearly crucial in a sport such as boxing where failure to do so could have substantial consequences for the athlete. The emotional highs and lows of competitive sport, whether experienced as a competitor, spectator or coach may be the essential ingredient that gives sport its universal and compelling appeal. Who could fail to share the intense anticipation, nervousness, excitement, relief and jubilation when Cathy Freeman won 400 metres gold in front of a frenzied home crowd at the 2000 Sydney Olympics?

Emotion is clearly a pervasive force within competitive sport, and this is reflected in its academic study, with a burgeoning interest over recent decades in athletes’ emotions and strategies for coping with these emotions. A search of ‘Web of Science’ shows that a little over 150 articles on emotion and coping in sport have been produced since the early 1980s. 53% of these were published in the 1990s but,

reflecting increased focus on understanding this phenomenon, 46% of the total number of articles produced to date have been published since the start of this century. With over half of the current decade remaining, simple extrapolation of these figures would suggest that in the coming years sport psychology researchers and practitioners will add considerably to our knowledge of coping and emotion in sport.

Given the centrality of competitive stress within the sport psychology literature and the importance of understanding how athletes cope with stress (Eklund, Grove, & Heard, 1998) it is not surprising that a great deal of research has focused on athletes' stress-related coping. These studies have examined how athletes cope with stress across a range of sports, for instance, wrestling (Gould, Eklund, & Jackson, 1993), figure skating (Scanlan, Stein, & Ravizza, 1991), soccer (Holt & Hogg, 2002), and, decathlon (Dale, 2000). However, Lazarus (2000) has commented that two distinct literatures have emerged: one with a focus on stress and coping and a second focusing on emotion and coping. He further states that although stress is important in its own right, we should examine the athlete's emotional experience as this includes all the important aspects of stress and stress comprises the psychological basis of certain emotions, such as hope and relief. Moreover, insight into the emotional process will deepen our understanding of human attempts towards adaptation, including those made in the sports context. He suggests that the discrete emotions experienced by athletes are likely to be of major import for performance outcomes whether they emanate from the competitive situation itself or from the athlete's broader life events and experiences. In line with this sentiment, the sport psychology literature on emotion and coping in sport is now flourishing with a number of key texts published. Substantial contributions by theorists such as Hanin (2000), Kerr (1997), Weiner (1986) and Vallerand (1987) have greatly increased our understanding of athletes'

emotional experiences. These are not discussed in detail in this book although Jones and Uphill do provide brief summaries of each theory and interested readers are referred to the texts cited within these summaries for stimulating and in some aspects, quite different perspectives on emotion in sport.

The various authors who have contributed towards this book present, through theoretical discussion, and consideration of their own and others' research, arguments that illustrate the importance of emotions and coping in competitive sport. These need not be reiterated here, but we will refer to a succinct summary by Lazarus (2000) that clearly conveys the critical role played by emotions and coping in sport. He identifies motivation (commitment of energy and persistence towards competition and training), attention (to events occurring during competition), and, concentration (on actions and strategies required for success) as the most important psychological functions influencing athletic performance. Although some readers may wish to add to this list of functions, few would likely question the importance of these functions in achieving a successful sports performance. We would suspect that even fewer would question his claim that all of these psychological functions are under the influence of the athlete's experienced emotions. Although some emotions experienced by athletes can have adaptive functions, others may hinder the athlete's attempts at goal achievement and coping with the demands of competitive sport (Lazarus, 2000). Those emotions that result in increased motivation to attend and concentrate can be productive, but, emotional experiences that shift the athlete's focus from their current competitive goals can be counterproductive in terms of subsequent goal achievement. However, unless we also consider how athletes *cope* with their experienced emotions, it is impossible to understand the full impact of emotions on the athlete, their behaviors and competitive outcomes.

