Reflections on a 5-Year Consultancy Program
With the England Women’s Cricket Team

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This paper documents a 5-year sport psychology consultancy program with the England Women’s Cricket Team. The paper describes the method and content of sport psychology service provided and distinguishes between four phases of delivery: introduction and education in mental skills training, competition preparation and thinking, preliminary World Cup preparation, and final World Cup preparation and on-site provision. Service delivery was evaluated by the use of the Consultant Evaluation Form (Partington & Orlick, 1987), ongoing informal feedback from players and coaches, and a formal interview conducted after the World Cup. Reflections on successful and unsuccessful aspects of the program are provided. Overall, the sport psychology program was very well received and was considered instrumental in achieving the stated goal of winning the World Cup. The paper concludes with a number of recommendations for delivering extended sport psychology services to an international team.

In 1987, I was approached by a colleague who invited me to become involved in a program of sport psychology support for the England Women’s Cricket Team. As a former player and qualified National Cricket Association Senior Coach, I was particularly interested in becoming involved as a sport psychology consultant in this sport. To date, the team had received no training in the application of sport psychology, and the governing body—the Women’s Cricket Association—had no previous, or existing, links with universities offering sports science support. Following several initial meetings with the players and coaching staff, I began formally working as sport psychology consultant to the team in April 1988. This paper documents my program of work and describes its progression leading up to, and culminating in, the World Cup which took place in the summer of 1993.

Few accounts of sport psychology consultancy in the sport of cricket have been published. Gordon (1990) described his work with the Western Australian Cricket Team, and my own work is outlined briefly in Doust, Bull, and Prideaux (1990). Also, few publications exist that document the application of sports

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science generally to the game of cricket. Elliott, Foster, and Blanksby (1989)
described the application of various facets of sports science (including sport
psychology) to the specific skill of fast bowling, but most texts merely accord
a nominal mention of factors such as the importance of fitness training and
appropriate mental attitude. Although women’s cricket is well established (Hawes,
1987), it is not accorded high status and has received little publication interest.
The absence of publication in these areas provides a further rationale for the
present paper.

Philosophy of Service Delivery

From the outset, my philosophy of service delivery was based, in part, on that
used by Jerry May in his work with the U.S. Ski Team (May & Veach, 1987):
the utilization of a broad theoretical framework, an attempt to fit into the existing
program, the avoidance of involvement in team selection, assuming a low profile
regarding the media, and constant attempts to ensure continuity of contact.

In addition to these principles, I felt that using my knowledge of the sport
was a positive advantage. Having been a competitive player at representative
level and a qualified coach, I was confident in my ability to apply mental training
principles to the game of cricket. Although the issue is a contentious one, I have
always felt that a sport psychology consultant is at an advantage if he or she has
knowledge and experience of the sport in question. The main reasons I would
identify for this advantage in cricket are the following:

1. Cricket is a very technical sport. Having the ability to converse in technical
terms is advantageous in that it allows fuller integration into the coaching
team and facilitates a greater degree of acceptance and respect by the
players.

2. Understanding the requirements of cricket enables one to provide real,
practical examples of mental training techniques specific to cricket-
related situations.

3. Being able to get involved in the practical aspects of training further
enhances credibility and respect from the players.

Three other issues informed my philosophy of service delivery. First, women’s
cricket is an amateur sport. All the players have full-time jobs, fund their own
travel to training camps, and often must take unpaid leave to compete in extended
tournaments. Expectations regarding the amount of mental skills training by these
players must therefore be significantly less than one would expect from a team
of professional athletes. These cricketers simply cannot commit themselves in
the way professional athletes can. This is a variable that researchers investigating
adherence to mental skills training should consider carefully. Indeed, in one of
the few studies examining this issue, I demonstrated the significance of time
constraints as an influential variable in the adherence process (Bull, 1991).

The second factor concerns the nature of the game. Cricket, as a sport, has
not embraced sports science developments in the way some other sports have.
In sports such as cricket, therefore, it is essential to provide a lengthy initial
educational phase during which the basic principles of applied sport psychology
are introduced. Additionally, every effort must be made to eliminate any misconceptions about the role of a sport psychology consultant. Recent research demonstrates that a problem remains in this area with derogation of athletes who consult a sport psychologist (Linder, Brewer, Van Raalte, & De Lange, 1991).

