

Expanding the Realms of Sport Psychology in Esports: An Epilogue

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27 **Expanding the Realms of Sport Psychology in Esports: An Epilogue**

28 This special issue provides insights from a range of sport psychology practitioners
29 (SPPs), such as qualified and trainee sport and exercise psychologists, alongside performance
30 coaches working in esports. Within this special issue, comprises four case studies spanning
31 two different esports titles, League of Legends (LoL; n = 4) and Overwatch (n = 1). To our
32 knowledge, this is the first special issue dedicated to applied sport psychology in esports.

33 For the purpose of this epilogue, we have identified three key areas of applied sport
34 psychology to which the featured case studies contribute: 1) interventions with teams and
35 esports athletes, 2) coach support and development, and 3) practitioner development. This
36 epilogue will discuss these three areas in relation to the case studies within the special issue
37 along with suggestions for future research. Our aim is to provide a structured exploration and
38 discussion of the experiences shared within these case studies, offering insights into how
39 sport psychology is applied within esports.

40 **Horizon 1: Intervention with Teams and Esports Athletes**

41 The featured case studies contribute examples of sport psychology support at multiple
42 levels, delivering interventions to esports athletes as well as teams. During the needs analysis
43 process, a range of performance challenges were identified across the case studies. These
44 included, but were not limited to, communication issues in-game (e.g., conflicting
45 communication between teammates, indecisiveness), lack of team cohesion, transitioning to a
46 professional level, emotional dysregulation (e.g., coping with tilt), and lack of agreement on
47 training methods. Collectively, this highlights the necessity of SPPs being cognizant of the
48 breadth of performance challenges one may encounter when working with esports teams and
49 individuals.

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50 To overcome performance challenges, various interventions were implemented in line
51 with the practitioners' philosophies. These included interventions such as identifying team or
52 individual values and goals (Agrawal et al., 2024; Brain et al., 2024), psychological skills
53 training (e.g., reappraisal, self-talk, breathing techniques; Brain et al., 2024), and personal
54 disclosure and mutual sharing (Agrawal et al., 2024). The interventions were delivered either
55 online or in-person through one-to-one sessions with esports athletes or psychoeducational
56 workshops with the whole team. Alongside individual and team interventions, Pedraza-
57 Ramirez et al. (2024) noted the importance of psychological safety and organizational culture
58 within esports. To support culture development within LoL, Pedraza-Ramirez et al. (2024)
59 suggest creating space for meaningful, open, and safe one-to-one discussions alongside daily
60 team activities. This may contribute to psychological safety and building optimal
61 relationships, potentially resulting in trust, closeness, and autonomy (Pedraza-Ramirez et al.,
62 2024).

63 Despite the meaningful interventions delivered, the case study authors share specific
64 contextual demands and challenges that they faced. For example, cultural and linguistic
65 differences (Agrawal et al., 2024), limited time to deliver provision (Brain et al., 2024), and
66 challenges building relationships with team members due to the lack of visual cues (i.e., lack
67 of webcam use; Brain et al., 2024). Understanding the contextual challenges that may be
68 present in esports will hopefully aid current and future practitioners when planning their sport
69 psychology provision and mitigating these demands if possible. For example, within the
70 contracting process practitioners should clearly define roles and responsibilities, have clear
71 non-negotiables to allow for effective practice (e.g., cameras on, set times for workshop
72 delivery), and learn how to work effectively in an online environment (see Price et al., 2022),
73 aided through supervision and continued professional development.

74 Notably, no one-to-one case studies were featured as stand-alone cases within this
75 special issue, and the intervention work outlined multiple levels of delivery (e.g., Brain et al.,
76 2024; Agrawal et al., 2024; workshops, coach support, one-to-one support). Further, Pedraza-
77 Ramirez et al. (2024) took a holistic ecological approach to practice, taking into account the
78 environment esports teams are influenced by. Though every team must be considered on an
79 individual needs basis, this may suggest that multi-level interventions are well-suited to sport
80 psychology practice within esports rather than solely one-to-one work. Additionally, multi-
81 level support within esports has been shown to be beneficial as it can meet the preferences of
82 different team members (Swettenham & Whitehead, 2022). Therefore, training routes and
83 educational pathways, which have been known to focus heavily on one-to-one work, might
84 benefit from integrating more content on team and organisation level interventions into their
85 curriculums.

86 When working at multiple levels (i.e., coaches, esports athletes, teams, and
87 management), SPPs must consider the context of their work and the challenges this may
88 bring. First, multi-level support can generate a high volume of work and may be difficult for
89 a single SPP to deliver, spreading the practitioner thin and potentially limiting on-the-ground
90 support for athletes competing in the coalface. Second, there is the ethical issue of “who is
91 the client?”. Working across multiple levels “blurs the lines” (Ramaker & Pedraza-Ramirez,
92 2023 p. 89) of who the client is (e.g., the organisation, the coach, the players). As such, this
93 can pose ethical concerns and make it challenging to gain trust across all levels of support. If
94 a team of SPPs are present, it may be worthwhile placing one practitioner at each level of
95 support to mitigate these challenges.

96 **Horizon 2: Coach Support and Development**

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97 It is well-recognised that coaches are viewed as performers in their own right (Gould
98 et al., 2002; Thelwell et al., 2008). As such, SPPs commonly work with and through coaches
99 to enhance effective service delivery. Agrawal et al.'s (2024) case study noted weekly
100 coaching meetings that the trainee SPP and multi-discipline team attended. Attending these
101 meetings may be beneficial for supporting coaches' reflective practice skills (Pedraza-
102 Ramirez, 2024), identifying the needs of the team or coaching staff, upskilling the SPP's
103 knowledge through conversations with the coaches, and acting as a means to monitor and
104 evaluate intervention effectiveness (Agrawal et al., 2024). The case study from Pedraza-
105 Ramirez et al. (2024) recognises the importance of supporting coaches and suggests
106 implementing coach development programmes to overcome challenges coaches face, such as
107 frequent game changes and a lack of formal development programmes.

