

Leis, O, Meichsner, N and Swettenham, LD

Exploring Esports Players' Perspectives on Sport Psychology Support An Interview Study

<https://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/id/eprint/27241/>

Article

Citation (please note it is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from this work)

**Leis, O, Meichsner, N and Swettenham, LD ORCID logoORCID:
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7010-6543> (2025) Exploring Esports Players'
Perspectives on Sport Psychology Support An Interview Study. Team
Performance Management. ISSN 1352-7592**

LJMU has developed **[LJMU Research Online](#)** for users to access the research output of the University more effectively. Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may download and/or print one copy of any article(s) in LJMU Research Online to facilitate their private study or for non-commercial research. You may not engage in further distribution of the material or use it for any profit-making activities or any commercial gain.

The version presented here may differ from the published version or from the version of the record. Please see the repository URL above for details on accessing the published version and note that access may require a subscription.

For more information please contact researchonline@ljmu.ac.uk

Exploring Esports Players' Perspectives on Sport Psychology Support An Interview Study

Oliver Leis¹, Nicolas Meichsner¹, Laura D. Swettenham²

¹Leipzig University, Germany, ²Liverpool John Moores University, United Kingdom

Published in

Team Performance Management: An International Journal

Purpose: Acknowledging the prospective role of sport psychology support in esports, current research remains limited, hindering evidence-based practices within esports. The present study addresses this gap by exploring players' awareness, attitudes, and expectations towards sport psychology support including their views on sport psychology practitioners. Additionally, the study aims to understand the players' perspectives on perceived benefits of sport psychology support.

Methodology: Through criterion-based sampling, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six male professional players (Mage = 23.00; SD = 2.83 years). Thematic reflective analysis was facilitated by the use of MAXQDA Plus 2020 software.

Findings: The study reveals positive attitudes among esports players towards sport psychology support, despite initial skepticism from one participant. Participants emphasized the importance of addressing esports' unique challenges and recognized the role of sport psychology in fostering awareness and teamwork, especially in communication. Key elements identified in their engagement with sport psychology practitioners included trust, empathy, and personalized approaches. Participants reported benefits including improved team cohesion, individual performance, and well-being, highlighting the perceived positive impact of sport psychology support within esports.

Originality: This is the first study to explore esports players' perceptions and experiences of sport psychology support, shedding light on the potential benefits and challenges. By employing qualitative methodologies and focusing on the nuanced perspectives of professional players, this research expands our understanding of the role of sport psychology in esports and its implications for player well-being and performance.

Keywords: electronic sport, sport psychology support, performance psychology, well-being, intervention strategies

Successful performance in esports has been associated with high levels of confidence, sustained focus, and immersion in flow states (Poulus et al., 2022a). However, esports players must also demonstrate their performance while managing the demands of the competitive environment (e.g., Leis et al., 2022; Poulus et al., 2022b). A systematic review highlighted stressors in esports research, including defeats, performance pressure, communication challenges within the team, unfavorable team plays, audience reactions, social media scrutiny, and the difficulty of balancing life commitments (Leis et al., 2024). Despite the increasing research attention on esports, including areas such as cognition (see review by Pedraza-Ramirez et al., 2020) and stress (see reviews by Leis et al., 2020; 2024), the exploration of sport psychology support in esports remains limited. While initial strides have been made towards the development of esports-specific interventions enhancing team cohesion (Swettenham & Whitehead, 2022), appraisal focused (Behnke et al., 2024; Sharpe et al., 2024), and coping strategies (Poulus et al., 2023), there remains a need for further investigation and refinement of existing interventions allowing them to be more context specific. Similarly, equipping practitioners to be contextually aware may allow them to create bespoke interventions using preexisting approaches. In addition, it's worth highlighting the increasing involvement of sport psychology practitioners (SPP) in the esports (e.g., Leis et al., 2023). With increased professionals entering esports, there is a growing recognition of the need for tailored psychological support for players (e.g., Leis et al., 2024). Indeed, researchers argue that SPP could be an essential part of esports teams (e.g., García-Lanzo et al., 2020; Watson et al., 2021). Although a handful of case studies on intervention strategies and applied practice in esports have been published (e.g., Agrawal et al., 2024; Brain et al., 2024b), the literature base is still limited, particularly for one-to-one interventions with esports players (Swettenham et al., 2024a). This issue limits the assurance of ethical and professional standards and restricts the adherence to guidelines set forth by associations such as the Association for Applied Sport Psychology (2011). Without contextual awareness of the esports high performance environment or a solid understanding of effective intervention methods, practitioners may struggle to provide competent and conscientious support.

Addressing this gap requires delving into the experiences of esports players who are receiving support from SPP. By exploring what players perceive as beneficial qualities in practitioners and understanding the outcomes of the support they receive, researchers and practitioners can gain valuable insights into effective practices, delivery of support, and areas for improvement. This study not only serves to enrich our understanding of sport psychology in esports but also supports the development of evidence-based guidelines and interventions tailored specifically to the unique challenges and demands of the esports environment. Therefore, the primary objective of this study is to explore esports players' perceptions of sport psychology support within esports, and the factors influencing the evaluation of SPP.

According to the American Psychological Association (APA, 2011), applied sport psychology is defined as "the study and application of psychological principles of human performance in helping athletes consistently perform in the upper range of their capabilities and more thoroughly enjoy the sport performance process" (p. 9). In short, applied sport psychology encompasses the identification, development, and implementation of mental and emotional skills, aimed at reducing performance inhibitors, and improving athletic environments for optimal performance and positive experiences. In numerous countries, the term "psychologist" is legally protected, requiring practitioners to meet specific qualifications and standards (Keegan, 2015). Sport and exercise psychologists undergo rigorous, regulated training with supervised practice to ensure the highest ethical and competency standards. Sport psychology consultants gain expertise through a Master of Science degree or equivalent education in sport psychology, but may not have the same level of supervised experience as sport and exercise psychologists (for differentiation of roles and competencies, see Swettenham et al., 2024b). Despite these differences, both roles share a multitude of similarities and aim to support well-being and performance in performance environments. For the purpose of this manuscript, we refer to both sport and exercise psychologists and sport psychology consultants collectively as SPP.

