The context and mechanisms within an English tennis youth development club that influence players' development of psychological skills and characteristics: An Action Research Study

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The rocky pathway to excellence...

The messy landscape of psychological terms

Psychological Characteristics are... very stable and enduring dispositional characteristics that are consistent over various different situations and impact upon physical behaviours.

Psychological Skills are... athletes' ability to use and retrieve complex psychological methods at appropriate times to regulate or facilitate psychological characteristics.

The development of PSCs within a successful English youth tennis academy


“We discuss them [experiences] and look at what would be an optimum for example attitude. What is your attitude to going in and playing a competition? Do you have to win? Do you feel thrown if you start and your first serve is going out? Do you start beating yourself up, or do you say to yourself it’s ok? Conversations like this happen all the time, going to school and back, when going to bed, before a tournament after a tournament, sat on the sofa, watching TV, all the time.”

Context – Athlete’s Holistic Ecological System

Bronfenbrenner (2005)

15months Action Research Study

Context + Mechanism = Outcome

Pawson & Tilley (1997)

Pawson & Tilley (1997)

WHICH Outcomes?

Psychological Skills
- Goal Setting
- Social Support Seeking
- Self-Efficacy
- Self-Evaluation
- Imagery
- Relaxation
- Balanced Lifestyle
- Pre-Performance Routine
- Self-Talk

Psychological Characteristics
- Self-Confidence
- Hard-Work Ethic
- Emotional Control
- Interpersonal Competencies
- Commitment
- Independence
- Sport Intelligence
- Motivation
- Competitiveness
- Positivity
- Resilience
- Focus

Context

Athletes’ Holistic Ecological System

Bronfenbrenner (2005)

Mechanisms

How?

8

Purposeful Conversations

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Didactic Enforcement of Behaviour Rules

"I have certain things that I will not tolerate, full stop. I will not tolerate bullying. I hate, more than anything else, people being lazy and I hate people who have a negative effect on the group. They are the three things I won’t tolerate."

"I praise them, above all, if they work hard. I do not care if they are technically that great, if they are putting the effort in. I always praise player X, because he will come and give it 100% and that is all I want."

Field note 18th of November 2015 – Freddie (A1) was playing a weaker player, which causes him to lose focus. He was sitting on his racket, chatting to people on the neighbouring court, playing drop shots and according to Jason "just taking the piss". Suddenly Jason shouts "FREDDIE. Get off the court NOW! Your lack of sportsmanship and work rate is a disgrace. I don’t want you on my court anymore. Get out of my sight."

Freddie begged for another chance but eventually headed for the back of the court. He was fidgeting with his racket behind the mash curtains, staring at the courts and his mates.

Social Recognition
Observational Learning
Exposures to Competitive Experiences
Autonomy Support coupled with an Expectation for Engagement
Variability of the Coaching Climate

"The Problem"

1) The Role and Purpose of Sport Psychology and Psychologists is still misunderstood – Problem Fixers rather than Problem Preventers

"It is totally not what I expected. I always thought psychology would help the kids that are crazy. The ones that are absolutely out there. But what it had made me realise is that it helps absolutely everybody."

Barriers to explicit PSC Development

2) A Lack of Capability to teach PSCs which is rooted in a Lack of Opportunities to develop Subject Specific Knowledge and translate it into Practice

"I would like to be able to help my son, but I don’t feel like I can. I don’t feel like I know enough, I don’t feel like I have the knowledge to really help him."

"Coach education workshops don’t really teach you that. They touch on it, maybe talk about it, but don’t show you how to do it."

"I went to a three hour self-belief course recently. It was basically them telling us for three hours that you should praise children, never put them down, always be positive. But it doesn’t give me those practical skills for on the court."

The COM-B system
A Framework for understanding Behaviour (Michie et al., 2011, p. 45)

Capability
Motivation
Opportunity
Behaviour

Barriers to explicit PSC Development
The Future
Professionalisation of Sport Psychology

Long-term collaborations between coaches, parents and practitioners that foster the translation from knowledge into practice

Contextualised/Individualised Learning - Mentoring Programmes
Moving from “Problem Fixers to Problem Preventers”

Thank you for listening

Any questions or comments, I am all ears?
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