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An Evaluative Case Study of a Psychological Skills Training
Program with Athletes with Intellectual Disability

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SCHOOL OF HUMAN PERFORMANCE AND LEISURE SCIENCES

AN EVALUATIVE CASE STUDY OF A PSYCHOLOGICAL SKILLS TRAINING
PROGRAM WITH ATHLETES WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY

BY

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To the Dean of the School of Human Performance and Leisure Sciences:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Kari Hoefling entitled “An Evaluative Case Study Of A Psychological Skills Training Program With Athletes With Intellectual Disability”. I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science with a major in Sports & Exercise Performance Psychology.

Dr. Duncan Simpson, Thesis Committee Chair

We, members of the thesis committee,
have examined this thesis
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Abstract

This study explored a neophyte consultant's reflective practice within the context of supervision. It employed an evaluative case study methodology, involving both coaches and athlete participants; coaches were asked to participate in one semi structured interview to help the trainee find meaning with a personal reflection to ID and disabled sports and to gain further understanding of how Special Olympic (SO) coaches experience training athletes with ID. In contrast, athletes were asked to participate in a series of psychological skills training (PST) activities in which the primary researcher made observations and notes regarding this intervention. The results of the interviews, PST and observations were used to form reflective meaning that otherwise may not be formed with a direct reflection of how the primary researchers interoperated her thoughts, feelings, opinions, and emotions during these experiences.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1	1
Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	4
Purpose.....	6
Operational Definitions.....	6
Assumptions.....	7
Limitations.....	7
Delimitations.....	8
Research Questions.....	8
Significance.....	8
CHAPTER 2.....	10
Literature Review.....	10
Overview.....	10
Part One:	10
Athletes with Intellectually Disabilities.....	10
Benefits of Sport and Recreation.....	12
Influence of Family.....	13
Barriers To Access.....	15
Minorities.....	17
Part Two:	18
Special Olympics.....	18
Part Three:	21

Sport Psychology Intervention	21
Part Four:	25
Student Reflection Experiences.....	25
Part Five:	27
Case Study Research.....	27
CHAPTER 3.....	30
Methods.....	30
Methodology.....	31
Disability Theory.....	32
Disability Interpretive Lens.....	33
Participants.....	33
Procedures.....	35
Qualitative Interview.....	36
Participant, Non Participant Observation.....	37
Analysis.....	38
CHAPTER 4.....	40
Results.....	40
Initial Contact with Participants.....	41
Reflection.....	41
Initial Introduction: SO Administration, Coaches and Softball Athletes.....	42
Reflection.....	43
Subsequent Introduction: Information Session and Consent.....	47
Reflection.....	47

Session 1: Icebreaker.....	50
Debrief.....	51
Reflection.....	51
Participant Observation	53
Reflection.....	54
Session 2: Team Building – Active Listening.....	56
Debrief.....	57
Reflection.....	57
Session 3: Team Building – Trust.....	59
Debrief.....	60
Reflection.....	61
Session 4: Communication and Leadership.....	63
Debrief.....	64
Reflection.....	65
Non-Participant Observation.....	66
Reflection.....	66
Session 5: Focus and Distraction Control.....	69
Debrief.....	70
Reflection.....	71
Session 6: Increasing Self-Confidence Through Positive Self-Talk.....	72
Debrief.....	73
Reflection.....	74
Session 7: Goal Setting	75

Debrief.....	78
Reflection.....	78
Session 8: Focus and Distraction Control.....	79
Debrief.....	80
Reflection.....	81
Non-Participant Observation	83
Reflection.....	83
Session 9: Basic Relaxation Through Deep Breathing.....	84
Debrief.....	85
Reflection.....	86
Session 10: Team Building.....	87
Debrief.....	88
Reflection.....	89
Session 11: Team Building – Trust.....	91
Debrief.....	91
Reflection.....	92
Session 12: Communication.....	94
Debrief.....	96
Reflection.....	98
Session 13: Team Building and Leadership.....	99
Debrief.....	99
Reflection.....	100
Participant Observation.....	102

Reflection.....103

Supplementary Results.....104

 Qualitative Interview.....104

CHAPTER 5.....108

 Discussion.....108

 Limitations.....113

 Practical Implications.....113

 Future Research.....114

REFERENCES.....116

APPENDICES.....135

 Appendix A: Informed Consent Form- Coaches135

 Appendix B: Informed Consent Form- Athletes.....137

 Appendix C: Psychological Skills Training.....139

 Appendix D: Psychological Skills Training Session Overview.....141

 Appendix E: Participant Recruitment.....145

 Appendix F: Data Gathering146

List of Tables

Table 1: Psychological Skills Training Overview.....34

Chapter I

Introduction

According to the United States Census Bureau (2010), approximately 56.7 million people living in the United States have some kind of disability. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), define “disability” as (a) physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; (b) has a record of such an impairment; or (c) has been regarded as having such an impairment (ADA, 2009; U.S. Department of Justice, 2012). Disabled sport is growing around the world with momentum and is described as a “movement” (Bailey, 2008; De-Pauw & Gavron, 2005). With this growth, Wolff and Hums (2003) implied that sport for people with disabilities should focus on how to construct opportunities that emphasize *ability* rather than disability. However, despite this movement there still exists little research on applied sport psychology and athletes with different types of disability.

Taken together, prior research has investigated athletes with a range of diverse disabilities including: congenital and acquired (Skordilis, Skafida, Chrysagis, & Nikitaras, 2006), physical (Martin, & Whalen, 2012), sensory (Wang, & DePauw, 1995), developmental (Weiss, Diamond, Demark, & Lovald, 2003), cognitive (Travis & Sachs, 1991), mental health-psychiatric (Reardon & Factor, 2010), as well as speech and language (Burroughs, 1997). Specifically, when considering organized sport, the most widely available resources (e.g., public schools and community based recreation centers) for athletes with intellectual disabilities (ID) are the Special Olympics (SO) programs (Hanrahan, & Andersen, 2010). Growing in popularity, a recent survey reports that SO serves more than 4 million persons with ID in 226 programs in 170 countries (Special

Olympics, 2013). However, despite the increased participation, interest, and development there is still little applied sport psychology research on athletes with ID.

Although not specific to ID, prior empirical research has investigated athletes' experiences of psychological skills training (PST) Gould & Damarjian, 1998; Patrick & Hrycaiko, 1998; Thelwell & Greenlees, 2003). This research has largely examined PST in the context of performance enhancement such as relaxation (Kudlackova, Eccles, & Dieffenbach, 2013), imagery (Munroe-Chandler & Hall, 2004; Post, Muncie, & Simpson, 2012), self-talk (Tovares, 2010), and goal setting (Munroe-Chandler, Hall, & Weinberg, 2004; Wanlin, Hrycaiko, Martin, & Mahon, 1997). Results for these studies suggest that PST when implemented correctly can improve the performance of athletes. Furthermore, prior research has been helpful in understanding youth (Johnson & Gilbert, 2004), collegiate (Horn, Gilbert, Gilbert & Lewis, 2011), professional and elite athletes' experience of PST (Keeler & Watson, 2011).

Despite the aforementioned findings on athletes without disability, further research is needed to investigate the effectiveness of PST on athletes with ID (Asken & Goodling, 1986; Hanrahan, Grove, & Lockwood, 1990). Currently, it is uncertain if the experiences of athletes described in prior PST research are similar to those who take part in SO events. Given the increased participation and interest of SO and the apparent mental, physical, and social demands placed on athletes with ID (see Harada & Siperstein, 2009), it is reasonable to assume some may benefit from sport psychology interventions. In order for sport psychologists to provide effective support and PST to athletes with ID, additional information is needed about these sport experiences.

One descriptive study designed to collect information broadly about the

experiences of athletes in SO illustrates they are similar to athletes without disabilities given that sport is a significant life experience (Harada & Siperstein, 2009). Further findings indicated that athletes with ID participate in sport for fun (54%) and social interaction (21%). Similar to athletes without disabilities, SO athletes leave sport because of changes in interest (38%), but also because of program availability (33%; Harada & Siperstein, 2009). By bringing together people with similar disabilities, sport contributes to normalization (Mastandrea, 2007) enabling persons with disabilities to share their experiences and enjoy camaraderie with others who understand their challenges and capacities (Right to Play, 2008). Considering the various benefits that are linked with participation in sport, it is evident that sport can significantly contribute to the development of athletes with disabilities.

Although more than 4 million athletes with ID participate in SO each year, there is a dearth of sport psychology research focusing on these individuals (Porretta & Moore, 1996,1997; Travis & Sachs, 1991). Past research on athletes with ID has focused primarily on physical fitness levels (Van de Vliet, Rintala, Fröjd, Verellen, Van Houtte, Daly, & Vanlandewijck, 2006), postural stability (Dellavia, Pallavera, Orlando, & Sforza, 2009), psychosocial and physical health status (Marks, Sisirak, Heller, & Wagner, 2010), technical proficiency (Van Biesen, Mactavish, Pattyn, & Vanlandewijck, 2012), and participation motives and benefits (Shapiro, 2003; Tedrick, 2009). However, most of this research has been descriptive in nature, used quantitative assessment tools, or offered participants limited choices of response to given questions and perhaps fail to capture the in-depth and complex nature of participants' experiences. Furthermore, these assessments have not investigated how PST techniques can be developed and

implemented within this population (Asken & Goodling, 1986; Hanrahan, Grove, & Lockwood, 1990). Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative investigation is to gain an in-depth understanding of SO experiences of a PST intervention by implementing a flexible methodological practice to collect data due to the exploratory nature of this project.

Statement of the Problem

Sport is well suited to helping persons with ID acquire social skills they may be lacking (Alexander, 2009). It teaches individuals how to communicate effectively (Roy, 2007), in addition to understanding the significance of teamwork and cooperation, goal setting, self-discipline, respect for others, (Cambodian National Volleyball League-Disabled, 2007), and the importance of rules (Ikelberg, et al., 1998). Likewise, sport enables persons with disabilities to take risks and learn how to manage failure and success in a safe and supportive environment (Right to Play, 2008). Moreover, coaches and teammates can provide each other with a great magnitude of role modeling (UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace, 2003) and skill development, which can be transferred into other areas of life (i.e., employment) (Right to Play, 2008). Additionally, sport has the power to reduce dependence and develop greater independence by helping individuals to become physically and mentally stronger (Right to Play, 2008).

Despite the fact that IDs have been characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior as expressed in conceptual, social, and practical adaptive skills (American Association on Mental Retardation, 2002), there still lacks a significant amount of research regarding the implementation of PST for athletic

participants possessing an ID. In order to provide more in-depth information on athletes with ID, some researchers have utilized a case study approach implementing PST (Gorely, Jobling, Lewis, & Bruce, 2002; Gregg, Hrycaiko, Mactavish, & Martin, 2004). Specifically, Gorely, Jobling, Lewis, and Bruce (2002) focused their sessions on stress management, with primary attention given to cue words, breathing techniques, and positive thinking. Findings produced were based on interviews and participant observations, which revealed all participants believed that the PST was appropriate and worthwhile. Similarly, Gregg, Hrycaiko, Mactavish, and Martin (2004) assessed the effects of a PST intervention on off-task behaviors and athletic performance (i.e., work output and competition results). The results were clearly beneficial for two participants, decreasing the frequency and duration of off-task behaviors and increasing the percentage of laps completed for the third participant. A social validity assessment provided further support for the effectiveness of the intervention.

Taken together, participation in sport by individuals with ID has increased considerably due to a focus on community integration in the provision of recreational activities (Castagno, 2001; Moon, 1994; Ninot, Bilard, Delignières, & Sokolowski, 2000) and the specific provisions that have been made by disability sporting organizations such as Special Olympics International and the International Paralympics Committee. When athletes with ID are competing with the idea of maximizing performance, then sport science services, including sport psychology, should be available to them. A challenge to the profession of sport psychology is to determine what modifications in content and presentation are required to maximize the effectiveness of PST programs for individuals with ID (Hanrahan, 1995). While a reasonable argument can be made that athletes with

ID have the potential to learn and benefit from the psychological skills generally included in PST, it is clear that attempts to conduct such training with this population have been limited.

Therefore, the primary reason for this research was to develop a reflective case study that incorporated 13 PST sessions, spaced over 13 weeks, which was provided to ID athletes, who practiced weekly in preparation for the 2014 National SO games. In addition to 4 observations (combination of both participant and nonparticipant), and 1 semi-structured interview, per coach, which was conducted post intervention.

Purpose

Using an evaluative case study, the primary purpose of this study was to explore with a detailed, reflective account of a neophyte consultant's (first author) experience developing, and implementing PST with a group of ID athletes

Operational Definitions

To aid in full comprehension of the manner of which this research was conducted, the following key operational terms were defined.

- Psychological Skills Training - a systematic and consistent practice of mental or psychological skills for the purpose of enhancing performance; includes an interaction with a sport psychology consultant, coach, or teacher in which mental skills are being taught (Frey et al., 2003; Weinberg & Gould, 2011).
- Intellectual disability- a disability characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior, which covers many everyday social and practical skills that: (a) originates before the age of 18, and (b) has an IQ test score of around 70 or as high as 75 which indicates a limitation in

intellectual functioning language, motor and social abilities' (AAIDD, 2013).

- Developmental disability- a severe, chronic disability of an individual 5 years of age or older that: (a) is attributable to a mental or physical impairment or combination of both, (b) is evident before an individual reaches the age of 22, (c) is likely to continue indefinitely, (d) results in substantial functional limitations in three or more areas of major life activity, and (e) reflects an individual's need for long-term coordinated services and supports. Examples of specific conditions that fall within this category include Autism, Mental Retardation and Cerebral Palsy (Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council, 2014).
- Disability- a functional limitation with regard to a particular activity (Carter, 2013).
- Handicap- a disadvantage in filling a role in life relative to a peer group (Carter, 2013).
- Impairment- a problem with a structure or organ of the body (Carter, 2013).

Assumptions

It was assumed that (a) the interviews with the coaches and/or athletes was completely honest and that their responses provided a subjective overview of their experiences coaching athletes with ID and (b) the case study was an honest reflective account of the neophyte trainee.

Limitations

Some limitations to the reflective approach (see Johns, 1994) used in this study were; limited insight of the reflective process, un-comfortableness experienced when challenging and/or evaluating own practice, unsure which experiences or problems to

reflect on, personal biases unbracketed and time consuming (Davies, 2012).

Delimitations

Participation in this study was delimited to athletes who (a) have a diagnosed ID (b) 18 years of age or older, and (c) participate in SO of Miami-Dade.

Research Questions

Describe the experience and what were the significant factors? What was I trying to achieve and what were the consequences? What things (internal/external/knowledge) affected my decision-making? What other choices did I have and what were those consequences? What will change because of this experience and how did I feel about the experience? How has this experience change my ways of knowing: (a) empirics-scientific, (b) ethics-moral knowledge (c) personal-self-awareness or (d) aesthetics- the art of what we do, our own experiences?

Significance

The current study sought to extend the aforementioned research (Gorely, Jobling, Lewis, & Bruce, 2002; Gregg, Hrycaiko, Mactavish, & Martin, 2004) and was unique because it consisted of a reflective case study approach, which explored a PST program, designed for ID athletes, who were chosen to represent their state's team at the 2014 SO games held in New Jersey. In addition, this study has contributed to the sport psychology literature and the ongoing need of much warranted attention that involves a detailed examination of the role of reflective practice in the development of PST designed for athletes with ID.

As a consequence to the nature of this goal and the very essence of reflective practice, a qualitative approach was used to examine the factors pertinent to the current in

depth investigation. Specifically, this involved embracing alternative methods of qualitative enquiry (e.g., personal reflective narratives and observations), as well as more traditional approaches (e.g., focus groups with neophyte and accredited sport psychology consultants), and the design and implementation of an intervention that enhanced the ability of a student practitioner to reflect on her consultancy. Importantly, this thesis further presented a movement away from traditional intervention procedures by incorporating an in-depth, semi-structured interview approach that was intended to support links between the development of reflective skills and the enhancement of applied practice in disability sport.

Ultimately, this study sought to enhance understanding of the sport psychology consultant (SPC) trainee's experience, the importance of incorporating reflective practice, and the impact of PST on a group of ID athletes.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Overview

While many studies have been conducted on nondisabled athletes regarding the benefits of PST and performance enhancement, little research has been done on individuals with ID (see Gregg, 2010; Gorely, Jobling, Lewis, & Bruce, 2002). In order to address this issue, a fundamental review of previous research literature on sport psychology intervention and persons with disabilities fostering inclusion and well-being follows. Part one identified athletes with ID and their motives to participate in sport. Part two provided an in-depth exploration of the Special Olympics. Part three addressed sport psychology interventions. Part four discussed student reflective practice. Finally, part five was an overview of case study research in sport.

Part One: Athletes with Intellectual Disabilities

According to the American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD, 2013), an individual is considered to have an ID based on the following three criteria: (a) intellectual functioning level (IQ) is below 70-75; (b) significant limitations exist in two or more adaptive skill areas (communication, self-care, home living, social skills, leisure, health and safety, self-direction, functional academics, community use, and work); and (c) the condition manifests itself before the age of 18. Therefore, organizing sport for athletes with ID requires an understanding of their diverse abilities to compete in various games at different levels. Specifically, familiarity with these adaptive skills is more relevant than the classification or the degree of ID (Gregg, 2010; Hanrahan & Andersen, 2010). For example, providing services to help athletes

with ID aids in determining a person's strengths and weaknesses. This approach gives a realistic picture of each individual. It also recognizes that the abilities can change as athletes grow and learn their ability in sport.

Taken together, sport is meaningful and important in the lives of many people, including those with ID. Like other members of society, some individuals with ID participate in sport for purely recreational reasons, to develop skills, for fitness, and to have fun socializing with other people (Mactavish & Dowds, 2003). Furthermore, when persons with disabilities participate in sports with non-disabled individuals (unified sports) it presents an opportunity for all athletes, regardless of age or ability, to deal with the reality that human relationships always involve accommodating differences and uniqueness (Coakley, 2009).

For some athletes, the transition from recreational sport to intensive training and competition is a natural progression for testing personal limits and pursuing athletic dreams and goals (Mactavish & Dowds, 2003). Dealing with this reality requires a choice to be made: maintain power and performance sports as they limit participation for those with ID, or organize them around the pleasure and performance model to be inclusive (Coakley, 2009). Which, according to Coakley (1998), the dominant sport experience in the United States is based on the *power and performance model*, which involves competitive activities that emphasize: (a) the value of physical strength and power to extend human limits and dominate opponents; (b) the concept that personal excellence is connected with competitive success and requires dedication and "playing in pain"; (c) the importance of establishing records and defining the body as a machine; (d) exclusive participation based on skill and success; and (e) a hierarchical authority

structure in which the athlete is subordinate to the coach. In contrast, the value of an integrated self and the opportunity for personal expression defines the sport experience in the *pleasure and participation model* (Coakley, 1998). Specific points of the model include: (a) sense of connection between individuals, the union of mind and body, and a relationship between physical activity and the environment; (b) personal ethic of living that is grounded in expressing support for teammates and opponents and enjoying the activity for its health benefits; (c) empowerment by experiencing the body as a source of well-being; (d) participation based on inclusion and accommodating individual difference in performance; (e) belief in sharing power between coach and athlete; and (f) the idea of competing with, not against, others (Coakley, 1998).

Despite these findings, many disabled athletes now engage in power and performance sports on a regular basis yet a notable inequity of athletes still exists between disabled and standard sport participation in partial to stigma, fear, or the lack of publicity of disability sport. In fact, the most recent comparative figures from the General Social Survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006) indicated that, on average, people with disabilities are 15% less likely to participate in sport and active recreation than the general population. Effectively including persons with ID in sport competitions not only requires in-depth knowledge of their physical skill acquisition, physical fitness, social skill development, and overall functioning, but also of their mutual relationships and the interaction of the cognitive and neuropsychological potential (Mactavish & Dowds, 2003). Therefore, actively including athletes with ID in sport and recreation may offer a multitude of benefits.

Benefits of Sport and Recreation

While limited, prior research has documented many benefits of sport and recreational participation for athletes with ID including, physical (DePauw, 1986; Dodd, Taylor, & Graham, 2003; MacPhail & Kramer, 1995; Morton, Brownlee, & McFadyen, 2005) and social-emotional development, facilitation of self-help (DePauw, 1986; Dodd, Taylor, & Graham, 2004), in addition to enhancing the overall wellbeing and promoting social inclusion (Wilson, 2002). Engaging in sport has also been shown to be beneficial in improving athletes' emotional control, social awareness, self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-concept, as well as increased motivation and independence (DePauw, 1986). Most notable is self-confidence as it has consistently been identified as an important influence on athletic performance regardless of disability (e.g., Jones & Hanton, 2001; Vealey, 2001). Although limited, it appears that individuals with ID have benefited from participation in various sport or recreation activities.

Influence of Family

Considering the benefits of sport and recreation, families have shown to play a crucial role in providing social support for athletes with ID (Kersh, & Siperstein, n.d.; Right to Play, 2008). Insofar, that social support, in its many forms, operates as a powerful engine of connections for athletes and their families, which ultimately provided them with a normative life experiences critical to healthy development (Kersh, & Siperstein, n.d.). For example, athletes and their families were provided opportunities to forge new relationships or strengthen existing ones, fostering much needed inclusion to make friends and become actively engaged in meaningful activities outside the home. Furthermore, it has promoted opportunities to develop social relationships with peers, and experience the deep bonds of true friendship (Kersh, & Siperstein, n.d.).