Finally, as a male working with female athletes, I was sensitive to potential problems that may arise with this situation. Like Henschen (1991), when dealing with individuals, I tended always to work in a semiprivate atmosphere with the door never completely closed; I maintained constant effective communication with the coach; I avoided physical contact with the athletes; and I learned to talk the language of the team.

Finally, throughout the 5-year program, I devoted regular periods to reading accounts of other sport psychology consultations in an effort to gain ideas and recommendations concerning modes of delivery. The Sport Psychologist was particularly useful in this respect.

Outline of Service Delivery

When I first met formally with the team 5 years prior to the World Cup, a team meeting revealed that the ultimate goal desired by all players and coaching staff was to win the competition—a goal the England team had not accomplished for 20 years. Therefore, it was important that the nature of my service delivery be consistent with this goal.

In the 5 years leading up to the World Cup, I met with the squad approximately five times per year. The consultancy service I provided took four basic forms. First, workshop sessions were provided for the squad as a whole during which the basic principles of mental skills training were introduced. Fundamental skills such as relaxation training, imagery, attentional control, goal setting, and positive thinking were covered with efforts made at all times to relate these skills to specific elements of the game of cricket. Second, one-on-one sessions with players were available on request. During these sessions the skills introduced during the group workshops were individualized and any other emerging problems were discussed and various possible solutions explored. Third, group sessions were held in which various team-building exercises were employed to foster communication, clarify roles, and enhance both social and task aspects of team cohesion. Fourth, regular meetings were held with the coach and manager to plan training programs, practice schedules, and general management of the squad.

The 5 years of service delivery can be separated into four distinct phases. These phases are briefly described with an overview of the content covered in each phase.

Phase 1: Introduction and Education (2 Years)

This phase involved introducing the basic elements of mental skills training. A workshop approach was adopted whereby I gave brief presentations on different psychological skills, supplemented by appropriate reading material and small group discussions focusing on how to apply the techniques to the game situation. The major skills introduced during this phase were goal setting, relaxation, imagery, concentration, positive thinking, and precompetition planning. The rationale for covering these particular categories of psychological skills was based,
in part, on the content of relevant existing literature in the area at the time. In particular, Grove and Hanrahan (1988) discussed perceptions of the mental training needs by elite field hockey players and their coaches. This paper was deemed very useful because it concerned a team sport and included women athletes in the sample. Vealey’s (1988) content analysis of 29 psychological skills training books was also influential. Additionally, I engaged in detailed discussions with players and coaches to elicit suggestions from them regarding the content of my service delivery. However, in the early stages, their suggestions were limited in scope because the area of applied sport psychology was so new to all members of the squad.

Workshops were also held to cover aspects of team building such as group roles, social and task cohesion, and communication. The rationale for covering these areas was again based on relevant contemporary literature (Carron, 1988) as well as my own experience of coaching different cricket teams.

Players who desired individual assistance received one-on-one consultancy and advice on how to individualize appropriate aspects of the mental training material covered. For example, a player would ask for specific advice on how to develop a concentration routine that was tailored to her own style of batting or bowling. Alternatively, a player would seek advice on how best to communicate with another member of the squad with whom she had conflicting views on approaches to training and match preparation.

Phase 2: Competition Preparation and Thinking (2 Years)

During this second phase, I focused on preparation for competition and the specific application of certain mental skills to the competition experience. Further work on team building was also implemented. Having undergone 2 years of this, the players were now in a position to deal maturely with evaluation and criticism from teammates. Considerable work was therefore carried out to encourage players to appraise strengths and weaknesses in each other in an attempt to coordinate efforts and resources into developing these strengths and minimizing the impact of weaknesses. I found that small group discussions were effective means of achieving this. Additional focal points in these discussions were the concepts of role clarity, role satisfaction, and role performance. Role clarity refers to the extent to which players understand their role on the team; role acceptance refers to the extent to which players are satisfied with their role; and role performance refers to the extent to which players successfully carry out their role. Carron (1988) described how important these three elements are in team effectiveness. At the national level, considerable attention must be paid to these elements. When playing representative cricket, it is very common for players to be fulfilling a very different role from the one they are used to when playing for their club team. Confusion and lack of role clarity is sometimes therefore a problem.