Research has shed light on various aspects of sport psychology support among practitioners, such as self-care (e.g., Quartiroli et al., 2019), professional identity (see review by Quartiroli et

al., 2021), and professional development (e.g., McEwan et al., 2019; 2023). Similarly, perceptions of SPP have been documented in traditional sports such as soccer (e.g., Pain & Harwood, 2004; Heaney, 2011), ice hockey (Dunn & Holt, 2003), rugby league (Green et al., 2012), and youth athletics, swimming, and triathlon (Bell et al., 2022). Researchers have gathered perceptions from a variety of coaches, managers, directors, physiotherapists, and athletes. Broadly, perceptions of sport psychology were varied, with multiple factors impacting the effectiveness and use of sport psychology support (e.g., knowledge and experience of sport psychology, characteristics of the sport psychologist, perceived value of sport psychology, role and service clarity; Bell et al., 2022; Pain & Harwood, 2004). Suggestions made to enable effective sport psychology practice include educating athletes on the benefits of sport psychology from a young age (Bell et al., 2022), educating coaches about sport psychology (Bell et al., 2022), and utilizing language appropriate to the sporting context and audience (Pain & Harwood, 2004). Further, Green et al. (2012) noted characteristics of effective SPP included having good knowledge of the sport, and familiarity with the athlete and their career. Conversely, sport psychology practices can be negatively impacted by the perceptions of significant others or coaches and the stigma associated with psychology (Green et al., 2012). A lack of engagement or value placed on sport psychology may hinder the effectiveness of service delivery (e.g., Pain & Harwood, 2004). In 2022, a systematic review highlighted essential traits of effective SPP: they build strong bonds with athletes through interpersonal skills and knowledge, foster genuine relationships based on openness and realistic perceptions, inspire hope and appropriate expectations, encourage active engagement in the change process, and adapt to clients' contexts (Tod et al., 2022).

Although more recent research highlights the benefits of sport psychology support in esports (e.g., Cottrell et al., 2018; Leis et al., 2023), our current understanding is constrained. Initial studies have begun to shed light on various aspects, including the role of SPP in drafting esports teams (Brain et al., 2024a), experiences of delivering sport psychology support in esports (e.g., Agrawal et al., 2024), and the application of stress management strategies by SPP (Leis et al., 2023). Studies also outline challenges in esports service provision, including integrating

technology, online communication barriers, accessibility, and the novel context for sport psychology support (Cottrell et al., 2018; Horne et al., 2024). Additionally, research indicates that sport psychology support in esports extends beyond SPP, with roles like mental coaches and performance coaches providing support without standardized training, potentially limiting their effectiveness (Leis et al., 2023; Watson et al., 2020). Qualified SPP bring unique competencies to esports, distinct from other roles (Swettenham et al., 2024b), yet research on players' perspectives and the impact of sport psychology support remains limited despite initial studies (e.g., Leis et al., 2023; Swettenham et al., 2024b).

Study Purpose

While sport psychology research has provided insights into sport psychology support among athletes (e.g., Bell et al., 2022; Tod et al., 2022), our understanding of effective sport psychology practice in esports remains limited. However, the demands posed on esports players require tailored support strategies, facilitating effective and competent sport psychology provision (e.g., Leis et al., 2021). A first step to increase the body of knowledge and support the information and delivery of appropriate sport psychology support is to explore how esports players experience current sport psychology support and the associated outcomes. This study aims to provide initial insights into: (i) players' awareness, attitudes, and expectations regarding sports psychology support; (ii) their perceptions of both the support provided and the practitioners delivering it; and (iii) the perceived benefits of such support. Specifically, this study aims to explore the following research questions: How do players perceive their awareness of sport psychology support?; What expectations and attitudes do players have regarding the support they receive?; What factors do players believe influence the effectiveness of sport psychology support?; What benefits do players experience as a result of receiving such support? The findings from this research can provide valuable insights, enabling a greater awareness among SPP that are currently not working in esports due to a lack of knowledge or understanding of the potential benefits their support can offer in this context.

Method

The study employed a qualitative approach to explore the assessment of qualities in SPP within esports and the impact of their support on professional players. This methodological choice

was guided by the philosophical framework of critical realism (Bhaskar & Bhaskar, 1979; Ronkainen & Wiltshire, 2021; Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021). Through semi-structured interviews, diverse perspectives were captured to illuminate subjective understandings within esports. Critical realism was adopted to integrate a perspective that investigates underlying structures and mechanisms, while emphasizing individual experiences.

Reflexivity Statement

To engage reflexively with the data, we reflected on our personal experiences and how they may have influenced the analysis. I (Author 1) am a male, postdoctoral research assistant and applied sport psychologist, with research focusing on sport psychology in esports, including qualitative research. I (Author 2) am a male, German master's student with experience as an esports player. Although I had limited experience with qualitative research before this study, I was supported by the first author throughout the process. I (Author 3) am a female sport and exercise psychologist and lecturer based in the UK. I have experience working in various team and individual sports and esports., I was not directly involved in the interviews or data analysis and was able to act as a critical friend during the later stages of theme refinement.

Participants

Six male professional esports players participated in this study, including two League of Legends players and four Counter-Strike: Global Offensive players. Their ages ranged from 20 to 26 years ($M = 23.00$, $SD = 2.19$ years), with an average of 2.83 years of experience in professional esports ($SD = 2.15$). On average, they had 4.67 months of experience receiving support from sport psychology professionals ($SD = 3.44$). According to the participants, sport psychology support was provided by six SPP. Although players were only recruited if they reported that they were supported by sport psychologists, the exact role description and qualification level of the sport psychologist were not documented, representing a limitation. Due to this, the term sport psychology practitioner will be used throughout. Out of the six participants, three players received online support, while one received both online and offline support, and the remaining two players had offline sessions on a regular basis. Of the participants, four were from Germany, one from Austria, and one from Denmark.

Inclusion criteria required participants to be: 1) be over 18 years of age, 2) possess a minimum of one year of experience in professional esports, 3) be proficient in English or German, 4) have received support from a sport psychologist, and 5) were male. A player was considered a professional esports player if they had played for at least one year in a team affiliated with a recognized esports organization, demonstrated professional structures within the organization (evidenced by the presence of sponsors, team coaches, analysts, and sport psychologists), and generated income through their work as an esports athlete. Furthermore, only male participants were chosen to omit potential gender differences in the perception of sport psychology support, warranting separate investigation.