Additionally, family support for ID athletes engaging in SOs may also play a larger role than in non-disabled sport. For example, parents and families tend to come together, supporting each athlete in a way that extends beyond the cheers, creating a positive and caring environment which influences sport access and participation (Nixon, 2007; Special Olympics, 2013). Sport may also bring together and allow families who have similar experiences to provide support to one another, which empowers them to advocate for positive change to ensure greater inclusion and equality for persons with disabilities (Gustavsson, et al., 2007). Likewise, experts and parents of athletes also believe that participation in sports, specifically SO, improves social adjustment and quality of life for participants, increases social support for families with members involved, and fosters public understanding of individuals with ID (Klein et al., 1993).

Despite having support and encouragement to change, parents of individuals with disabilities may also find themselves socially isolated (Gustavsson, et al., 2007; Right to Play, 2008). Insofar, the consequences of stigma can be so severe for parents, especially mothers, who may be blamed for the birth of a child with a disability that they choose not to have their children participate in sport (Right to Play, 2008). Learning of a child's diagnosis of disability has long been regarded as a crisis for parents (Hatton et al., 2003). Their reactions include shock as a loss to their expectations of a healthy baby, denial, refusal to accept the diagnosis, anger, blaming the medical system for poor quality treatment, fear, uncertainty about the extent or degree of the disability or associated impairment (George et al., 2007; Graungaard & Skov, 2006; Ho & Keiley, 2003), and feeling disempowered or overwhelmed by an unpredictable future (Graungaard & Skov 2006). Taken together, family influences have also been a vital role to supporting athletes

with ID.

Barriers To Access

Despite the aforementioned benefits of sport, recreation participation and the influential family support, individuals with various disabilities generally are considered to be a marginalized population; some even excluded from general freedoms such as education, employment, and community life (SPDFI, 2013). In fact, such exclusion deprives these individuals of opportunities to engage and develop relationships with others, which are likely essential to their social development and important determinants of health and well-being (Right to Play, 2008). As a result, persons with disabilities may have had very little experience greeting people, carrying on conversations, and interacting with others resulting in social barriers (Right to Play, 2008). Taken together, all of these factors could be severe barriers for athletes with ID when it comes to participation in sport and recreation.

Although some athletes with ID have significant limitations in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior (Conyers, Martin, Martin, & Yu, 2002; Schalock et al., 2010), many still have an aptitude for learning despite these drawbacks. In fact, Zoerink and Wilson (1995) demonstrated that there are more similarities than differences in psychological factors between athletes with and without disabilities. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the needs and various abilities of all athletes, both those with and without ID for effective sport participation, minimizing stigmatic barriers for disabled athletes (Gregg, 2010; Hanrahan, & Andersen, 2010).

Likewise, environmental barriers have been identified and exist that limit the occurrence of active participation in sport and regular exercise. For example, the high costs or the

lack of nearby facilities or programs are some of the reasons for nonparticipation within the ID population (King et al., 2003). Similarly, an athlete with a disability may not be accommodated to fit the general population's abilities within a private organizational entity such as churches or private clubs as they may be exempt from the American's with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Smith, 2001).

The disability rights movement pressured mainstream society to provide reasonable accommodations so that people with disabilities could participate more fully in the mainstream society, which included a push for more rights and opportunities in sport (Silvers & Wasserman, 2000). In recent years, advocates such as Eli Wolff have advanced a rationale for the inclusion of people with disabilities in sports as a human right (Wolff & Hums, 2003), which would allow persons with disabilities to have an equal opportunity to pursue sports, just as their able-bodied counterparts, and be viewed as a matter of fairness (Nixon, 2007). However, it is still questionable as to whether or not the pursuit of sport opportunities for people with disabilities has led to mainstream acceptance. In fact, the historical lack of conventional sport opportunities for people with disabilities is one of many significant rationales for the under development of disability sport opportunities. Because mainstream sport typically has not been very accommodating, athletes with disabilities have more commonly sought and found a level playing field in segregated disability sport, rather than in mainstream sport (Nixon, 2007).

Furthermore, barriers of stigma and social handicaps, as well as practical difficulties in sport, have blocked access and complicated integration efforts for people with certain types or degrees of disability. Such barriers or problems have been

especially daunting in more competitive sports settings, where the implications of diversity are magnified (Nixon, 2007). Still, people with disabilities who are capable of competing with or against able-bodied athletes may be prevented from doing so simply because they are disabled, because people in control of a sport will not make or allow appropriate accommodations of its structure, equipment, or facilities or because these people cannot or are unwilling to accept new or different conceptions of athleticism in their sport (Nixon, 2007). When these things happen, people with disabilities lose the chance to display their athletic talent and to challenge negative stereotypical conceptions of disabled athletes and disabled people in general as unable or incapable (Nixon, 2007). Considering the said barriers and limited access to resources among the ID population, effective sport participation remains paucity, create a minority among disabled sports.

Minorities

Scholars have given much warranted attention to issues of opportunity, integration, and justice concerning females, racial and ethnic minorities, but have devoted relatively little attention to these issues concerning athletes with disabilities (Nixon, 2004, 2007; Shapiro, 1993). However, sport organized for people with disabilities may not fully or appropriately accommodate all those who might want to participate. Therefore, it is important for people who construct and administer sports to understand the diversity of individuals with disabilities, and the types of sports and sports settings needed to accommodate the differences among these people (Nixon, 2007). Taken together, organizing effective sport participation for athletes with ID and understanding their diverse abilities to compete in various games at different levels will expand the research field.

Part Two: Special Olympics

Historically, there have been relatively few programs providing opportunities for sport participation for athletes with disabilities of any nature. The three most prominent are the International Paralympics Committee (IPC; i.e., physical disabilities such as limb loss and blindness), the International Committee of Sports for the Deaf (i.e., hearing impairments), and the Special Olympics (i.e., intellectual disabilities), all of which are recognized by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). While there have been opportunities for individuals with ID to participate in elite sport through the IPC, the primary provider of sport programming for ID athletes is the SOs. While IPC is focused on providing athletes with disabilities the opportunity to compete at elite levels, SO promotes sport *participation* for athletes with ID at all levels, regardless of ability (Harada, Siperstein, Parker, & Lenox, 2011).

Due to SO's emphasis on participation there has resulted in exponential growth in the number of athletes with ID participating in sport, serving more than 4 million persons in 226 programs in 170 countries (Special Olympics, 2013). In 1986, the International Sports Federation for Persons with Intellectual Disability (INAS-FID) was formed to support elite competition for athletes with ID (INAS-FID, 2009). This was established in contrast to the more participative 'sport for all' approach of SO (INAS-FID, 2009). The INAS-FID fosters competitive sport environments for athletes who choose open competition governed by the rules of the international sport federations (INAS-FID, 2009). Working in a complementary fashion, the SO and the INAS-FID aim to improve society's perceptions of individuals with ID through sport participation and competition (Hanrahan & Andersen, 2010).

Even so, the distinguishing characteristics of the SO model can be seen in the combination of (a) sport classification that involves competition organized for a single broad disability category but with different competitive divisions for people with different functional ability levels; (b) selectivity that varies from open competition, which is generally at the local level and is accessible to people with a particular disability having a wide range of functional and athletic ability levels, to competition that is more selective or elite as venues shift to state, regional, national, and international levels; and (c) competitive intensity that is generally controlled and based on the “everyone is a winner” philosophy of the SO, but may be more intense as the competition moves from local to larger geographical venues.

Along with less intense or controlled competition, the SO has offered more competitive opportunities up to the international level since 1968 through its World Games (Special Olympics, 2004). Sports include but are not limited to: aquatics, athletics (track and field), basketball, bowling, cycling, softball, tennis, and volleyball (Special Olympics, 2013). Traditionally, sport has been primarily intended for and related to non-intellectually disabled persons until the 1950s and early 1960s, when Eunice Kennedy Shriver saw how unjustly and unfairly people with intellectual disabilities were treated. She also saw that many children with ID didn't even have a place to play (Special Olympics, 2013). This is when opportunity for the ID population began to emerge. As the SO movement began to be organized in the 1960s, sport opportunities were developing for persons with ID and so the movement began, resulting in a series of summer camps being organized and ran by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, beginning in 1962 (Special Olympics, 2013). As time progressed, greater opportunities evolved.

Specifically, in Chicago in 1968, the first international SO was held (Special Olympics, 2013).

The specific mission of SO is to:

Provide year-round sports training and athletic competition... for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendships with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community (Special Olympics, 2013).

The mission of the SO centers on year-round participation of sports training and competition with the added intentions of enhancing fitness levels, motor skills, confidence, and self-concept (Hanrahan & Andersen, 2010; Winnick, 2000). The SO offers participation in 32 Olympic-type sports (Roswal, 2007; Special Olympics 2013).

Athletes with ID were originally included in the Paralympic Games. However, in 2000 INAS-FID athletes were banned from Paralympic competition after a cheating scandal at the 2000 Summer Paralympics, where a number of athletes participating in intellectual disability events revealed to not actually be disabled. After years of campaigning from various groups involved in parasport, the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) decided to reinstate ID athletes into the Paralympic Games on 21st November 2009. Today, SO provides training and competition in a variety of sports for persons with ID (Special Olympics, 2013).

Media coverage of sport events like the Paralympics can play a major role in creating more positive and accurate perceptions. For example, the growing profile of the

Paralympics has significantly contributed to increasing recognition of persons with disabilities (Blauwet, 2007; Right to Play, 2008). In fact, over 300 million people watched television coverage of the 2000 Sydney Paralympic Games (Right to Play, 2008). This single event significantly increased awareness of the capabilities of persons with disabilities (Right to Play, 2008). While SO does not get the television coverage given to Paralympics, SO exists to provide people who have ID, and are 8 years and older, opportunities to be physically active, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in the sharing of gifts, skills and friendships with their families, other athletes and the community (Detweiler, 2012). Within SO, “we see continued growth in softball, with more than 78,000 Special Olympics athletes participating in the sport globally,” said Bob Gobrecht, President and Managing Director of Special Olympics North America (Amateur Softball Association of America, 2013).

Given the size of this population group, the increasing number involved in SO, the increased media coverage and the competitive nature of disabled sport, it would be reasonable to assume that this population may benefit from PST. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to the sport managers of SO to better understand the benefits of sport psychology to their consumers. Despite the number of researchers who have examined the link between physical activity programs such as Special Olympics and psychosocial variables of the athlete (Castagno, 2001; Dykens & Cohen, 1996; Gibbons & Bushakra, 1989; Riggen & Ulrich, 1993; Weiss, Diamond, Demark, & Lovald, 2003), few authors (see Gorely, Jobling, Lewis, & Bruce, 2002; Gregg, 2010) have examined PST for athletes with ID.

Part Three: Sport Psychology Intervention

PST is defined as the development of psychological skills and techniques (e.g., anxiety management, concentration, confidence) with the goal of improving sport performance (Weinberg & Williams, 1998). Although not specific to IDs, mental skills training have been applied to a variety of sports and environments (e.g., Birrer & Morgan, 2010; Norman, 2013). Achieving personal excellence in sport is dependent on athletes' cognitive and affective states (Morris & Thomas, 1995). However, psychological skill development is typically presented in the context of non-disabled sport although a few sport psychologists have noted the importance of PST for athletes with disabilities (Asken, 1991; Hanrahan, 1998).

With the ongoing development of the field of sport psychology, the role of practitioners of applied sport psychology (ASP) has expanded to include the wide array of psychological services currently in demand among many performance areas (e.g., sport, exercise, military, performing arts, medicine, business). The professional role of practitioners of ASP has taken on many differing forms over the years. For some, ASP primarily refers to using basic cognitive-behavioral and self-regulatory procedures and techniques to help athletes of all levels enhance their performance (Hardy, Jones, & Gould, 1996). This approach to sport psychology, based on qualitative and quantitative research, suggests that psychological factors are significant contributors to optimal performance (Williams, 1998). Therefore, the development of psychological skills is a necessary component, along with motor skill development, in the attainment of athletic performance excellence. For others, ASP includes the delivery of psychological care and development of athletes above and beyond efforts at enhancing athletic performance. In this model, the development of life skills, coping resources, and care and attention to both

clinical and developmental issues often seen in the athletic domain becomes the purview of the applied sport psychologist (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1995). The developmental approach certainly seems congruent with the needs of many ID athletes while simultaneously many SO participants may also benefit from regular PST for performance enhancement purposes.

ASP is likewise practiced in a variety of settings across a wide range of skill levels, including the youth sport (Weiss, 1995), collegiate (Greenspan & Andersen, 1995), Olympic (Murphy, 1995), and professional levels (Gardner, 1995). As one might expect, the actual roles and responsibilities as well as the goals and mission of sport psychology consultants vary across both setting and level (Greenspan & Andersen, 1995; Weiss, 1995). For example, in intercollegiate athletics, the sport psychologist is faced with developmental, educational, and performance concerns in working with teams and athletes (Greenspan & Andersen, 1995). Whereas, those working in youth sport may be more concerned with the opportunity to educate young athletes about the purposes, principles, and nature of PST while also exposing them to valuable life skills (Visek, Harris, & Blom, 2009). Like any specialized level of sport it appears pertinent that sport psychology services are adjusted and relevant to the specific needs of that population group.

Despite calls by Asken and Goodling (1986) and Travis and Sachs (1991), there remains a paucity of research in the area of sport psychology and athletes with ID (Porretta & Moore, 1996, 1997). The majority of the work that exists in this domain has been descriptive in nature, presenting observations and findings with regard to athletes with disabilities and arousal control, body awareness, imagery, goal setting, self-

confidence, pre-competition preparation, and simply identifying practical considerations for working with athletes with disabilities (e.g., Hanrahan, 1995; 1998). Or otherwise, is focused on individual psychological skills in a laboratory setting (e.g., Porretta & Surburg, 1995; Screws & Surburg, 1997; Surburg, Porretta, & Sutlive, 1995).

Specifically, in Porretta and Surburg (1995), results support the use of imagery practice, in conjunction with physical practice, when performing a relevant anticipation of coincidence (striking) task as well as an aid in reducing performance variability among adolescents with mental retardation (MR). Likewise, the outcome from Screws and Surburg (1997) yielded that imagery practice enhanced the motor performance of children with mild mental disabilities (MMD) on both the peg-board (cognitively oriented task) and pursuit rotor (motor oriented task). Meanwhile Surburg, Porretta, and Sutlive, (1995) demonstrated that participants supplemented with imagery practice were superior in performance compared to non-imagery groups, reflecting the efficacy of imagery practice as a means to improve motor performance of students with mild MR. Despite these results of the usefulness of imagery for athletes with ID, there still lacks a more in-depth exploration of PST for athletes with ID outside of imagery.

Regardless of potential barriers and cognitive limitations, when athletes with ID are competing with the idea of maximizing performance, then sport science services, including sport psychology, should be available to them. A challenge to the profession of sport psychology is to determine what modifications in content and presentation are required to maximize the effectiveness of psychological skills training (PST) programs for individuals with ID (Hanrahan, 1995). However, it should not be simply assumed that PST needs to be adjusted for ID athletes and SO participants. Rather practitioners

need to alter their delivery based on the specific needs of individual clients and teams just like they should for any population group.

Part Four: Student Reflection Experiences

It has recently been acknowledged that there is a growing consensus within the ASP literature that reflective practice can benefit both the ASP practitioner and athlete alike (Knowles, Katz, & Gilbourne, 2012). The concept of using reflection as an approach to enhancing athletic performance, however, is a relatively new endeavor within the field (e.g., Faull & Cropley, 2009; Hanrahan, Pedro & Cerin, 2009; Richards, Collins, & Mascarenhas, 2012). Congruently, reflective practice may offer a useful and appropriate framework for the professional training and development of ASP practitioners (Anderson, Knowles, & Gilbourne 2004). Telfer and Knowles (2009) suggest journals, reflective conversations with a critical friend, taped narrative, and discussion forums in groups as formats for capturing reflection, and these techniques can often be found within training activities for the trainee sport and exercise scientist or sport psychologist.

Taken together, reflective practice is an approach to practice that involves creating opportunities to access, make sense of, and learn from the tacit knowledge in action we use in our daily work (Knowles, Gilbourne, Tomlinson, & Anderson, 2007). It has been suggested that this tacit knowledge in action, which incorporates values, prejudices, experiences, knowledge, and social norms (see Anderson, Knowles, & Gilbourne, 2004; Andersen, Van Raalte, & Harris, 2000, for detailed discussion), is integral to practice. Being able to access and understand this tacit knowledge in action will make a significant contribution to a practitioner's professional and personal

development (Knowles, Gilbourne, Tomlinson, & Anderson, 2007). Similarly, Poczwardowski, Sherman, and Ravizza (2004) suggested that understanding one's personal and professional philosophy is among the essential prerequisites to an effective consulting practice, and ongoing self-reflection can facilitate this understanding. Anderson et al. (2004) suggested that it could offer a framework that could be used to facilitate effective supervision, which has been described as a long-term interpersonal relationship designed to develop competent, knowledgeable, and ethical practitioners and ensure the welfare of athlete-clients (Van Raalte & Andersen, 2000). The supervision process involves the development of the supervisee's self-knowledge and understanding of practice.

Similarly, much of the reflective practice in sport psychology literature focuses on individual reflections (e.g., Cropley et al., 2007; Woodcock, Richards, & Mugford, 2008). Additionally, benefits to the practitioner include; being able to make sense of, and learn from, practice, helping to explore and inform decision-making, helping to increase understanding, ensuring accountability, self-management and, ultimately, improving effectiveness (Anderson et al., 2004). Furthermore, it has been suggested that reflecting on practice can empower an individual to implement change, become more self-aware (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998) and generate practice-based knowledge (Cropley et al., 2010). Therefore, the purpose of this reflective framework was to increase understanding of the supervision process through the writing of a supervisee's experience using reflective practice while implementing PST for athletes with ID.

More importantly, reflective practice is a consistent phenomena emerging in the professional practice and development literature within ASP, which is suggested to be

intrinsically linked, to both personal and professional development and the enhancement of consultant effectiveness, (Anderson, Knowles, & Gilbourne, 2004; Holt & Streat, 2001; Martindale & Collins, 2007; Woodcock et al., 2008). Accordingly, Paterson and Chapman (2013) demonstrated that reflection and learning from experience is key to staying accountable, and maintaining and developing aptitude throughout one's developing practice. Without reflection a practitioner may not be able to look objectively at their actions or take into account the emotions, experience, or responses from their actions to improve one's overall professional practice. Therefore, in implementing a process of reflective practice a consultant trainee was able to move beyond existing theories in practice (Leitch & Day, 2000).

Part Five: Case Study Research

Therefore, the purpose of this current study was to explore the value of reflective practice within an ASP case study, which allowed for an in-depth exploration of a variety of situations and issues. Specifically, case studies can include unexpected occurrences, unique and innovative interventions, unusual circumstances, or typical experiences that illustrate important principles in consultation (Giges & Van Raalte, 2012). Moreover, a qualitative case study approach, in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case), through a detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), can yield significant reports such as case descriptions and themes (Creswell, 2013) that otherwise may not be produced. Ultimately, this is a significant representation of the importance of an evaluative case study.

Likewise, and relative to sport psychology, previous literature contains several articles discussing the value of the case study approach (Rotella, Boyce, Allyson, & Savis, 1998; Smith, 1988; Vernacchia, 1998). For example, Vernacchia (1998) provided an excellent discussion of case study methodology and research design, with a comprehensive bibliography of case study literature. He wrote, “case studies and reports can provide the sport psychology professional with valuable insights into the appropriateness and effectiveness regarding the influence of performance intervention and enhancement techniques or strategies” (p. 11). He also mentioned that, “the key component of the case study or report is the personal interview phase, which allows the athlete to reflect upon and describe his or her performance behaviors and outcomes.” (p. 12).

Take together, case studies can also play an integral role in the accumulation of knowledge about psychological principles in the athletic environment, and can promote the development of intervention strategies for enhancing performance, health, and psychological well being (Smith, 1998). Similarly, Rotella (1998) argued that repeated experiences involving different levels of sport competition, different sports, and various age groups could play an important role in ensuring the continued growth and success of ASP consultation. Therefore, it was suggested that this too was an effective approach in gaining reflective understanding of a trainees experiences’ with ID athletes through PST and the SO.

Through an evaluative case study, the primary author was able to form meaning groups that otherwise may not be formed, wherein were a direct reflection of her thoughts, feelings, opinions, and emotions during these experiences. Altogether, this

study represented a product of inquiry, the purpose of this research, focused on the case itself (e.g., evaluating a consultant trainee's experience while implementing a PST program) because the case presented an unusual and unique situation. Likewise, this case study consisted of rigorous, detailed examinations, with an underlying assumption that the case was representative of many other such evaluative cases. Consequently, through an in-depth study, a greater understanding about similar cases was achieved.

Chapter III

Methods

PST should target consumers other than elite performers, as the largest proportions of the population are not elite performers (Gregg, 2010). Many PST programs are geared to nondisabled athletes, as their physical skills are well developed and psychological factors are thought to play a major role in their performance (Vealey, 1988). To further the field of sport psychology and to enhance the performance of more individuals, it is imperative that more research be done with a wider range of people within the general population (Crocker, 1993). This need is even more evident when an extensive literature review of PST and athletes with ID yielded few results (Gorely, Jobling, Lewis, & Bruce, 2002; Hills, & Utley, 2010; Travis & Sachs, 1991). Research on PST with ID athletes supports the current educational philosophy of inclusion, fostering understanding of disabilities, and possibly increasing acceptance of special populations by society in general (Lavay & McKenzie, 1991; Reid et al., 1993). Furthermore, gaining an evaluative understanding of a reflective case study while implementing PST with ID athletes can increase much needed awareness to the field of sport psychology.