An example of this occurred prior to the European Cup in 1990. One player expressed her confusion and lack of confidence about her role in the England team. Four other players were involved in a small group discussion with her and, after expressing surprise at her feelings, proceeded to explain the value of her contribution to the team as a whole and exactly what they felt her role was in the England team. The player’s role was different from that when she played for her club team. The following quotation from the player in question illustrates
how useful the discussion exercise had been: "I became a lot more confident as a team member. I have found it difficult to understand and establish the role I play, but after this discussion I feel a lot more accepted by the squad" (Bull, Fleming & Doust, 1992, p. 39).

During this phase of the program, I attended the European Cup to gain on-site experience of sport psychology provision with the team. I had been present at several minor matches prior to this, but this competition acted as a preparation for the World Cup. The team won the tournament (as they did on the two other occasions it was staged during the 5 years of the sport psychology program), and it was very useful for me to observe the dynamics of the team during the stress of international competition.

**Phase 3: Preliminary World Cup Preparation (1 Year)**

In the 12 months prior to the World Cup, I focused all my work into two areas. I selected these two areas largely on the basis of informal feedback I had received from the players, part of which was a direct inquiry regarding which material they wanted me to develop. The first area was the development of confidence and positive thinking. Much time was spent on evaluating self-talk and the process of replacing negative self-statements with positive ones. Obviously, these aspects of thinking had been covered earlier in the program, but like all aspects of competition preparation, reinforcement and reminders are important.

The second area consisted of very specific work on team building. Building on the work of the previous 4 years, much time was spent on further developments in communication, role aspects, and behavior codes. This involved many sessions of small and large group discussion designed to improve communication skills by creating a relaxed forum for expressing attitudes and opinions. Individual roles were consistently reviewed during these sessions, and players were encouraged to contribute their views regarding the establishment of behavior codes relating to aspects of training and pre-match preparation.

**Phase 4: Final World Cup Preparation (2 Months)**

During the final two training camps before the World Cup started, my sessions were essentially devoted to revising previous material related to positive attitude and team cohesion. In the penultimate camp, I provided all players with a handout outlining different ways of maintaining and regaining confidence. These strategies included recalling previous excellent performances through imagery, monitoring the nature of self-talk, considering how the ideal player would behave, and setting regular targets and goals. The handout was based, in part, on material given to Australian athletes prior to the Barcelona Olympic Games in 1992 through the Australian Institute of Sport (Crampton, 1992). The handout also covered material based on rational emotive therapy (Ellis, 1982), which encouraged the players to accept events they could not control and focus strongly on the importance of enjoying the experience of the World Cup. Players were guided on how they could apply these strategies to their own individual needs.

During the final training camp, players were provided with a World Cup handbook. This covered relevant aspects of sports science in addition to management information such as doping control arrangements, a useful address list, and
a code of conduct. The code of conduct provided information on topics such as travel uniform, regulations regarding access to facilities, alcohol consumption, and playing/warm-up uniforms. I provided three sections of the handbook covering attitude, mental preparation for competition, and team spirit, each of which I introduced in a workshop session during the training camp. The attitude section focused on the importance of setting daily targets during the tournament, establishing a reliable precompetition routine, not allowing media to disrupt training, planning ahead for distractions, and using reminders for appropriate use of body language to encourage positive images, thoughts, and behaviors. A result of this reminder led to the team deciding to run onto the field of play at the start of every World Cup match. This is an unusual practice in cricket, as it is normal for teams to walk onto the field in a rather sedate manner. The approach of the England team was noted by the press, and the players were convinced it contributed to a strong feeling of team confidence. The mental preparation section consisted of advice on sport-related thinking prior to matches, during matches, and after matches. In short, I advised the use of positive self-affirmations and specific mental rehearsal prior to matches.

