Preventing Burnout in Elite Sport

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Who is concerned about Athlete Burnout?

Players

("Steve Waugh worried about player burnout", 2001).

Coaches

("French season too long: Laporte", 2005),

Administrators

("Tennis burnout rule holds back hot property", 2003)

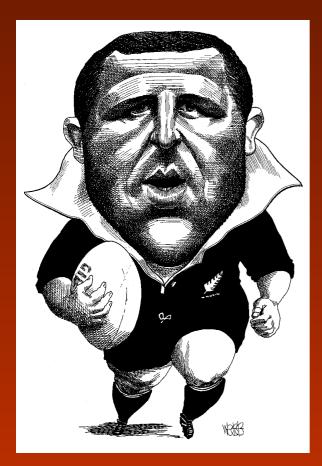


What is Athlete Burnout?

Three symptoms

- 1. Emotional and Physical Exhaustion
- 2. Sport Devaluation
- 3. Reduced Sense of Accomplishment

Athlete Burnout...



"I didn't really want to play - no desire to play whatsoever, I didn't want to turn up. [I would be] sitting there going 'What am I doing here? It's a beautiful sunny day, I could be out'. I started thinking about other things I could be doing, thinking about [travelling] overseas.... I found I was getting quite tired in games. I was rooted, physically knackered [i.e., exhausted]. I'd turn up and play and be rooted in the warm up"



What is Athlete Burnout?

- 1. Exhaustion
- 2. Devaluation "I don't care anymore"
- 3. Low Accomplishment "I'm not achieving much"

Important:

- months/years not days/weeks
- not always dropout





What Causes Burnout?

- Physiological:
 - •Over-training / under recovery?
- •Psychological:
 - •Motivational issues? (ext. vs. int.)
 - •Stress?
 - Underlying psych causes?



What Causes Burnout?

Basic Needs Theory

- 1. Autonomy ←→ Choice
- 2. Competence $\leftarrow \rightarrow$ Confidence
- 3. Relatedness ←→ Close Relationships





Basic Needs Theory

1. Autonomy:

"My opinions are taken into consideration"

2. Competence:

"I am good at my sport"

3. Relatedness:

"I get along well with people in my sport"





Our Research: Method

Procedure: Questionnaires for basic needs fulfillment and athlete burnout.

Participants:

- 1. NZ Rugby Academy (n=133) (age = 20)
- 2. NZ Academy of Sport (n=343) (age = 24)
- 3. PacificSport (Canada) (n=201) (age = 23)



Our Research: Results

Good news: Most athletes reported positive experiences and low burnout.

Bad news: Between 8 and 13 % of athletes were classified as high burnouts.

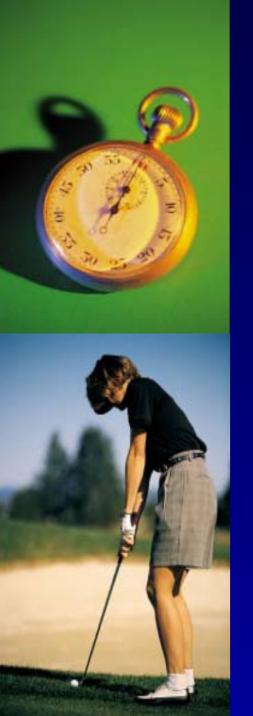


Our Research: Results

Low Needs → Burnout

Autonomy + Competence = Strong Predictors

Relatedness = Modest Predictor



Further Research

- Cross-sectional → Longitudinal →
 Intervention research
- 2. Cross-cultural issues?
- 3. Multi-disciplinary research.



From Research to Practice..

Promoting Basic Needs Fulfillment:

- 1. Theory and research.
- 2. Others' experiences working with elite athletes.
- 3. My own consulting experiences.



How can we promote Basic Needs Fulfillment?

Who are "we"?

What *specifically* can we do?



Working Together...

Form groups of 4-5.

Include a range of athletes, coaches, sport scientists, administrators, others.

1. Ideas

2. Specific Methods





Promoting Autonomy and Competence

- 1. Focus on self-comparisons.
- 2. Provide rationale and choices
- 3.Promote athlete-centred learning.
- 4. Avoid controlling behaviours



Feedback and Goals

- 1. Reduce comparisons with others.
- 2. Focus on comparisons with self.
- 3. Focus on effort and performance, downplay outcomes.

Why?

Example...





Feedback and Goals Example: Baton exchange within zone

- 1. Times recorded.
- 2. Players and coaches set goals together.
- 3. When goals not reached,

 <u>athletes</u> look for solutions, guided by coach.
- 4. Progress charted.
- 5. Goals re-evaluated.
- 6. Improvements celebrated.





Provide Rationale and Choices:

Aussie 2000 Olympic Relay Team

Pre: Choice of training times, uniforms

During:

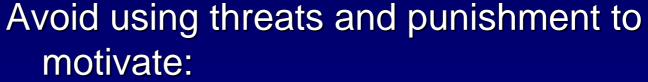
- Selection -Rationale
- Running Order:
 two choices → discuss

mportant: athletes may need time before they feel confident offering their own opinion.



Avoid Controlling Behaviours

Coached and Administrators



- short term benefit (?)
- long term harm.







Promote Athlete-centred Learning: Baton Exchange

- 1. Two athletes practice an exchange.
- 2. Participants discuss.
- 3. Athlete observers give feedback.
- 4. Observe video
 - athletes make comments.
- 5. Coaches role
 - -ask questions:

"Advantages and disadvantages?"

"What was another option?"



Summary

Initial Evidence:
Low Autonomy + Competence

→ Burnout

Promote Needs Fulfilment by:

- 1. Promoting athlete-centred learning
- 2. Avoiding controlling behaviours
- 3. Focusing on self-comparisons.
- 4. Providing Rationale and Choices



Final Thought

Today:

Only Principles and Ideas

Application:

- Requires Creativity and Self-reflection
- Discussion with Peers Helps

