## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Athletic careers are filled with fluctuations of fortune that allow athletes to experience both the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat within their own career. There are contextually imbedded reasons why some athletes perform with higher outcome expectations than others. One approach to understanding differential abilities of people to cope with the same negative experience has been the examination of moderator variables, characteristics of persons or their environments that make them more or less vulnerable to the negative effects of stressful life events.

Research efforts have been focused on the identification of particular aspects of competitive sports that contribute to the experience of stress among athletes, the magnitude of stress produced by different sports-related contexts, as well as the consequences of such stress experience. However, very little systematic research has examined how athletes manage or cope with stressful experiences and the influence of support factors that positively or negatively influence the athletes coping skills. Within high performance sport contexts, according to Bandura (1997), one performance related aspect worth considering is the relationship between athletes and the support infrastructure (human resources) who are meant to assist them in athletic pursuits.

1.1 Support Infrastructure in Sports

Research on elite sport athletes has focused a great deal on sport developmental paths (e.g. Baker, Cote, & Abernethy, 2003; Ericsson, Krampe,
&TeschRomer, 1993). Also, the elite sport context is characterized by the changing roles of parents, coaches, and peers in athlete’s lives (Bloom, 1985; Ericsson et al., 1993). Research targeting the unique and interrelated roles of the coaches, parents, and peers (including teammates) on enhancing the youth elite sport experience is warranted. One approach to understanding how the multiple social influences affect young athletes and their sport experience is to better understand the social support context from the lived experiences of the athletes themselves.

Bandura (1997), Seligman (1991) and Peterson (2000) have noted that people do not develop and sustain their motivation autonomously. In terms of high-performance sport, Bloom (1985) and Salmela (1994) have recognized that athletes develop and perform in collaboration with support from family and personal coaches. It seems that the emotional and financial support of parents and the emotional, technical and tactical support of personal coaches are fundamental to the development and persistence of high-performance athletes in sport over their career span. To this interactive human component of performance, Schinke and da Costa (2000) have recently noted that high-performance athletes explain other national team athletes, national sport organizations (termed NSO's), and major-games mission staff as additional causal factors affecting bottom line athletic expectations, and subsequently, tournament results within and across athletic careers. The five aforementioned support infrastructure resources, namely parents, personal coaches, NSO mechanisms, teammates and mission staff, all contextually based factors, seem to affect the confidence, long-term motivational persistence and bottom-line results of athletes in the most challenging competitions.
In some instances, Jackson (1995) and Orlick and Partington (1986) have noted that high-performance [international level] athletes sometimes perform at exceptional levels during major-games tournaments. When Jackson elicited reasons contributing to major-games athletes' flow performances through semi-structured interviews, explanations common across the respondent group included teamwork and active verbal and emotional support from coaches, emotional support from other athletes and emotional and technical assistance from supplemental expert support-staff.

Social Support is a multidimensional construct consisting of structural (i.e., existence of social support networks), functional (i.e., the exchange of resources), and perceptual (i.e., appraisals of available amount and quality of social support) dimensions that are important factors in sport (Bianco & Eklund, 2001; Holt & Hoar, 2006; Rees & Hardy; 2000). In sport, the structural dimension of social support is primarily founded on the athlete’s network of significant others including coaches, teammates, and peers (Bianco & Eklund, 2001; Scanlan, Russel, Beals, & Scanlan, 2003). The coach-athlete relationship may be the most important social support interaction (Mageau& Vallerand, 2003). According to Jowett and colleagues (Jowett & Cockerill, 2002; Jowett, Paull, & Pensgaard, 2005), the relationship is a dynamic process characterized by the coach and athlete having interrelated thoughts, supporting, and encouraging young athletes’ sport involvement (Fredricks & Eccless, 2004). Limited findings also suggest peers (Smith, 2003; Vazuo, Weiss & Stuntz, 2004) may be important providers of sport-specific social support. Parents and peers also have distinct yet complimentary roles in providing social support (Ullrich-French...
& Smith, 2006). It is important to advance the social support literature by focusing on the structural dimension and also by understanding the meaning of support strategies (Holt & Hoar, 2006) provided by significant others in competitive sport.

The family provides the primary social environment where the athlete can develop an identity, self-esteem and the motivation for athletic success” The term “significant other” was first coined by Sullivan (1947) who was exploring the socialisation of children. The original use of the term “significant others” was primarily restricted to parents as it was believed that they were the essential people in training and influencing the child. Nowadays the use of the term has generalised to include all others who are believed to have an impact on one’s life, for example, siblings, partners, teachers and coaches.

Previous research on coaching behaviours has led to an emergence of interest in the role of significant others in children’s psychosocial development in sports (Black & Weiss, 1992). Subsequent studies have shown that it is the parents who have the greatest impact due to a combination of the great amount of time spent between parent and child and the necessary high level of parental involvement with their child’s sports. Examples of such studies include Power and Woolger’s (1994) which demonstrated that parental support was positively correlated with children’s enjoyment and enthusiasm in swimming. Even at Olympic level, athletes who are more successful in their event reported greater levels of family support than those who were less successful, that is, those who failed to perform up to performance predictions and reported more conflict and communication problems.
Social support is an important coping mechanism that helps athletes resist psychological distress, fosters better performances, and provides motivational incentives. For these reasons, it is important to better understand the social support context with respect to coping skills and strategies among athletes.