During matches I advised the use of verbal, visual, and physical concentration triggers and cues taken from Bull, Fleming, and Doust (1992), in addition to further positive self-affirmations. After matches, I advised players to engage in a performance review followed by goal setting for future matches and training sessions. The team spirit section consisted of three major themes. The first theme was the importance of role clarification for the tournament as a whole, as well as specific matches. The second theme was the importance of having regular squad meetings throughout the tournament and allowing all players to contribute freely in open discussions. However, the squad members were advised to accept that there would be occasions when captain, vice-captain, head coach, or manager would have to make quick (perhaps undemocratic and unpopular) decisions. During team meetings it would be important to focus on positive issues and, if criticism was warranted, the final note should be a positive one.

The third theme focused on an acknowledgment that things would not go smoothly throughout the World Cup. Loehr (1982) suggested that competition is a continuous presentation of problems and described the importance of an athlete’s emotional response to the presentation of these problems in determining whether they have a debilitating influence on performance. Loehr (1982) claimed that if athletes expect to enter competition and have everything run smoothly, they will not achieve their ideal performance state.

I suggested that the cricketers should (a) be prepared for a variety of different problems that may arise, (b) try hard to keep things in perspective, and (c) avoid looking to attach blame. Cricket is a sport that is prone to shifts in psychological momentum—a concept that has been investigated in other sports such as tennis (Richardson, Adler, & Hankes, 1988) and volleyball (Miller & Weinberg, 1991). A one-day cricket match involves approximately 6 hours of playing time. Consequently, it is often the case that one team experiences a period of strategic dominance but then the other team recovers momentum and assumes a position of control. I felt it was important that players acknowledge, in advance, that matches would ebb and flow in this manner. The important factor would be to stay positive, committed, and cohesive during periods of subpar performance and misfortune. We spent considerable time during this phase
exploring this concept and working toward group acceptance of the inevitability of ups and downs in performance. The following quotation from one of the key players illustrates this theme:

When we were playing in the final nobody seemed to panic, even when New Zealand were taking quick singles and pushing the score along. I was just thinking what Steve was saying—just go with the flow and it will eventually come your way.

As a practical example of this theme, I showed the squad a video (Botham’s Ashes, 1993) of a very famous cricket match in which the England Men’s Team beat Australia in 1981. This is a famous victory due to the nature of the comeback by England team players who were, at one stage, given odds of 500–1 against them winning the match. The purpose of showing the video was threefold: first, to raise team spirit and develop a confident squad attitude toward playing Australia—the firm favorite to win the World Cup; second, to highlight the importance of maintaining commitment even when the situation looked hopeless; third, and indirectly, to raise players’ attention of the danger of focusing only on Australia as the team to beat. A discussion followed on how another team may emerge as a stronger than expected contender and how disastrous complacency could prove. Ironically, this did happen: New Zealand beat Australia for a place in the final.

Another role I played during the final training camp weekend involved counseling two players who had not been selected for the World Cup squad but who were still invited to the weekend by the Women’s Cricket Association. These players found it extremely difficult to accept their nonselection as they had fully expected to be chosen. My approach was a supportive and rationalizing one that involved encouraging these players to look ahead to the rest of their careers, as well as reflecting on their achievements to date.

My role during the World Cup covered six broad areas. These areas were not planned a priori fashion, but emerged when I reviewed my role after the competition was complete. Each of the roles was facilitated by having an extremely supportive coaching and management team that regularly sought my advice and that made great efforts to integrate me with the day-to-day running of the team. I was not residentially based with the team for the duration of the tournament with the exception of the night preceding the final. The matches were close enough to my home to allow me to travel on a daily basis, although other commitments meant that I missed the early part of the competition.

**Team Meetings.** The coach and captain encouraged me to be actively involved in the running of team meetings. It was therefore usual for me to have a few words with the team prior to matches and then a few words immediately after matches had finished. The content of these team talks focused on reinforcing the work I had done previously on positive thinking and self-talk, encouraging the players to concentrate on the delivery of personal excellence, and reminding players to maintain commitment during all phases of the game and accept the transient nature of psychological momentum within a match.

