

## Sport and Exercise Psychology Around the World

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### *Sport Psychology is an Olympic Event*

The recent Olympic games not only highlighted international sport, but also showcased psychology at work (or at play). Olympic competitors from around the world discussed mental training and cited experiences with sport psychologists. Less visibly, but no less important, sport psychology is reaching diverse sport and exercise participants around the world. We can see sport psychology with youth sports or health-related exercise programs in France, Korea, Brazil or New Zealand. Although the prominence of sport psychology in the Olympics is relatively recent, sport psychology was an international event when it emerged as a discipline in the 1960s, and the early roots of sport psychology over 100 years ago stretch around the world.

### *Sport Psychology: A Definition*

Sport psychology, as defined in my recent text (Gill, 2000) and for most professionals in the field, refers to sport and exercise psychology, and includes both science and practice. So, sport and exercise psychology involves the scientific study of human behavior in sport and exercise, and the practical application of that knowledge in sport and exercise settings. This definition is not unique to me or to North America. The European Federation of Sport Psychology (FEPSAC, 1996) recently defined sport psychology as including affective, cognitive, motivational and sensorimotor dimensions of psychology, and defined sport as physical activity in competitive, educational, recreational, preventive and rehabilitative settings, including health-oriented exercise. That statement noted that sport psychology draws upon: (a) sport practice, (b) psychology, and (c) other sport sciences; and that sport psychologists have three interrelated tasks: research, education and application.

### *Sport Psychology: A History*

Sport psychology has deep roots. Participants, the public, and the occasional scholar have long been intrigued by the mental game. Still, the discipline of sport and exercise psychology did not emerge in North America until the late 1960s, when physical education scholars looked to scientific disciplines. Although the specific historical events, trends and emphases differ, European sport psychology developed over a similar time frame. Norman Triplett's (1898) study, widely cited as the first social psychology experiment, is a benchmark for sport psychology. Triplett, a cycling enthusiast, observed that social influence (pacing machine, competition) seemed to motivate cyclists to better performance, and his lab experiment tested those observations.

Other researchers conducted isolated studies of such issues as speed and accuracy of motor responses, mental practice, transfer of training, attention, and character development and sport in the early 1900s, but Coleman Griffith was the first person to conduct systematic sport psychology research and practice in North America. Griffith taught sport psychology classes, published research articles and books, and ventured into the field to make observations and interview athletes. Peter Roudik and A.C. Puni in Russia, and R.W. Schulte in Germany, carried out parallel efforts, but sport psychology was not an identifiable area.

### *Sport Psychology Organization*

Sport psychologists began to organize in the late 1960s. The North American Society for the Psychology of Sport and Physical Activity (NASPSPA) began in 1967. Although North Americans think we did everything first, international sport psychology developed earlier. In 1965 the International Congress of Sport Psychology in Rome marked the beginning of the International Society of Sport Psychology (ISSP). In describing ISSP, Vanek (1993) noted that the use of psychology in sport was stimulated in the 1950s by the "sovietization" of top-level sport. Thus, international sport psychology traditionally has aligned more with performance enhancement of elite athletes and has a clearer applied emphasis than the more research-oriented discipline in North America.

Several sport psychologists from Europe and the Soviet Union were instrumental in forming ISSP, including Paul Kunath (East Germany), Peter Roudik (Russia), Miroslav Vanek (Czechoslovakia), Morgan Olsen (Norway) and John Kane (England). However, Ferruccio Antonelli (Italy), founding President of ISSP and organizer of the first International Congress, was the primary organizing force. Antonelli, who died in January 2000, served as ISSP president until 1973, and he started the International Journal of Sport Psychology in 1970. ISSP not only played a key role in the development of NASPSPA, but also inspired the European sport psychology organization, FEPSAC, which formed in 1968 and continues as an active international force.

By the mid-1980s applied issues moved to the forefront, capturing the attention of students and the public, and bringing more people into the field. A 1985 meeting marked the beginning of the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology (AAASP), which is now the primary professional organization for sport psychology in the U.S. In 1987 *The Sport Psychologist* was developed to focus on applied sport psychology and complement the *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, which began publishing in 1979 and is widely recognized as the leading publication outlet for sport and exercise psychology research. AAASP started its *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* in 1989. Richard Suinn, past-president of the American Psychological Association (APA), and others, including Steve Heyman and William Morgan, organized sport psychology within APA. After starting as an interest group, Division 47 - Exercise and Sport Psychology - became a formal division in 1986.

