

INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE ON SPORT AND EXERCISE PSYCHOLOGY

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This issue addresses topics related to the psychology of sport and exercise by presenting five empirical studies which examine broadly understood determinants of sports performance and the effects of engaging in physical activity. The first study focuses on the importance of coaches' psychological knowledge in the context of athletes' functioning. The second one investigates the role of mindfulness training in shaping psychological characteristics and performance levels among athletes. The third study concerns the adaptation of a scale designed to measure mental toughness in sport. The fourth paper analyzes the determinants of burnout in youth sport, while the final study explores the significance of physical activity in one's acceptance of disability. The topics addressed in this special issue contribute to a deeper understanding of human psychological functioning in the domains of sport and physical activity.

Keywords: sport psychology; exercise psychology; physical activity; sport performance

We are pleased to present an issue of *Annals of Psychology* devoted to sport and exercise psychology. The publications included herein contribute to a broad and comprehensive understanding of the psychological functioning of athletes and individuals engaging in physical activity. More than three decades ago, while outlining future directions for sport psychology research, Strea

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and Roberts (1992, p. 59) noted that “we don’t need sport-specific theories, but we do need to test how general theories or models function in the context of sport.” Accordingly, one of the main aims of sport and exercise psychology is to understand how participation in sport influences an individual’s psychological development and how psychological factors affect physical performance (Weinberg & Gould, 2014).

From as early as 1890 to the present day, one of the most extensively explored areas of research and practice in sport and exercise psychology has been athletic performance (Kornspan, 2012). Since the earliest studies in the field, psychologists have investigated factors that may enhance athletic performance, such as reaction time (Kornspan, 2007). A general definition of performance psychology describes human performance in relation to the achievement of specific goals across various domains of daily life. In this sense, “performance psychology is a domain in which researchers and practitioners describe, explain, and predict human behavior” (Raab, 2020, p. 1115). Scientific research in this area aims to generate knowledge that professionals can use to support improved human functioning and development in sport. Consequently, one of the primary goals of psychologists conducting research in this field is to apply general psychological theories and examine how they operate within the sport environment (Blecharz, 2006).

Against this background, the research presented in this issue seeks to draw conclusions that are significant for both theoretical advancement and practical application. Research in sport psychology often focuses on explaining the mechanisms that lead to sport mastery and on identifying the factors that determine success among athletes (Łuszczynska, 2014). Examining how psychological characteristics translate into sport performance has contributed to a better understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying optimal functioning in relation to sport demands. Accordingly, four of the articles included in this issue follow this line of inquiry and present empirical studies addressing a broad range of determinants and antecedents of sport performance. Together, they contribute to the ongoing effort to better understand the psychological processes that shape engagement and performance in sport. Last but not least, the final article offers a somewhat different perspective by showing that physical activity may itself serve as a resource and may foster the acceptance of disability.

The first article, written by Zuzanna Gazdowska, Izabela Krejtz, and Dariusz Parzelski under the title “Changes in Coaches’ Psychological Knowledge and Its Impact on Young Swimmers’ Psychological Functioning,” focuses on

mental training workshops. A study involving young swimmers and their coaches examined the impact of sport psychology training for coaches participating in workshops focused on motivation, concentration, coping with stress, and building self-confidence. Coaches exert a strong influence on athletes' development (Li et al., 2025), and this article highlights the importance of ongoing education for coaches in the context of sport psychology. Coaches serve as role models for their athletes, and their knowledge—both technical and psychological—affects athletes' behavior and sport performance. The authors present the results of a study testing whether educating swimming coaches in mental skills training techniques would improve their swimmers' sport performance and mental skills, and whether the observed changes in the measured variables would have long-term effects.

The second article highlights the potential of mindfulness training in fencers. This study “The Impact of Fencing-Focused Mindfulness Training on Locus of Control in Sport, Sport Confidence, and Choice Reaction Time,” by Angelika Marszołek and Zuzanna Gazdowska, examines whether fencing-focused mindfulness training increases internal locus of control and sport confidence, as well as shortening reaction time in young fencers. The authors highlight that fencing is characterized by the presence of many open motor patterns and that psychological and tactical skills are just as important as fencing technique. This creates a particular need for fencers to develop various aspects of attention, perception, operational and tactical thinking, as well as the analysis of motivational and emotional processes (Czajkowski, 1988; Poliszczuk et al., 2013). Mindfulness interventions foster greater attention to and awareness of present-moment experience. Therefore, they are often implemented in mental training and may help athletes achieve optimal performance. By reading this article, readers will gain insight into the characteristics of fencing and mindfulness practice in the sport context, as well as into the study's interesting findings.

In contemporary research, simple and user-friendly tools that provide a general overview of selected sport-related constructs are increasingly being used. The third article, “Mental Toughness in Sport Questionnaire (MTSQ-19),” by Jacek Przybylski and Karol Karasiewicz, emphasizes the role of mental toughness in sport and introduces a questionnaire that helps practitioners and researchers assess this construct in a convenient way. Mental toughness—a concept that is difficult to define succinctly—has proven to be one of the most highly valued factors in achieving success in sport and maintaining optimal performance. It may be innate or developed through mental training

(Gucciardi et al., 2017). In the first part, the authors introduce this concept on the basis of different definitions and theories. Then they describe the stages of developing the new tool as a shortened version of a previously published longer scale.

Another potential factor influencing athletes' development in sport is burnout associated with continuing participation in sport (Raedeke, 1997). Importantly, this issue is also relevant to young athletes. Aneta Cichosz-Dziadura, Małgorzata Siekańska, and Jan Blecharz, the authors of the fourth article, entitled "Effects of Individual and Organizational Factors on the Dynamics of Burnout in Youth Sport," focus on the challenging issue of burnout, which affects not only employees but also athletes. Burnout in sport can also affect children and adolescents. The authors introduce this syndrome, along with the environmental, organizational, and socio-interpersonal factors that may contribute to its development, as well as its consequences for youth development. Their study, involving athletes aged 14 to 18, included two measurements collected at an eight-month interval, at the beginning and at the end of the school year. Readers will find answers to the following questions: (1) What are the characteristics of burnout in the examined sample? (2) What is the dynamics of burnout during the school year? (3) What is the relationship between burnout in sport and selected individual and organizational factors related to the frequency and course of training? Finally, the authors identify factors that may protect young athletes from burnout.

Importantly, sport participation extends beyond performance outcomes alone. In addition to promoting physical and mental health, engaging in sport fulfills important integrative, recreational, and social functions (Eather et al., 2023). For this reason, the issues addressed in this thematic issue concern not only elite athletes but also recreational participants who treat sport as a personal challenge, even though it is not their profession. Finally, the last article, "Importance of Regular Physical Activity and Personal Resources for Acceptance of Disability," by Monika Krupa-Nowosad and Milena Różyło, presents the role of physical activity and personal resources—such as positive orientation, values, and motivation—in the acceptance of acquired disability. In their article, the authors introduce the issue of disability acceptance, the process of adapting to living with a disability, and its importance for mental health. Furthermore, they present the concept of personal resources as qualities, skills, and competencies necessary for self-development and self-management (Hobfoll, 2011), focusing particularly on the role of positive orientation and preferred values. Readers will also gain insight into the importance

of physical activity, which supports many areas of life. Finally, the authors address the question of whether physical activity and personal resources are associated with disability acceptance.

To sum, what we address in this issue of the *Annals* is a range of topics related to the role of psychology in sport and exercise. We hope that the findings presented here will contribute to a deeper understanding of optimal functioning in sport and the psychological resources that can be strengthened through participation in physical activity.

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