**Benchwarmer Counseling.** For each of the tournament matches, 3 of the squad of 14 were not selected to play. This was an issue we had spent long periods discussing during the buildup to the tournament. Consistent with the
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recommendations of Connelly (1992), the team had been encouraged to talk openly about what it would be like to be chosen as a match reserve. However, the issue still presented significant problems during the tournament. In the players’ minds, there seemed to be a difference between being “rested” and being “dropped”—the latter perception leading to sometimes serious feelings of frustration, anger, and loss of confidence. The problem was heightened by the refusal of the selectors to provide a rationale for many of their decisions, which left omitted players feeling very confused. When players are in this frame of mind, it is important to communicate both the tangible, and nontangible, contributions they make to the team, to help them recognize the factors over which they have no control, to keep lines of communication open with the coaches, and to encourage the players to be ready to play at any time (Connelly, 1992).

I was also approached on several occasions by the team physiotherapist, who was very sensitive to this problem and who was finding herself in the role of sport psychology consultant much of the time. Because she was living and traveling with the team, she had become very close to many of the players. I therefore spent time advising her on different approaches she could take if players expressed a desire to discuss selection problems with her. One of the most significant cases of benchwarmer counseling arose when the team selected to play in the final was announced. In this case, helping the players in question maintain perspective was crucial. Rotella and Newburg (1989) described possible loss of identity in benchwarmers and suggested that sport psychology consultants can be useful in “helping the athletes objectively view the yardstick they use in life to measure their worth” (p. 61).

Management Advice. The head coach and team manager were always very keen to seek my advice when issues of behavior and team dynamics arose. Both individuals were extremely supportive of the sport psychology program and made extensive efforts to integrate my work with their own planning at all levels. One example of this concerned the extent to which the squad should spend time together on the weekend of the final. The manager felt it was very important for the squad to spend lots of time together, whereas several of the players expressed a desire to spend time alone or away from the squad with friends and relatives. My contribution was to make suggestions of how an acceptable compromise could be reached that acknowledged individuality while encouraging togetherness and group cohesion. I suggested that on the day preceding the final, following a light training session, players would have the choice of either joining a social squad activity—a trip to the cinema—or breaking away from the squad and meeting family or friends. However, it would then be mandatory for players to reunite late in the afternoon, eat dinner as a squad, and then attend the important squad meeting in the evening. This suggestion was accepted and implemented with the successful outcome that those players who wanted time away from the squad were satisfied, and others were able to maintain the camaraderie that had become so important to them.

Media Planning. A basic media plan had been outlined during pre-World Cup preparations. I had made several recommendations to the squad based on my own previous experience of on-site competition sport psychology provision and on the suggestions of Orlick (1986). These concerned issues such as reading newspaper reports of matches, dealing with intrusive journalists, and giving media interviews. During the tournament, I attempted to reinforce adherence to these
plans as much as I could. This was mainly achieved by ongoing discussions with the coach, manager, and captain. However, media attention increased greatly over the course of the tournament. This resulted, in part, because the success of the England Women’s Team coincided with very disappointing results by their male counterparts against Australia. When the Women’s Team then beat Australia in the qualifying rounds, press attention became intense. The result was front-page news in *The Times* newspaper, and the captain became the focus of many interview requests.

When a place in the final was assured, the BBC announced that they would provide live television coverage of the match. This was a significant decision, and we were all aware that it would serve to heighten other media interest, as well as increase the number of spectators attending the final. I immediately called a meeting of the captain, vice-captain, coach, manager, and myself to discuss potential problems arising from this increase in media attention. A dilemma was faced. The game of women’s cricket was desperate for as much publicity as possible, but the players had serious preparation to do and, on the whole, were not experienced at dealing with such intense media attention. A short-term plan was devised during this meeting that involved identifying certain players who were experienced in, and comfortable with, dealing with the press. The names of these players (veterans who had played in a World Cup Final before) were then given to the press by the manager when any requests for interviews were made. Additionally, it was decided to take a fairly assertive stance with the press. We felt that for the next few days, we had the bargaining power and therefore were not prepared to allow media attention to disrupt training and preparation.

**Liaison With the Captain.** The captain, although an experienced international cricketer, was new to the role. She was appointed as captain for the World Cup, and there were two former captains in the squad. She therefore benefited from support and encouragement from the coaching staff. I made a point of having regular, informal chats with her in which I was extremely encouraging and positive. I supported tactical decisions she had made on the field (another advantage of having knowledge of the game) and provided her with positive feedback regarding team dynamics.

