**Expanding the Realms of Sport Psychology in Esports: An Epilogue**

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This special issue provides insights from a range of sport psychology practitioners (SPPs), such as qualified and trainee sport and exercise psychologists, alongside performance coaches working in esports. Within this special issue, comprises four case studies spanning two different esports titles, League of Legends (LoL; n = 4) and Overwatch (n = 1). To our knowledge, this is the first special issue dedicated to applied sport psychology in esports.

For the purpose of this epilogue, we have identified three key areas of applied sport psychology to which the featured case studies contribute: 1) interventions with teams and esports athletes, 2) coach support and development, and 3) practitioner development. This epilogue will discuss these three areas in relation to the case studies within the special issue along with suggestions for future research. Our aim is to provide a structured exploration and discussion of the experiences shared within these case studies, offering insights into how sport psychology is applied within esports.

**Horizon 1: Intervention with Teams and Esports Athletes**

The featured case studies contribute examples of sport psychology support at multiple levels, delivering interventions to esports athletes as well as teams. During the needs analysis process, a range of performance challenges were identified across the case studies. These included, but were not limited to, communication issues in-game (e.g., conflicting communication between teammates, indecisiveness), lack of team cohesion, transitioning to a professional level, emotional dysregulation (e.g., coping with tilt), and lack of agreement on training methods. Collectively, this highlights the necessity of SPPs being cognizant of the breadth of performance challenges one may encounter when working with esports teams and individuals.

To overcome performance challenges, various interventions were‌ implemented in line with the practitioners’ philosophies. These included interventions such as identifying team or individual values and goals (Agrawal et al., 2024; Brain et al., 2024), psychological skills training (e.g., reappraisal, self-talk, breathing techniques; Brain et al., 2024), and personal disclosure and mutual sharing (Agrawal et al., 2024). The interventions were delivered either online or in-person through one-to-one sessions with esports athletes or psychoeducational workshops with the whole team. Alongside individual and team interventions, Pedraza-Ramirez et al. (2024) noted the importance of psychological safety and organizational culture within esports. To support culture development within LoL, Pedraza-Ramirez et al. (2024) suggest creating space for meaningful, open, and safe one-to-one discussions alongside daily team activities. This may contribute to psychological safety and building optimal relationships, potentially resulting in trust, closeness, and autonomy (Pedraza-Ramirez et al., 2024).

Despite the meaningful interventions delivered, the case study authors share specific contextual demands and challenges that they faced. For example, cultural and linguistic differences (Agrawal et al., 2024), limited time to deliver provision (Brain et al., 2024), and challenges building relationships with team members due to the lack of visual cues (i.e., lack of webcam use; Brain et al., 2024). Understanding the contextual challenges that may be present in esports will hopefully aid current and future practitioners when planning their sport psychology provision and mitigating these demands if possible. For example, within the contracting process practitioners should clearly define roles and responsibilities, have clear non-negotiables to allow for effective practice (e.g., cameras on, set times for workshop delivery), and learn how to work effectively in an online environment (see Price et al., 2022), aided through supervision and continued professional development.

Notably, no one-to-one case studies were featured as stand-alone cases within this special issue, and the intervention work outlined multiple levels of delivery (e.g., Brain et al., 2024; Agrawal et al., 2024; workshops, coach support, one-to-one support). Further, Pedraza-Ramirez et al. (2024) took a holistic ecological approach to practice, taking into account the environment esports teams are influenced by. Though every team must be considered on an individual needs basis, this may suggest that multi-level interventions are well-suited to sport psychology practice within esports rather than solely one-to-one work. Additionally, multi-level support within esports has been shown to be beneficial as it can meet the preferences of different team members (Swettenham & Whitehead, 2022). Therefore, training routes and educational pathways, which have been known to focus heavily on one-to-one work, might benefit from integrating more content on team and organisation level interventions into their curriculums.

When working at multiple levels (i.e., coaches, esports athletes, teams, and management), SPPs must consider the context of their work and the challenges this may bring. First, multi-level support can generate a high volume of work and may be difficult for a single SPP to deliver, spreading the practitioner thin and potentially limiting on-the-ground support for athletes competing in the coalface. Second, there is the ethical issue of “who is the client?”. Working across multiple levels “blurs the lines” (Ramaker & Pedraza-Ramirez, 2023 p. 89) of who the client is (e.g., the organisation, the coach, the players). As such, this can pose ethical concerns and make it challenging to gain trust across all levels of support. If a team of SPPs are present, it may be worthwhile placing one practitioner at each level of support to mitigate these challenges.

**Horizon 2: Coach Support and Development**

It is well-recognised that coaches are viewed as performers in their own right (Gould et al., 2002; Thelwell et al., 2008). As such, SPPs commonly work with and through coaches to enhance effective service delivery. Agrawal et al.'s (2024) case study noted weekly coaching meetings that the trainee SPP and multi-discipline team attended. Attending these meetings may be beneficial for supporting coaches’ reflective practice skills (Pedraza-Ramirez, 2024), identifying the needs of the team or coaching staff, upskilling the SPP’s knowledge through conversations with the coaches, and acting as a means to monitor and evaluate intervention effectiveness (Agrawal et al., 2024). The case study from Pedraza-Ramirez et al. (2024) recognises the importance of supporting coaches and suggests implementing coach development programmes to overcome challenges coaches face, such as frequent game changes and a lack of formal development programmes.