The purpose of this study was to explore a consultant trainee's experience working with SO coaches and athletes with ID while implementing PST interventions. Meanwhile, the experiences and feedback from the coaches in addition to the responses of the ID athletes to the PST were significant to the reflective practice. The primary goal was to identify the reflective meaning that the student trainee held about PST in sport, specifically with ID athletes, ultimately providing a detailed description of the

complexities of the phenomenon, which was examined. In addition, the links between reflective practice and the development of consultant characteristics associated with supervision were explored; which generated a more holistic understanding to effective practice in sport disability shedding light to a taboo topic within ASP. To begin, this chapter discussed in detail the following components: (a) methodology, (b) participants, (c) procedures, and (d) analysis.

Methodology

In this case study, the primary researcher strived for an in-depth understanding of a single situation or phenomenon within a real-life, contemporary context or setting (Yin, 2009). The lack of scientific rigor that has been applied in addressing reflective practice in sport disability, specifically for ID athletes was the key to the general lack of conceptual clarity within this area. The investigation described in this paper attempted to address a major gap in the sport psychology literature. The purpose of this study was to explore a consultant trainee's experience of working with SO coaches and implementing a PST program design for athletes with ID. Consistent with a number of recent studies that have advocated the use of alternative approaches (Clark & Parette, 2002; Munroe-Chandler, 2011; Smith, 2013), this study adopted a qualitative approach. This approach was chosen, as it appeared to be the most ideal methodology for the investigation, which gave the primary researcher the opportunity to recapture practice experiences and mull them over critically, gaining new understandings, especially with regard to improving future practice. One of the main advantages to this qualitative research was that it allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of one self and the participants' personal constructs and experiences. The aim here, therefore, was to progress beyond

“popular” sport psychology approaches and the extent to which PST has typically been implemented, underpinning the larger social context of increasing reflective acceptance for neophyte consultants and trainees who serve special populations in our general society.

For the purpose of this study, an evaluative case study design was employed to investigate an intrinsic phenomenon with regard to reflective experiences. According to Stake (1995; 1998), this intrinsic case study was exploratory in nature, where the researcher planned to be guided by her interest in the case itself rather than in extending theory or generalizing across cases. Taken together, this case study also consisted of reflexivity, which conveyed the primary authors background experiences, interpretation to the information discovered, and knowledge which was gained from this present study. Specific to the design, this case study outlined disability theories, distinctively through disability interpretive lenses, as a theoretical framework to guide the researcher.

Disability Theory

Originally, disability inquiry addressed the meaning of inclusion in schools and encompassed administrators, teachers, and parents who have children with disabilities (Mertens, 2009, 2010). Despite this research was not tailored to schools, administrators, teachers or parents. This experience sought to address the meaning of inclusion for athletes with ID as illustrated through a consultant trainee’s reflective practice while implementing PST. Disability theory (Mertens, 2003; 2009; Lincoln et al., 2011), the general framework on which this study was guided by, emphasized the way in which the researcher construed and interpreted the nature of reality; focusing on human differences. The fundamental premise of disability theory was that it revolutionized the terrain of

theory by providing indisputable evidence to the value and utility that a disability studies perspective could offer key critical and cultural awareness (Siebers, 2008).

Disability Interpretive Lens

Researchers who have used a disability interpretive lens focused on disability as a dimension of human difference and not as a defect (Creswell, 2013). As a human difference, its meaning was derived from social construction (i.e., society's response to individuals), simply one dimension of human difference (Mertens, 2003). Viewing individuals with disabilities as different was reflected upon in this research process. For example, the type of questions asked, the labels that were applied to the individuals, considerations of how the data collection would benefit the community, the appropriateness of communication methods, and how the data was reported in a way that was respectful to existing relationships (Creswell, 2013). Consistent with Hanrahan's (1998) suggestion, it was recommended that the reader think athlete first and disability second.

Participants

To qualify for this study, participants were either: (a) a certified coaching instructor through the SO or, (b) an athlete, 18 years of age or older, (c) who has previously been diagnosed with an ID, (d) currently enrolled in SO, and (e) was practicing in preparation for the National Games for SO Softball. Participants were selected based upon the following criteria: (a) all aforementioned qualifications were met (b) informed consent was obtained and (c) participation was completely voluntary. Specifically, all participants were able (intellectually) to provide consent themselves or had proper consent obtained from their legal representative. This was previously

determined by the current SO administrative staff, that all athletes, regardless of disability, were competent adults and could make conscience decisions independently, unless otherwise stated. Therefore, the selection of participants was subjective and primarily based on the availability of the coaches and athletes. Reasons for exclusion were a result of improper consent, the level of sensitivity, cultural context, or the vulnerability of the participants. However, there were no exclusions during this study.

In order to engage a sufficient number of eligible participants, the primary researcher contacted the SO recruiter by phone and followed up with an email. Attached in the email, was a handout containing contact information for the researcher, what was expected of each participant, privacy concerns, risks (no known risks), voluntary participation, experiment parameters and informed consent. Next, all participants were then invited to attend an information session for themselves and their caregivers (if applicable), which was conducted prior to the PST. During the information session the experimenter explained PST, the benefits to participants, any potential risks of participation (there were no known risks), and provided a brief description of the program requirements. At the conclusion of the session, consent for research involvement was obtained from all participants. The consent forms (Appendices A & B) specifically requested permission from the athletes to participate in this sport psychology project that explored a neophyte consultant trainee's experience of working with athletes with ID while implementing PST activities in effort to indirectly optimize one's performance (see Appendices C & D). Specifically, all but two participants were able (intellectually) to provide consent themselves. The two participants who required legal representative's to give consent, was likewise obtained and verified by the SO administrative staff,

following proper ethical guidelines that all athletes, regardless of disability, are competent adults and can make conscience decisions independently. Therefore, the selection of participants was subjective and primarily based on the availability of the coaches and athletes.

Procedures

After gaining ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board, selected participants were contacted, informed of the nature of the study and asked to complete an informed consent form (see appendix A & B). All participants were then asked to meet with the primary researcher in a neutral location in order to brief them about their engagement in the study. During this meeting, all participants were introduced to PST and educated specifically as to how they could effectively engage in the process. Athlete participants were also informed that they would be required (voluntarily) to participate in a PST activity per week for the 13-week duration of the study. Once the athlete participants had completed their weekly PST activity (for an overview of the PST, see Table 1, and appendix D), they were asked a series of semi-structured debriefing questions, which served as an opportunity for the participants to reflect on their own experience; what made it meaningful and identify what they learned.

	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5	Session 6	Session 7	Session 8	Session 9	Session 10	Session 11	Session 12	Session 13
Intervention Theme	Ice Breaker	Team Building: Active Listening	Team Building: Trust	Communication & Leadership	Focus & Distraction Control	Self-Confidence & Positive Self-Talk	Goal Setting	Focus & Distraction Control	Deep Breathing & Relaxation	Team Building	Team Building: Trust	Communication & Leadership	Team Building & Leadership
Task completed	Human Knot	Balloon Keep Up	Trust Lean	Discussion	Memory	Discussion	Jenga	Group Juggling	Deep Breathing Exercise	Jenga	Spider Ball	Communication Web	Blind Square
Time Frame	30 min	30 min	30 min	30 min	30 min	30 min	30 min	30 min	30 min	30 min	30 min	30 min	30 min
PST	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations													
Reflections	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Interview													

Table 1. PST Overview

Qualitative Interview

The primary researcher chose semi-structured qualitative research questions post intervention (see appendix F) that sought to understand a coach's subjective experience within the context of coaching athletes with ID. More specifically, the open-ended questions inquired with understanding, the central phenomenon of a reflective case study that implemented PST to athletes with ID. Insofar, that the primary research reflected upon the coach's experience, to in turn reflect upon the coaching experience relative to her own experiences. For both interviews, the first author followed a scripted protocol where the purpose of the interview was explained. Additionally, the coaching participants were advised that their responses were completely voluntary and confidential, which they were given the opportunity to decline to answer any question or terminate the interview at any time. Once the athlete participants had concluded their final PST activity, the coaching participants were interviewed. In order to maximize the retrieval of in-depth data and aid reflection, each coaching participant was asked to describe in as much detail as possible their past or present experiences of coaching athletes with ID. All interviews, conducted by the lead researcher, were face-to-face, in a neutral setting, designed to aid

the flow of conversation and avoid any environmental bias. The interviews last between 20-30 minutes each, were audiotape recorded, and subsequently transcribed verbatim.

Participant, Non Participant Observation

The method of participant observation was chosen because it allowed the researcher insight into the mundane, the typical, and occasionally extraordinary features of an everyday life that a participant might not feel worth commenting on in an interview or in casual conversation (Smith, 2013). Combining observational data with interview data enabled the primary researcher to understand not just what a participant says they do, but also by observing what they do in everyday life and sports (Smith, 2013). Thus, the combination of data acted as a resource to generate a more complex understanding of the athlete's lives. Data was then recorded in the form of field notes, with the researcher recording her own thoughts, feelings, opinions, emotions and experiences. This method is useful when trying to discover the more delicate aspects of group behavior and consultant trainee reflection that are otherwise not easy to see from the outside.

In contrast, non-participant observation involved the researcher observing 'from the outside'. Wherein, there was no interaction with the individual athletes or the activity being observed. For example, the researcher observed the coaching style during a softball practice and gained the insight on how to go about effectively designing PST activities for athletes with ID. Therefore, this allowed the researcher to watch how the coach conducts their practice, see how the athletes responded, and what types of responses could be beneficial for a consultant trainee working with the same athletes. Recording of this observation was done so in the form of field notes. Consequently, for the purpose of this study, both participant and nonparticipant observations were made and the primary

author wrote in a journal, personal encounters and reflections to working with the selected participants. To address procedures for reflection, see John (1994).

Analysis

Qualitative analysis dealt primarily with words, and rested on the ability to systematically identify and interpret meaningful patterns of responses and interrelationships in that which was said by and/or observed about the participants. For the purpose of this study, data analysis began informally during personal encounters with the team, planning PST activities, to observations and interviews, which continued throughout transcription, when recurring thoughts, feelings, opinions, and emotions became evident. Once the written record became available, analysis involved the coding of data and the identification of salient points outlined.

Similarly, the interviews were analyzed, to look for patterns or themes generated from the participant's (coaches) subjective responses to the interview question, which assisted the author with reflection to her personal experience in working with athletes with ID, following the Johns (1994) framework. The concept of reflection has been widely debated for a number of decades (Brockbank, & McGill, 2007; Kreber, 2004). To advocates of reflective practice, deep-learning is dependent on individuals making meaning from their experiences through reflection (Sugerman et al, 2000). Specifically, this author followed John's (1994) model of reflection through analyzing the experience working with coaches and ID athletes through the SO.

More in-depth, current effectiveness research that focused on the characteristics of effective sport psychologists has provided a framework for neophyte practitioners to guide professional development and facilitate self-evaluation through reflective practice

(Cropley, Miles, Hanton, & Niven, 2007). Although a range of both structured and unstructured methods of reflective practice were available, in this study, the neophyte SPC's reflections were conducted using Johns's (1994) model of structured reflection, which contained five subsections (description, reflection, consequences of actions, alternative tactics, and learning) designed to guide the trainee through personal experiences in a structured and meaningful way. Furthermore, by using a structured method, this allowed the opportunity to identify in detail, specific information, thoughts, and feelings that allowed meaningful reflections.

Chapter IV

Results

Knowingly, various SO programs exist across our nation in order to promote sport participation among athletes with ID. Equally understood, PST is a process of learning skills and techniques for managing different aspects of performance (Mountains, Marathons, and More, 2012). Although these two phenomena exist, they rarely are experienced together. Hence why the following results illustrated the importance of PST among athletes with ID, giving the neophyte SPC trainee (the primary researcher) the opportunity to capture practice experiences and mull them over critically in order to gain new understandings, especially with regard to improve future practice.

Specifically, case study methodology was used to assess the effectiveness of a reflective practice in this research due to its ability to uncover richness of detail and meanings not otherwise, clearly understood (Yin, 2004). For that reason, an evaluative case study was necessary to understand the reflective meaning that a neophyte consultant trainee holds about PST in sport, specifically with ID athletes, ultimately giving a detailed description of the complexities of the phenomenon being examined. In addition to examining the potential links between reflective practice and the development of consultant characteristics associated with supervision; generating a more holistic understanding of effective practice in sport disability will have a greater impact on the role of reflection within applied sport psychology.

The following results are presented in a timeline format as used in previous evaluative case studies (see Gorely, Jobling, Lewis, & Bruce, 2002), which include the 13 PST sessions, provided to ID athletes, who practiced weekly for 13 weeks, and competed

in the 2014 National SO games held in New Jersey.

Initial Contact with Participants

In preparation of making contact with a SO team, I accessed a local SO website, and requested more information via one of the site prompts which resulted in an email response back. After making the initial contact, I was introduced through emails, to a SO athletic recruiter and further arrangements to meet were made. As the plans were executed, I was given the opportunity to share my interest in being able to directly support a local SO team. Specifically, I discussed my passion for special populations, involvement with applied sport psychology and my aspirations of working with a SO team. Explicitly I was interested in understanding the effectiveness of my approach as the SPC trainee when implementing a PST program for athletes with ID. After the initial introduction, I received a follow up email from a SO manager (appendix E), which confirmed the recruitment of a team and requested a best day/time to meet at camp.

Reflection:

This session gave me hope for the future, that maybe one day, all athletes regardless of (dis)ability, would have the opportunity to benefit from PST. In doing so, there needs to be an increase in the number of SPC's who are willing to provide opportunities for PST in all levels of disabled sports. Unfortunately, I believe there still exists an immense amount of segregation between services provided for athletes with disabilities as compared to athletes without disabilities. As a result, this session made me more self-aware, recognizing what I truly enjoy and wish to get out of life as a SPC. In my beginning efforts to establish an approach suitable for my clients, I realized how a well-grounded first impression could be monumental. Which later would come as

confirmation through an email sent from the SO athletic recruit, providing genuine feedback, recognizing my passion for our ID community and how “inspiring” it is. In addition to having the opportunity to raise awareness and potentially make a difference, its moments like these, where I became inspired to *be* the change and motivated to *make* it happen for the future of applied sport psychology.

Other than wanting to become more conscious of my capabilities and limitations, I want to examine the potential links between reflective practice and the development of consultant characteristics associated with supervision. I would argue more awareness for disabled athletes, exercisers and performers should begin at the educational level, wherein developing consultants flourish with equal knowledge about athletes with and without disabilities. Ultimately, creating a greater understanding of effective applied sport psychology practice in sport and sport-disability. However, in more realistic terms, I believe the number one issue as to why we don’t have more PST programs in the field of disabled sports is merely the lack of resources. Which is a direct correlation to the lack of finances to support the SPC professional’s, which in turn affects the athletes with ID who don’t have funding to support a SPC. Although, there is no economic gain to be made during this PST program, I intend to increase my self-awareness in an attempt to become more self-conscious about myself and make the changes where necessary.

Initial Introduction: SO Administration, Coaches and Softball Athletes

This was an informal introductory session where I met the SO athletic recruiter at a local camp (i.e., a division of the city’s local parks and recreation department), and was introduced first to the coaches and administrators as a potential “sport psychology student-intern/volunteer,” before being sequentially introduced to the SO softball team as

the “intern.” Here, I gave a general explanation of sport psychology and illustrated my personal beliefs about why this softball team could benefit from PST. Questions from the administrators, coaches and athletes included, how frequent the sessions would be, the duration of the sessions and if the sessions would occur before practices were all addressed accordingly. For example, the coaches and administrator’s inquired, “Will 30 minutes before practice be enough time for you?” The athletes asked, “miss, when you coming again?” Subsequently, I was then given directions to complete the online application process for a volunteer position through the city’s local parks and recreation department, pending approval from the IRB, followed by a discussion on how the arrangements will be made in order to complete the required background check, on behalf of the SO camp in conjunction with the local city’s department of parks and recreation.

Reflection

In the days leading up to this experience, I felt this rush of mania come over me, as if I wasn’t sure what to expect, generating thoughts of: what should I say? Will it make sense? Will the information I provide be sufficient enough for the administrators, coaches and athletes to essentially buy in? Then all at once, those thoughts diminished like rain leaving behind a rainbow; reassuring myself that I have what it takes to reach my greatest potential. As those days dwindled to minutes and into the final moments, an abundance of self-confidence came over me, giving me my final boost of encouragement. After all, I had what was required to carry out that position effectively. In fact, I was the best candidate for them and they wouldn’t have any reason to oppose. As evidenced by my passion and dedication to the ID population, my personal experience of ID within my family as well as my current role with my employers, encouraging adults with ID to live

independently and teaching adolescents with mild to profound ID in the educational system.

Essentially, what I was trying to achieve during this session, was making that initial connection with the administrators, coaches and athletes a success in hopes of building a relationship. Once the relationship was established, I knew I could develop the opportunity as a consultant, implementing a PST program with purposeful activities that would aim to benefit the athletes, meanwhile, I would be given the chance to reflect on my own experiences consulting with this population in order to carry out my study. Additionally, I would be making a difference and giving this population an opportunity to receive training that is otherwise thought to traditionally benefit non-disabled athletes.

In terms of significant factors, I would describe my initial experience meeting the administrators, coaches, and athletes similar to a pilot flying a plane, wherein the aircraft makes the initial contact with the runway, indicating a safe arrival (i.e., landing) among the passengers. In making my approach towards the building, the only person I knew was the recruiter waiting outside the facility door. Having previously met, I initiated a handshake and proceeded into the facility. Once inside, I was greeted by an abundance of people with no direct insight of who was who, other than the recruiter at this point. With welcoming smiles, handshakes, and swarms of people gathering around me, I felt heroic despite having done nothing. In navigating our way to the office, the recruiter informed me that the majority of the people I had just met are not athletes but instead attended the life skills development program at this facility. With knowledge of similar programs, and desires to build a strong rapport, I inquired about the adult training program, making known my current experiences in working with adults with ID who attend similar

programs at different facilities.

Upon entering the office, I was prepared to make the initial contact with the administrators, coaches, and athletes. In doing so, I knew without a doubt that I would present myself on the foundations of a reliable sport psychology background, wherein making the connections successful for the journeys that lied ahead. With no further time to spare, I was quickly introduced to the administrators, some of which worked directly with the SO athletes and others who assisted in the life skills development program. As the introduction continued, the men's slow-pitch softball coaches arrived in the office, ensuring they hit the time clock first, before the recruiter requested they make their way over to meet me. As everything continued to flow naturally, following the recruiter's initial introduction, I simultaneously introduced the purpose of my visit.

Concluding my discussion with the administrators and coaches, the best part of this experience was the very moment the head coach for the men's slow-pitch softball team indicated a general knowledge, interest and familiarity within the field of sport psychology. It was as if the coach had confirmed my participation would be warranted and requested me to carryout PST within his team. In addition to this experience, it was relevant to take into consideration what administration had made clear, that all athletes, except for two, are considered competent adults who can provide their own written consent. This shed light to the complexities entailed when working with persons with ID. Despite the levels of their intellectual ability, these athletes are deemed competent and fully capable of making informed choices for themselves.

After initial contact was made with both the administrators and coaches of the men's slow-pitch softball team, I was then introduced to the SO athletes who were

waiting patiently outside and preparing the equipment for practice. Joined together, there was an abundance of excitement and eagerness, among the athlete's desires, in wanting to meet me. The recruiter then introduced me to the team, this time, solely as the "intern," and stated my name, before giving me the opportunity to elaborate further. I wasn't so sure I would remember all of their names, but I asked the participants to introduce themselves anyway and tell me what position they played. With direction observation, the athletes illustrated various levels of intellectual understanding and comprehension as evidenced by their ability to reason and respond congruently. Which was evident by their ability to reply with good insight, meanwhile, others were delayed or required multiple repetitions of encouragement and help from their peers. Essentially, confirming what I had previously discussed with administration in relation to the athlete being fully aware and consciously giving informed responses. However, I also felt that this could be a result of the athletes exhibiting shyness from meeting me for the first time. All of which I feel are important factors to consider as I move forward, working with this team.

As a result to this session, I felt confident with my ability to make the connections, identifying the participants and preparing myself for a noteworthy experience. With high hopes of shedding new light to the field of applied sport psychology, and raising the awareness for the ever-deserving population of athletes among sport and disability, I recognized that this is where I needed to be, creating this experience for athletes who otherwise, may not have the opportunity to benefit from a PST program. Consequently, what I intended to change during this experience was my own self-awareness when working with athletes with ID. In addition to, raising much needed awareness in the field of applied sport psychology, my ultimate desire is to bring

to an end the segregation among athletes with and without disabilities.

Subsequent Introduction: Information Session and Consent

This was a formal introductory session wherein the purpose was to provide all the participants (i.e., coaches and athletes) with an overview, including general information, about the present study. During the information session I gave an in depth explanation of PST, discussed potential benefits to participants (there were no known risks), and provided a brief description of the program requirements (as outlined in the methods section). At the conclusion of the session, those individuals that were interested in participating provided written consent (see Appendices A & B) or consent was obtained by their caregivers (if applicable). In addition, the administrative staff at the local camp advised all legal documents are on file regarding specific athlete participants, which require a parent/legal guardian's signature. The consent form specifically requested permission from the athletes (or legal representative) to participate in this sport psychology project that explored my experience as a SPC trainee, working with athletes with ID, while implementing PST interventions in efforts to indirectly optimize one's performance.