**General Support and Involvement.** I feel that merely being present at matches to watch and support is an important part of the sport psychology consultant’s role. I therefore felt that, even if I was sitting in the pavilion watching the match, I was being productive. Sometimes, I assisted with the warmup (another occasion where my knowledge of the game was useful) or operated the video camera. I believe one’s credibility is enhanced in the eyes of athletes when they see someone contributing in these ways.

May and Brown (1989) suggested that the mere presence of the sport psychology consultant can remind athletes of their psychological programs. I agree with this suggestion, and I feel it is a significant part of what I refer to as the immersion approach. By this I mean operating in a manner that allows the sport psychologist to become a fully integrated member of the coaching/support staff by broadening the sport psychologist role to include assistance in different aspects of training and preparation, as well as interacting informally with the athletes. An additional benefit to which May and Brown (1989) refer is the contribution an active presence can make to the development of rapport with the athletes:
The athletes and coaches seemed to value my willingness to be out on a snowy, windy, freezing hill riding chairlifts with them in addition to the traditional office visits. This relationship made the program more practical and realistic for the athletes and coaches. It also solidified my position as a fellow staff member willing to assist in the tasks of carrying poles, helping with course preparation, observing training runs, timing, videotaping, and so forth. (May & Brown, 1989, p. 325)

**Evaluation of the Sport Psychology Program**

Evaluation of the program took three forms:

1. The Consultant Evaluation Form (CEF; Partington & Orlick, 1987) on two separate occasions during the 5-year program
2. Ongoing informal feedback from players and coaches through mealtime discussions and general comments during training
3. A formal evaluation interview conducted after the World Cup by a member of the coaching team

Players were initially asked to complete a CEF (Partington and Orlick, 1987) midway through Phase 2 of the program and then again prior to the commencement of the World Cup. Conducting this second evaluation before the tournament prevented the competition outcome from biasing the responses. The one modification I made to the original version of the form was to remove the space for athletes to write their names. I wanted to encourage an open and frank response from all the players, and I felt that anonymity would facilitate this.

The CEF was developed as a step toward assisting sport psychology consultants in the monitoring and improvement of their own services by allowing athletes to use it as an index of evaluation. Athletes rate their consultant on a range of characteristics, such as ability to provide clear, practical, and concrete strategies; being easy to relate to; and success in fitting in with the team. Additionally, the instrument requires athletes to assess the overall effectiveness of the consultant on a scale of −5 (hindered a lot) to +5 (helped a lot). Scores indicated generally positive responses, and overall perceptions were that I had a beneficial effect on both individuals and the team as a whole.

Informal feedback from players yielded a number of valuable pieces of information and, in conjunction with the formal interviews, enabled me to identify specific aspects of the sport psychology program that had been favorably, or unfavorably, received. The following sections represent my reflections on these aspects of feedback.

**Reflections on What Went Well**

**Team-Building Work.** Throughout the 5 years, the players consistently reported that it was the work on team building that they felt to be of most value. They enjoyed the exercises and group work I initiated and always responded well during open discussion times. My own feelings concurred with those of the
players in that of all the material I covered over the years, the team-building work seemed to have the most demonstrable effects in terms of team morale and improved communication. The following quotation from a player supports this: “One of the outstanding things about being in the squad was the team spirit; it was excellent. The sport psychology input can only have helped that.”

**Positive Thinking.** Of the basic mental training principles, the material relating to confidence and positive thinking was well received. This material included training in maintaining positive self-affirmation, reframing negative thinking, and focusing on aspects of competitive performance that can be controlled. The following quotation by a key player in the squad acknowledges the impact of this material: “The atmosphere and the ethos that was built up with the sport psychology got us into that frame of mind, being positive and encouraging, and it just became automatic really.”

This is the area to which the coaches and captain frequently refer when discussing the contents of my work with the team (Bown, 1993). I felt this work integrated easily with the team-building exercises and generated an elevated level of not only self-belief but also belief in the team as a whole. One player reflected on the comparison between this World Cup and the previous one, in which the team lost to Australia in the final:

Our attitude against Australia this time was totally different. The atmosphere out there compared to what it was in Sydney was so brilliant. You could see that the players were much more positive compared to the Aussies. That was the game where it really showed, as that was the one team we really wanted to beat.