In addition, SPPs may support esports coaches through the use of novel coaching approaches. Bubna et al.’s (2024) case study details how a constraints-led approach (CLA; e.g., Renshaw et al., 2019) can be implemented in LoL training practices (e.g., by limiting players’ communication or use of wards). Notably, Bubna et al.’s (2024) evaluation of this CLA intervention showed the potential to improve various elements of team performance, for example, the team’s coordination, planning, and communication.

Despite the importance of the coach being reflected in these case studies, esports coaches lack specific coach education and support that is contextualised to the world of esports. Though SPPs cannot solve this issue, they may be well-placed to support esports coaches by providing psychological support and education. For example, developing coaches’ interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). Nevertheless, as Bubna et al. (2024) noted, the absence of an esports coach in the team can result in players coaching themselves which presents another challenge to SPPs. To further the SPP’s ability to work effectively with coaches in esports, it may be important to integrate specific training on how to work with coaches onto training routes to highlight the differences and similarities between working with an athlete and working with a coach.

**Horizon 3: Practitioner Development**

Practitioner development is multidimensional (Tod et al., 2007) and essential for professional growth and service delivery competence. One key element, as noted by Tod et al. (2007), is the importance of practitioners reflecting on how they influence the service delivery process. The case studies featured in the special issue provide open and vulnerable reflective accounts of practitioners’ experiences within esports. Particularly noteworthy is the work by Brain et al. (2024), who reflected on the challenges faced and mistakes made, ‌whilst providing tangible practical suggestions for those working in esports or contemplating entering esports. Presented as a series of confessional tales, Brain et al. (2024) explore challenges such as limited time for developing and delivering interventions, misalignment of values between practitioners and the esports team, and effective practice in an online environment with limited behavioural cues. Importantly, Brain et al. (2024) highlights the mental and physical toll on practitioners due to intense schedules and long hours that may be expected in an esports performance environment. These reflections underscore the salient need for practitioner self-care to help mitigate the stress of operating in esports and ensure ethical practice (Quartiroli et al., 2021).

Another case study showing the importance of reflective practice is Agrawal et al.’s (2024) which shares multicultural reflections as a trainee sport and exercise psychologist and its importance for developing multicultural practice. Agrawal et al. (2024) utilise the T-R-E-E-S model (see, Gupta, 2022) for multicultural reflective practice in sport psychology and show this model to be effective within an esports context. Using such a model may be of benefit to SPPs working with esports teams of multiple nationalities to support their continued professional development and effective practice.

**Future Directions**

Despite the meaningful topics and knowledge shared within this special issue, there are areas that need to be explored further to support sport psychology practice within esports. Importantly, esports encompass more than just professional male esports athletes. Cisgender men are overrepresented in esports research in comparison to women and transgender individuals (Di Nicola et al., 2024). Therefore, future case studies should endeavour to share interventions with women and transgender esports athletes and gamers.

Beyond the professional scene, benefits from playing esports (and video games), such as psychological development (Trotter et al., 2021), and health and physical activity behaviour (Trotter et al., 2020), have been found. Physical activity interventions within esports would benefit practitioners who consider themselves a sport and exercise psychologist. Although the case study by Pedraza-Ramirez et al. (2024) briefly mentions the use of weekly physical exercise interventions with teams, the current special issue adopts a predominant performance and well-being focus. Indeed, this perpetuates the narrative concerning performance in esports, neglecting health and physical activity within esports. Therefore, there is scope for future studies to investigate the effects of physical activity interventions in esports along with the positive benefits that esports or gaming may have on the general population.

As mentioned previously, there is no standalone one-to-one intervention featured within this special issue. It would be insightful to see single case studies in esports published as well as within a greater variety of esports titles and genres, with the case studies featured in this special issue being limited to two esports titles and two game genres (i.e., MOBA, FPS). Case studies need to consider a broader range of settings aside from elite performance in esports, such as grassroots esports, esports academies, and working with parents.

**Conclusion**

This Special issue of *Case Studies in Sport and Exercise Psychology* on esports has included four case studies from two esports titles. The featured case studies have provided meaningful and novel contributions to applied sport psychology in the world of esports. The case studies cover multicultural reflections, a holistic ecological approach to esports, CLA in esports training practices, and confessional tales of applied practice in esports to aid practitioner development. Alongside this, a variation of philosophical approaches, intervention strategies, and reflective experiences have been shared to enhance the contextual understanding of applied sport psychology practice in esports. The case studies within this special issue suggest that sport psychology in esports is viable at multiple levels of delivery, taking a holistic stance on the work delivered. However, some challenges arise when working at multiple levels that SPPs need to consider to achieve ethical and effective practice.

We would like to thank the authors and reviewers involved in this special issue; this would not have been possible without you all. We hope that this special issue has inspired trainees and experienced practitioners to look towards the esports horizon and consider supporting the teams and individuals within this setting.

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