108 In addition, SPPs may support esports coaches through the use of novel coaching
109 approaches. Bubna et al.'s (2024) case study details how a constraints-led approach (CLA;
110 e.g., Renshaw et al., 2019) can be implemented in LoL training practices (e.g., by limiting
111 players' communication or use of wards). Notably, Bubna et al.'s (2024) evaluation of this
112 CLA intervention showed the potential to improve various elements of team performance, for
113 example, the team's coordination, planning, and communication.

114 Despite the importance of the coach being reflected in these case studies, esports
115 coaches lack specific coach education and support that is contextualised to the world of
116 esports. Though SPPs cannot solve this issue, they may be well-placed to support esports
117 coaches by providing psychological support and education. For example, developing
118 coaches' interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). Nevertheless, as
119 Bubna et al. (2024) noted, the absence of an esports coach in the team can result in players
120 coaching themselves which presents another challenge to SPPs. To further the SPP's ability

121 to work effectively with coaches in esports, it may be important to integrate specific training
122 on how to work with coaches onto training routes to highlight the differences and similarities
123 between working with an athlete and working with a coach.

124 **Horizon 3: Practitioner Development**

125 Practitioner development is multidimensional (Tod et al., 2007) and essential for
126 professional growth and service delivery competence. One key element, as noted by Tod et
127 al. (2007), is the importance of practitioners reflecting on how they influence the service
128 delivery process. The case studies featured in the special issue provide open and vulnerable
129 reflective accounts of practitioners' experiences within esports. Particularly noteworthy is the
130 work by Brain et al. (2024), who reflected on the challenges faced and mistakes made, whilst
131 providing tangible practical suggestions for those working in esports or contemplating
132 entering esports. Presented as a series of confessional tales, Brain et al. (2024) explore
133 challenges such as limited time for developing and delivering interventions, misalignment of
134 values between practitioners and the esports team, and effective practice in an online
135 environment with limited behavioural cues. Importantly, Brain et al. (2024) highlights the
136 mental and physical toll on practitioners due to intense schedules and long hours that may be
137 expected in an esports performance environment. These reflections underscore the salient
138 need for practitioner self-care to help mitigate the stress of operating in esports and ensure
139 ethical practice (Quartiroli et al., 2021).

140 Another case study showing the importance of reflective practice is Agrawal et al.'s
141 (2024) which shares multicultural reflections as a trainee sport and exercise psychologist and
142 its importance for developing multicultural practice. Agrawal et al. (2024) utilise the T-R-E-
143 E-S model (see, Gupta, 2022) for multicultural reflective practice in sport psychology and
144 show this model to be effective within an esports context. Using such a model may be of

145 benefit to SPPs working with esports teams of multiple nationalities to support their
146 continued professional development and effective practice.

147 **Future Directions**

148 Despite the meaningful topics and knowledge shared within this special issue, there
149 are areas that need to be explored further to support sport psychology practice within esports.
150 Importantly, esports encompass more than just professional male esports athletes. Cisgender
151 men are overrepresented in esports research in comparison to women and transgender
152 individuals (Di Nicola et al., 2024). Therefore, future case studies should endeavour to share
153 interventions with women and transgender esports athletes and gamers.

154 Beyond the professional scene, benefits from playing esports (and video games), such
155 as psychological development (Trotter et al., 2021), and health and physical activity
156 behaviour (Trotter et al., 2020), have been found. Physical activity interventions within
157 esports would benefit practitioners who consider themselves a sport and exercise
158 psychologist. Although the case study by Pedraza-Ramirez et al. (2024) briefly mentions the
159 use of weekly physical exercise interventions with teams, the current special issue adopts a
160 predominant performance and well-being focus. Indeed, this perpetuates the narrative
161 concerning performance in esports, neglecting health and physical activity within esports.
162 Therefore, there is scope for future studies to investigate the effects of physical activity
163 interventions in esports along with the positive benefits that esports or gaming may have on
164 the general population.

165 As mentioned previously, there is no standalone one-to-one intervention featured
166 within this special issue. It would be insightful to see single case studies in esports published
167 as well as within a greater variety of esports titles and genres, with the case studies featured
168 in this special issue being limited to two esports titles and two game genres (i.e., MOBA,

169 FPS). Case studies need to consider a broader range of settings aside from elite performance
170 in esports, such as grassroots esports, esports academies, and working with parents.

171 **Conclusion**

172 This Special issue of *Case Studies in Sport and Exercise Psychology* on esports has
173 included four case studies from two esports titles. The featured case studies have provided
174 meaningful and novel contributions to applied sport psychology in the world of esports. The
175 case studies cover multicultural reflections, a holistic ecological approach to esports, CLA in
176 esports training practices, and confessional tales of applied practice in esports to aid
177 practitioner development. Alongside this, a variation of philosophical approaches,
178 intervention strategies, and reflective experiences have been shared to enhance the contextual
179 understanding of applied sport psychology practice in esports. The case studies within this
180 special issue suggest that sport psychology in esports is viable at multiple levels of delivery,
181 taking a holistic stance on the work delivered. However, some challenges arise when working
182 at multiple levels that SPPs need to consider to achieve ethical and effective practice.

183 We would like to thank the authors and reviewers involved in this special issue; this
184 would not have been possible without you all. We hope that this special issue has inspired
185 trainees and experienced practitioners to look towards the esports horizon and consider
186 supporting the teams and individuals within this setting.

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