Reflection

Over the course of my experience conducting this information session, I felt that the athletes displayed a good sense of understanding, as they appeared engaged and were attentive to the discussion, if their eye contact and silence across the room was considered a valuable source. However, once the information had been explained, I quickly gained a sense of who really understood as evidenced by those select few athletes who began to sign their names on the consent form before turning them in. Then, all at

once, I heard, “Miss, what am I supposed to do with this? Can you help me?” Maybe I was wrong, perhaps that was not eye contact, but rather a vacant stare overlooked. With thoughts that I may have exceeded beyond their level of understanding mixed with feelings of uncertainty, I quickly reflected back to my intended purpose for this session, asking myself specifically, what it was that I wanted my audience to know. Remembering the multitude of variations that exist within this team’s ability to understand, I recalled from the previous session how some athletes required repeated, simple step directions and more in depth details, stimulating comprehension.

Therefore, in efforts to achieve what I had originally set out to do and to ensure the athletes understood, I went through the consent form a second time, only this time, reframing the questions to make them more specific and engaging. For example, under the section heading, why have I been asked to take part in the study, I asked the athletes, who here plays for the SO? Who here is 18 years of age or older? Who would like to receive help during practice and/or competitions? As the athletes responded to those questions with their hand raised and shouts of “me, me, me” could be heard, I proceeded to inform them that this is why they were asked to participate in this research study. Those wishing to continue were asked to sign their name on the back of the form, before handing it back to me.

In hopes that I would become more efficient in my forthcoming PST sessions, I consulted with my supervisor and colleagues, regarding further development of consultant characteristics, which included educational based models and a “kid-ify” approach. Wherein, sessions are not “dumbed” down, but rather, modified to reach youth populations, relevant to the developmental age of the athletes with respect to their

chronological age. Despite the need to adapt approaches that enhances their ability to comprehend, it was of great importance that the sessions support The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and identify the need to individualize support for each individual with an ID in a way that builds on their strengths, develops self-esteem, and is appropriate for their social and cultural circumstances (Hills & Utley, 2010).

Additionally, I needed to obtain written consent from two athletes' caregivers, with what seemed to be an easy process, proved to be otherwise. Taken into consideration past research and the examples provided by the IRB, I included on the consent form "parent or legal guardian" where the appointed caregiver would then sign. However, the administrator that oversees the legal entities of athlete relations suggested that the wording needed to be modified to better suit the intended recipients, despite having already been approved by the IRB. Specifically, they asked me to take "parent or legal guardian" off and requested that I replace it with "legal representative," for the two athletes that had proper legal documentation on file. And for all the other participants, replace "parent of legal guardian" with "parent acknowledgement." Which was a result of an ongoing battle for some of the parents who feel they are the guardians, despite not having gone through the financially bound process making it an official legal status. Therefore, per the request of the administrators, all signed consents included an optional signature line for "parent acknowledgement" for those athletes that wanted to share this with their parents before turning into me. Nonetheless, I was able to take away from this experience, a valuable lesson learned, that regardless of a parent's role, proper consent/assent must be attained, starting with accurate illustration of all parties including

the wording on the forms. Finally, I had received written consent from the two coaches, who required no additional information.

Session 1: Icebreaker

The initial meeting between a sport psychology consultant and athlete is shaped by a number of demands including the need to begin to develop rapport, to establish trust, to gain some clarity about the ground rules of the relationship, and to assess the type of support that would be most appropriate (Fifer, Henschen, Gould, & Ravizza, 2008; Gould, Damarjian, & Hays, 1998; Orlick, 1989). In addition, icebreakers serve a particular purpose. In their ideal form, they start getting people engaged with each other and the topic of the session. Too often, the focus is just to get people talking instead of being mindful about how the activity relates to why a person is in attendance (Martell, C., n.d.). Likewise, they need to have a reason beyond potential enjoyment to appeal to a wide range of people. Therefore, I decided to implement an icebreaker activity that introduced the basic concepts of PST in a fun way. Meanwhile, allowing the athletes to introduce themselves so I could again, familiarize their names with their faces. The session first began with a question to all athletes; which one of you feels like a good athlete? Of course, they all raised their hands. I then introduced myself and shared with the team one fun fact about SO. In turn, the athletes were asked to state their name and what they like best about their team. After introducing themselves, the team came up with a list of unique characteristics they like about their team which included, “working together, a good catcher, playing catcher, left field, always win, home runs, work really hard, train really hard, being on the team, and it’s easy.” As key factors illustrating what they like best about their team, I decided to put these key factors to the test. I instructed

the team to form a circle and put their left hand in and reach across to “shake” someone else’s hand, just not the person to either side of them. Once they completed that task, I asked them to do the same with their right hand, ensuring that they connect to a different person, forming a human knot. The athletes were then instructed to unravel their knot by unthreading their bodies without letting go of each other’s hands. The purpose of the human knot was to promote team building, problem solving and communication skills (see appendix D).

Debrief

As a wrap up to today’s session, I asked the team, how well do you think you worked together? “Good” was the majority of their responses, despite three team members declining to participate in the human knot activity. Considering those that did not participate, I felt it was important to know why. Their responses were honest, and while it was alarming in the moment, I understood. The three athletes stated, “it’s gay, I’m not gay, and because I didn’t want to.” With an up roar of laughter, the remaining athletes made gestures (i.e., snapping of the fingers) and comments like “ah su” indicating a sense of shock in anticipation of my response. Refocusing the team’s attention back to the discussion, I asked if they had any goals that they would like to work on specifically? One athlete raised his hand and said, “concentration, focus and patience.” These topics were discussed briefly to illustrate how all three could be applied to the activity they just completed. Examples provided were, concentrating on who moves next and in what direction, focusing on the main objective of the activity and having patience with each team member throughout the process.

Reflection

I set out for today's session, in hopes that I would build a healthy rapport with the team while introducing the basic concepts of PST (i.e., goal setting, team building, communication, self-confidence, focus, relaxation, etc.). During the introductory phase, where I began describing PST, I felt as if I wasn't making sense to the athletes. Feelings of self-doubt succumbed my thoughts, was my language too vague; was it superior to their level of competence? Reflecting back to what I had discussed in supervision, I knew the language I used in preparing for this session was identical to that which was used in the consent forms, so why was I feeling like this? In backtracking, I realized how overtly excited I was in comparison to my audience. Consciously aware, I was speaking really fast and quickly losing interest of them. Repeating the same various topics of PST (as outlined in the athlete consent, see appendix B), I spoke slower, finding it beneficial, in addition to giving examples as they related to softball.

In completing the introductory phase of PST, I asked the athletes a series of questions, including, which one of you feels like a good athlete and what do you like best about your team? Having generated significant meaning from their responses, I proceeded forth with my planned activity. The purpose, ideally, was to get the athletes engaged, reflecting meaning from their responses (i.e., working together) and linking them to PST (i.e., team building). Additionally, I would compare their responses about their team with their performance during the activity. Taken into consideration, I felt the human knot activity was a great choice because it required the team to work together, communicate, and focus on the process that would ultimately lead them to the end goal, unraveling the knot.

However, prior to going into this session, thoughts of sexuality and homophobic

language were something that I had not considered, nonetheless, prepared for. I believe this experience reiterated the importance of how all athletes, regardless of skill level and abilities, display their individual sexuality; the lens of being a male or female through which a person views and responds to the world. (American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disability, 2013). Specifically for this SO team, irrespective of their ID, they exhibit a level of intelligence and understanding presented on the foundation of their core values and beliefs which essentially illustrates what they consider acceptable or deem inappropriate. Considering each athlete comes from varying cultures and backgrounds, perhaps those athletes who declined to participate felt the requirements (i.e., standing close together, touching fellow male peers) of the activity itself was a violation of their beliefs. Hence, why three athlete's considered this "gay."

After the session, I felt indifferent, questioning myself; did I fail with this activity because I didn't take into consideration the requirements of close proximity? After all, I knew I was going to be working with an all male team. Yet, I looked through a narrow lens, assuming what works for one sports team, may work for another. Despite comments entailing homophobic language, this experience made me realize the impact social, cultural, and environmental factors have among individual athletes, and not just within this team. While this can be a sensitive topic often not discussed, this made me more sensitive to the activities that I intend to carry out for the remainder of this PST program. As a result to this experience, I felt my greatest lesson learned was the need to have heightened moral knowledge, correlating what I gained in supervision, "know your client".

Participant Observation

The aim of today's session was to try and discover the more delicate aspects of group behavior and consultant trainee reflection that are otherwise not easy to see from the outside. Hence, why I actively engaged with the team during this softball practice. However, due to the recent rain, and the actual softball field being flooded, coach resumed practice at the camp instead. To begin, I walked laps with the team. After completing 4 laps around the field, coach instructed the team to form a circle and begin stretching. I stretched in sync with the team, preparing myself to practice with them. After the stretching exercise was completed, coach set up cones and each athlete was paired up with a partner and instructed to throw the softball back and forth. Coincidentally, there were an odd number of athletes, so it worked out well for my participation. The coach would blow his whistle and the athletes standing infield were asked to step back to the next marked cone and begin throwing the ball, each time, a little bit further. Again, coach blew his whistle, and the same athletes stepped back additionally to make a great long pass back to their partner. Once this exercise was completed, and their arms were nicely warmed up, coach split the team up into two groups, one group would catch fly balls entailing them to run from their standing position and aim to catch it, while the other group practiced short distant sprints to first base. Once each group practiced thoroughly, there were asked to switch. This concluded the end of the participant observation, as I did not participate in these group drills specifically.

Reflection

With limited access and no previous knowledge regarding the athlete's talent in this team sport, I found it important to study the fundamentals of the activity as well as practicing it. Furthermore, no matter how good the "people skills" are of each individual

athlete, I believe the team's performance can always be improved through practice (i.e., sport drills), learning skills (i.e., PST), and direct observation. Hence, the reason why I felt it would be beneficial for me to engage as a participant observer. Considering our initial interactions from previous sessions (i.e., meet and greet, information, consent, icebreaker), I still felt there was much to be learned about this team and what life is essentially like as a SO athlete, meanwhile remaining, inevitably an outsider. Likewise, I found that this would be a useful tool in gaining further understanding of the relationships among and between the athletes and coaches. Ultimately, enabling me to develop a familiarity with the cultural milieu that will prove invaluable and give me a sense of self-worth in how I would further implement PST as the SPC.

During my participant observation experience practicing with the team, I obtained an increase of awareness with regard to team dynamics. For example, during the warm-up laps, stretching, and softball throws, I observed how the team behaves, performs, and their interactions with the coaches, ultimately influencing how the team reacts. I also considered factors such as personalities of individual team members, how the team operates and/or views itself within the organization as additional influences of team dynamics. Moreover, aside from individual aspects, I realized how friendships could foster communication among the athletes, increasing their motivation and commitment and making them feel good to the point that they enjoy being a part of the team.

Taken together, I witnessed the team demonstrate a lot of skill strengths and abilities as evidenced by their participation in practice which included; their stance or posture when throwing the ball, the use of their glove and guiding hand when catching the ball, and their efforts when sprinting, trying their best to run really fast. With these

observations, I was able to gain sufficient insight with the aforementioned findings of how the athletes responded to coach's feedback. For example, when the coaches gave guidance for a better stance, enhancing their position when holding their glove or praise regarding their "hustle" of the sprint, the team willingly accepted the feedback, making the attempt to practice the stance with proper technique, or smile, recognizing that they are working really hard. In addition to the interactions amongst the teammates, the sounds of laughter, criticism, and seeing unity illustrates bonds of friendships and cohesion. All of which lead me to believe that this team will greatly benefit from this PST program. Insofar, that the team collectively accepted the instruction and feedback as ways to improve. In addition to this team being motivated, as suggested by the coach, this team likewise demonstrates desires to be better. All of which relates to the team's overall performance in which PST will collaborate with the coaches training, with hopes of enhancing the teams overall performance as a benefit to them as I explore my experience implementing the PST program with this SO team.

Session 2: Team Building – Active Listening

The aim of today's session was for the team to work together to keep the balloon in the air using select body parts (i.e., wrist, elbow, feet, chest, etc.) when called out. If the balloon touched the ground, the team was asked to just pick it up and continue, as the goal was to stimulate team interaction. Which was essentially more desirable than implementing the rule "you're out," if the balloon touched the floor, switching the focus to competition itself. In addition, the directions were only given once. This gave an opportunity to see how well the athletes used active listening skills and how they responded if they heard the directions or not (see appendix D).

Debrief

The athletes were encouraged to think about this activity, and were asked, whether or not this was difficult to have the directions given only once? One athlete spoke up and responded, “yeah, I can’t stand the players together, don’t understand it good.” In addition, the athletes were asked if they ever give direction to one another. And they informed me, “no, just screaming.” To gain an in depth understanding of what screaming meant, I asked for them to give me an example. According to this team, screaming is giving motivational praise to one another, such as, “come on, you can do it.” Lastly, I asked is receiving directions once difficult? A response was, “yes, because the coaches do the directions.” Despite the responses being limited, I gained great insight from the observation throughout the activity.

Reflection

During this team session, ultimately what I was trying to implement was the concept of active listening skills among a team of athletes and how they would respond having only been told the directions of the activity once. Essentially, this would be two fold: The first part was the athletes were told the directions one time (only), motivating them to give me their undivided attention and allowing them to demonstrate their ability to listen attentively. Meanwhile, the second part, urged them to communicate with their fellow teammates if they didn’t hear the directions or perhaps didn’t understand. Clearly stated, the athletes were given the directions and told, if the balloon touched the ground, to just pick it up and continue, as the goal was to stimulate team interaction. Which was essentially more desirable than implementing the rule “you’re out,” if the balloon touched the floor, switching the focus to competition itself.

Throughout my experience, I could see athletes getting frustrated, as some understood what was going on while others didn't. I found this to be a significant source of knowledge as I continue to build my practice and resume working among this team of athletes with ID. Insofar, that despite the diagnosing criteria for a person to be deemed intellectually disabled, I felt there are great opportunities, perhaps presenting themselves throughout this session, that illustrate ranges between intellectual functioning, skill and abilities. For example, one athlete may have difficulty focusing their attention for periods of time longer than five minutes, whereas, another athlete may not fully understand the concept of this activity. In comparison to someone else who could listen with their eyes closed, becoming agitated when their peers don't understand the purpose of the activity. Given the various range of talents among this team and seeing select athletes shift in their arousal level, becoming frustrated, shed new meaning, grounding a continuous learning opportunity for me with ways I could better enhance future sessions to meet the needs of my entire audience. Meanwhile, accepting the athlete's frustrations as an ineffective response of coping to the situation as probable cause to unidentified psychological skills that would otherwise benefit this team of athletes in practice or competition where frustration may be experienced.

As the session continued, and the activity progressed, those athletes who once were frustrated found purpose, whether it was from observation of their peers or direct communication, which enlightened them, encouraging them to participate. However, this is not to ignore the fact that I so badly wanted to repeat the direction or remove what I assumed to be a trigger and keep the arousal level regulated. In keeping my silence, I learned that sometimes my internal responses take action, where I get feelings of

remorse, sorrow or even pity that have an effect on me, where I start to question if I should resume with the current rules or make a decision to alter the activity to continue.

As a result of me accepting the athlete's frustration amid my silence, I realized how this experience could relate to their softball performance in so many ways. For example, when an athlete drops an intended catch to assist in a play (i.e., out), striking out when batting, or when the team together is losing during competition all of which have the potential of provoking a level of frustration. While this session alone may not make the changes necessary for this team to better respond to or handle frustration, I do believe the concepts of having good active listening skills, in addition to communicating with their fellow teammates among the team illustrates the benefits of PST for athletes with ID.

Thus, the outcome to the activity was much like a reflex. Once the athletes saw their peers using their body parts (i.e., wrist, elbow, feet, chest, etc.) to keep the balloon in the air and not let it touch the floor, frustration seized and participation increased. In addition, it was apparent that when multiple athletes get together, they often talk and create a distraction for others. Leading to frustration among athletes, decreasing ability to understand the one-time directions well. In ongoing efforts to implement PST with this team, I realized how important this knowledge is.

Session 3: Team Building - Trust

The aim of today's session was to introduce *trust* within a team environment. Similar to other trust lean activities, where you have a single faller and the remaining team members as the catcher. This activity consisted of the athletes splitting up into pairs, finding a partner with similar body statute. The athletes on one side were then instructed

to lean towards their partner, (one person at a time) and trust that their partner wouldn't let them fall. I was available as a "spotter" in the event that an athlete would begin to fall. As each athlete had the opportunity to be the faller, they each made relevant eye contact and leaned towards their partner. While some leaned more than others, they essentially built trust with their teammate that they wouldn't fall. In addition, each athlete was given the opportunity to be the catcher. Some athletes would provoke their teammate to feel as if there were falling, however, didn't let them fall. This triggered some athletes to get upset and stop. While other fallers challenged their catcher to see how far they could go, holding them. As a result, all athletes remained up, and no one fell.

Debrief

Each athlete/pair appeared to have trust within their teammate as evidenced by the outcome of the lean, and no one falling. Therefore, it was of interest for me to ask each athlete, what made you trust your teammate? Upon the variation amongst the team, responses included, "teammate catch me, I didn't fall," which illustrated a sense of trust. In addition, this activity is important for athletes to consider within their softball team, as trust is an integral part of teamwork. As suggested by Mach, Dolan, & Tzafrir (2010), team tasks require a high level of interdependence between members wherein trust is needed. Therefore, my next question was, what are some examples of trust needed in softball? As the athletes began to connect the purpose of this activity to how trust is needed in softball, athletes responded with, "pitcher, catcher, and help when the sun is in your eyes." This was further explored to gain a clearer understanding, which essentially meant that each athlete puts trust in their team pitcher, who attempts to pitch strikes for the opponent, that the catcher would catch the balls after a strike was pitched and attempt

to get a base stealer out. As well as your teammates will step up and help if the sun is in your eyes, they may call “ball” and catch it. As the athletes demonstrated positive understanding, it was important to probe further, what are other ways athletes show trust? While some of these athletes play multiple sports in the SO, it was encouraged to think in generality, and not just softball, as athletes could relate in multiple ways. For example, the team suggested that other athletes can show trust like “the quarterback in football,” illustrating that the team puts a lot of trust in a key player.

Reflection

Knowing that successful teamwork is built on a foundation of trust, it was my intention to implement an activity during this group session that illustrated just that, identifying practical ways to employ trust within this team environment, and encourage them to maintain it. In the short amount of time spent together, I have noticed multiple friendships being built and bonds being fostered, creating a “brotherhood” among the team. Despite the athlete’s beliefs that they have established trust via their strong relationships formed with their coaches. I felt it would be essential to discuss the importance of being able to maintain trust collectively as a team, meanwhile, exploring their individual abilities, cultivating trust through their actions, words, and working together to sustain it.

For now, I felt trust was a critical factor that needed to be examined in order to continue building a team full of success. Specifically, each athlete needs to be able to trust each other, in order to carry out their commitment to the team and work diligently with their goals in mind, communicating consistently about any issues that may arise. In addition to displaying acceptance to the new athletes that recently joined the team, and

trusting them, despite them having no previous experience in softball. Taken into consideration, I decided to implement the trust lean activity to gain further insight regarding each individual's ability to trust.

Throughout the preparation phase, I felt uncertain about which activity to implement, as a result to our initial session and the use of homophobic language. While I contemplated ideas and activities, it was resourceful to address in supervision. With different viewpoints, I questioned, how would this trust lean present itself as "gay?" Given alternative tactics, I found myself wanting to take the chance anyway. Perhaps this was my way of knowing if the athletes really thought the first session activity was "gay" or was it the fact that they didn't want to participate. Not knowing, I felt the only way to find out was to attempt another activity that required physical contact with a peer, although limited in comparison.

Ironically, the athletes did well during this session and were able to demonstrate understanding of why it is important to have trust within a team sport, as evidenced by their responses in the debriefing. Furthermore, with consideration to our initial session (i.e., the human knot), the present activity (i.e., trust lean) did not produce feelings of being "gay." Despite having made contact with another peer, placing their hands together and leaning. More over, I could have experienced a lot of self-doubt from peer criticism going into the session; yet I was determined to know my audience. And in doing so, I made the conscious decision to follow through with my original idea. While the present activity was about identifying practical ways to employ trust within the team environment, I believe that a rational justification as to why such homophobic feelings were not produced was because it would unknowingly create a masculine test of strength

with the athlete's ability to lean consciously believing that their partner would not let them fall. Ultimately leaving me with thoughts of: had their partner fell, would this illustrate weakness in trust to the individual? Team?

Session 4: Communication and Leadership

Prior to today's session, the coach had informed me about a fundraising event that the athletes were going to participate in, for the purpose of raising money to fund their trip to New Jersey for the 2014 National Special Olympics games. Therefore, today's topic was aimed at identifying ways to communicate thoughts and feelings in a positive and constructive manner, and taking on leadership during a fundraising event. To begin, I first explored with the athletes, the many ways in which one can communicate (i.e., verbal and nonverbal). The athletes provided examples such as; "cell phone, texting, email, Facebook and Instagram." This led the discussion into more detailed topics of language (i.e., English, words, American Sign Language), tone (i.e., cheerful, unpleasant), gestures (i.e., greeting, body language, eye contact) and contact (i.e., hand shake, greeting, drawing pictures). Relating to their team sport (softball), we discussed ways in which the athletes communicate with each other and their coaches during practice and competitions. For example, the athlete's mentioned, "coach's sign, and the other team (i.e., opponents)". In understanding communication and the various ways in which we can communicate with our friends and family, we then discussed how we can demonstrate communication with people that we do not know. Suggestions such as "be nice" came up. Lastly, we discussed how communication in softball is relatable to how we can communicate during a fundraising event. While the majority of this session stimulated a casual conversation, I felt it was important to also observe how the athletes

transferred our discussion about communication to the people they encountered during the fundraising event. Therefore, no PST activity was implemented.

