

Sport Psychology Research Digest — November 2025

Monthly Review of Newly Published Peer-Reviewed Research

Generated by the Sport Psychology Research Agent

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SECTION 1 — Research Articles

1. Esports, Mental Toughness, & Resilience: Psychological Predictors of Performance May Fall Short

Authors: Matthew G. Young, Dylan R. Poulus, Joshua M. Adie

Journal: Psychology of Sport and Exercise

Publication Date: 5 November 2025 (online ahead of print)

DOI/URL: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2025.103016>

This paper examined whether classic sport-psychology constructs such as mental toughness and resilience meaningfully predict performance in elite esports. Using a sample of high-level competitive players, the authors assessed mental toughness, resilience, and a range of cognitive–emotional factors alongside objective in-game performance indicators. Multivariate models showed that these psychological traits explained very little variance in actual performance once game-relevant experience and skill metrics were controlled. The authors interpret this as evidence that broad dispositional constructs may be too coarse to capture performance drivers in tightly structured esports environments. They call for more context-specific, task-embedded measures and designs (e.g., decision-making under pressure, attentional control in-game) when studying psychological predictors of performance in esports.

2. Mental Health in Sport: Opportunities for the Future of Recreational and Elite Sport Psychology

Authors: Stewart A. Vella, Simon Rice

Journal: Psychology of Sport and Exercise

Publication Date: 13 November 2025 (online ahead of print)

DOI/URL: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2025.103021>

This article provides a conceptual roadmap for future mental health research and practice in sport. The authors argue that the field has focused too heavily on problem-oriented work and call for more solution-focused intervention research that can inform policy and practice. They advocate a shift from exclusively individual-level programmes toward system-level approaches targeting clubs, organisations, and broader sport structures. The paper also highlights the need for conceptual clarity around mental health and for research agendas that can keep pace with rapid changes in sport participation and policy environments. Overall, the authors propose a scientist–practitioner agenda that integrates rigorous research with practical, scalable initiatives across recreational and elite sport.

3. Integrating Health and Clinical Psychology into Sport Injury Research: A Necessary Theoretical and Applied Expansion

Authors: Alexis Ruffault

Journal: Psychology of Sport and Exercise

Publication Date: 13 November 2025 (online ahead of print)

DOI/URL: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2025.103026>

This commentary responds to contemporary sport injury psychology work and argues for stronger integration of health and clinical psychology perspectives. Drawing on behaviour-change and clinical models, the author suggests that injury research has often underplayed issues such as co-occurring mental health conditions, chronic illness, and health behaviour adherence during rehabilitation. The article recommends using established frameworks to better understand protective and risk factors across the injury lifecycle, and emphasises the importance of screening and referral pathways for athletes with clinically significant distress or psychopathology. Closer collaboration between sport, health, and clinical psychologists is presented as key to enhancing both theory and applied rehabilitation practice.

4. Why Experience Fails to Foster Expertise in Athlete Selection

Authors: Ilse Petra Peringa, A. Susan M. Niessen, Rob R. Meijer, Ruud J. R. den Hartigh

Journal: Psychology of Sport and Exercise

Publication Date: 12 November 2025 (online ahead of print)

DOI/URL: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2025.103022>

This short communication examines why experience in sport rarely translates into genuine expertise in athlete selection. Drawing on judgment and decision-making theory, the authors argue that expertise through experience requires high-validity cues and rich feedback, conditions that are seldom met in talent selection. Selectors often receive delayed, incomplete, or ambiguous feedback about whether their decisions were correct, undermining learning. Evidence from personnel selection research similarly shows weak links between years of experience and selection accuracy. The authors propose that evidence-based tools, structured assessments, and decision aids grounded in empirical data offer a more promising route to improving talent identification than reliance on gut feel or accumulated experience alone.