Procedure

Participants were purposefully recruited through direct outreach to esports organizations and teams, following Patton's approach (2002). Initially, 34 esports organizations and teams were contacted, yielding responses from seven clubs (21%). However, players from six clubs either failed to meet eligibility criteria or lacked availability. Consequently, the recruitment strategy was adjusted to directly contact esports players via X (formerly known as Twitter). Out of 71 players contacted, 21 responded (30%), with six meeting the eligibility criteria (8.5%). Upon obtaining informed consent, interviews were conducted according to each participant's preference, using either Skype or Discord for audio communication. OBS Studio was utilized to record online interviews, with no other individuals present during the interview process. Interviews were conducted between October 2020 and December 2020, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Interviews lasted an average of 39 minutes ($SD = 9.2$). Following each interview, demographic data was collected, and participants were given the opportunity to provide feedback on their interview experience and engage in informal discussion about their experience. This study adhered to the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki and the ethical guidelines of the American Psychological Association.

Interview Guide

Semi-structured interview guides were developed for this study following recommendations by Kallio et al. (2016). This format allowed for interviewer flexibility, enabling participants to express individual perspectives while maintaining conversational

flow. The guides were collaboratively created by the first and second authors to explore esports players' perceptions of the relevance and benefits of sport psychology support (e.g., "How has sport psychology support impacted you?"), their experiences with the support (e.g., "What aspects of working with a sport psychology practitioner did you appreciate?"), and factors influencing their perceptions (e.g., "What do you consider effective support?"). Following initial drafting and discussion, the guides were piloted with two esports players meeting the study's inclusion criteria. This pilot phase resulted in adjustments to streamline certain questions and introduce additional prompts to elicit comparisons with past competitive experiences (e.g., "Can you contrast this experience with previous competitive encounters and highlight any differences?").

Data Analysis

Qualitative data collected for analysis was transcribed using the f4transkript program and adhered to Dresing and Pehl's (2018) content-semantic transcription guidelines, focusing on simplicity, readability, and capturing spoken content. The subsequent inductive analysis was conducted by the first author and second researcher, following reflective thematic analysis principles outlined by Braun et al. (2016) and Braun & Clarke (2020). This process involved familiarizing themselves with the data, coding, generating initial themes, reviewing, defining, naming themes, and contextualizing the analysis. The first and second author thoroughly read and re-read the transcripts, noting initial ideas. Using MAXQDA Plus 2020 software, they created initial codes, which were then applied independently on a line-by-line basis. The final set of codes encompassed: i) players' awareness, expectations, and attitudes; ii) perceptions of the support and practitioner, and iii) perceived benefits of sport psychology support. These categories were discussed between the two researchers to refine coding and ensure comprehensive coverage to identify and address blind spots (e.g., Smith & McGannon, 2018). The researchers focused on key narratives and thematic structures during analysis, discarding minor themes such as differences between individual and group support due to limited participant responses. For example, based on this discussion, the initial concept of examining the positive aspects, barriers, and effectiveness of sport psychology support was refined to focus on presenting the factors perceived as most

important. As the analysis progressed, contextual examination of codes and quotes considered existing sport psychology literature (e.g., Tod et al., 2022). German quotes deemed valuable for inclusion were translated into English by a bilingual researcher (A1), with feedback on their clarity and value provided by a third researcher. This iterative process ensured quotes were effectively contextualized within the manuscript, enhancing overall coherence and relevance. The third author critically reviewed the final set of codes, themes, and supporting quotes, posing questions, offering alternative perspectives, and prompting deeper reflection. This process led to a deeper examination of the connections between codes and themes, resulting in their merging and refinement. This also led to the inclusion of additional quotes where further support was needed. Esports players' names were replaced with pseudonyms.

Rigor

Given the limited experience of the author who conducted the interviews, close collaboration with the first author was maintained, and two pilot interviews were carried out. After these pilot interviews, the experiences were discussed, leading to revisions of the interview guide and further preparation for Author 2 to conduct the final interviews. Additionally, a researcher not present during data collection reviewed the analysis helped challenge assumptions, raise critical questions, and ensure a balanced understanding of the data. Reflecting on your personal experience with esports helped questioning potential gaps in your understanding, ensuring to remain aware of these limitations when interpreting the data. The third author, acting as a critical friend, reviewed the content provided by the first and second authors, raising key questions and prompting follow-up discussions. Furthermore, thick description was used to provide rich, detailed accounts of the participants' experiences, deepening our understanding (e.g., Waldron et al., 2011). Negative case analysis was also employed to examine data that contradicted emerging themes, encouraging us to question our interpretations and reflect on cases that did not align with previous research (e.g., Sparkes & Smith, 2013). This approach ensured a more comprehensive and nuanced interpretation of the findings.

Results

In line with the study's aims, the findings are presented in three main sections: i) players' awareness, attitudes, and expectations towards sport psychology support, ii) perception of the support and practitioner, and iii) perceived benefits of sport psychology support.

Awareness, Expectations, and Attitudes

Players exhibited a growing awareness of the role of sport psychology in esports. They first encountered sport psychology support in esports between 2015 and 2019, a period that coincided with the early stages of their professional careers, which began between 2013 to 2019. The players learned about sport psychology support through organizations that attributed their success to such support. For instance, Mark recalled that his team faced issues with performance anxiety until they began working with a sport psychologist, a move that gained attention in the broader esports community. Similarly, Benjamin noted the increasing visibility of sport psychology in the media, particularly after a team's victory at a major tournament in 2017, which was attributed to their inclusion of a sport psychologist. Mike discovered sport psychology support through his own organization, which had hired a sport psychologist.