Debrief

The development of interpersonal communication skills is an important aspect of psychological skill development in interactive sport athletes (Sullivan, 1993). Therefore, it was of interest for me to understand how each athlete could relate communication in softball to this fundraising event. And so I asked just that. Athletes associated communication with random people shopping at a local market as, “to know the place, like directions.” In efforts to ensure I understood, I inquired by what they meant. Athletes shared that in order to communicate with “strangers,” they needed to know that place they were going to (i.e., the national games in New Jersey). In addition, they had to communicate based on the directions they were given, framing ways they could communicate with local shoppers, as directed from the coaches. Meanwhile, other athletes implied that they have to communicate with their teammates and coaches to know the place of the fundraising event and the directions to get there. This was no surprise to me as two athletes drive themselves independently to practice. This would suggest that those athletes need communication within the team to ensure they know where they are to be and at what time. Before the event began, I asked the team, what are your expectations during the fundraising event? Just as one would expect, they responded with, “money for the state, for the USA, Special Olympics, New Jersey, and to get donations for the softball team.” This displayed the effectiveness of two-way communication, as one must be able to listen attentively as another form of communication, which was evident by the athlete’s ability to state their expectations with

meaningful purpose. In relating to the sport, I then asked the team, how can we communicate in softball? Displaying understanding, the team responded with, “talking, screaming, looking with eyes, catching the ball, saying I got it, listen to my third base coach, look and listen to coach, if he says go, keep going, he say stop, you stop at the base. Either you keep running or stop.” With a final discussion, the team illustrated how communication is not only speaking verbally, but also actively listening to members on their team, in addition to non verbal communication as illustrated with eye contact in being able to see the coaches directions portrayed through hand gestures and feedback.

Reflection

Today, my ultimate goal was aimed at identifying ways to communicate thoughts and feelings in a positive and constructive manner, and taking on leadership as needed. Essentially, what I was trying to achieve was the way in which the athletes communicate amongst themselves, with the coaches, in addition to ways they can communicate with strangers in hopes of raising money to help fund their trip to the SO National Games. Significant factors that I felt were relevant to today’s society that the team mentioned related communication to social media and the ever-evolving use of electronics. Additionally, they gave great examples, naming the various methods, some even showing their social media pages from their cell phones to prove their account.

Aside from that, communication skills as we know are critical for ensuring success within a team sport in addition to their effort. Likewise, strong teams with effective communication skills can help build healthy relationships (i.e., accepting new team members). As a result, I felt that the team communicated well with those they encountered during the fundraising event, stating reasons as to why they were raising

money, displaying excitement for their upcoming travels and determination that they would bring home the trophy from Nationals. In addition to communication through verbal interactions, some athletes were holding up signs as another form of communication, previously identified as written communication.

Therefore, in conclusion, I felt this session went well; the team worked together, ultimately communicating effectively with both their teammates and those who donated money. Despite not having completed a PST activity due to the coach's request and time needed to get to the site. I felt that the discussion session was a sufficient experience in terms of ways PST can be identified, discussed and transferred to other tasks, as carried out by the team.

Non-Participant Observation

The aim of today's session was to observe the team during softball practice. This time, they would be practicing on the softball field in their original environment, beginning with the usual warm ups and passing drills, in addition to individuals taking turns batting base hits and running the bases, while the remainder of the team completed defense practice in their respectable positions, rotating to bat. Additionally, the coach instructed the team while batting, to focus on where the ball was going and they had to either stay on first or keep running to second, depending on the type of pass thrown to first base. For example, if the ball was passed and went beyond the first base man, the athlete was encouraged to continue running to second. If the first base man caught the ball after the athlete arrived to first base, they were instructed to stay until the next bat.

Reflection

Preparing for this session, the primary aim was to gain a better understanding of

the environment in which the team practices, using a purposive sampling approach to see athletes performing different roles within the team, at different career stages (in SO), and with different levels of experience. All of which I felt I may not have been able to gain in depth otherwise as a participant observer or consultant during a session. Likewise, I still felt there was much to be learned about this team and their performance in practice.

Therefore, I found that this would be a useful tool in furthering my understanding of the many relationships among the athletes and between the coaches. Ultimately, enabling me to obtain further knowledge in efforts to continue developing ideas to assist me in the preparation of more PST sessions.

Additionally, I was interested in watching the team's ongoing dynamic interactions, recalling select skills from previously implemented session and how they impact their current role or position on the team. For example, during the softball throws, batting and outfield drills, I hoped to gain a more in depth understanding of how the team behaved among the different positions, how well they performed during that role, and their interactions with the coaches ultimately influencing how they respond or react to feedback. I also considered on going factors such as their individual personalities, team operations under the direction of the coaches and the attitude illustrated in terms of the team viewing itself as a qualifier for the National Games, ultimately impacting the team environment.

Essentially, what I gained from this experience was heightened awareness with regard to the diverse roles assumed by each athlete. For example, team clown, team leader, and short-tempered player, perhaps even scapegoat. Relevant to the different levels of skill involvement, I felt this was an important area to highlight. Specifically as it

concerns the roles of different players, ultimately having an affect on the team. Having played team sports myself, I had prior knowledge that teams often have the tendency to assign roles to different individuals. For example, there are the formal roles, such as your position and number in the batting order, as well as informal roles which come about in ways that have more to do with one's personality style than your playing ability (Carron, 1988). Likewise, I believe an athlete's duration of participation (i.e., career length) and level of experience, aid in the prediction of an athlete's role.

As the team practiced, I noticed confidence amid the athlete's ability to successfully carrying out their formal role as an outfielder, catching the ball. Which in turn, illustrates a level of trust within themselves as well as their fellow teammates. In addition, I witnessed select athletes who unintentionally would close the glove before the ball made contact with it, causing the ball to drop. And when such incidents occurred, informal roles would surface, resulting in audible feedback, such as "oooohhhhhh snap" from the team clown, shadowed by a rage of laughter from others. At times, creating frustration for the athlete who dropped the ball, making comments such as, "shut up" to drown out the negative peer interactions, reflecting his short-temper.

Furthermore, the athletes demonstrated varying abilities to focus on the ball's location upon completion of their turn at bat, ultimately determining whether they would continue running to second base, or stay on first. The instructions from the coach were, if the softball was thrown beyond first base, continue running to second base. However, if the ball was thrown within proximate distance to first base, they knew to stay. In efforts that the athletes would portray accountability, the coaches remained in their silence, meanwhile the athletes carried out the drill. Although a wide range of athletes performed

as directed, not all of them did. Illustrating to me, the varying limitations among the team. However, the coaches used those moments to teach with guided instruction, giving correction to those who stopped at first when the ball went beyond first base and they were to continue running to second base. With consideration to this observation and how the team performed during practice, among the different positions, varying roles, and their interactions with the coaches, I felt an important key factor to consider going forward is each individual's personality and how it affects their role within each PST session.

Session 5: Focus and Distraction Control

Today's topic was aimed at teaching athletes to be fully present (i.e., engaged and free from worry, fatigue, mental habits, daydreaming, etc.) and able to manage their distractions during an activity that required them to use memory recall, promoting focus and concentration. Meanwhile, during this session, they were encouraged to pay attention so they could remember where each card that was turned over was and hope they would complete a match on their next turn (see appendix D). With a team of male athletes who work or attend school, getting together in the afternoon tends to be their time to talk and catch up on their lives, as evidenced by their conversations. With lots of people, objects, and topics, some athletes were unable to fully devote their ability to focus on the activity and control the distractions. Meanwhile, others had no problems and were very attentive, displaying a competitiveness to get as many matched cards as possible. As the activity went on, the distractions diminished and athletes were helping each other find matches. Meanwhile, others were intentionally telling an athlete to pick a card, which they knew was wrong so they could get the match on their turn.

Debrief:

As the athlete's ability to focus increased, their memory was activated, leading to successfully matching cards. In terms of relating this activity to their sport, I asked the team, how does this activity relate to softball? What one may consider being common sense could be seen differently for others. Likewise, consistently practicing the same patterns can become habitual that you may not even subconsciously think about the basics of the sport. However, the team illustrated memory as, "knowing (i.e., remembering) where 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and home base is." This illustrated that they not only run in the right direction, but they also have a good sense of judgment to determine the time to run, using memory from the game rules (i.e., the batter has to stay at home plate until he hits a fair ball, or is awarded a base) in addition to recalling the coaches feedback. Examples of using the coach's feedback came from "practice or the dugout" and were transferred to the field, implying a sense of memory activation, recalling what was said or signaled for them to do. In this case, the team reported, "gestures from coach to keep going, or to stop" during a base hit. This lead to the next question, why is focus important in softball? In relation to memory, the team suggested, "because, when the coaches say go to swing, you don't swing at any ball, I have to wait for a good pitch." Despite being given feedback from the coaches, the athletes report that they also need to focus to make sure they are hitting a good pitch and not just swinging when the coach implies they should swing. Although the coach's input is appreciated, the athletes demonstrate the need to focus. Hence asking, how does this activity demonstrate your ability to focus in softball? With limitation to the amount of responses, some athletes suggested, "don't want to hear the people (i.e., spectators) screaming in the field, when I cover outfield, I

have to focus on the batter and where the ball is to catch the ball.” This implied that the outfield positions require attention and their ability to focus so they could have awareness of the balls direction once hit by the batter. However, the fans can be a distraction, hence why they “don’t want to hear people screaming.”

Reflection:

Considering memory as a crucial sport skill, team players, especially in softball, must make split-second decisions about their next move based on where they see fellow teammates, opponents or objects (i.e., softballs) situated on the field. Likewise, those split second decisions can become costly with diminished focus and distraction control. Insofar, that the athletes are not able to perform at their best when caught up in self-limiting or external distractions. With consideration to athletes with ID, external distractions can be a great challenge. For example, worrying about the coach’s expectations, personal relationship or role identification within the team and the opponent are all examples of external distractions. Essentially, distracting the athlete from focusing on their immediate decision needed to achieve their next move. Hence, why I felt it was necessary to achieve an understanding to the athlete’s ability to demonstrate memory with regard to split-second decisions and managing focus and distraction control.

In efforts to implement an activity which I felt would be ideal to the perceived skill/intellectual functioning, I reflected back to previous supervision sessions. With hands on activities as something I found beneficial for this group of athletes, I soon realized that I didn’t have enough tools to carry out my session activity. Taken into consideration, I set out to the local store looking for significant ideas that could be illustrated in the context of a game, with consideration to my audience. Wherein, I

encountered a memory game with “super friends,” that depicted masculine super heroes. Thinking creatively, I chose to implement this game, asking athletes to determine where a picture was last seen and successfully match it. Meanwhile, their fellow teammates could be distractions.

Throughout my experience in consulting this session, I was able to gain further insight as to how this team’s various skills differ. In addition to their role identity, and frequent need to play pranks and tease other members, I noticed that one athlete tends to withdrawal from participation, despite being encouraged; he prefers to “watch.” However, his watching only lasted momentarily as coach came and informed the entire team that these sessions are part of the team and that everyone needs to be participating. Coach later told me that, “he (the withdrawn athlete) thinks he’s too cool for these groups.” This led me to a realization that because their perceived skill/ intellectual levels vary significantly, could it be that this activity was way too easy, or perhaps unrealistic to what he felt he could benefit from. This was something that I had to discuss during supervision, to better develop my consultant experience to ensure that I’m meeting the needs of all the athletes, and not just select players. As a result, my greatest challenge I encountered was finding that happy medium and still having the ability to reach your entire audience, in my case, the team.

Session 6: Increasing Self-Confidence Through Positive Self-Talk

The aim of today’s session was to teach the difference between positive, negative, and instructional self-talk. An important strategy for success is to develop an understanding of the way that our attitudes and thoughts influence (for better or worse) our feelings and behavior. When athletes learn to recognize the negative and irrational

attitudes that lead to self-defeating behaviors, they can change them to more positive and rational attitudes through positive self-talk and develop or increase their self-confidence. In terms identifiable for the team, it was explained that sometimes we get upset, mad, or frustrated when we are losing. And that can make us think, say or do bad things. The team was questioned if anyone has ever experienced that, and if so, give an example. The team responded with examples of negative self-talk that they say to themselves, including, “I suck” to “I lose concentration”. The team mentioned that these negative thoughts come most often when there are batting. They were then asked to think of something positive they could say in place of the negative thought. Examples given were motivational in nature, such as, “come on, I can do it.” In addition, they were encouraged to think of alternatives they could say that may be instructional. The example I gave to ensure the athlete’s understanding was, bend your knees! They suggested that while at bat, they could redirect their thoughts to be calming by saying, “relax,” or instructional by saying, “hit a homerun, and make a base (i.e., base hit).” Aside from batting, the team was encouraged to think of other ways they could use self-talk. Per the teams suggestions, they mentioned when on defense (i.e., outfield), having instructional thoughts such as, “move feet quick, catch fly/foul balls” would likewise, be beneficial.

Debrief:

Leading into the discussion, the team was asked if you become frustrated (i.e., angry), how do you cope (i.e., deal) with it? Athletes suggested, “get angry, then take deep breath and calm down.” In addition to recognizing accountability, one athlete mentioned, “when I get mad, that’s my error (i.e., a result of), I need to breath, take my time, and later go to communicate with my team again, apologize for actions.” This

illustrated that some athletes need to walk away from the stimulation and take time for one's self before returning to the team dugout.

Reflection:

Prior to this session, I was anticipating the athletes to display less insight compared to previous sessions as today's session was aimed at self-talk. While I didn't want to underestimate the athlete's insight and understanding, I wasn't confident that I would be able to explain it in such a way that they would be able to identify and relate to. However, the feedback and responses provided indicated the athlete's ability to respond as evidenced by their level of insight to the current topic. In addition to exhibiting the potential to respond effectively to deep breathing, and relaxation exercises that could aid during moments of negative self-talk.

In terms of significant factors as they relate to my experience consulting, I realized the importance of being mindful of your own facial expressions when working with any client. Especially, with regard to athlete responses, that you necessarily wouldn't expect to hear, or otherwise, indicate something you didn't intend for. For example, during this session, I assumed that it would be more difficult to grasp and understand than previous sessions. Especially considering the topic of self-talk. However, as the discussion began and progressed, I felt myself taken back by the responses and literally was shocked by the significance to the team's replies. In fact, it was in this very moment that I realized the importance of being aware of my facial expressions and the responses given to avoid a misleading response that could otherwise damage the rapport or create un-comfortableness between the client and/or consultant. Furthermore, I realized that beyond my assumptions, beliefs or stereotypical thinking, this team is

knowledgeable, and capable of reading into my facial expressions.

In learning to be prepared for the unexpected, I also felt that this session taught me how one's responses could trigger negative thought process. For example, what if the coach was taken back by something said, a play completed, or the call of the umpire, would his facial expressions affect the athletes? It's the thought of not knowing. Facial expressions also carry very distinct meanings and give a multitude of perspectives. However, until we ask the source, how will we ever know? Therefore, in efforts to achieve the topic of self-talk, I also felt it was important to discuss reasons that trigger self-talk, hence asking the team to think back to certain situations that triggered those thoughts.

Session 7: Goal Setting

The aim of today's session was to discuss goals, specifically outcome, performance, and process goals. An example was given of each to ensure awareness and understanding. Outcome goals were explained as the big, overarching goal that the athlete wants to get better at. For example, in football, I want to kick 3 out of 5 field goals during competition. To ensure understanding, I gave an additional example that related to softball. The example given was, to beat the throw (of the softball) to first base, which carried meaning that they would be safe on first base, upon a successful swing in the batters box and a strong sprint. In contrast, the process goal was explained as the daily or weekly tasks and achievements that help you move toward your outcome goal. They are the goals that the athlete has control over, the building blocks. Examples of process goals that can relate to a multitude of sports, including softball, were to attend weekly trainings and lift weights to build strength. In addition to the previous football example, I

elaborated that in order to achieve the outcome goal; an athlete would need to rehearse kicking 5 field goals during practice. Likewise in softball, beating the throw to first base, an athlete may need to practice their batting swing and short sprints to first base. Lastly, the performance goal was discussed as the personalized goal for each individual that can be used to monitor achievement of their process goals and progress towards their desired outcome goals. For example, generic examples included, giving 80 % in practice and leg pressing 250 pounds. Whereas in the football example, an athlete may consider making 2 field goals each practice. Going back to softball, the athletes were encouraged to think of how they could individually attain their personal performance goal during practice. Meanwhile, I gave the example, to make bat-ball contact in 2 out of 3 swings and practice hard.

To demonstrate this idea of goal setting, I implemented The Jenga Game, and asked each player to take a turn, removing a block from the jenga tower and balance it on top, creating a taller and increasingly unstable structure as the game progressed, to help facilitate the discussion. As each player removed a block, they were encouraged to share a goal.

Initially, the team was really excited when they saw the game and they began to share insight from past experiences. As a team preparing for national competition, we discussed what their main, over arching outcome goal would be as a team. Primarily, some suggested, “hitting homeruns,” implying a more individualized outcome goal. Therefore, I redirected the athletes to think together as a team, what their main goal is that they want to achieve during nationals. In unison, the majority of the team suggested “win” which concluded with a fellow athlete ensuring I knew what it was they were

going to win, implying, “win New Jersey” (i.e., nationals). While I felt confident everyone wants to win, I wanted to make sure those who did not say anything, want the same for the team. So I asked the team, does everyone want to win the national SO games in New Jersey? Shouts of “yeah, yeah, yes, yeah” rang out and could be heard from all members of the team. The excitement that echoed from their voices as they shouted “yeah, yes” and the joy displayed in their affects was such a momentous experience. So it was confirmed that this team wants to win the SO National USA games. We then discussed the process goals as a team, how would they achieve this? Together, the team came up with “show up to practice, work really hard, train really hard, to play good (in practice), and to work (in practice) like in a game, harder.” The Jenga blocks were then placed into a tower, with select members assisting in creating the structure. The rules of the game were briefly explained as the majority of the team already knew and they were anxious to begin. Each athlete was then given an opportunity to remove a Jenga block from anywhere on the tower and balance it on top. When doing so, they were encouraged to give their personal performance goal in how they can help the team achieve their desired outcome goal of winning nationals, beginning in today’s practice. As a team, they represented various skills and abilities, ranging from, “hitting a home run, catch the ball (i.e., outfield, bases, short stop), stealing a base, batting good, catch 5 fly balls and catching (i.e., the catcher)”. As the tower began to grow unstable, the team was encouraged to think about the team as a whole and if one person does not contribute to the team, it could affect everyone. By then, the Jenga tower grew too tall and collapsed, illustrating the need for the team to work together to achieve their goals and hopefully win nationals.

Debrief:

Debriefing can serve as an opportunity to reflect on an experience and make it meaningful by identifying what was learned (Knapp, 1998). In wrapping up this session, the athletes were questioned, why do you think we need goals as a team? Demonstrating understanding to the topic, athletes suggested, “So we can win and play good.”

Understanding the purpose of goals is also of importance, but believing you can achieve those goals provides significant meaning. Therefore, I inquired with the team, do you think your team will be successful? Subsequently they responded with, “yeah, I am so happy we [are] going to New Jersey for the National USA Olympic’s.” Although, with efforts to understand, I probed more because I didn’t feel “yeah” gave me the understanding of how this team thinks they are successful. However, they were quick to inform me that, “yes, we success” and they feel successful because of their opportunity to go to New Jersey. In addition, this is the team’s first time ever competing at the national level and representing the state of Florida. Therefore, suggesting that this team is indeed, successful with evidence of the team feeling confident about themselves as athletes and being able to achieve their goals. Likewise, they also feel successful because, “I think the coaches do a really good job with this team.”

Reflection:

During the planning phase, leading up to this session, I wasn’t sure the complexities of goals and goal variation would be easily understood. For example, ensuring the athletes knew what each goal type illustrated, the purpose, and the differences between them. However, I felt confident that the athletes could relate to the examples I provided. In addition to working with athletes with ID, I felt that using hands

on activities (i.e., Jenga) would help stimulate a greater learning environment. Taken together, I believe this was one of my better sessions; I had the team engaged, giving descriptive, rational examples of potential team goals and ways they can individually contribute towards those goals. In addition, once I concluded the session, I just knew the team understood as evidenced by their responses. However, I do believe this team would benefit from weekly check-ins, follow up and reflections of how they will follow through with their goals leading up to the national competition.

Session 8: Focus and Distraction Control

The aim of today's session was to teach athletes to be fully present (i.e., free from worry, fatigue, mental habits, daydreaming, etc.) and able to manage their distractions. Therefore, a group juggling activity (see appendix D) was implemented with the intended purpose that each athlete would work together as a team to successfully juggle several items while remaining focused to activity. To begin, each individual was asked to form a circle and were explained the rules, fostering similarities to softball, as they were encouraged to toss each object underhand. Once the rules were explained, I conducted a practice round to ensure each athlete completely understood the activity and directions. Once the practice round was completed, the athletes were instructed to share out loud whom they passed the object to (i.e., catcher). After each athlete successfully identified the catcher, they were asked to pass to the same person for the first portion of this exercise.