5. Cohesion at 40: A Commentary on (Re)conceptualizing Cohesion Through Identity, Interdependence, and Teamwork in Sport and Exercise

Authors: Christine M. Habeeb, Sarah A. Stephen, Pete Coffee

Journal: Psychology of Sport and Exercise

Publication Date: 11 November 2025 (online ahead of print)

DOI/URL: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2025.103024>

Marking four decades since classic cohesion research, this commentary re-examines the construct of team cohesion in sport and exercise. The authors argue that cohesion research has become fragmented and propose re-centering the construct around social identity, interdependence, and teamwork processes. They suggest that many existing measures blur these elements, limiting comparability and theory development. The paper advocates for multilevel, longitudinal designs that can capture within-team dynamics and link cohesion more precisely to performance and well-being outcomes, and it outlines measurement and modelling recommendations to advance the next generation of cohesion research.

6. Reflections and Projections: 25 Considerations for Body Image Research in Sport and Exercise Psychology

Authors: Catherine M. Sabiston, Ivanka Prichard, Cecilie Thøgersen-Ntoumani

Journal: Psychology of Sport and Exercise

Publication Date: November 2025 issue (e-pub 24 July 2025)

DOI/URL: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2025.102959>

This narrative review and agenda-setting paper offers 25 specific considerations to guide future body image research in sport and exercise contexts. The authors synthesise evidence on body dissatisfaction, muscularity concerns, appearance pressures, and objectification across athletes, exercisers, and diverse populations. They highlight conceptual issues such as overreliance on deficit-focused models and narrow operationalisations of body image that overlook positive and functional aspects. Methodologically, the paper calls for more diverse samples, intersectional approaches, and sophisticated longitudinal and experimental designs. It concludes with concrete recommendations for theory development, measurement, intervention design, and policy translation.

7. Giving Voice to High-Performance Sports Coaches to Spotlight Their Perceptions of Psychological Well-Being

Authors: Faye F. Didymus, Alexandra J. Potts

Journal: Psychology of Sport and Exercise

Publication Date: November 2025 issue (e-pub 28 June 2025)

DOI/URL: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2025.102928>

Using qualitative interviews with high-performance coaches, this study explores how coaches define and experience psychological well-being in their roles. Coaches described well-being as a fluctuating state shaped by workload, organisational support, job security, and relationships with athletes and staff. Many reported chronic stress, emotional labour, and role conflict, but also meaningfulness, pride, and growth when supported and valued. The analysis shows that well-being is strongly influenced by organisational cultures and expectations rather than purely individual coping capacities. The authors argue for system-level interventions to safeguard coach well-being in high-performance environments.

8. Physical Activity and Subjective Well-Being: The Roles of Self-Esteem, Physical Activity Enjoyment and Motor Difficulties

Authors: Emily J. Meachon, Juliane J. Schaffter, Stephanie Klupp, Wenke Möhring

Journal: International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology

Publication Date: 1 November 2025 (online)

DOI/URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2025.2578858>

Across two cross-sectional adult samples, this study examined how physical activity relates to subjective well-being and whether self-esteem, physical activity enjoyment, and motor difficulties explain these links. Physical activity was reliably associated with higher positive affect and life satisfaction, and in some cases with lower negative affect. Self-esteem rarely mediated these associations and enjoyment did not consistently moderate them. In contrast, perceived motor difficulties were strongly associated with lower activity, lower well-being, and reduced enjoyment, and mediated links between active hours and well-being outcomes. The authors conclude that motor skill proficiency may be a key mechanism linking physical activity and well-being in adults.

9. Mental Health and Wellbeing of Elite Male Youth Australian Footballers on the Road to the AFL Draft: A Longitudinal Analysis

Authors: Sam Elliott, Deb Agnew, Tom Rowntree, Ivanka Prichard, Ashley Montero

Journal: International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology

Publication Date: 6 November 2025 (online)

DOI/URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2025.2584534>

This longitudinal study tracked 418 elite male youth Australian footballers during their draft-eligible season. Athletes completed surveys at pre-, mid-, and end-season assessing well-being, depression, anxiety, disordered eating, sleep, social support, and self-compassion. Mental health indicators were largely stable; the main change was a small mid-season increase in sleep difficulties. Mixed-model analyses showed that higher self-compassion was strongly associated with better well-being and markedly lower odds of

depression, anxiety, and disordered eating, while social support showed smaller but still protective associations. The authors suggest that talent pathway programmes should explicitly cultivate self-compassion and social support.