Overall, players expressed positive attitudes toward sport psychology support before their initial sessions. For instance, Phil stated, "I was looking forward to it. I think it's something really good, and I found it great to have the opportunity to take advantage of it." However, some players experienced a shift in their attitudes over time. Matthew, for instance, initially enjoyed the benefits of sport psychology but began to perceive diminishing returns toward the end of his engagement. On the other hand, his initial skepticism gradually waned as he recognized the ongoing benefits of the support. Craig acknowledged that his initial expectations had been unrealistic:

I think I had too many expectations, actually. [...] I thought that they were some kind of super sick psychological magicians. That you just, like, express symptoms and then immediately get everything told to you. But basically, a lot of questions are asked, and they just try to slowly approach how you perceive yourself and how you understand yourself more.

Despite this, the majority of participants expressed satisfaction with the inclusion of a sport psychology practitioner, emphasizing the

positive impact it had on their team environment. Benjamin articulated the collective sentiment, stating, "It would be very unfortunate to lose this support."

Importance of Empathy, Trust, and Individualization

The players emphasized that the success of the support was closely tied to the practitioner's ability to build trust, emphasize with the players, and provide individualized support. For example, Craig stressed the importance of feeling comfortable during sessions, highlighting the necessity of confidentiality and an absence of judgement: "I think the most important thing is that you really feel comfortable while you're talking and that you don't have the feeling that you're not somehow being judged or that everything you say is not confidential". Other participants, including Mike, Craig, and Phil, echoed this sentiment, appreciating the trust and openness they experienced with their sport psychologists. Craig specifically valued the supportive, non-judgmental attitude of their sport psychologist, who became a figure similar to a close friend, offering objective feedback even when the players' behaviors needed correction. Phil emphasized the importance of building a personal connection with the practitioner, explaining that it was not about immediate judgment but about getting to know the person and appreciating their character. For Phil and others, perceiving the sport psychologist as more like a friend and helper rather than an assigned professional was a key factor in the support's effectiveness. The importance of empathy and personal connection in the relationship was discussed by Craig as follows:

Yeah, that you've just become more open with the person and that you've realized, that you've noticed that the chemistry really is there, how you can talk to each other about it. And I really enjoyed that, having a person with whom I, at least personally, I felt that it's completely independent of the profession, and that we talk about the profession, but that we have such a neutral perspective on it, which is still there but quite objective. And I think, for me, that was something quite nice to have.

Furthermore, players emphasized the importance of individualized support. Some players expressed frustration with sessions that followed a rigid schedule, while others, like Mike, appreciated the flexibility to request personalized sessions based on individual needs, allowing participants to approach the sport psychologist and make appointments as needed.

Phil also appreciated the flexibility, noting that he could contact the sport psychologist at any time and receive a response. Craig highlighted issues with a one-size-fits all approach, stating:

These are very individual topics, and you have to fit the whole team into one shoe. And that doesn't always work. Or at least it's not the case that the whole team has the same problem that you can solve in one session. I think that will rarely happen.

A few players, like Benjamin, highlighted that the sport psychologist's understanding of the esports environment was crucial for effective support. He emphasized the importance of having at least a basic understanding of the sport, noting that sport psychologists need to be informed about the specific context.

However, the participants also noted negative experiences when they perceived a lack of trust or felt that the practitioner was not genuinely invested in their well-being. For example, Mike shared a negative view of a psychologist who appeared more aligned with the interests of the organization than with the players' needs. Additionally, participants reported dissatisfaction when the support remained too theoretical, underscoring the importance of applying psychological principles to practical, real-world situations in esports. Mike, for instance, criticized theoretical advice that felt disconnected from the individual's unique challenges, preferring more personalized, context-specific approaches.

Lastly, players underscored the importance of the sport psychologist's genuine interest in their personal and professional development. Phil expressed this by stating, stating: "He doesn't just tell me that because it's his job, but he says it because I felt like he was really interested in me personally advancing". Additionally, Phil appreciated that their sport psychologist genuinely embodied the methods he taught. He noted,

Especially, with him, you could tell that he didn't just say it, but he really lived it too. You just sensed that, so he was just with us at the boot camp, and you just noticed that he wasn't just talking, but he really lived it. And that definitely helped.

In sum, Phil's quote effectively encapsulates what players valued in sport psychology support, highlighting the relationship with the practitioner and individualization of the support:

Trust. Closeness. That you don't have the feeling that you're talking to someone external. That you know who you're talking to. That the support is

individual, that it's not because your teammate does it that way, you have to do it too, but that you as a human being receive individual support.

Perceived Benefits of Sport Psychology Support

The players discussed significant improvements in several areas due to sport psychology support, particularly in team cohesion, communication, and performance. Mike noted that his sense of belonging within the team had significantly increased, highlighting a stronger connection with the group. Additionally, Benjamin and Matthew emphasized the positive impact of open communication, which facilitated faster conflict resolution within the team. Benjamin remarked:

That you just come onto the server and are still open with each other, without causing any conflicts, because you're used to it from mental training or generally from the meetings after training, before training, from the way you interact with each other, because you're already used to it. You have absolutely no problem being open with each other because you're used to it. And this, in turn, means that you make progress much faster because you know, okay, I don't have to pay attention to exactly how I phrase it now, but I know my counterpart can handle it. And vice versa, he also knows that I can handle it and we can just speak openly with each other and no one misses out, and we can continue to develop.

Matthew added to this by highlighting how a sport psychologist helps address team dynamics, stating:

Every time there is a team, then there is always some kind of toxins or toxicity within the team, but if you have a sport psychologist I think you are slowly removing all the toxins, and then it's way easier to improve because everyone will be open-minded and everyone will be able to talk freely about the issues that they see.

Mike further explained that the social dynamics in esports, especially for young players, could benefit from sport psychology support in navigating interpersonal challenges. He observed that many players enter esports with limited social experience and, as a result, struggle to manage stress and integrate into team structures. He added:

Esports is an environment where people usually come in who are actually a bit socially backward, I would say. They don't necessarily know how to behave in a competitive environment, how they actually need to act, and how they actually need to behave.

Craig emphasized the importance of sport psychology in fostering team compatibility and collaborative problem-solving, which he viewed as essential for long-term success. Mike echoed this by comparing sport psychology support to the guidance provided by elementary school teachers, who help players develop awareness and interpersonal skills necessary for success in esports. Players reported that improved team dynamics also strengthened their relationship with the coach. Matthew noted that the sport psychologist helped resolve team issues, improving coach-player relations, while Mike felt the psychologist allowed the coach to adopt a different role, easing the pressure to be the sole trusted figure.