As the activity began, the athletes started rushing as if it were a timed race, which lead to athletes getting impatient with each other, stating comments like, "come on, hurry up, throw it." As passes were being completed, the group environment became

increasingly aroused to the point that I felt the current milieu of the team was not an environment conducive to learning. As shown by one specific athlete who over used his strength intentionally, resulting in peer conflict. As witnessed by the initiating individual who threw the object as forcefully as he could, hitting the receiving individual, in the leg, wherein he wasn't able to catch the ball. This led to an uproar of feedback from multiple people on the team stating, "you don't know how to throw it, why did you throw it like that, don't throw it hard like that, oh my gosh, come on" followed by angered eye gazes and facial expressions that displayed uneasiness and frustration. This then led me to redirecting the team's attention back to the group topic. In doing so, I also addressed the athlete specifically regarding his actions, who then walked away from the group activity, resulting in an unsuccessful first round of group juggling.

In preparation to begin this activity again, I reminded the team to stick to the activity rules, and throw the object underhand just as they do when pitching softball. In addition to revisiting the purpose of today's activity, implying this is not a race and to encourage the athletes to work together as a team, successfully juggling several items while remaining focused to the activity, and limit the amount of distractions to ensure objects don't drop. The team did well and they were able to successfully complete the second round. After completion of every successful round, I continued to add one additional object. The team did great and provided feedback during the challenge of juggling multiple objects, which included, "hold on, wait, oh my, this is hard" in addition to names being called out and giving positive encouragement such as, "it's ok, come on pass it."

Debrief:

While this activity was a bit more challenging, I encouraged the team to think about how this activity can help them focus and relate it to their softball performance. Surprisingly, athletes responded with, “this activity help me so much, because, before activity, I didn’t focus and I don’t have patience. I need more patience and focus with the people.” While this seemed contradictory when considering everything that occurred in today’s session, I felt that these responses gave an accurate depiction of today’s intended purpose. For example, the multiple objects that were being juggled gave additional stimulus, which the athletes had to learn to control, meanwhile remaining focused, learning to have patience with team members, and increasing their ability to work together effectively. With respect to how this session turned out, I wanted to keep the debriefing short, therefore, I asked one last question; what helps you focus? As the participation began to diminish, I sensed that the team had enough with the session, resulting in one suggestion relating to focus, “talk to the coaches.” But before I would dismiss the athletes, I asked for a hand raise of all those who feel the coaches help them concentrate. Much like I expected, they all raised their hands.

Reflection:

All the hype and distractions leading up to a big game can be overwhelming for athletes, hindering their ability to perform well. Therefore, in order for athletes to perform their best when the stakes are high they need to know how to avoid getting caught up with external distractions or self-limiting internal distractions. Hence, what I planned to achieve during this session was the athlete’s ability to work together meanwhile limiting the amount of distractions and encouraging self-control in efforts to remain focused throughout the activity. With intentions of having a successful session,

margin for error still exists, and in this case, was short lived after the conflict between two peers occurred, requiring redirection and a second attempt to complete the activity. Meanwhile, during this session, when things were chaotic, I really doubted myself, and the activity that I had planned. Yet, I was determined to make a better outcome once I was able to regain everyone's focus.

As the team began to regain and display interest as evidenced by their engagement in the activity, I felt a greater sense of accomplishment, that despite the interruptions that occurred, I was able to carry out the activity with its intended purpose. Therefore, considering the bigger picture, I honestly felt this activity was a success. As witnessed by the athletes' ability to still have fun, laughing, socially interacting and working as a team to not drop too many objects. However, when considering the event that led to the redirection of the athletes, I felt this was one of my greatest lessons learned. It was the way in which the object was thrown, with excessive force that appeared to me, intentional, urging the catcher to flinch and not be able to catch it, or potentially hit the athlete in a location that was inappropriate for his amusement. Hence, why I felt the need to take corrective action and address the issue at hand. After all, this is a team building activity.

Despite feeling it was the right thing to do in the moment, I was left with this plague of doubt, that I did the wrong thing. Ultimately questioning myself, did I overstep my boundaries? Was I wrong for redirecting this athlete? In that very moment, I didn't think so. But to ensure a continued rapport with the team and coaches, I confronted the head coach and discussed with the athlete before leaving, apologizing and ensuring the intended purpose of the activity was understood. As a result, I believe the demeanor of

the athletes could possibly change because of this experience, wherein they come to sessions with less “horseplay” and prepared to work knowing that the coach is following up after the discussion that I had with him today.

Non-Participant Observation

The aim of today’s session was to observe the SO athletes during batting practice with the intentions of gaining a direct understanding of this phenomenon in its natural context. Each athlete completed their usual warm ups, stretching, walking laps, sprinting to first base and preparing themselves for the practice. During the batting practice, the assistant coach would pitch while the head coach closely observed the batting stance, grip and anatomy of the swing. While waiting their turn to bat, all athletes participated in the outfield, catching and retrieving balls for the coach, and passing them back in to the catcher at his designated location near second base. Once up to bat, some athletes performed with ease, knocking the ball consistently towards the fence, at times close to having home runs. For other athletes, they were hitting ground balls, foul balls and some even striking out. In addition, I observed the team’s dynamics and how they socially interacted, some pressuring their fellow peers to do better (i.e., “it’s ok, you got it”), while others pressured themselves (i.e., “oh my gosh, I suck”). Specifically, one athlete became very angry, took his helmet off, threw it against the fence and said, “What’s wrong with me? I can’t focus!”

Reflection

This observational experience gave me more insight into how the athletes respond to their individual performance with meaning generated from their personal reactions (i.e., affect, gestures, responses, etc.) and the outcome of their performance during batting

practice (i.e., base hit, foul ball, strike out, etc.). Specifically, what I found to be the most significant was the way in which the individuals handle the current situation, how they followed through with the current outcome (i.e., foul ball, strike out, home run, etc.), whether it would affect them on into the next series of events in practice, and how they responded to feedback, if any was given. Noticeably, those who consistently hit the balls towards the fence returned to the outfield full of energy, hustling to catch any ball that came near his domain of stance and was heard making chants that confirmed his success. Whereas, those who struggled with proper stance, making contact with the bat to ball, were less enthused, harder on themselves and heard making comments about how bad they suck. Which now leaves this team with two different morals, as some were hyped while others were frustrated. Similar to what may occur in any competition, I was interested to see how these responses can be addressed in sessions to come that would aid in my way of knowing. Specifically, I am interested in knowing how relaxation can benefit those athletes who are frustrated and hard on themselves to help regain their composure, and not giving up, but simply be willing to try again.

Session 9: Basic Relaxation Through Deep Breathing

The aim of today's session was to introduce deep breathing, a simple technique that is basic to most other relaxation skills. So to start, an introductory discussion was designed to get the athletes thinking about past experiences where they may have felt anxious, nervous or had a high level of arousal during practice or competition settings. Furthermore, we discussed the physical responses that our bodies have when encountered with stress. Such as heart rate, sweating, and rapid, shallow breathing. Once each athlete had become aware of their bodies stress response, they were encouraged to turn off the

stress reaction and turn on their relaxation response. In doing so, they inhaled slowly and deeply through their nose, allowing their lungs to breathe in as much oxygen as possible to relieve any tension that may lead to negative stress and holding the breath for a few seconds before exhaling. While exhaling, they were asked to do so slowly through their mouths, pursing their lips together to control how fast they exhaled. This exercise was repeated four times.

Debrief:

The activity itself went well and the athletes demonstrated a great level of understanding, which limited the amount of time needed to complete the exercise. Initiating a discussion of how this team relates the importance of basic relaxation via deep breathing to their softball participation, they were asked, during competition, when do you feel most anxious? With various possibilities, the team responded, “when on deck to bat, in the dug out and mostly when the game is tied or we are close to winning the game.” The athletes went into more detail, describing a past competition, when the score was tied and the game was in the bottom of the last inning. Their opponents began swing towels in celebration of the game, screaming with the assumption the “visitors” had already won, as they had runners on base and their best player was up to bat. As I assumed it was due to pressure, the “home” team stated that the best batter on the visitors team struck out, causing them to lose and my SO (home) team won the competition. This was a great illustration of how these athletes could feel anxious, nervous, or even doubt themselves and their team during such pressure filled moments. With recall to that very moment, I encouraged the team to try and remember what that felt like and in one word, describe how they felt after completing the deep breathing exercise. For one athlete, he

said it was like, “whoosha.” Others generically stated, “good” and smiled.

Reflection:

It is important to understanding that breathing has a lot to do with one’s athletic performance as well as their quality of life. I felt basic relaxation through deep breathing could powerfully improve the athletes abilities to decrease stress and muscle tension; calm their nerves; sharpen their focus; minimize negative and distracting thoughts; reduce fatigue; and promote stamina, a much needed commodity among this masculine team. Unfortunately, proper breathing is often an overlooked component in coaching, which is why I made the decision to include this rather easy task of deep breathing that could be a useful tool for this particular team during their national competition.

Reflecting back to previous experiences as I continued onward in this session, listening to the responses given, athletes acknowledging when they most often feel anxious with a justifiable cause, and having the ability to see each athlete partaking in the deep breathing exercise itself, I came to realize that the aforementioned benefits of deep breathing and PST as a whole can and will impact the athlete’s abilities. Therefore, boosting my confidence and giving me a stronger sense of faith, believing that what I am doing for this SO team is nothing more then what I could do for a team without disabilities.

In addition, I felt previous discussions in supervision about the various ways to implement deep breathing was also of importance during this experience. For example, going back to the “kid-ify” approach, and remembering to keep the steps simple yet appropriate for the age and gender of my participants which was also a factor in making a decision about which style of deep breathing would I implement. As a result, I felt that

this experience was relevant to each individual athlete and it is something they can take to New Jersey and use as needed during competition.

Session 10: Team Building

The aim of today's session was to encourage the team to think and identify variables needed to achieve success and learn about their teammates. This activity was designed to help teach a variety of concepts: working with others, making contributions to the team, accepting and using suggestion from all members of the team, leading and following at appropriate times, trusting the other athletes on the team and working with people who have very different skill levels. Ultimately, working with others is the essence of being on this softball team. Likewise, it is normal, and probably desirable, for athletes on teams to have different skill levels. Therefore, a challenging teamwork activity was suggested in order to see how the athletes worked together in order to accomplish a difficult task. As a result, many special things occurred among the team including; group trust was formed, doors were opened for meaningful discussion, self-esteem was boosted when success was being praised and the athletes learned more about improving their social and communication skills. To better illustrate this concept, I asked the team to gather around a large table and I gave each athlete 3 Jenga blocks. I informed the whole team that the only information I was going to provide was that each team member had to contribute their 3 blocks to the structure they were building. However, I did not tell them what to build or how to build it. I wanted to see them working together to create that. I then prompted them to begin, taking off like a race. They were engaged, placing their blocks one after the other, talking and some providing feedback, stating, "right here" and signaling guided assistance on where to place the block. After successful

completion of the first structure, I split the entire team up into two groups and had them compete against each other's team in building a structure. This time I asked them to build a structure similar to a dugout. And so it began, however, this time it was interesting to see the different structures. One team created a vertical tower. Meanwhile, the other team created a floor plan of a dugout. Overall, there was teamwork and communication through the entire session. We ended with debriefing and relating the activity to teamwork within competition and why it's important.

Debrief:

This activity initiated a lot of team building opportunities. Therefore, I asked the athletes to describe how they felt they worked together as a team during this activity. While not the response I expected, their feedback suggested ways they have worked together as well as how they continue to work together and communicate. For example, the team suggests, "As a group, we talk about the game and other games and past games." Which demonstrates their ability to relate past competitions to their upcoming games, being prepared, and talking about the variations between the games. Likewise, in efforts for me to gain a better understanding of what they communicate about, the team shared, looking at the players (i.e., their size), catching a ball (i.e., they could improve their catching skills), talking and communication. All of these are examples relevant to the team. Additionally, I asked the team why they felt talking about the game or past games help? With no hesitation, athletes responded with, "to help win the game, to play good." Moreover, "we scream at each other, you need to concentrate in game and play for passionate time." All of which depict significant meaning relevant to team building. Keep in mind that this team relates "scream" as motivational feedback or encouragement.

Continuing with the discussion, the team was asked, what each individual contributed in order to make the outcome a success? Despite not everyone responding, the majority of the team agreed upon those responses that were mentioned. For example, the athletes need to, “be so happy we won, we need to play good to be great and to be the best that our team is and we can compete the whole way to our battle.” Implying that with their team’s ability to work together, they can make it to the medal ceremony winning the battle of competition. While this is great insight obtained from the team, there’s always room for improvement, hence the question, what could have been done differently? Similar to their coaches, they suggested, “to change players,” during activities or competitions so the less skilled players are given the opportunity to perform. Or to do their best and “be a good player.” In search for meaning relevant to their sport, I asked the team, how their behavior in this teamwork activity relates to softball? And to my surprise, the responses were, “motivation, but nobody does it.” Which contradicts previous discussion wherein they advised me that their team’s “screams,” are ways in which they motivate each other. Likewise, I saw methods of motivation throughout the activity. Lastly, I asked the team, did they feel everyone contributed to the structure building? And their responses suggested that they were tired of being asked questions, as evidence by “yes, oh my God, yes, we did good.” This concluded the debriefing section.

Reflection:

Thinking back to the endless discussions in supervision, past experiences shadowing team sessions, and the current opportunities I have experienced with this team, I find the overarching purpose of team building activities to generally foster awareness of the team spirit or moral and to reinforce individual commitment to the

team's shared goals and objectives. Likewise, the purpose of team improvement should include the encouragement of individual team members to cooperate together in the team's sport environment, interacting and integrating skills into a united effort so that each individual's goal achievement is connected to the greater overall team goal success.

With this in mind, I felt that my intended purpose was achieved and if ongoing efforts are properly applied, these PST activities can help develop stronger interpersonal relationships, which will help to bond this team closer together, building a stronger foundation for the national games that are a few short weeks away. In addition, I felt that my decision of implementing this team-building activity helped develop the team's efficiency and effectiveness in achieving a common goal, which they identified as the national games, earning a medal. Not only is this something that is important for the team dynamics, this too can be done through improving the interaction and understanding of team roles. For example, if individuals do not feel appreciated, their focus shifts from doing the best they can to simply meeting the minimum requirements of their role.

Lastly, it was important to illustrate this activity in a way that individual athletes see their purpose and self-worth amid a team sport. Insofar, that if one athlete fails to meet their goal that helps bind together the foundation of the team sport, then not only does that individual athlete fail, the team as a whole likewise suffers. As the tower grew unsteady and collapsed, this illustrated that one individual's choice to make a play can cost the entire team. While this was an example that was visually illustrated through the activity, each athlete was also reminded that their involvement is crucial and that each decision they make can have an adverse effect on the team. Therefore, it is important for them to consider their individual effort in hopes of achieving their overall team goal as

previously discussed and identified. Overall, I felt that the debriefing was great, and instead of relating to the activity, they gave examples as it relates to softball and their competition.

Session 11: Team Building - Trust

The aim of today's session was to implement an activity where the athletes learn to build a greater sense of trust with themselves and their teammates and give practical application on how this can help them during softball competitions. To begin, the team was asked to share examples of how they learned to trust others. Responses included, "we have to trust our two coaches, to not make mistakes." Going further, I asked the athletes to give more specific examples of how they use trust in their relationships (i.e., parents, siblings, friends, etc.). Essentially, this discussion led us into a discussion of how these athletes trust their teammates, coaches and opponents. Examples included "not to cheat and play fair." Therefore, a game called Spider Ball (see appendix D) was implemented to encourage those to play fair, trust their self and their ability to catch the ball, and if they dropped it, to trust they could catch the ball next time.

Debrief:

Upon completion of the game, I asked the team how they did in terms of their participation. Not surprising, the responses included, "good, I did good, I did the best." In addition to the purpose of this activity, I asked the athletes if they trusted themselves enough that they could catch the ball? Surprisingly, their responses indicated acceptance even in the event that they didn't catch the ball, stating, "No, I can miss it, I can drop it," suggesting, "next time, I'm going to look with my eyes at the ball". Out of curiosity, did I overlook a sense of fear? After all a previous activity resulted in an object being tossed

with too much force. Also, other team members implied that trust could be two ways, they “might drop it, might get it (i.e., catch it).” And, “if we dropped it, we felt disappointed.” However, others felt, “if I dropped the ball, I didn’t feel disappointment just need guys to say it’s ok come on you could do it.” Again, referring back to the motivational feedback. Moving forward, I then asked the team, if they trusted their teammates would play fair? Their responses included, “yes, because we follow the rules.” In addition, they gave an example of the coaches, stating “yes, if we [are] winning, coach plays lower players to be fair, because they don’t play very well.” Which illustrates how each athlete, despite their level of intellectual/performance functioning, work to play by the rules. Lastly, I asked the team how they see trust as a factor in softball? And their responses indicated, “to play good, your team plays together, for example, this team is good.” However, I felt this required further explanation, as I was not clear on what they meant by this, therefore I asked, why? And the responses given included, “because the coaches see they do a really good job with us, I trust my team that we can do good on swinging (i.e., batting) and catching and we have to trust our two coaches. “ Therefore, I felt this team had a great understanding of trust, relating this activity to their sport.

Reflection:

Considering the vast majority of teams are plagued by a lack of trust (Hall, 2007), one of the critical components in a team climate is having the confidence, where risk and creativity are tolerated. In fact, trust can be seen as a crucial sport skill team players must have which requires: clear goals, openness, fairness, willingness to listen, being decisive, support for other team members, taking responsibility for team actions, giving credit to

other team members, being sensitive to others, respecting the opinions of others, and empowering team members to act. With consideration to athletes with ID, trust can be a great challenge. For example, a marathon runner who I associate with regularly is a person with an ID. While he understands his limitations, he does not limit himself from endless possibilities. However, he hasn't always been like this. In his younger years, he would shy away due to feelings of not being "normal" or "good enough" and would essentially miss out on opportunities, ultimately affecting his ability to trust people. While it's unknown to me, I still consider this to be a factor for other athletes with ID, perhaps some on this team, who could potentially experience a lack of trust due to biases or stigmatic assumptions. Hence, why I felt it was necessary to achieve on-going understanding of the athlete's ability to demonstrate trust with regard to confidence and team building.

In efforts to implement an activity which I felt would be ideal to the perceived skill/intellectual functioning, I reflected back to previous supervision sessions and hands on activity tools that I felt would be beneficial for this group of athletes. With access to activity resources, I chose to utilize the parks playground balls, and implementing a childhood favorite of mine, with intentions of making the activity fun yet modifying it to reflect the importance of trust. Throughout my experience in consulting this session, I was able to gain further insight as to how this team perceives individual and team trust amid their competitive nature and ability to be truthful with activity rules, taking the required amount of steps and refraining from the ability to cheat. Specifically, what I noticed was a competitive nature over powering the ability to follow the rules, resulting in athletes exceeding beyond the three-step rule. However, a fault of my own that I

realize was a contributing factor, was I did not set limits or boundaries, indicating how far the athlete could go.

This was an important lesson learned and going forward, I have an increased awareness regarding this. The activity was done in an open field with no limiting markers, indicating the athletes needed to stay in bounds much like any team sport with parameters. Likewise, this made me realize that the fear of “not knowing” can also decrease one’s ability to trust. Therefore, during the activity, I called for a time out and requested specific landmarks such as trees, fences, soccer goals, picnic tables and sidewalks be the limitation or in this case, the boundaries which are allowed for the team to continue playing the game in. I soon realized that it created a greater challenge, but it also signaled the athlete’s ability to trust that they would continue to follow the rules, play within the suggested parameters, catch the ball if applicable and trust themselves and their teammates to play fairly.

Session 12: Communication

The aim of today’s session was to explore communication, the act of transferring information (i.e., facts) from one person to another. More importantly, understanding what is effective communication, and being able to identify ways to communicate one’s thoughts and feeling in a positive and constructive manner. Specifically, games, activities, and sports can become useful tools for teaching communication skills. In addition to every game having its own set of rules and directions that must be communicated and followed in order for the game to go smoothly. It also suggests that teamwork, in any sport, requires good verbal and listening skills in order to be successful. If there is ever a dispute during the game, it may be worked out by talking it out.

Therefore, in softball, there are many aspects of communication during every game that is played. This activity focused specifically on the need for clear communication skills and stressed the importance of paying attention to communication from others. Most of our communication is verbal, so that is what we emphasized in this activity, but noted nonverbal communication is important, too.

This activity began by communicating the purpose of the activity (introductions, sharing expectations, feedback, etc.). A large spider web of yarn was formed as participants tossed the ball of yarn to each other. Constraints were also communicated, for example: yarn cannot be tossed to the person next to you, the first participant needs to be sure to hold onto the beginning strand, and the ball of yarn must be tossed over (opposed to under) to avoid getting tangled. After discussing the constraints, the athletes were encouraged to share requested information as they tossed the ball of yarn to a peer. The procedure continued until all athletes had caught and thrown the ball of yarn and were connected through the web.