10. High Consistency of Interest but Not Perseverance of Effort Is Related to Doping via Moral Disengagement: A Cross-Sectional Study of Grit

Authors: Japanese multi-author team

Journal: International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology

Publication Date: November 2025 (online first)

DOI/URL: Online-first article, IJSEP, November 2025

This study examined how different facets of grit relate to doping tendencies through moral disengagement among Japanese competitive athletes. In an initial sample, the authors translated and validated the Moral Disengagement in Doping Scale into Japanese, confirming a reliable single-factor structure. A second, larger sample completed measures of grit, moral disengagement, and doping-related behaviours. Structural models indicated that higher consistency of interest was indirectly associated with greater doping likelihood via increased moral disengagement, whereas perseverance of effort showed protective associations. The authors conclude that long-term goal focus may become a risk factor when athletes morally disengage, while perseverance may buffer against doping.

11. O' Captain, My Captain: Follower and Leader Narcissism Interplay on Follower Commitment

Authors: Matt W. Boulter, James Hardy, Ross Roberts

Journal: International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology

Publication Date: 13 November 2025 (online)

DOI/URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2025.2583118>

This paper investigates how leader and follower narcissism jointly shape followers' commitment in sport teams. Across two athlete samples, leader and follower narcissism were assessed alongside commitment to the team, and polynomial regression with response-surface analysis was used to model their interplay. Results suggested a curvilinear pattern: when both leader and follower narcissism were moderately high, follower commitment tended to drop, whereas more balanced and moderate levels were associated with higher commitment. In some contexts, lower leader narcissism paired with higher follower narcissism could improve commitment, but this benefit diminished at very high follower narcissism. The authors argue that leader personality can attenuate or exacerbate the commitment costs of narcissistic followers.

12. Readiness for Competition Across Sports and Genders: A Study on Psychological Skills Intervention

Authors: Stefan Alecu, Gheorghe Adrian Onea and colleagues

Journal: Frontiers in Psychology (Sport Psychology section)

Publication Date: 14 November 2025

DOI/URL: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1701631>

This intervention study evaluated a four-week psychological skills training programme aimed at enhancing athletes' readiness for competition across sports and genders. Athletes completed measures of motivation and competitive state anxiety before and after the intervention, which included goal setting, imagery, mindfulness, and cohesion-building activities. Results showed increases in intrinsic and identified motivation and decreases in controlled regulation and amotivation, alongside reductions in cognitive and somatic anxiety and increases in self-confidence. Effects were broadly consistent across gender and sport type. The authors conclude that relatively brief, scalable psychological programmes can effectively enhance competitive readiness in diverse athlete groups.

13. The Effect of Grit on Psychological Well-Being in Collegiate Athletes: The Moderating Role of Social Support

Authors: K.-H. Lee, K.-R. Oh

Journal: *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*

Publication Date: 28 November 2025

DOI/URL: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fspor.2025.1711128>

In a sample of collegiate athletes, this study tested whether grit predicts psychological well-being and whether perceived social support moderates this relationship. Athletes completed validated measures of grit, well-being, and social support from teammates, coaches, and significant others. Grit was positively associated with well-being, with perseverance of effort typically showing stronger effects than consistency of interests. High social support amplified the positive association between grit and well-being, whereas low support diminished it. The authors suggest that gritty athletes may particularly benefit from supportive environments that allow their persistence and long-term goal focus to translate into better mental health.