Beyond team dynamics, players noted that sport psychology support also contributed to individual performance. Matthew observed that the support helped him address misbehavior during games, ultimately leading to improved performance. Mark described how sport psychology interventions helped him maintain a more consistent level of performance, noting that while everyone experiences intense and bad games, the support helped him have good games more frequently and reduce the occurrence of bad games. In addition, players highlighted the impact of sport psychology support on their ability to cope with setbacks and defeats. For example, Mark explained that sport psychology helped him to understand that bad games are normal and not a reason to lose confidence. Similarly, Matthew shared that the support provided him with methods to regain composure during negative game sequences. Moreover, Benjamin reflected on how sport psychology support helped him manage his emotions both within esports and in his personal life:

When something annoys me now, and at first I might just want to get angry, but I've learned in mental training, because I can't use that in the game, that I don't get angry and that I can deal with the emotions. Then it also helps me in real life.

This ability to manage emotions more effectively extended not only to their esports performance but also their personal lives. Players recognized benefits of sport psychology support outside of esports. For instance, Mark shared that the support made him more reflective, helping him become more conscious and aware of different aspects of his life. He found this process helpful, even though it didn't always provide immediate solutions or involve direct advice. Similarly, Matthew emphasized the role of

reflective questions in increasing his awareness, explaining that being asked reflective questions, rather than receiving direct answers, helped him stay more engaged and allowed him to remember the solutions better. Phil also highlighted the positive impact on his interpersonal relationships, noting that by gaining a better understanding of himself, he was able to learn more about others on an interpersonal level. As Mike expressed, this growth extended beyond individual performance and positively impacted team dynamics:

The thing is, when you're the best version of yourself, automatically, you become a better part of the whole picture, and if everyone is the best version of themselves, the whole thing automatically, well, improves because of that. And I think, when everyone has this individual support, it just made it easier for everyone to become a better player and at the same time, a better teammate. Consequently, the biggest difference is simply that every single person could work on their problems and had building blocks they could implement in their lives. These blocks just helped them to become more positive, balanced, and simply better, in that sense.

Discussion

The aim of the present qualitative study was to provide insights into three main aspects: players' awareness, attitudes, and expectations towards sport psychology support; players' perception of the support and practitioner; and the perceived benefits derived from such support. The findings demonstrate that the esports players' attitudes towards sport psychology support were positive, though perceptions evolved over time, with one player expressing initial skepticism. The participants discussed characteristics of effective SPP and the importance of trust, confidentiality, empathy, and individualization. Furthermore, participants emphasized the importance of managing the unique demands of esports (e.g., communication issues, game updates) and highlighted the role of sport psychology in nurturing awareness and teamwork (e.g., communication). They further reported benefits including improved team cohesion, individual performance, and personal well-being, indicating the broad impact of sport psychology support in esports (i.e., supporting the person and the performer).

In line with our findings, early research in traditional sport highlighted effective characteristics of sport psychologists, including flexibility, openness, likeability, and accessibility, which fostered rapport with athletes

(Partington & Orlick, 1987; Orlick & Partington, 1987). These findings are reinforced by evidence, emphasizing the importance of consultants being open, trustworthy, and capable of building strong athlete relationships (Sharp & Hodge, 2011; 2014). Drawing from previous research (Katz & Keyes, 2020), unconditional positive regard (e.g., holding no judgement on the client, accepting the client fully) was reported by multiple participants in the current study. This suggests that drawing on person-centered or counselling skills may be beneficial within esports, representing an alternative to delivering theoretical workshops and allowing the practitioner to focus on the person alongside the performer. Consistent with our findings, Tod et al.'s (2022) review emphasized that effective practitioners in traditional sport settings build strong rapport and interpersonal connections with athletes, foster genuine relationships grounded in openness and realistic perceptions, instill hope and appropriate expectations, encourage active engagement in the change process, and adapt effectively to the environments in which their clients operate. Unlike previous research in esports (Brain et al., 2024b; Ramaker & Pedraza-Ramirez, 2023), this study did not emphasize the need for deep esports domain knowledge among practitioners. While understanding esports-specific terminology may be beneficial (Brain et al., 2024c), participants prioritized trust and confidentiality, suggesting these are not taken for granted by esports players.

The importance of confidentiality within professional esports may stem from the ever-changing nature of this unique high-performance environment—where roster changes and game updates impact careers—leading players to fear unauthorized information sharing. Confidentiality and ethical standards may be further exacerbated by practitioners' involvement in the player drafting process (Brain et al., 2024b). While Ramaker and Pedraza-Ramirez (2023) discuss practitioners acting as a bridge between management, players, and coaches, blurring client distinctions, McDougall et al. (2015) recommend a "being a part and apart" approach to effectively navigate multiple relationships. Moreover, the use of multiple role titles, sometimes without official certification (Swettenham et al., 2024), could further contribute to these concerns. Due to the risk of unqualified practitioners working in esports, it is important to reinforce, to stakeholders and practitioners, that ethical standards and

therapeutic skills are paramount when working within an esports context.

Participants discussed how sport psychology practitioners support with communication, team cohesion and performance, suggesting esports-specific interventions targeting these areas may be of benefit. This aligns with previous literature highlighting the stressors faced by esports players, including communication challenges, performance pressure, social media and public scrutiny, and frequent game updates (e.g., Leis et al., 2024), as well as case study interventions within esports contexts (Swettenham et al., 2024a). Such case studies highlight the value of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (Brain et al., 2024b; Swettenham et al., 2022) and Personal-Disclosure Mutual-Sharing (Agrawal et al., 2024), with other research recognizing the utility of Psychological Skills Training in esports (Leis et al., 2023). Alongside performance focused interventions, the current study reinforces the importance of sport psychology practitioners implementing interventions in esports focused on well-being, long-term development, and personal growth (e.g., Brown & Fletcher, 2017; Lochbaum et al., 2022). Independent of the intervention approach, research, including the current study, emphasizes the importance of personalized support and how each esports team and individual must be considered on a case-by-case basis after a thorough needs analysis (Brain et al., 2024c).