An illustration was then demonstrated to show how important communication is when one person does not communicate in a team sport. One athlete was requested to let go of his part of the web, allowing the web to collapse. This dynamic illustration represented how one person not communicating on the team can cause the whole team to be affected. The athlete was then instructed to rejoin the web with his section. Even though team sports are not always easy, it is often very important to be able to work with others towards the same goal. Sometimes, if just one person on the team is not working together with the rest of the team, the outcome goal cannot be reached. This illustration demonstrated that everyone must communicate and work together to accomplish a goal

(i.e., winning a softball game), with each person doing his best to contribute. Even if other people are not as skillful or are much more skillful, each athlete needs to work with them to be successful in their sport. The process was then reversed and the ball of yarn was rerolled with the first athlete ending up with the ball of yarn.

Debrief:

Each athlete was encouraged to think about why good communication skills are important? It was evident that the team understood “so you know what’s going on” generating the example, “for the catcher, getting people out, because communication helps the teams win any game.” As stated, the team implied that communication is significant across all positions because that is what aids in successful team competition (i.e., wins). For personal feedback, I asked the team if they found anything difficult about his activity. As a result, they shared “to throw the yarn” as it was light and didn’t easily transfer to the intended person they were passing to. This was evident as the yarn dropped. However, it was correlational to the amount of yarn that was taken and unwound before throwing. If there wasn’t enough slack, the yarn obviously wouldn’t go too far.

In addition, I asked, what aspects of communication were the most difficult for you? Not specific to the activity, however, linking to softball, the athletes suggested, “when coach says pass it to me, but the person throws it to someone else on first base or home base.” Which creates a sense of discord and frustration, knowing what the coach communicated was not executed from a fellow athlete. In addition, athletes admitted to their inability to speak up to the coach, as evidenced by their response stating, “not talking, when I can’t understand it.” And a final example given was in relation to

environmental and social factors that caused the communication to be unpleasant. Take for example, the athlete who verbalized belligerent language when he stated, “fuck you.” According to this athlete, his rationale was, “when you don’t have a good day, personal problems, family, [pause]. For example, I leave my grandma to go to Cuba. It’s difficult for her she has 80 years.” What the client shared here illustrates a great example of how our performances can suffer when other aspects of our lives are affected.

Continuing with this idea, I then asked, why is it important to have clear communication skills? Without a doubt, I knew this team understood with the responses of, “to be clear, hear well, and to understand it.” Feeding off their idea of having clear communication, I then asked the athletes to think about the importance of communication within their team. Athletes responded with, “Because it’s important for the game, for the team to win all the games.” Again, relating to a foundational framework in building a successful team.

Lastly, I wanted to know if the athletes ever become frustrated during practice, if so, how did they cope with it? Ironically, their responses reflected previously completed PST sessions involving their ability to, learn how to “calm down”, take “deep breaths”, display accountability (i.e., “I get mad that’s my error”), “take my time”, and implement appropriate “breaks” away from the team before returning “to communicate with my team again, apologizing for [my] actions.” Essentially, this team demonstrated how deep breathing and relaxation skills can be implemented, in addition to knowing when to remove themselves from the stimulus, and take time for self. Yet, when these opportunities appeared to fall through, the team suggested that communicating with other team players or coaches helped them deal with their issue or concern that triggered the

initial reaction.

Reflection:

Four factors affect team cohesion: a clear role for team members, willingness to make personal sacrifices for the team, the quality of communication between team members, and shared goals for the team (Jarvis, 2006). Considering communication as an additional skill that is crucial to team sports, team players must exhibit effective interpersonal communication, as it is a vital component to the smooth functioning of any team task. Furthermore, there are many ways to facilitate the learning of effective communication skills. For example, active listening exercises, practice in giving and receiving feedback, and practice in checking for comprehension of verbal messages, are all aimed at developing communication skills. Likewise, it is also important for a team to develop an effective communication network; who communicates to whom; is there anybody "out of the loop?"

With consideration to athletes with ID, self-expression and understanding through communication can be of a greater challenge. For example, some athletes have speech or auditory limitations, language barriers and cognitive delay that may limit one's ability to communicate effectively and efficiently, especially under pressured conditions. Essentially, hindering the quality of communication between team members. Hence, why I felt it was necessary to achieve an understanding to the athlete's ability to acknowledge the importance of communication with regard to giving and receiving vital information as portrayed through the communication web exercise.

Another choice that I could have considered was norms and whether or not they will develop governing communication. While I didn't feel it was necessary at this time.

If I were to continue working with this team, I would consider any such norm and whether or not those norms encourage everyone to participate, or do they allow one or two dominant members to claim all the "air time?"

Session 13: Team Building and Leadership

Today's activity illustrated that everyone cannot be the leader when a group is working together. And of course, not everyone can follow either. There must be a balance. In this activity, the athletes were encouraged to find a balance between leaders and followers and since nobody knew everything that was going on, each person had to do a little of both leading and following. First, everyone was encouraged to work together to accomplish the task. Hence, the main objective, for the participants to learn what role they take when involved in a group project and to find out how to shift roles as required by the project. Essentially, promoting each participant to learn to give ideas, accept ideas and take on appropriate roles in the team activity.

This activity is called Blind Square (see appendix D), which required the team participants to stand around a rope that was in the shape of a circle. The team then had to turn the circle into a square, then a diamond, working together as a team.

Debrief:

This activity required a lot of effort from everyone working together to carry out the activity successfully. Therefore, I asked the team, what did they do in an attempt to complete the task? In relation to this activity specifically, the team suggested, "work together." Comparable to softball, the team suggests that in order to complete a game successfully with "a chance to win," they need to "work out good, work together, and play defense together." The next question asked was in relation to this current activity;

did you help or hinder the group? While I observed the activity, I wanted to know how the team felt they did individually and working together as a team. While the answers were not reflective of this activity, the team did suggest a helping team. Insofar, their responses included, “I help my team, I try to make a base hit, and I hit the ball really hard to make the person to home plate.” All of which suggest helping is essential for this team to win. Lastly, I asked the team, how was teamwork a factor in this activity? Again, the response was geared to their sport and less to the activity just completed. Which, overall is what I wanted the team to relate it to. Therefore, the responses included teamwork as, “important to play good, play right, and being able to catch the ball good.”

Reflection:

During this session, what I was ultimately trying to implement was the concept of cohesion among athletes, building a team that encourages individual role identification and learning how to shift roles from leader to follower and vice versa, essentially, promoting each participant to learn to give ideas, accept ideas and take on different roles among the team. Throughout this consulting experience, I could see athletes laughing, supporting each other, dictating movements, giving directions, accepting direction, getting frustrated and creating different shapes ultimately resulting in a game of tug-of-war where one leader initiated the idea and everyone else followed. As the session continued, and the activity progressed, those athletes who once were frustrated found purpose, whether it was from observation of their peers or direct communication, which enlightened them, encouraging them to participate and collaborate with the rest of the team, forming the requested shapes of a square and a diamond.

Still, this is not to ignore the fact that I desperately wanted to give clues, direction

and insight in what to do, where to make adjustments or who needed to move in order to create the suggested shape with definition. In keeping my silence, I again learned that sometimes my maternal responses take action, where I get feelings of wanting to help nurture and give hand over hand instruction. Additionally, this reminded me of seeing young children completing a task for the same time. Wherein, I felt humor brewing inside of me, as if it were going to erupt into an out roar of laughter as I observed the team and their many attempts, creating what looked more like ovals, instead of diamonds.

Although, I refrained from laughing out loud and giving hand-over-hand demonstration, I did provide verbal instruction and feedback, pointing to specific areas that needed more definition in the shape and giving hand gestures as how the shape should be modified (i.e., put more bend there so it looks more like a “v”). In conjunction with the coach observing, re-indicating the shape, saying “diamond” with two hands put together re-illustrating the shape, he too began to smile with the athletes and enjoyment was perceived. Despite the personal amusement I felt observing the team work together, I started to question if I should resume with the team’s efforts to get the diamond shape perfect, or make a different recommendation such as forming a square. With little thought needed, I realized that perfection is nothing to be concerned about, and personally, can be frustrating. Hence, I chose to congratulate the team on their efforts well done, challenging them next, to form a square from their diamond shape.

Again, the team continued to work diligently, displaying cohesion that inspired individuals to shift roles from leader to follower and vice versa. Essentially, encouraging each participant to learn to give ideas while in turn, acquiring other suggestions amid the different roles on the team. As a result, I continued, comfortable with my silence,

realizing how this team building exercise relates to their softball performance in so many ways. For example, when the athletes are on deck or up to bat, coach doesn't go out and give hand over hand instruction, illustrating how to better hold the bat, or pointing to areas that need improvement. Instead, athletes are encouraged from a distance (i.e., sideline, team huddles, dugout) with verbal feedback or verbal instruction, "keep your elbow up."

In contrast, while I didn't give any [verbal] feedback, it was rewarding to see the athlete's continued efforts to complete the task, encouraging each other, and accepting instruction. While this session alone may not make the changes necessary for enhanced team cohesion and their ability to better respond to or handle frustration; I do believe the concepts of having good active listening skills, in addition to communicating with their fellow teammates illustrates the benefits of PST for athletes with ID.

Participant Observation

The aim of today's session was for the team to display patience, focus, and distraction control as they completed a series of soccer goalie kicks. While this team is preparing for their softball competition, there still exists a strong passion for other sport and leisure interests, soccer being one of them. Though many of the athletes play soccer with their family and friends, they also enjoy "penalty kicks" as witnessed by their multiple previous engagements during their downtime. Therefore, I felt this would be a fun and exciting opportunity to actively engage while inevitably remaining as the outsider. Specifically, this observation allowed me to experience exactly what I was hoping the athletes would be able to benefit from. Which required the intended purpose of the athlete's ability to maintain focused and to control various distractions. To begin,

the team completed their normal routine of warm ups as a preventative measure to injury. Once completed, multiple athletes worked together to set up the soccer goals. Upon completion of the set up, athletes lined themselves up in the position of who would kick first, second, so on and so forth.

Interestingly, those athletes who rearranged the soccer goals were the first athletes to kick. As I waited my turn, I was looking to see who had yet to go and what was their involvement in the session. After waiting, I was instructed by the athletes to kick. Knowingly, soccer is not one of my strengths, let alone a goalie kick. Wherein I knew it to be true when I kicked the goalie shot, missing the target. With laughter in the atmosphere, athlete's yelled out, "here coach, try it again." At their request, I gave another attempt. Still to no prevail would I be able to successfully complete a goalie kick. However, I was given the feedback, "its ok coach." I completed the rest of the session observing the athletes kicking multiple soccer goals. This concluded the end of the participant observation.

Reflection

With continued weather interruptions, I have learned to adapt to available resources, despite having little background knowledge and understanding to the fundamentals of a soccer penalty kick. Still, it was during this experience, I was able to obtain ongoing awareness regarding team dynamics. For example, during the warm-up laps, stretching, softball throws, batting and outfield drills, I observed how the team behaves, performs, and their interactions with the coaches ultimately influencing how the team reacts. I also considered factors such as personalities of team members, how the team operates and views itself within the organization as additional influences of team

dynamics. Moreover, aside from individual aspects, I realized how friendships could foster communication among the athletes, increasing their motivation and commitment and making them feel good to the point that they enjoy being a part of the team.

Leading up to this session, I took into consideration all PST sessions and felt this was a great opportunity to for me to visually summarize what has been discussed and to what extent I believe the team has progressed. Additionally, I wanted to recap all that I have learned about this team and what life is essentially like as a SO athlete.

Taken together, I witnessed the team demonstrate a lot of skill strengths and abilities as evidenced by there participation in practice, which include, their stance or posture when throwing the ball, the use of their glove and guiding hand when catching the ball, and knowing the rules and intended purpose of each play, such as, who to throw the ball to when the batter swung a hit into the outfield. With these observations, I was able to gain sufficient insight with the aforementioned findings of how the athletes responded to coach's feedback. For example, when the coaches gave guidance for a better stance or follow through in an execution phase of a swing. In addition to the interactions amongst the teammates, the sounds of laughter, criticism, and seeing unity illustrates bonds of friendships and cohesion. All of which lead me to believe that this team will greatly benefit from this PST program.

Supplementary Results

Qualitative Interview

Following a scripted protocol (as outlined in the methods section), I chose to implement qualitative research questions post intervention (see appendix F) as a method that looked to address a coach's perspective of athlete development within the context of

coaching athletes with ID. More specifically, the open-ended questions assisted me with understanding the central phenomenon of this reflective case study in which I implemented PST for the SO team. In relating to their experiences, I felt the coach's involvement training with SO and ID athletes added a remarkable variation to the sampling strategy, representing a diverse case seen through multiple lenses.

Taken together, when considering the coaches responses, I felt a lot of their understanding to thoughts, feelings and/or perceptions about SO and the ID athletes, were in a sense, similar to my own. It's like that saying, "It takes some one very special to do your job." What I am implying here is, not every one is cut out to work with this populations. Take for instance, scholars who have given much warranted attention to issues of opportunity, integration, and justice concerning females and racial and ethnic minorities, but have devoted relatively little attention to these issues concerning athletes with disabilities (Nixon, 2004; 2007; Shapiro, 1993).

In addition, I feel that my passion for the SO and working with this select team of ID athletes mirrors that of the coaches. Insofar, that I believe the coaches effectively see the ability in their team of athletes, using a disability interpretive lens which focuses on disability as a dimension of human difference and not as a defect (Creswell, 2013). Consistent with Hanrahan's (1998) suggestion, I believe the coaches, much like myself, employ the idea that an athlete comes first, disability second.

Reflecting upon the responses when asked about their experiences coaching SO, I recalled the passion in his voice, a headshake, followed by a look that searched the room meaning, "It's a feeling that's unexplainable!" How do you explain this? I often wondered if anyone ever felt this way. If only my heart could talk, then I could find the

words. The coach then went on to say, “It’s a fulfilling experience [that] I was never able to achieve coaching high school sports. Watching the athletes attain their goals and seeing them grow athletically is very pleasurable for me. I enjoy being around the athletes every day.” Much like the coach, I likewise enjoyed the many team sessions, the shouts of “hey miss” or sometimes the referred to me as “coach.” Even beyond what was heard, the feelings that I felt, the personal reward and satisfaction, was something I have never felt in my other SPC trainee experiences. Yes, I made a lot of progress with big strides of growth, but this by far is my best experience. In fact, the head coach, while very direct, described his experience coaching for the SO as, “the best job one could ask for.” Mutually, I agree, there is nothing more rewarding then the satisfaction you receive at the end of each day when your athletes strive to better themselves with the tools you provided them with.

Considering the challenges that I faced and the countless supervision inquiries suggesting educational models or a kid-ify approach. I too was interested in knowing what coach felt was one of his greatest challenges with his team. He indicated, “The greatest challenge is working with athletes with a wide range of skills and ability”. But despite these many challenges, the coaches identified some of the team’s characteristics as having an “overall passion and willingness to get better, to learn, their appreciation of you is their motivation.” As the SPC, I felt the team carried out these characteristics. For example, the athlete’s displayed the desire and drive with their enthusiasm filled spirit, showing up to practice weekly in order to attend these PST sessions. This by far, has exceeded any expectation I wished to find in past research. This was my experience, a foundation intended to provide a more holistic understanding of effective practice in sport

disability that may have a greater impact on the role of reflection within applied sport psychology, raising awareness for all applied sport psychology consultants serving athletes with (dis)abilities.

Chapter V

Discussion

The present study explored a SPC trainee's reflective account of developing, implementing, and evaluating PST with a group of ID athletes using an evaluative case study. As a whole, the neophyte consultant's experience working with the SO coaches and ID athletes, was the most prominent meaning that emerged from the personal reflections. In addition to having a strong passion for ID athletes, the SOs and its entirety, the trainee's drive to gain much needed awareness reflects the interview responses from the coaches. Insofar, that the coaches found meaning to working with this population, which laid a well-grounded foundation to which the trainee strongly upheld.

Taken together, the consultant trainee likewise experienced vulnerability to the population. Insofar, that a couple of uncomfortable situations (i.e., regarding homophobic language and inappropriate use of PST activity objects) arose, which allowed for personal biases to reflect. It wasn't until after reflection, that the SPC trainee would recognize this. However, it was vividly illustrated through the SPC trainee's decision to ignore the homophobic language. Whereas, after considering the situation and reliving the experience, it was later determined that had this team been a traditional sports team, with no apparent ID evident, the language would have been addressed immediately, stating, "that language is not appropriate nor will it be tolerated going forward." Despite the biases to sensitive terminology, another situation, which created vulnerability, felt by the SPC trainee, was when correction, redirection was given during a PST activity. Specifically, this was a direct result to one athlete's decisions to test limits, not only those of his peer, but also to the facilitation of the session. Despite finding fault in the athlete

for not complying with instruction, the SPC trainee likewise found fault for a lack of an in-depth explanation that addressed strength and masculinity as it pertained to this all male team.

Aside from these unsettling encounters, the results to this reflective experience, in which the SPC explored the use of PST with ID, appeared to be consistent with prior PST research and athlete performances. For example, significant meaning, which constructed an opportunity that emphasized *ability* rather than disability, was congruent with research, suggesting that, PST when implemented correctly can improve the performance of athletes (Kudlackova, Eccles & Dieffenbach, 2013; Munroe-Chandler & Hall, 2004; Post, Muncie & Simpson, 2012; Tovaes, 2010; Wolff and Hums; 2003). However, the current study also provided additional insights into the distinctions of PST for athletes with ID. For example, unlike many other sport organizations where ability and success are sometimes criteria for acceptance, in the SO community, sport *participation* is encouraged for all athletes [with ID] at all levels, regardless of ability (Harada, Siperstein, Parker, & Lenox, 2011). Therefore, any athlete (having met the participation requirements, see methods), that was willing to endure the mental challenges of PST, was welcomed to participate in this intervention. This combined, provided a PST experience consistent with the mission of the SO to demonstrate courage, participate in the sharing of talents, enriching skills, and fostering friendships within their team or among other SO athletic communities (Special Olympics, 2013).

Additionally, it was strongly felt by the SPC trainee that the athletes performed exceptionally well, despite having been diagnosed with an ID. Much of this was experienced through direct observation during the implementation of each PST activity,

being apart of the team (i.e., participant, nonparticipant observation), in addition to the life lessons gained from personal encounters of a reflective practice experience.

Likewise, the SPC trainee felt many of the documented benefits of sport and PST were similar for athletes with ID and consistent to previous findings, which included, physical (DePauw, 1986; Dodd, Taylor, & Graham, 2003; MacPhail & Kramer, 1995; Morton, Brownlee, & McFadyen, 2005) and social-emotional development, facilitation of self-help (DePauw, 1986; Dodd, Taylor, & Graham, 2004), in addition to the enhanced, overall wellbeing and promotion of social inclusion (Wilson, 2002). For example, the SPC's personal reflection towards the physical development of the ID athletes, although lacking measurable baseline data, had shown improvement towards the athlete's ability to handle stressful situations in practice. Take for example; the first observation, which involved a single athlete, who was visibly upset and agitated, throwing his helmet against the fence, and walking away, had exhibited poor performance on the field, which triggered this automated response to a perceived dissatisfaction. And although biased, upon conclusion to this PST activity design, this same athlete was observed striking out in practice, yet had a general, cheerful affect and stronger confidence. All of which was evidenced by his smile and a positive head nod, while accepting the fact he would try to accomplish the goal given his next performance opportunity. Essentially, this illustrated development with the enhanced tools (i.e., PST) to increase physical performance triggered by mental components (i.e., frustration, disappointment, etc).

Similarly, the SPC trainee felt that social-emotional development, facilitation of self-help (DePauw, 1986; Dodd, Taylor, & Graham, 2004), in addition to, the enhanced, overall wellbeing and promotion of social inclusion (Wilson, 2002) were also

experienced by participants during this study. For example, the athletes' performance, when observed during practice, demonstrated social-emotional development as evidenced by one's ability to gain control over and manage their emotions more effectively (i.e., not throwing helmets) and the ability to identify areas of weakness (i.e., focus, concentration). Subsequently, self-help (i.e., deep breathing) also aided in the athlete's abilities to quickly redirect to the stimulating environment, which in this case, was observed as practice. Per the primary author, all of these are suggested to have improved the overall wellbeing and promotion of social inclusion as suggested by Wilson (2002).

Another unique finding involved the coaches who were hugely interested in PST. Although, prior research suggests some athletes with ID have significant limitations in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior (Conyers, Martin, Martin, & Yu, 2002; Schalock et al., 2010), many still have an aptitude for learning. Hence, why the SPC trainee believed that the coaches invested confidence with the athletes and their previous knowledge of PST, although limited, gave this team the propensity to embrace all of the PST sessions. Similar to the findings of Right to Play (2008), sport participation combined with PST, enabled all these ID athletes to take risks, step outside of their comfort zone and learn how to manage failure and success in a new, safe and supportive environment.

Throughout this process, the SPC has also found that doing PST with these ID athletes demonstrated a strong correspondence to non-ID athletes, as evidenced by their abilities to rationalize similarities in psychological factors as it related to past research (Zoerink and Wilson, 1995). For example, when the athletes were asked, "how do you cope with frustration? [experienced among the team], athletes suggested, "take [a] deep

breath and calm down.” Similarly, these athletes were able to recognize and accept accountability, just as one would expect in traditional, non-disabled sports. The SPC trainee, having experienced and seen first hand the potential that ID athletes poses, would argue that all athletes, regardless of disability, should be allowed equal opportunities and provided sport services, just as their able-bodied counterparts, to be viewed in a matter of fairness (Nixon, 2007).