**The Immersion Approach.** As mentioned earlier in this paper, the immersion approach means the sport psychologist operates as one of the coaching staff rather than as the isolated consultant who is drafted to deliver a service and then departs. I am convinced that in most, if not all, sports it is essential to be seen by the athletes as an integral part of the support staff. This can only be achieved by getting involved in other aspects of training, attending team meetings, being residential at some training camps, and integrating as fully as possible with other members of the coaching team. This is the role I assumed to an increasingly greater extent as the 5 years progressed, and feedback from players and coaches would suggest that it was an effective method of working:

I think the extra support [sport psychology input] is one of the advantages we had over the other teams. It took a lot of pressure off the captain and the coach who would have had to have carried the load that everyone else carried on their shoulders during the tournament.

**Reflections on What Did Not Go Well**

**Relaxation Training.** In the early part of the program, I introduced the players to several forms of orthodox relaxation training, such as progressive muscle relaxation and meditative relaxation. These techniques, although used extensively, and often to good effect, in nonsport contexts, were not well received by the players, and midway through the program I dropped them completely.
My general feeling (based on experience of consulting in sports other than cricket) is that relaxation training is an aspect of applied sport psychology that has perhaps been accorded too high a profile.

Anshel (1991) raises awareness of this point also by questioning the effectiveness of certain orthodox relaxation programs. He suggested that certain relaxation programs may be overly prescribed and incorrectly implemented. Although identifying the arguments in favor of relaxation training, Anshel reviews the case against the use of relaxation techniques in sport. Anshel suggests a number of potential problems. First, research has not clearly demonstrated a causal link between relaxation training and improved performance. Second, some athletes prefer to regulate emotion by techniques other than relaxation. Third, not all sports require a relaxed state. Fourth, there may be advantages in ignoring fears and anxieties rather than focusing internally on them. Fifth, relaxation training tapes and videos have inherent problems, such as their prescriptive pace and the possible distraction of external sources.

On reflection, I feel that I included relaxation training in my program without a clear consideration of its benefits and the manner in which it was introduced. In short, I think the players felt it to be too far removed from the field of play. As team sport athletes, their gregarious personalities were also not conducive to the experience of deep relaxation in the context of their sport. Shorter versions of anxiety control, such as centering (Miller, 1991), seem to be far more appropriate for this type of athlete and bear a much closer relevance to performance preparation.

**Imagery.** Although I continued to persevere with imagery training throughout the 5 years of the program, the players were in general fairly reluctant to integrate the skill into their overall training. Their reactions to imagery were varied (some players accepted it readily and use it regularly), but in general I feel that because the skill was so new to most of them, they essentially found it very difficult. Slowly, they have come to realize its importance, but it has been a very long process, hence my identifying it as an aspect that has not gone well. I feel that the way I initially introduced the skill was inappropriate—I was too theoretical and failed to make use of cricket-specific anecdotal examples of successful use of the skill. I have subsequently used the two quotations below, by Desmond Haynes and Richard Hadlee, respectively (both world class cricketers), when introducing imagery and have found far greater success in soliciting player approval for the applicability of the skill:

> During practice for the second Test at Perth, I walked back from the nets to the dressing room with my bat raised as if I’d just made a hundred. I visualized it, then I lived it. (Steen, 1993, pp. 161-162)

> I learned to play back successes in my mind, not as a spectator, but actually going through it all in the middle. (Hadlee, 1985, p. 30)

**Psychometric Testing.** Early in the 5-year program, I administered several psychometric tests. In general, and consistent with the views expressed by Orlick (1989) and Gipson, McKenzie, and Lowe (1989), I did not find them particularly useful in my consultancy, and I found I was using them merely as a means of generating discussion among the team on sport-related psychological skills.
Although this may have its advantages, this is not the purpose for which the tests were developed and is probably not the most productive use of time—a commodity often in short supply in sport psychology consultancy. Additionally, I found that the players did not generally like them and felt their use to be futile.