Limitations

Data collection was conducted exclusively through online platforms (i.e., Skype and Discord). This methodological approach introduces potential biases and limitations associated with virtual communication, such as technical issues, distractions, and the absence of non-verbal cues, which may have influenced participant responses and interactions. The limited sample size (six male participants) and relatively short data collection period may have constrained the depth of insights into players' experiences. For example, females are currently underrepresented in research in esports (DiNicola et al., 2024) and it is important for future research to recruit and value the perspectives of female participants. Including females in the current study will have provided further insights into sport psychology support in esports, as female players may experience different demands relating to toxicity and sexual harassment (e.g., Leis et al., 2024), which could play a crucial role

in shaping their support needs (e.g., Leis et al., 2024).

Additionally, participants had varying levels of familiarity with sport psychology support, with most having minimal prior exposure. Although this implies that their reports about the initial perception of the sport psychology support seem more accurate, limited experience might have shaped their evaluation of the outcome of sport psychology support, potentially overlooking nuances or complexities that more seasoned individuals could provide. A limitation of this study is that interviews during the COVID-19 pandemic may have amplified players' need for support, potentially leading to more positive views on sport psychology. Moreover, the absence of assessment regarding the sport psychologists' role titles and training backgrounds also limits the understanding of our findings. Consequently, the findings may not fully capture the breadth of experiences among individuals with extensive engagement in sport psychology support.

Future Research

Future research could employ experimental designs to establish causal effects of sport psychology support interventions on esports outcomes such as performance and mental health. Controlled interventions comparing different treatment conditions would strengthen our understanding about relationships between sport psychology support and performance, well-being, and team dynamics. For instance, teambuilding interventions, supported by player discussions on benefits and existing stressor research (Leis et al., 2024), could be studied for their effects (e.g., Swettenham et al., 2022). Exploring different esports along with demographic factors such as age, gender, and experience level could shed light on how these variables impact the effectiveness and acceptance of sport psychology support, ultimately guiding more tailored and effective interventions.

Future research should also examine the roles of sport psychology practitioners, including but not limited to their qualifications, experience, forms of support (e.g., online vs. offline; one-on-one vs. group workshops), and backgrounds (e.g., Swettenham et al., 2024b). Incorporating qualitative methodologies such as diaries or longitudinal studies would offer deeper insights into athletes' experiences over time, capturing developmental nuances. Further research could also include perspectives of and effects on other

organizational members (e.g., coaches, physiotherapists) to enhance understanding of integrating sport psychology support within esports teams (Pain & Harwood, 2004; Heaney, 2006). Examining sport psychologists' perspectives, challenges, and opportunities in esports (e.g., Cotterill et al., 2018) could deepen our understanding, and provide a different perspective on awareness, expectations and attitudes, factors believed to benefit support, and perceived benefits. Furthermore, investigating psychological processes involved in esports athletes' appraisal of challenges, coping strategies, and use of support mechanisms during stress would clarify intervention mechanisms and inform targeted approaches. Detailed insights into need analysis and case formulation in delivering sport psychology services to esports athletes (e.g., Leis et al., 2023) are crucial for optimizing support effectiveness. Moreover, research should consider the training and qualifications of sport psychology practitioners to ensure comprehensive insights (e.g., Swettenham et al., 2024b).

Practical Implications

The findings and previous research (e.g., Cottrell et al., 2018), suggest integrating SPP into esports teams can provide various benefits, including improved team cohesion, communication, and performance. Teams and organizations involved in esports may consider incorporating these professionals into their support staff to enhance player well-being and performance (e.g., García-Lanzo et al., 2020; Watson et al., 2020). Effective sport psychology support should be personalized, evidence-based, and grounded in trust and empathy, while also maintaining professional boundaries (e.g., Brain et al., 2024c). Despite the challenges posed by the dynamic esports environment (e.g., frequent staff and roster changes), sport psychology support should prioritize proactive approaches like well-being interventions and culture development for long-term effectiveness (e.g., Swettenham et al., 2021). However, practitioners shouldn't be expected to share sensitive information (Swettenham et al., 2021). In esports, as in traditional sports, performance-driven environments can create ethical challenges, such as breaches of confidentiality or role confusion, often stemming from limited stakeholder understanding (Andersen, 2005). To navigate this, practitioners should clearly communicate ethical boundaries and expectations with both stakeholders and players (Moore, 2003). Factors

such as individual differences, context, and esports' unique demands should guide tailored support strategies. SPP's approach might involve integrating into the team while maintaining professional detachment, as recommended by McDougall et al. (2015). This balance helps navigate relationships and build supportive connections with players. Collaboration with coaches, managers, and support staff promises greater impact, creating a cohesive environment for player development. Additionally, reflective practices, as highlighted by Wadsworth et al. (2021), could further enhance SPPs' professional growth. Individuals seeking sport psychology support might find value in consulting the guide for locating a sport psychology practitioner outlined by Swettenham et al. (2024). Teams without dedicated SPP may benefit from collaborating with supervised trainees, adhering to professional guidelines

Conclusion

In conclusion, this is the first study to explore esports players' perceptions of sport psychology support. Players generally expressed positive attitudes, emphasizing trust, empathy, and individualization as key factors for effective sport psychology support. They also highlighted the importance of confidentiality, likely reflecting an ongoing concern in the field regarding the sharing of sensitive information. Players emphasized positive impacts both within and beyond esports, including improved team cohesion, communication, and performance, as well as greater self-awareness and the ability to grow into better versions of themselves. These findings support prior research advocating for sport psychology integration in esports (e.g., Swettenham et al., 2024b). Future research should explore qualified practitioners' approaches, long-term player development, and tailored intervention strategies. While services must prioritize trust and confidentiality, maintaining professional boundaries and self-care is equally important.