Taken together, the SPC trainee believed this experience with a reflective practice approach was consistent with prior research. Insofar that this experience allowed opportunities to be involved, creating a multitude of ways and means to access, make sense of, and learn from the tacit knowledge gained as suggest by Knowles, Gilbourne, Tomlinson, & Anderson (2007). Additionally, it was believed that this experience has opened opportunity to develop awareness to the often, unspoken topic regarding applied sport psychology and sport disability practice. Consist with previous findings, it is believed that awareness to PST and athletes with ID will likewise incorporate; values, prejudices, experiences, knowledge, and social norms (see Anderson, Knowles, & Gilbourne, 2004; Andersen, Van Raalte, & Harris, 2000, for detailed discussion), to become an integral part to effective ASP practice.

Given the opportunity to recapture and reflect on the PST experience, having mulled them over critically to gain new understandings; the SPC trainee considered this experience to have made a significant contribution to the future of her professional development. Insofar that this study has documented how reflective practice helped a SPC consultant trainee develop her practice in the context of consultant effectiveness characteristics. Likewise, it also provided evidence to suggest that reflective practice

offers a framework from which one can examine and learn about actually doing sport psychology. Consistent with past research, it proved that reflecting on practice can empower an individual to implement change and become more self-aware (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998).

Limitations

While the present findings offer additional insights to a SPC trainee's reflective account of developing, implementing, and evaluating PST with a group of ID athletes, they are limited. Despite the opportunity to facilitate a PST activity and reflect on the experience that increased self-awareness, this is the SPC trainee's first reflective experience. In addition, there has been a limited amount of prior, traditional, consulting practices in which the consultant has completed. Moreover, it was believed that the sequencing of the sessions might have impacted the reflections.

Practical Implications

The present study is not without limitations and the *effectiveness* of the PST was not specifically measured. Being able to access and understand this will make a significant contribution to future practitioner's professional and personal development. Going forward, some practical recommendations for neophyte, SPC trainee's, and seasoned SPCs, is to ensure a: (a) kid-ify approach to the PST design is appropriate for the level of intellectual functioning yet suitable for their age group, (b) well-grounded plan is structured to meet the needs of all participants, and (c) due to limited attentional focus span, keep sessions limited to 30 minutes, (d) entertaining and respectful. Additionally, it is important to enhance the understanding and experiences of SPC trainees, therefore, incorporating reflective practice, and the impact of PST on a group of

ID athletes is highly encouraged.

Future Research

Despite the aforementioned reflective findings of this SPC trainee's personal account to experiencing PST activities with a group of ID athletes, further research is needed to investigate the effectiveness of PST among athletes with ID (Asken & Goodling, 1986; Hanrahan, Grove, & Lockwood, 1990). As few sport psychology professionals have sought to identify the importance of PST for athletes with disabilities (Asken, 1991; Hanrahan, 1998). Which inevitably, includes a lack of theoretical and applied PST research specifically for athletes with ID. Going forward, PST should be available to ID athletes, not only to increase the diversity of individuals with ID, but also to increase the types of sport services needed to accommodate the differences among athletes with disabilities (Nixon, 2007). Therefore, going forward, it is recommended that future research explore further in-depth, ASP and the various implications for the ID populations.

This is one of the first steps into the field of sport psychology and disabled sports, which implies, there's an endless possibility, due to the lack of research. However, however some potential ideas for future research may include the ability to quantitatively assess the effectiveness of PST intervention designed for ID athletes, which was not conducted on this present study. Also, more involvement with various participants, including different genders, sports, and levels of functioning are highly suggested. Likewise, exploring more methodologies, which could include interviews with ID athletes, or other various qualitative measures. Specifically, one, which would outline PST, using a baseline approach, and includes the effectiveness measured between pre and

post interventions.

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*Appendix A***Barry University
Informed Consent Form - Coaches**

Your participation in a research project is requested. The title of the study is “An Evaluative Case Study of a Psychological Skills Training Program With Athletes With Intellectual Disability”. The research is being conducted by Kari Hoefling, a student in the Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology program at Barry University, and is seeking information that will be useful in the field of Sport Psychology. The aims of the research are to attain an in-depth reflection of a sport psychology consultant trainee’s experience working with Special Olympic (SO) coaches and their athletes with intellectual disabilities (ID) while implementing psychological skills training (PST) activities. In accordance with these aims, a detailed description of the issues will be sought through interviews, PST facilitations and observations, which will later be analyzed to draw reflective meaning from the primary researcher’s experience.

To begin, should you decide to participate in this study as a coaching participant, you will be asked to participate in one semi-structured interview conducted by the primary researcher concluding the PST at a time and location of your choice.

During the interviews you will be asked to describe in as much detail as possible your experience of coaching athletes with ID. You may occasionally be asked follow-up questions to gain further clarification or to obtain additional details to previous comments. The interview should last approximately 30-60 minutes depending on the depth of your responses. The interview will be digitally recorded and then transcribed (i.e., type it out on paper) by the primary researcher for further analysis. Once your interview has been transcribed, it will be returned to you either electronically or via mail as a hard copy. This will allow you to look at your transcript to be sure it accurately portrays what you were trying to say in your interview. You may choose to omit, add, or modify any part of the interview in order to provide a more accurate description of your experience. Similarly, for the two needs assessments questionnaires you will be asked to respond to the questions that most accurately depict you as a coach and how you prepare your athletes for practice and/or competition, and the team’s athletic coping skills ability. During the needs assessments, you will be asked to circle the most accurate responses in relation to how you prepare your athletes to cope when coaching them. We anticipate the number of coaching participants to be 2.

Your consent to be a research participant is strictly voluntary and should you decline to participate, answer any questions, or should you choose to drop out at any time during the study, there will be no adverse effects to you. Also, there are no known risks to you presented through involvement in the study. Although, there are no direct benefits to you, your participation in this study may help us value reflective practice experiences with SO coaches and athletes with ID; generating a more holistic understanding of effective practice in sport disability that may have a greater impact on the role of reflection within applied sport psychology, raising awareness for all sport psychology consultants serving athletes with (dis)abilities.

As a research participant, information you provide will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Your signed consent forms will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the primary researcher's home, separate from the audio files and transcribed interviews. You will be requested to select a pseudonym (fake name) for this study, which the primary researcher will substitute for your real name whenever you make comments that might identify you. Any published results of the research will refer to you by your pseudonym; no real names will be used in the study. All interview transcripts and audio files will be stored on a password-protected computer and maintained for a minimum of 5 years upon study completion. The audio files will be permanently deleted from the audio recorder once they have been uploaded to the computer. Any other information that could potentially be used to identify you or other participants will be changed or excluded from the transcripts. This is done to help preserve the confidentiality of your responses. Similarly, all questionnaires will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the primary researcher's home, separate from your consent form and will not contain any demographic information that may identify you.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study or your participation in the study, you may contact me, Kari Hoefling, at (305) 401-6706, kari.hoefling@mymail.barry.edu, my supervisor Dr. Simpson, at (305) 899-4890, dsimpson@barry.edu, or the Institutional Review Board point of contact, Barbara Cook, at (305) 899-3020, bcook@barry.edu. If you are satisfied with the information provided and are willing to participate in this research, please signify your consent by signing this consent form.

Voluntary Consent

I acknowledge that I have been informed of the nature and purposes of this experiment by Kari Hoefling and that I have read and understand the information presented above, and that I have received a copy of this form for my records. I give my voluntary consent to participate in this experiment.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

*Appendix B***Barry University
Informed Consent Form - Athletes****Introduction**

- My name is Kari Hoefling and this study is part of my coursework for my Master's thesis at Barry University
- You are being asked to take part in a research study that examines your participation in Special Olympic (SO) softball and some mental skills training

Why have I been asked to take part in the study?

- Because you are an SO athlete at least 18 years of age and you have a diagnosed intellectual disability.
- Because you might have an interest in team building and mental skills activities that can perhaps help you and your team during practice and/or competitions.

What do I do first?

- Before agreeing, please read this form.
- Please ask any questions that you may have.

What is the Study about?

- The primary researcher's experience working with SO athletes with intellectual disabilities

Who will take part in the Study?

- About 15 athletes on the Special Olympic (SO) softball team

If I agree to take part, what will I be asked to do?

- Come to meetings weekly before practice (meetings will last approximately 20-30 minutes).
- Participate in group activities (with the other player) such as:
 1. Goal setting – setting different types of goals for practice and competition (i.e., long and short term).
 2. Team building – working with teammates to solve problems.
 3. Communication/Leadership – working on ways to positively communicate with teammates and coaches. Learning how to take responsibility for your actions.
 4. Increasing self-confidence through positive self-talk – changing negative self-talk to positive comments.
 5. Focus and distraction control - identifying the right things to focus on at the right times.
 6. Basic relaxation – simple breathing exercises to calm players down.
- Allow the researcher to observe you and/or participate with you in practice.

What are the risks of being in the study?

- There are no known risks.

What are the benefits of being in the study?

If your participation is effective, you may gain new skills and techniques to help you in your softball game.

How will things I say be kept private?

- The records of this study will be kept private.
- In any type of report I may write, I will not include your name or anyone else's but will use fake names.
- Research records (including tape recordings) will be kept in a locked file.
- Research records will be kept for at least 5 years after the completion of the study and then may be destroyed.
- Access to your information will be limited to the primary researcher.

What if I choose to not take part or leave the study?

- If you do not wish to participate, you can drop out of any activity or the whole study at any time and your ability to play on the team will not be affected.

Who can I contact if I have any questions?

- You can call or email me, Kari Hoefling, the primary researcher of this study at (305) 401-6706, kari.hoefling@mymail.barry.edu
- You may call or email my supervisor, Dr. Simpson, at (305) 899 4890, dsimpson@barry.edu
- Or you may call or email the Institutional Review Board point of contact, Barbara Cook, at (305) 899-3020, bcook@barry.edu.

Statement of Consent:

- I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form.
- I have been encouraged to ask questions.
- I have received answers to my questions.
- I give my consent to take part in this study.
- I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form

Signature of Participant *Date* *Signature of Researcher* *Date*

Signature of Parent/Guardian *Date* *Signature of Researcher* *Date*

*Appendix C***Psychological Skills Training**

PST is a process of learning skills and practices for managing different aspects of performance and is defined as the development of psychological skills and techniques (e.g., anxiety management, concentration, confidence) with the overall goal of improving sport performance (Weinberg & Williams, 1998). Likewise, PST is as important to the athlete as physical training, and in most sports success comes from utilizing and maximizing a combination of technical, tactical, physical, and psychological abilities (Hardy, Jones & Gould, 1997; Hodge, 2007; Orlick, 2000; Weinberg & Gould, 1999). Additionally, every PST program is different, and only needs to include the PST methods required to meet the athlete's PST requirements (i.e., develop and maintain their strengths, and enhance their weaknesses; Hodge, 2007; Weinberg & Gould, 1999). Specifically, this PST focused on identifying important skills (as illustrated below), for individual and team performances, and provided various opportunities to practice the skills learned. The following was a basic list of common topic areas, which were used as part of the PST. Given the duration of the study, the researcher chose 13 session activities (see overview).

1. Goal setting with players and coaches- Weinberg & Gould (2011)
 - a. Long/short term goals
 - b. Outcome, performance, process goals
 - c. An example activity is “SMART” where both the coaches and athletes will be asked specifically what goals they would like to work on. All goal ideals will be pooled together where everyone will agree on the top 5 goals as a team.

2. Team building – Weinberg & Gould (2011)
 - a. These activities will be psychological based (i.e., identifying and discussing the variables needed to achieve success, learning about teammates)
 - b. An example activity is “The Maze” which is a group problem-solving and leadership activity in which the team completes the task of all members successfully going through the maze without stepping on the incorrect bases. Debriefing questions will be asked at the end (i.e., How did you work together as a team? Etc.).

3. Communication/Leadership – Weinberg & Gould (2011)
 - a. Identifying ways to communicate thoughts and feelings in a positive and constructive manner. Allow athletes to lead/follow
 - b. An example activity is “Spider-Web” which is a group activity designed to encourage identified communication (i.e., everyone says ball) in a sharing way by tossing a ball of yarn to form a web. This illustrated that if one person does not communicate, the web is dropped and illustrates the importance of communication within a

team setting. Debriefing questions will be asked at the end (i.e., How does communication relate to you in softball? Why do you need to communicate? Etc.).

4. Increasing self-confidence through positive self-talk- Weinberg & Gould (2011)
 - a. Teaching the differences between positive, negative and instructional self-talk. Helping players to recognize negative self-talk statements and help change them to positive comments. This will also be a theme incorporated with the communication session.
 - b. An example activity is “Making it Happen” which consists of a group game and discussion, encouraging athletes to express how they feel and when they state something negative, they will be asked to replace it with something positive (i.e., I suck- negative → I’m awesome-positive).
5. Focus and distraction control – Weinberg & Gould (2011)
 - a. Teaching athletes to be fully present (i.e., free from worry, fatigue, mental habits, daydreaming, etc.) and able to manage their distractions.
 - b. An example activity is “Group Juggling” which requires different size, colored, soft balls (that cannot hurt anyone), each athlete joining together to form a circle, a pattern is formed (with ball toss). Once the pattern is formed, the facilitator will slowly incorporate another ball (up to 5 balls) to increase the distractibility. Activity will be wrapped-up with discussion questions (i.e., how does this illustrate your focus in softball? Etc.).
6. Basic relaxation through breathing exercise – Weinberg & Gould (2011)
 - a. Deep breathing is a simple technique that is basic to most other relation skills. By inhaling deeply and allowing one’s lungs to breathe in as much oxygen as possible, each athlete can begin to relieve the tension that can lead to negative stress. Deep breathing can be done anywhere and at any time.
 - b. An example activity is “Deep Breathing” where each participant will be asked to inhale slowly and deeply through their nose. Once they have breathed in as much as possible, they will be asked to hold their breath for a few seconds before exhaling. Once the lungs feel empty, the athletes will be asked to begin the inhale-exhale cycle again. This will be repeated three or four times during the session.

Appendix D

Psychological Skills Training Overview

	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5	Session 6	Session 7	Session 8	Session 9	Session 10	Session 11	Session 12	Session 13
Intervention Theme	Ice Breaker	Team Building: Active Listening	Team Building: Trust	Communication & Leadership	Focus & Distraction Control	Self-Confidence & Positive Self-Talk	Goal Setting	Focus & Distraction Control	Deep Breathing & Relaxation	Team Building	Team Building: Trust	Communication & Leadership	Team Building & Leadership
Task completed	Human Knot	Balloon Keep Up	Trust Lean	Discussion	Memory	Discussion	Jenga	Group Juggling	Deep Breathing Exercise	Jenga	Spider Ball	Communication Web	Blind Square

1. Ice Breaker

a. Human Knot

- i. The purpose was to encourage team building in collaboration, problem solving skills, communication, active listening, and emotional articulacy.
- ii. Participants were asked to form a circle, standing shoulder to shoulder, grabbing the hands of two different people (i.e., not with someone directly next to them) and were then informed to untangle themselves, creating a circle without breaking the chain of hands. The session ended with wrap-up discussion questions.

2. Team Building: Active Listening

a. Balloon Keep Up

- i. The purpose was to learn to work together in collaboration, follow directions via active listening, and develop problem-solving skills and empowerment.
- ii. Participants were asked to work together, keeping one or more balloons up in the air so they didn't fall to the floor. Activity instructions were only given once verbally, triggering participants to listen attentively and focus to the topic, controlling distractions as they encountered them. The session ended with wrap-up discussion questions.

3. Team Building: Trust

a. Trust Lean

- i. The purpose was to explore taking risks, by encouraging physical and emotional trust, respect, trustworthiness, and empathy.
- ii. Participants were asked to form pairs with someone of similar size, one became the "faller" and one the "catcher". Participants were briefly taught methods for spotting, falling and catching. Start small and build to bigger falls, then swap. The session ended with wrap-up discussion questions.

4. Communication & Leadership

a. Discussion

- i. The purpose was to discover the importance of communicating ideas and experiences among the group to accomplish goals. In

addition to the various ways in which communication impacts team sports.

- ii. Participants were asked to explore in-depth, ways in which they communicate in support of their fund raising event. The session ended with wrap-up discussion questions.

5. Focus & Distraction Control

a. Memory

- i. The purpose was to exercise the participant's ability to be attentive, build concentration, manage distraction control while enhancing visual memory
- ii. Participants were asked to mix up the cards and lay them in rows, face down. Taking turns, they were instructed to turn over any two cards. If the two cards matched, they kept them. If they didn't match, they turned them back over. The challenge was remember what was on each card and where it was. Additionally, they were encouraged to watch and remember during the other player's turn. The session ended with wrap-up discussion questions.

6. Self-Confidence & Positive Self-Talk

a. Discussion

- i. The purpose was to discuss with participants, how thoughts and self-talk, which are based on personal beliefs, may or may not be accurate.
- ii. Participants were asked reflect on a previous experience where they felt uncomfortable, upset or agitated, resulting in negative things to be said to self, out loud or negative actions which were a direct result of a decrease in one's performance or self-confidence. Discussion reviewed the various ways that we think, believing things to be true, when reality disagrees. The session ended with wrap-up discussion questions.

7. Goal Setting

a. Jenga

- i. The purpose was to identify and discuss the team's desired outcome with one or more specific objectives, that defined in precise terms, what it was they wanted to accomplish (within a designated time frame).
- ii. Participants were asked to first build the tower. Subsequently, the game of Jenga consisted of each participant taking one block, on their turn, from any level of the tower (except the one below the incomplete top level), and place it on the topmost level in order to complete it. Players were instructed they could use only one hand at a time (i.e., either hand may be used, but only one hand may touch the tower at any time). The session ended with wrap-up discussion questions.

8. Focus & Distraction Control

a. Group Juggling

- i. The purpose was to teach athletes to be fully present (i.e., free from worry, fatigue, mental habits, daydreaming, etc.) and able to manage their distractions. In addition, this activity taught responsibility and the importance of caring about others.
- ii. Participants were asked to join together to form a circle; a pattern was formed with ball toss that required different size, colored, soft balls, (that couldn't hurt anyone). Once the pattern was formed, the facilitator slowly incorporated another ball (up to 5 balls) to increase the distractibility. The session ended with wrap-up discussion questions.

9. Deep Breathing & Relaxation

a. Deep Breathing Exercise

- i. The purpose was to relieve the tension that can lead to negative stress.
- ii. Participants were asked to inhale slowly and deeply through their nose. Once they breathed in as much air as possible, they were asked to hold their breath for a few seconds before exhaling. Once the lungs felt empty, the athletes were asked to begin the inhale-exhale cycle again. This was repeated four times during the session. The session ended with wrap-up discussion questions.

10. Team Building

a. The Block Game

- i. The purpose was to build trust among group members, explore how each participant worked together and the various ways each member contributed to the style of collective work.
- ii. Participants were asked to go around the group circle, taking turns moving the blocks, to form an unidentified structure. There was one rule: move only one block at a time. The session ended with wrap-up discussion questions.

11. Team Building: Trust

a. Spider Ball

- i. The purpose was to encourage team cooperation, honesty and strengthen trust among the team.
- ii. Participants were asked to move around anywhere within an open field. An individual thrower was identified as the "spider" and was restricted in movement to three steps from the time they received the ball (i.e., caught the ball, picked up from ground, etc.). Any player hit by the ball became the spider and in turn had to throw the ball. Spiders were able to leave the field edge to retrieve a ball

if it was out of reach. The session ended with wrap-up discussion questions.

12. Communication & Leadership

a. Communication Web

- i. The purpose was to encourage communication and emotional articulacy, problem solving and collaboration in leadership.
- ii. Participants were asked to communicate an identified word (i.e., everyone said “ball”) in a sharing way by tossing a ball of yarn to form a web. This illustrated that if one person did not communicate, the web dropped, illustrating the importance of communication within a team setting. The session ended with wrap-up discussion questions.

13. Team Building & Leadership

a. Blind Square

- i. The purpose was to encourage leadership and active listening skills, in addition to, team trust.
- ii. Participants were asked to form the rope into a perfect square, with everyone grasping the rope with 2 hands at all times (i.e., hands may never come off the rope), and the entire rope must be used for the 4 sides of the square. The session ended with wrap-up discussion questions.

*Appendix E***Recruitment**

The following was an email confirmation sent by the SO manager/athlete recruiter originally as a follow up to a phone call made by the primary researcher of this study to identify possible participant selection.

From: Mark Thompson [mailto:mthompson@somdc.org]
Sent: Wednesday, July 03, 2013 11:46 AM
To: Kari Hoefling
Subject: Special Olympics

Kari,

It was a pleasure meeting with you yesterday. Your passion for our intellectually disabled community was inspiring. I look forward to your efforts to involve the individuals that you are directly supporting. I am out of the office next week and back the week of July 15. Please give me a general idea of your availability to visit camp (with Michael?). I'll work with your availability and best days/times to meet at camp. FYI - the address is: 4560 NW 4th Terrace. I have attached the documents that I provided you yesterday to forward to others (if you have not already done so). Thanks for your interest!

Mark
Mark E. Thompson
Special Olympics Miami-Dade County
155 South Miami Avenue, Suite 200
Miami, FL 33130
(Office) 305.406.9467

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*Appendix F***Data Gathering Instrument****Data Gathering Instrument for Coaches**

Semi structured interviews will include questions such as: “How would you describe your experience coaching for SO?” “What is one of your greatest challenges in coaching this team?” “What are some of your team’s characteristics?” “What motivates your athletes to participate on your team?” “What do you feel is an important factor to keep in mind while implementing PST for your team?”

Data Gathering Instrument for Athletes

Field notes and personal reflections.