





Development, Implementation, and Evaluation of an Athlete-Informed Mental Skills Training Program for Elite Youth Tennis Players

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Informed by athletes' psychological needs, the current qualitative study developed, implemented, and evaluated a 15-month mental skills training (MST) program for elite youth athletes. The MST was divided into 3 phases that included a 9-month preintervention, a 2-month intervention, and a 4-month evaluation phase. The intervention consisted of 3 interactive workshops that were delivered to 11 competitive British youth tennis players (8–15 years of age) and their coach (age 34). The intervention was informed by data that were collected throughout a 9-month preintervention phase including longitudinal observations, field notes, and semistructured interviews. The intervention was evaluated over 4 months through observations, field notes, athlete-workshop data, and a semistructured interview with the coach. Results reinforced the value of the longitudinal preintervention phase by highlighting that the establishment of rapport between the researcher and athletes enhanced the meaningfulness and content of the MST program. In addition, an increase in athletes' use and regulation of psychological skills and characteristics (PSCs) was identified as a result of athletes' improved understanding of psychological skills (i.e., self-talk, imagery, performance routines) and characteristics (i.e., focus, emotional control, PSCs). Finally, the MST program fostered a shared subject-specific language between athletes and their coach, enhancing the openness and frequency with which PSCs were talked about. Practical guidelines for future sport psychology interventions with youth athletes and their coaches are provided.

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