### 1.2 Coping in Sports

It is generally accepted that poor performance is associated with a high level of stress and worry or anxiety, which prevent athletes from performing in their optimal zone. Athletes being exposed to a number of intense physical and psychological demands, they use a set of cognitive and behavioral strategies in order to cope with these challenges and related stress (Crocker, Alderman & Smith, 1988; Gould, Finch, & Jackson, 1993). If athletes are unable to cope with these demands, it can lead to poor performance, negative affect and drop out of sport. An athlete’s use of cognitive or behavioral strategies can further be seen as the core of the coping process (Anshel, Kim, Kim, Chang, & Eom, 2001). There seems to be a meaningful association among anxiety, confidence, and coping skills. People with appropriate coping skills could manage stress and adversity with self-confidence, however, people with inadequate coping skills tend to perceive anxiety as a threatening factor.

Coping can be described in terms of strategies, tactics, responses, cognitions, or behavior. Actual coping is a phenomenon that can be noticed either by introspection or by observation, and it includes internal events as well as overt actions. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) have defined coping as a dynamic process of cognitive and behavioral
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Attempts to deal with internal or external demands which are experienced as taxing or exceeding the individual’s resources.

A large amount of studies have used qualitative methods to describe coping behaviors of elite athletes. One important study was the one by Gould et al. (1993) that investigated the relationship between coping strategies and sources of stress among 17 senior U.S National Champion figure skaters. After conducting in-depth interviews, Gould et al. found that athletes used different coping strategies in response to stressful encounters. It was also discovered that the athletes used both adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies. Gould and colleagues concluded that coping is a complex process in which athletes strive at the same time to deal with both the stressful environment and distressing emotions.

Another study using a qualitative approach was the one by Holt and Hogg (2004) investigating perceptions of sources of stress and coping strategies among 10 female football players prior to the 1999 football World Cup finals in U.S.A. Using a case study approach, Holt and Hogg identified four major sources of stress reported by the athletes: (1) coaches’ communication, (2) demands of international football, (3) competitive stressors, and (4) distractions. Holt and Hogg also found that participants used different strategies depending on the source of stress which is consistent with the results found by Gould et al. (1993).

Crocker, Kowalski, and Graham (1998) and Lazarus (1999) said that coping represents an individual's cognitive, affective, and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands. Athletes must develop a range of cognitive and behavioral coping skills to manage the competitive stressors they face. Different
coping strategies have to be employed by athletes as they face different critical situation. Kristiansen, Roberts and Abrahamsen (2007), said that different sports have different sources of stress, and consequently participants require special strategies to cope successfully in their particular field.

1.3 Self Concept among Athletes

Self-concept has been viewed as hierarchical, multidimensional, and constructed of a variety of roles, characteristics, and competencies, or ‘sub-selves’ Self-concept is described as individuals’ self-perceptions of their experience and negotiations with their environment. Physical self-concept is thought to represent an overall perception of the physical self, based on general feelings of happiness, satisfaction, pride, respect, and confidence in the body and its capacities.

Marsh and Hattie (1996) described a variety of possible theoretical models of self concept that over time have resulted from a clear analogy with intelligence models, sometimes considered as a factor of general ability (one-dimensional model) and other times understood from a multidimensional point of view, its components sometimes considered at a similar level and other times presenting a hierarchical structure, which incorporates both perspectives, the general and the multidimensional ones. For a few years these approaches have been increasing considerably in research on self-concept.

The one-dimensional model proposes that there is only one self-concept factor or that one general factor dominates the more specific factors. Marsh and Winnne (1978) argued that multiple dimensions of self-concept were heavily dominated by a
general factor in such a way that separately the factors could not be suitably
differentiated. Successive research has established the multidimensionality of self-
concept even more clearly and at the same time the previous support given to the one-
dimensional perspective has been abandoned, which has led people to conclude that
self-concept cannot be interpreted appropriately if its multidimensionality is ignored.
The multidimensional hierarchical factor model considers the existence of a global
component at the top of a strong hierarchy. Therefore, changes in global self-esteem
will be the result of prior changes that have occurred in the facets of self-concept,
since these are at the bottom of the multidimensional hierarchical model, while global
self-esteem is at the top of this model. As a result, when changes in the facets of self-
concept are not significant, no changes will occur in global self-esteem (Boyd and
Hrycaiko, 1997). Therefore, physical self occupies a unique position in the self-system
because the body provides substantive interface between the individual and the world.

1.4 Need and Significance of the Study

Much energy within the domain of sports psychology has been dedicated to
the refinement of athlete’s affective states of efficacy information, often through
mental training exercises. Mental practitioners including Orlick (1990), Lynch (1992)
and Milman (1994), have suggested methods of how high performance athletes have
improved their mastery and coping capabilities in order to stabilize or increase levels
of self confidence.