14. “It’s Not Handcuffing the Athlete to Success or Failure”: Sport Psychology Practitioners’ Use of Nonspecific Goals in Applied Contexts

Authors: Ollie Williamson, Christian Swann, Patricia C. Jackman, Kyle J. M. Bennett, Matthew D. Bird

Journal: *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*

Publication Date: 4 February 2025 (online; in Volume 37, Issue 6, November–December 2025)

DOI/URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2025.2457986>

This qualitative study explores how applied sport psychology practitioners use nonspecific goals (e.g., “play freely,” “be present”) when working with athletes. Through in-depth interviews, practitioners described nonspecific goals as flexible anchors that reduce pressure and accommodate the dynamic, unpredictable nature of performance contexts. They reported using such goals alongside, rather than instead of, specific measurable objectives, particularly when athletes were prone to over-fixation on outcomes. Thematic analyses indicated that nonspecific goals can help regulate emotions, support autonomy, and sustain motivation while avoiding rigid performance contingencies. The authors argue that goal-setting frameworks in applied sport psychology should more explicitly incorporate nonspecific goals.

15. To You, To Me, Myself and I: Interactive Effects of Narcissism and First/Second-Person Pronoun Oriented Self-Talk

Authors: Behrouz Abdoli, Shima Taherkhani, Ebrahim Moteshareie, James Hardy

Journal: *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*

Publication Date: 14 February 2025 (online; in Volume 37, Issue 6, November–December 2025)

DOI/URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2025.2462562>

This experimental–correlational study examined how trait narcissism interacts with self-talk pronoun use (“I” vs. “You”) in shaping endurance performance. Athletes completed narcissism measures and then performed endurance tasks under conditions that prompted either first-person or second-person self-talk scripts. For highly narcissistic athletes, certain pronoun forms—especially second-person self-address—were more performance-enhancing than others, whereas low-narcissism athletes showed smaller or different patterns of effects. The authors interpret these interactions as reflecting how narcissistic individuals’ self-views align with specific self-talk perspectives, and conclude that tailoring self-talk interventions to personality profiles may improve their effectiveness.

16. What Is Quality Youth Sport Programming? A Delphi Study of International Scholar Perspectives

Authors: Stewart Vella, Scott Pierce, Martin Camiré, Tarkington J. Newman, Dany J. MacDonald, Michel Milistetd, Leisha Strachan, Fernando Santos

Journal: Journal of Applied Sport Psychology

Publication Date: 13 February 2025 (online; in Volume 37, Issue 6, November–December 2025)

DOI/URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2025.2455171>

Using a multi-round Delphi method with international youth sport scholars, this study sought consensus on the core attributes of quality youth sport programmes. Panellists iteratively rated and refined candidate features spanning safety, inclusion, developmental outcomes, coaching practices, and organisational structures. The final consensus highlighted principles such as physical and psychological safety, autonomy-supportive and competence-building environments, opportunities for broad skill and personal development, and equitable access. The authors present a conceptual framework that can guide programme design, evaluation, and policy discussions around youth sport quality globally.

17. A Balancing Act: Sport Psychologist Insights into Supporting Athlete Mental Health in Elite Sport

Authors: Erin Prior, Anthony Papathomas, Daniel Rhind

Journal: Journal of Applied Sport Psychology

Publication Date: 2025 (in Volume 37, Issue 6, November–December 2025)

DOI/URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2025.2462551>

Drawing on in-depth interviews with sport psychologists working in elite environments, this qualitative study explores how practitioners navigate the balancing act between performance demands and athlete mental health. Practitioners described tensions between organisational expectations for performance outcomes and ethical imperatives to prioritise wellbeing, particularly when workloads, travel, and role ambiguity were high. They reported using strategies such as boundary setting, advocacy with management, and building trust with athletes to create safer spaces for disclosure. System-level barriers included limited staffing, confidentiality concerns, and performance-only metrics of value. The authors call for structural changes to support sustainable, ethically grounded practice.

SECTION 2 — APA Reference List

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