The process of performance profiling has been reported in the literature recently (Butler & Hardy, 1992; Butler, Smith, & Irwin, 1993) and its use is becoming widespread among British sport psychology consultants. I used a version of this technique with the cricketers and found it to be far more useful than any standardized psychometric test. My version of the procedure involved guiding the players in a goal-setting process that incorporated self-assessment of current status in personally selected technical, physical, and mental skills. This self-assessment then led to formalizing short- and medium-term goals in each of the chosen areas. Consistent with one of the basic elements of the performance profiling process, players were not set goals prescriptively. Rather, they were encouraged to set their own goals with guidance from the team coach and myself.

One instrument I did find useful was the Group Environment Questionnaire (Widmeyer, Brawley, & Carron, 1985). This was always an effective means of assessing team cohesion and provided relevant data to which the players could relate. Periodically, I would distribute the questionnaire to the squad at the beginning of a training camp. I would then score all the sheets and prepare a visual aid reporting mean scores and ranges on each of the four dimensions (i.e., individual attraction to the group—social, individual attraction to the group—task, group integration—social, group integration—task). During a team meeting, we would then discuss the implications of the scores. The range scores were always interesting as they invariably demonstrated quite noticeable differences between individuals on the squad. I always used these figures to indicate that players did not all feel the same regarding team cohesion and that tolerance of individual differences was necessary. There were also occasions during the 5 years when scores on task cohesion were lower than expected, which led to extremely productive discussion on group goals and strategic planning.

**Post-World Cup Debriefing.** In short, this did not happen. On reflection, I am convinced that it should have taken place fairly soon after the completion of the competition, and I feel that I should have been proactive in arranging a suitable time and place with the national governing body. I did not do this because of logistical constraints and limited time availability. However, on reflection, I feel that the meeting should have been part of the long-term plan and, hence, an entry on the squad calendar months before the competition began. This would have allowed us to focus on the World Cup as a learning experience, as well as assisting some players in their coping with the emotional adjustment of returning to work and a normal lifestyle.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

The long-term goal of winning the World Cup for the first time in 20 years was achieved. Feedback from players, coaches, and management suggested a feeling existed that success would not have been achieved without the provision of sport psychology support:
I am convinced that we would not have won the World Cup without the sport psychology support. Enough people will realize that it was a positive help and one of the factors that helped us towards winning the World Cup.

However, a causal relationship cannot be established to support this contention. Obviously, many other factors contributed to the success of the team, such as excellent technical coaching, efficient management, appropriate fitness testing and training advice, access to practice facilities, and of course, the natural ability of the players themselves. From the 5-year experience I would offer the following recommendations to other consultants embarking on the delivery of an extended sport psychology service to an international team.

1. Immerse yourself in the culture of the sport. Broaden your role so that you can contribute to general training and preparation and become accepted as part of the coaching team.
2. Use psychological testing very carefully. Be very sure of the value of using a test before implementation and consider performance profiling (Butler & Hardy, 1992) as a practical alternative whenever possible.
3. Create many opportunities for group discussions. Encourage an atmosphere of openness and honest exchange of opinion. Ensure that roles are reviewed and clarified on a regular basis.
4. Work hard to develop a strong relationship with coaching and management staff early on. Keep them updated on the nature of the material you are covering with the athletes.
5. Create opportunities for the athletes to provide feedback on the sport psychology program. Use different ways of generating this feedback (e.g., evaluation forms, group discussions, formal interviews, and informal meetings).
6. Attend competition venues, initially to observe, and then to provide a service. Be prepared to sit around feeling that you are not contributing much, but be ready to utilize teachable moments as productively as possible.
7. Before and during the consultation experience, read relevant publications documenting the work of other experienced professionals. Partington and Orlick's (1991) analysis of Olympic consultants best-ever consultancy experiences is a particularly useful reference.

References


**Acknowledgments**

I wish to thank Jocelyn Brooks for her assistance in the collection of interview data used in this paper. The consultancy program was aided by a grant from the Sports Council through the Sports Science Support Programme.

*Manuscript submitted: March 30, 1994*
*Revision received: May 19, 1994*