Funding

This research did not receive grants from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

References

- Agrawal, A., Gupta, S., & Swettenham, L. (2024). Same game, many cultures: A multicultural reflection on a trainee's intervention work with a professional esports team. *Case Studies in Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 8(1), 36–45. <https://doi.org/10.1123/cssep.2023-0032>.
- American Psychological Association. (2011). What is exercise psychology and sport psychology? <https://www.apadivisions.org/division-47/about/resources/what-is>
- Andersen, M. B. (2005). 'Yeah, I work with Beckham': Issues of confidentiality, privacy and privilege in sport psychology service delivery. *Sport & Exercise Psychology Review*, 1(2), 5–13.
- Association for Applied Sport Psychology [AASP] (2011). Ethics code: AASP ethical principles and standards. <https://appliedsportpsych.org/about/ethics/ethics-code/>
- Bhaskar, R., & Bhaskar, R. (1979). *Philosophy and the human sciences: A philosophical critique of the contemporary human sciences. The possibility of naturalism*. Harvester Press.
- Behnke, M., Lakens, D., Petrova, K., Chwiłkowska, P., Białek, S. J., Kłosowski, M., Krzyżaniak, W., Maciejewski, P., Kaczmarek, L. D., Szymański, K., Jamieson, J. P., & Gross, J. J. (2024). Applying a synergistic mindsets intervention to an esports context. *Royal Society Open Science*, 11(6), 240691. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsos.240691>
- Bell, A. F., Knight, C. J., Lovett, V. E., & Shearer, C. (2022). Understanding elite youth athletes' knowledge and perceptions of sport psychology. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 34(1), 155–177.
- Brain, J., Wright, O., Quartiroli, A., & Wagstaff, C. R. (2024a). Sport Psychology Practitioners' Contributions to the Drafting Process of a Professional Esports Team: A Case Study. *Case Studies in Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 8(1), 1–46. <https://doi.org/10.1123/cssep.2023-0045>
- Brain, J., Wright, O., Quartiroli, A., & Wagstaff, C. R. (2024b). Supporting a national team during the over-watch world cup: Three confessional tales. *Case Studies in Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 8(S1), S1–28. <https://doi.org/10.1123/cssep.2023-0034>
- Brain, J., Quartiroli, A., & Wagstaff, C. R. (2024c). Transitioning From Traditional Sport to Esport: Exploring Sport Psychology Practitioners' Experiences. *The Sport Psychologist*, 38, 280–291. <https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.2024-0074>
- Braun, V., Clarke, V., & Weate, P. (2016). Using thematic analysis in sport and exercise research. In *Routledge handbook of qualitative research in sport and exercise* (pp. 213–227). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315762012-26>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2020). One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis? *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 18(3), 328–352. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238>
- Cotterill, S. (2018). Working as a sport psychology practitioner in professional cricket: Challenges, experiences, and opportunities. *The Sport Psychologist*, 32(2), 146–155. <https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.2017-0010>
- Cottrell, C., McMillen, N., & Harris, B. S. (2019). Sport psychology in a virtual world: Considerations for practitioners working in eSports. *Journal of Sport Psychology in Action*, 10(2), 73–81. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21520704.2018.1518280>

- Di Nicola, S., Assuncao, C., & Swettenham, L. (2024). The overrepresentation of cisgender men in esports research. *International Journal of Esports*, 1(1).
- Dunn, J. G., & Holt, N. L. (2003). Collegiate ice hockey players' perceptions of the delivery of an applied sport psychology program. *The Sport Psychologist*, 17(3), 351-368. <https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.17.3.351>
- Dresing, T. & Pehl, T. (2018). *Praxisbuch Interview, Transkription & Analyse: Anleitungen und Regelsysteme für qualitativ Forschende*. (8. Aufl.). Eigenverlag.
- Brown, D. J., & Fletcher, D. (2017). Effects of psychological and psychosocial interventions on sport performance: A meta-analysis. *Sports Medicine*, 47, 77-99. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40279-016-0552-7>
- Garcia-Lanzo, S., Bonilla, I., & Chamarro, A. (2020). The psychological aspects of electronic sports: Tips for sports psychologists. *International Journal of Sport Psychology*, 51, 613-625. <https://doi.org/f89x>
- Green, M., Morgan, G., & Manley, A. (2012). Elite rugby league players' attitudes towards sport psychology consulting. *Sport and Exercise Psychology Review*, 8(1), 32-44.
- Heaney, C. (2006). Physiotherapists' perceptions of sport psychology intervention in professional soccer. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 4(1), 73-86. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2006.9671785>
- Horne, G., Burkill, R., Agarwal, A., & Swettenham, L. (2024). Should aspiring esports psychologists train in esports? Reflections of trainee sport and exercise psychologists. *Journal of Electronic Gaming and Esports*, 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.1123/jege.2024-0020>
- Kallio, H., Pietilä, A. M., Johnson, M., & Kangasniemi, M. (2016). Systematic methodological review: developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 72(12), 2954-2965. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.13031>
- Katz, J., & Keyes, J. (2020). Person-centered approaches. In D. Tod & M. Eubank (Eds.), *Applied sport, exercise, and performance psychology* (pp. 31-52). Routledge.
- Keegan, R. (2015). *Being a sport psychologist*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Leis, O., & Lautenbach, F. (2020). Psychological and physiological stress in non-competitive and competitive esports settings: A systematic review. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 51(3), 101738. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2020.101738>
- Leis, O., Lautenbach, F., Birch, P. D. J., & Elbe, A.-M. (2022). Stressors, associated responses, and coping strategies in professional esports players: A qualitative study. *International Journal of Esports*, 3(3), 76. <https://www.ijesports.org/article/76/html>
- Leis, O., Watson, M., Swettenham, L., Pedraza-Ramirez, I., & Lautenbach, F. (2023). Stress management strategies in esports: An exploratory online survey on applied practice. *Journal of Electronic Gaming and Esports*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.1123/jege.2023-0002>
- Leis, O., Sharpe, B. T., Pelikan, V., Fritsch, J., Nicholls, A. R., & Poulus, D. (2024). Stressors and coping strategies in esports: a systematic review. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 1-31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1750984X.2024.2386528>
- Lochbaum, M., Stoner, E., Hefner, T., Cooper, S., Lane, A. M., & Terry, P. C. (2022). Sport psychology and performance meta-analyses: A systematic review of the literature. *PloS one*, 17(2), e0263408. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0263408>
- Harwood, C. G. (2004). Knowledge and perceptions of sport psychology within English soccer. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 22(9), 813-826. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02640410410001716670>
- Heaney, C. (2006). Physiotherapists' perceptions of sport psychology intervention in professional soccer. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 4(1), 73-86. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2006.9671785>
- McEwan, H. E., Tod, D., & Eubank, M. (2019). The rocky road to individuation: Sport psychologists' perspectives on professional development. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 45, 101542. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2019.101542>
- McEwan, H. E., & Tod, D. (2023). Trainee clinical, and sport and exercise psychologists' experiences of professional development: A longitudinal study. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 64, 102343. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2022.102343>
- Orlick, T., & Partington, J. (1987). The sport psychology consultant: Analysis of critical components as viewed by Canadian Olympic athletes. *The Sport Psychologist*, 1(1), 4-17.
- Pain, M. A., & Harwood, C. G. (2004). Knowledge and perceptions of sport psychology within English soccer. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 22(9), 813-826. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02640410410001716670>
- Partington, J., & Orlick, T. (1987). The sport psychology consultant: Olympic coaches' views. *The Sport Psychologist*, 1(2), 95-102.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Sage.
- Pedraza-Ramirez, I., Musculus, L., Raab, M., & Laborde, S. (2020). Setting the scientific stage for esports psychology: A systematic review. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 13(1), 319-352. <http://doi.org/ggkztzn>
- Poulus, D. R., Coulter, T. J., Trotter, M. G., & Polman, R. (2022a). A qualitative analysis of the perceived determinants of success in elite esports athletes. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 40(7), 742-753. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02640414.2021.2015916>
- Poulus, D. R., Coulter, T. J., Trotter, M. G., & Polman, R. (2022b). Longitudinal analysis of stressors, stress, coping and coping effectiveness in elite esports athletes. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 60, 102093. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2021.102093>
- Poulus, D. R., Bennett, K., Swann, C., Moyle, G., & Polman, R. (2023). The influence of an esports-adapted coping effectiveness training (E-CET) on resilience, mental health, and subjective performance among elite league of Legends players: A pilot study. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 102510. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2023.102510>
- Quartiroli, A., Etzel, E. F., Knight, S. M., & Zakrajsek, R. A. (2019). Self-care as key to others' care: The perspectives of globally situated experienced senior-level sport psychology practitioners. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 31(2), 147-167. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2018.1460420>
- Quartiroli, A., Wagstaff, C. R., Martin, D. R., & Tod, D. (2021). A systematic review of professional identity in sport psychology. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 17(1), 1-27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1750984X.2021.1998577>