Coping is an integral aspect of the emotional process (Lazarus, 2000). It is initiated at the start of an emotional experience and continues to function throughout its duration. Thus, in conjunction with the appraisals that underpin coping, coping itself can influence subsequent emotions and their patterns of change. In chapter three, Richards provides an overview of current thinking on coping in sport, therefore a detailed discussion of contemporary issues is not presented here. However, returning to Lazarus' key psychological functions, we can concisely summarize the role that coping plays in successful sports performances. Just as emotions influence these functions (motivation, attention and concentration), Lazarus contends that adaptive coping may lead to regeneration of motivation and increased ability to attend and concentrate on the task at hand. Hence, adaptive coping in the face of counterproductive action tendencies that result from maladaptive emotions, is crucial in attaining successful performance outcomes (Lazarus, 2000).

In theory then, the interplay between emotion and coping is a critical factor in determining, through its influence on key psychological functions, an athlete's potential success in competitive sport. Considering the growing body of evidence that is available, we felt it timely to produce a collection of edited papers that summarizes current theorizing and presents the findings of contemporary research on emotion and coping in sport. Our additional aims in producing this edited volume are twofold. First we wanted to illustrate the breadth of influence of emotions and coping in sport through the diverse range of topics covered in different chapters. We also wanted this book to outline some of the practical applications of theory and research that are discussed throughout the book. To fulfil these aims therefore, different sections of the book have differing emphases. The first section of the book offers a theoretical context for the remaining sections. Following this introductory chapter, Jones and

Uphill provide definitions of emotions and related constructs that can be applied throughout all of the chapters. They also summarize theoretical perspectives on emotion in sport and illustrate the importance of the emotional process for sport performance. Their chapter concludes by identifying key issues in understanding emotions and their functions in competitive sport. Similarly, in chapter three, Richards explains the coping process and how it is linked to emotion. Setting the scene for subsequent chapters on coping, he provides an overview of coping styles and approaches, different types of coping, research into coping in sport and issues concerning coping effectiveness. His review also looks forward as throughout this discussion he identifies key conceptual and methodological issues that require further consideration.

The theme of section two is research with each chapter drawing on the authors' original research findings. Readers should take note of the different approaches, geographical origins of the research (Europe, the United States of America and Australia) and the breadth of content and practical application evident within these chapters. This diversity offers a convincing illustration of the complexity, pervasiveness and influence of emotions in competitive sport. In the first of this section's chapters, Lovell examines the links between overtraining and mood and explains how mood state can provide an observable index of latent problems related to overtraining. Following on from this, Lovell discusses his research on mood state monitoring and a case study of an overtrained athlete that illustrates the practical utility of this monitoring process. Although Uphill and Jones' focus is on their research findings and theoretical issues arising from these, they begin chapter five with a very clear and comprehensible introduction to CMR theory for those who are unfamiliar with this approach. Overall, their data, obtained from elite athletes, do

support the use of CMR theory in understanding athletes' experiences of emotion and coping but these data have also revealed some important questions which CMR theory needs to address. In chapter six Walker and her colleagues also discuss conceptual issues, but the focus here is on re-injury anxiety. This phenomenon has not yet been widely researched but is one that can impact hugely on the athlete's holistic rehabilitation from sports injury and their return to competitive sport. A case study of a female soccer player experiencing re-injury anxiety demonstrates its possible influence on the athlete's behaviors and cognitions, and, how interventions can be employed to reduce this anxiety and restore pre-injury psychological states and behaviors. As previously identified, studies are needed that examine both emotion and coping simultaneously and in chapter seven Hagger and colleagues describe two quantitative studies which have done so. Their findings identified support for the use of Leventhal, Meyer, and Nerenz's (1980) self-regulation theory to explain the cognitive antecedents of injured athletes' coping responses, emotional and functional outcomes. Practical implications derived from these results emphasize the importance of both personal control and empowerment and social support for athletes experiencing sports injuries. Neave and Wolfson's chapter that follows focuses on a topic that is well documented in the literature and is familiar to sports fans and journalists across a range of sports: the home advantage. However, their discussion of commonly considered, although not conclusively demonstrated, explanations of this phenomenon centers on the emotional implications of these factors (e.g., crowd, referee, environmental familiarity). They go on to discuss their own research which tests the hypothesis that the home advantage is linked to mood and testosterone changes resulting from the analogy that playing at home is akin to defending one's territory. Adopting a somewhat different perspective from other authors to conclude

this section, Babkes and Partridge consider the social influences on athletes' emotions and the reciprocal relationship these factors share. After providing definitions of the concepts they discuss, they identify different theoretical frameworks that are particularly suited for examining this relationship. An examination of research into the influence of significant others, such as parents, coaches and peers, follows, and, based on findings from these studies, practical strategies are suggested to optimize the athlete's emotional experience, as are ways in which this research base should be extended.