Suinn's early work with skiers in the 1976 Olympics helped the U.S. Olympic Committee (USOC) recognize the potential role of sport psychology. Sport psychologists began to work with teams, and in 1983 the USOC established an official sport psychology committee and a registry. Many sport psychologists have worked with athletes, coaches and training programs through the USOC since then. Many other countries had been applying sport psychology with top international athletes for some time, and that work continues.

### *Sport and Exercise Psychology Today - Moving to a Global Future*

Sport and exercise psychology today is different from the discipline that emerged in the 1960s. Scholars have responded to public concern with increased research on health-oriented exercise, and many sport psychologists focus on youth development following a positive psychology approach. Some researchers emphasize theory-based research with tight controls while others use interpretive approaches and search for experiential knowledge. Some do no research, but use information to educate, consult or clinically treat sport and exercise participants.

European sport psychology, particularly in the former Soviet Union, was centrally controlled and focused on training elite athletes until recently. Current work encompasses more diverse activities, especially health-oriented exercise, with more diverse participants. Biddle (1995) in his edited volume of European perspectives, noted the former emphasis on elite sport, but also confirmed the changes in former state-controlled sport psychology programs as well as in most of western Europe. This welcome contribution to international dialogue includes several chapters on exercise and health topics as well as sport topics with diverse participants by authors from several European countries. For example, Kunath (1995), of the German Academy of Physical Culture at Leipzig, described the historical emphasis on training coaches and elite athletes, as he welcomed the extension of sport psychology to leisure sport, exercise for people with disabilities, and health-oriented exercise.

As we move into the new millennium, expanding international communication and interaction has moved us toward a global sport psychology with shared research and professional identification. Sport psychology has expanded beyond its North American and European bases to become a truly international discipline. Australia has many scholars and programs, and the rise of sport and exercise psychology in Asian countries is particularly notable. Japan and Korea have strong sport and exercise psychology programs, and the 1989 ISSP conference in Singapore enhanced mutual recognition of sport psychology research and approaches by Asian and Western countries. In 1994 I participated in an International conference with the Korean Society for Sport Psychology. I visited university programs and met sport psychology scholars who participate in international conferences and publish in top journals. Many international sport psychologists received their graduate training in North American universities, but the expanding number of international programs is highlighting unique cultural concerns.

The international presence at sport psychology conferences around the world should only enhance the dialogue. The 1996 AAASP conference emphasized the international theme, with keynote speakers from around the world, as well as a symposium entitled "Sport and Exercise Psychology: A Global Perspective" with panelists from Australia, France, Korea, New Zealand, Norway, Russia, Spain and the United Kingdom (Gould, 1996). Panelists noted specific features of sport psychology in their countries, but common themes also emerged. Chung (1996) noted that some Koreans are moving from traditional quantitative research to more qualitative approaches; Fournier (1996) commented on attention to certification criteria and consulting ethics in France; and Stambulova (1996) noted the decline in the emphasis on elite sport with increased interest in exercise for health in Russia.

International sport and exercise psychology continues to expand. The current AAASP membership includes professionals from 35 different countries, and the latest conference featured scholars from too many countries to list. ISSP's 10th World Congress of Sport Psychology will be held on Skiathos Island, Greece, May 28-June 2, 2001; keynote speakers represent all parts of the world, and the submissions, which are still being processed, will exceed all previous conferences. Conferences are increasingly international, and with easy access to communication networks, information is shared even when travel is prohibitive. North America, Europe, Asia and Australia/New Zealand have internationally active sport psychology communities now, and other countries are gaining. ISSP includes representatives from South America and Africa, and several countries have developed sport psychology organizations. As sport and exercise psychology activity expands around the world, we will likely recognize common global themes and gain insights into cultural variations. Overall, a more global sport and exercise psychology enriches our scholarship, and enhances sport and exercise for all.

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