- Ramaker, B., & Pedraza-Ramirez, I. (2023). Everyone is figuring it out along the way: Diving headfirst into the world of esports. In E. Prior & T. Holder (Eds.), *Navigating Applied Sport and Exercise Psychology: Reflections and insights from emerging practitioners* (pp. 84-99). Routledge.
- Ronkainen, N. J., & Wiltshire, G. (2021). Rethinking validity in qualitative sport and exercise psychology research: A realist perspective. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 19(1), 13-28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2019.1637363>
- Sharp, L.-A., & Hodge, K. (2011). Sport psychology consulting effectiveness: The sport psychology consultant's perspective. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 23(3), 360-376. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2011.583619>
- Sharp, L. A., & Hodge, K. (2014). Sport psychology consulting effectiveness: The athlete's perspective. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 12(2), 91-105. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2013.804285>
- Sharpe, B. T., Leis, O., Moore, L., Sharpe, A. T. R., Seymour, S., Obine, E. A. C., & Poulus, D. R. (2024). Re-appraisal and mindset interventions on pressurized esports performance. *Applied Psychology: An International Journal*, 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1111/apps.12544>
- Sparkes, A. C., & Smith, B. (2013). *Qualitative research methods in sport, exercise and health. From process to product*. Routledge.
- Swettenham L, McGinty-Minister K, Bicker S. 2021. The evolving role of the sport psychologist and the myth that their sole role is to "fix" athletes myths of sport coaching sequoia myths. In A. Whitehead & J. Coe (Eds.). *Sequoia Books*.
- Swettenham, L., & Whitehead, A. (2022). Working in esports: Developing team cohesion. *Case Studies in Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 6, 36-44. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1123/cssep.2021-0023>
- Swettenham, L. D., Leis, O., Birch, P. D. J., & Price, D. (2024a). Epilogue: esports horizon - Expanding the realms of sport and exercise psychology. *Case Studies in Sport and Exercise Psychology*.
- Swettenham, L., Abbott, C., M., Leis, O. (2024b). *Applied sport psychology in esports*. In S. Jenny, N. Besombes, T. Brock, A. Cote, & T. Scholz (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Esports*. Routledge.
- Smith, B., & McGannon, K. R. (2018). Developing rigor in qualitative research: Problems and opportunities within sport and exercise psychology. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 11(1), 101-121. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1750984X.2017.1317357>
- Swettenham, L., & Whitehead, A. (2022). Working in esports: Developing team cohesion. *Case Studies in Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 6(1), 36-44. <https://doi.org/10.1123/cssep.2021-0023>
- Tod, D., Pullinger, S., & Lafferty, M. (2022). A systematic review of the qualitative research examining stakeholders' perceptions of the characteristics of helpful sport and exercise psychology practitioners. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 1-25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1750984X.2022.2145575>
- Vealey, R. S. (2007). Mental skills training in sports. In G. Tenenbaum & R.C. Eklund (Eds.) *Handbook of sport psychology* (pp.287-309). Wiley.
- Waldron, J., Lynn, Q., & Krane, V. (2011). Duct tape, icy hot and paddles: Narratives of initiation onto US male sport teams. *Sport, Education and Society*, 16, 111-125. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2011.531965>
- Watson, M., Abbott, C., & Pedraza-Ramirez, I. (2021). A parallel approach to performance and sport psychology work in esports teams. *International Journal of Esports*, 1(1). Retrieved from <https://www.ijesports.org/article/52/html>
- Wiltshire, G., & Ronkainen, N. (2021). A realist approach to thematic analysis: making sense of qualitative data through experiential, inferential and dispositional themes. *Journal of Critical Realism*, 20(2), 159-180. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767430.2021.1894909>