The themes of the third section of the book are issues and special populations. This section begins with Woods and colleagues' consideration of how athletes cope with a role somewhat neglected by sport psychology, that of the substitute player. Based on qualitative interviews with soccer substitutes, these authors outline their emotional responses, coping strategies and factors mediating these responses at different phases of competition. In conjunction with evidence from case studies of both adaptive and maladaptive coping in substitutes, these findings are used to underpin recommendations to optimize coping when athletes are faced with carrying out the role of substitute. In chapter eleven, Reid presents a unique perspective on emotion and coping within the context of the rest of the book. Drawing on her work as a clinical psychologist, she explores a range of potential losses experienced by athletes (e.g., career transitions, injury, and, less obviously perhaps, the losses encountered following major competitive success). She considers the emotions accompanying such losses, the ways in which athletes can cope with these emotions, and the factors, such as personality and developmental stage, that may mediate this coping process. As do other authors, she concludes her chapter with a case study of an elite hockey squad, describing her work in helping the squad to prepare for, and deal with the losses



encountered in their Olympic participation. In chapter twelve, as have other chapters, Anderson, White and McKay focus on injury but their focus is on a range of emotional responses to injury and the cognitive processes that underpin them. In their application of CMR theory, they use elite athletes' narratives to elucidate the role of cognitive appraisals in the generation of emotional responses to injury that include anger, anxiety, sadness and relief. Martin and McCaughy then discuss emotion and coping issues that are of specific relevance for the disabled athlete. In general, as we would expect, mood state, stress, anxiety and coping responses in the disabled athlete mirror those observed in able bodied athletes. These authors identify, however, that the disabled athlete's psychosocial and cultural experiences in sport can be unique to this athlete population. Picking up a similar thread to one previously discussed by Reid, they illustrate how coping with the transition out of competitive sport is influenced by the disabled athlete's unique psychosocial and cultural experiences surrounding their overall sporting involvement. Following on from this is Peter Clarke's account of how one gold medal winning team coped with the Olympic experience. Instead of focusing on competition per se, Clarke discusses the team's dynamics and the strategies they used to cope with the issues related to and emanating from these dynamics. Spanning the 15 months of pre Olympic preparation, Olympic competition and the post Olympic period, Clarke's chapter provides a rare insight into coping with, and within, the dynamics of a sports team. In the penultimate chapter, Lane discusses the measurement of emotion, mood and coping. He begins with a concise outline of reliability and validity, explaining how these are essential considerations if we are to have confidence in the results of questionnaire-based research. He also highlights that conceptual and theoretical developments can be facilitated through the use of psychometrically sound measurement tools. His main

message centers around the need for ongoing development of these questionnaires in the face of conceptual, theoretical, empirical and statistical advances heralding a call for further empirical investigation to ensure the dynamic nature of these tools. In the final chapter we aim to draw together the diverse approaches and arguments presented throughout the book to provide an overall picture of contemporary issues in coping and emotion in competitive sport. The chapter identifies what we feel are the key directions for researchers to pursue to further current theoretical, empirical and applied knowledge about these processes.

One of the pleasures in producing this edited volume has been the opportunity to engage in dialogue with such a range of authors on a diverse range of topics. Initial drafts of the final chapters presented here often raised issues, questions and arguments (academic ones!) that resulted in stimulating debate between ourselves as editors and with different chapter authors. We would like to thank all the authors for their spirit of open-minded debate about these issues. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank Nova Science Publishers for welcoming and encouraging this edited volume, as well as Rhys Thatcher for his assistance in producing several figures for this book. We hope that the content of the book stimulates in its readers similar debate, discussion and questioning, in both theoretical and empirical forms, and subsequently advances our understanding of coping and emotion in sport.

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