The critics of Indian sports, including media have often attributed the poor
performance of Indian sportspersons to inadequate infrastructure and training, and
limited sport funding. Though such attributions are accountable, within high
performance sport contexts, one performance related aspect worth considering is the relation between the athletes and the support infrastructure who are meant to assist them in their athletic pursuits. Since no attempt has been made to analyze the support infrastructure, coping style and self concept among sportspersons in India, the present study is of significance and relevance.

1.5 Statement of the Problem

The present study is titled “Analysis of Support Infrastructure, Coping Style and Self Concept among Indian Sportspersons”.

1.6 Delimitations

The present study was delimited to the following aspects:

(i) The study was delimited to 216 national level sportspersons which included 126 male and 90 female sportspersons.

(ii) The study was delimited to sportspersons belonging to the following sports disciplines:

(a) Badminton
(b) Swimming
(c) Athletics
(d) Football
(e) Volleyball
(f) Basketball

(iii) The study was confined to sportspersons who had been actively participating at national level tournaments during the last three years.
The study was confined to analysis of the following variables:

(a) Support Infrastructure was assessed using the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) by Zimet, G.D., Dahlem, N.W., Zimet, S.G. & Farley, G.K. (1988).

(b) Coping style was assessed using the Athletic Coping Style Inventory Questionnaire (ASCI-28) by Smith, Schutz, Smoll and Ptacek (1995).

(c) Self Concept was assessed using The Physical Self Description Questionnaire (PSDQ) by Marsh et al, 1994.

1.7 Limitations

Idiosyncrasy influencing the results of the study may be considered as a limitation. Other environmental or situational factors which might have affected the responses of the subjects may also be considered a limitation of the study.

1.8 Explanation of Terms

The following operational definitions were considered suitable for the present study:

1.8.1 Support Infrastructure

The term support infrastructure in the present study refers to the human resource assistance made available from parents, personal coaches, friends, sports organization mechanisms, team mates and mission staff, etc., affecting the confidence, long term motivational perspective and bottom line results of the athletes in the most challenging sports competitions.
1.8.2 Coping

Coping has been defined by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person”

1.8.3 Coping style

Coping style refers to an athlete’s disposition, which is a preference or tendency to engage in specific types of coping strategies in a predictable manner in response to different types of stressful events (Krohne, 1993).

1.8.4 Personal Coping Resources

The seven subscales on the ACSI-28 can be summed to yield a general measure of psychological coping skills referred to as Personal Coping Resources.

1.8.4 Self Concept

Self-concept refers to a person’s perceptions of himself formed through experience with and interpretations of the environment. These perceptions are influenced by a number of factors such as evaluations of significant others, reinforcements, and attributions of behavior (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976).

1.9 Objectives of the Study

The present study on analysis of support infrastructure, coping style and self concept among Indian sportspersons focuses on the following objectives.

(i) To profile support infrastructure, coping style and self concept among Indian sportspersons belonging to different sports disciplines.
(ii) To compare support infrastructure, coping style and self concept between male and female sportspersons.

(iii) To compare support infrastructure, coping style and self concept between sportspersons belonging to individual and team sports.

(iv) To compare support infrastructure, coping style and self concept among sportspersons belonging to different sports disciplines.

(v) To explore the relationship between support infrastructure and self concept to personal coping resources.

(vi) To identify the main predictors of social support and self concept for personal coping resources for the sportspersons.

1.10. Hypotheses

(i) There would not be any significant difference in support infrastructure, coping style and self concept scores between male and female sportspersons.

(ii) There would not be any significant difference in support infrastructure, coping style and self concept scores between sportspersons belonging to individual and team sports.

(iii) There would not be any significant difference in support infrastructure, coping style and self concept scores among sportspersons belonging to different sports disciplines.
(iv) There would be significant relationship between various factors of social support and self concept to coping skills among Indian sportspersons.

(v) Social support and self concept would act as significant predictors to personal coping resources for the sportspersons.

1.11 Scope of the Study

With an increase in logistical challenge at the major-games level, proximal (external) sources of support seem to take on added importance. The high performance aspiring athlete requires an ever –widening circle of support infrastructure in order to remain personally confident of the likelihood of success when faced with major games tournament challenge. It is at that point of athletic development where support infrastructure mechanisms, and how they provide their respective and collaborative types of service to athletes, taken on considerable importance as factors affecting the bottom-line performance results that high-performance athletes, their sports organizations and national governments hope for. Various examples of elite and Olympic level athletes have shown that a wider social support factor was an important moderator for their sustaining motivation in sports, combating stressful moments and in achieving success in their sport. Not much is known about the scenario of Indian sportspersons in this regard. This prompted the research scholar to undertake the present study exploring the dynamics of support infrastructure, coping style and self concept among Indian sportspersons belonging to various sports disciplines.
The study would definitely highlight the need for behavioural interventions in personal and formal support infrastructure mechanisms for sportspersons in India. It would help in providing possible suggestions for the refinement of support infrastructure educational systems across various sports disciplines including the national sports organizations. It would be of assistance to the sports psychologists and mental training experts to develop standardize pre-competitive protocols for athletes with respect to their personal and support infrastructure mechanisms which enable better coping styles in competitive situations.