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Sport injury psychology: An overview and introduction to the special issue

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Welcome to this special issue of the *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* on Sports Injury Psychology. We introduce this special issue in the knowledge that just over 20 years ago, Britton Brewer was tasked with a similar introduction to write as Guest Editor of the 1998 special issue (Brewer, 1998). At that point in time, Brewer remarked that a special issue was timely given the expanding research interest in sports injury psychology and broadening of the domain to include topics, such as adherence to rehabilitation and interventions to prevent injury. Despite growing interest in the psychology of injury, Brewer highlighted the need for further research, suggesting “there is obviously a great deal more to be learned about the role of psychological factors in the occurrence of and recovery from sports injuries” (p. 2). The previous special edition, therefore, acted as a call to action, challenging researchers to traverse the sports injury landscape, building upon existing knowledge. Nearly 25 years later this special edition opens up a timely question asked by many a traveler, “are we there yet?”

As ever, the answer to this question is complex and it would be naïve to provide a simple answer. Yet, with this in mind, we propose that it is both timely and important to engage in critical dialogue. We suggest this because sports injury psychology is an area of research that has continued to flourish and diversify in the applied sports psychology literature. Following the publication of the 1998 special edition, 23 articles with injury in the title have been published in the *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* alone. These articles have continued to expand our understanding of the emotional responses to injury (e.g., Tracey, 2003), and provided new approaches to working with injured athletes, such as mindfulness (Ivarsson et al., 2015) and gratitude (Salim & Wadey, 2021) and have considered how injury impacts and is impacted by a broad range of individuals, such as coaches (Podlog & Eklund, 2007), parents (Podlog et al., 2012), and teams (Surya et al., 2015). Thus the volume and breadth of sports injury research have certainly increased, but alongside this, we might question whether this research is also driven in diverse theoretical and methodological directions. Furthermore, there is no doubt that this flourishing research area has developed new knowledge, but is this knowledge enough to enhance the work we (as psychologists, physiotherapists, coaches, and other supporters) do with injured athletes?

Our aim in this special issue is to present five articles, each of which challenges our current thinking on sports injury psychology in a different way. We open the special issue with

Seguin and Culver who focus on the lived experience of sport-related concussions, extending our understanding by using a new methodology, new theory, and new forms of representation. The authors use a collaborative inquiry methodology in which athletes and researchers worked together. Thus athletes who had experienced sport-related concussions became co-researchers taking part in collaborative decision-making, discussion, and reflection. Results are presented as composite narratives and interpreted using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory.

Our second article is by McGannon et al. and explores cultural portrayals of sports injury and retirement. Focusing on the injury-related retirement of one high-profile athlete in the National Football League, McGannon et al. present a narrative thematic analysis of 60 news articles. Their work highlights the toll that pain and injury may have on mental health, particularly in a sport where playing through pain is celebrated. It also emphasizes the value of media stories in understanding the stories that circulate about injury and how these could enhance our understanding of performance and relational aspects of injury. In doing this, the authors note the lack of previous research that has explored the media in its many forms (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) to understand sports injury and therefore opens our thinking on what might be gained.

Third, Tamminen and Watson highlight that although emotions have been shown to play a central role in the experience of injury, therapeutic approaches are typically grounded in a cognitive behavioral approach and use strategies that emphasize controlling or suppressing emotions. Their work provides a novel focus, outlining how emotion-focused therapy with injured athletes may be used. Furthermore, rather than simply describing how this might be done the article shows this in practice through dialogue between therapists and athletes, and outlining tasks for working with emotions, such as two chairs and empty chair work.

Fourth, van Iperen et al. investigate the use of a mobile application (app) to reduce the risk of running-related injuries and chronic fatigue. The app used self-regulatory mechanisms to assess current physical and mental load capacity and participants were given personalized advice using a traffic light system. Although results demonstrated no association between app use and running-related injury, the study provides valuable recommendations for those considering the use of mobile technology in reducing or recovering from injury.

Finally, Evans and Brewer provide a critical and reflective article on the current research landscape and application-readiness of sports injury research. In doing this they outline the gap between research and practice, highlighting that sports psychology consultants are infrequently directly involved in the prevention and treatment of injury and thus the target for the application of psychology in the context of sports injury should be coaches, sport-healthcare professionals, and athletes. Their work highlights how we might bridge the research-to-practice gap and looks ahead to future research and practice.

It has been our privilege to put together this special issue and we extend our thanks and appreciation to all of the authors and reviewers who have dedicated their time and efforts. As guest editors, these articles have challenged our ways of thinking and inspired us to look toward the future. We, therefore, close the special issue with an epilogue that provides a critical perspective on the field of sports injury psychology. In doing this, we outline how the studies in this special issue offer theoretical,

methodological, and applied diversification and provide a “call to action” for a shift toward a more diverse scholarship to gain a more enriched understanding of sports injury.

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