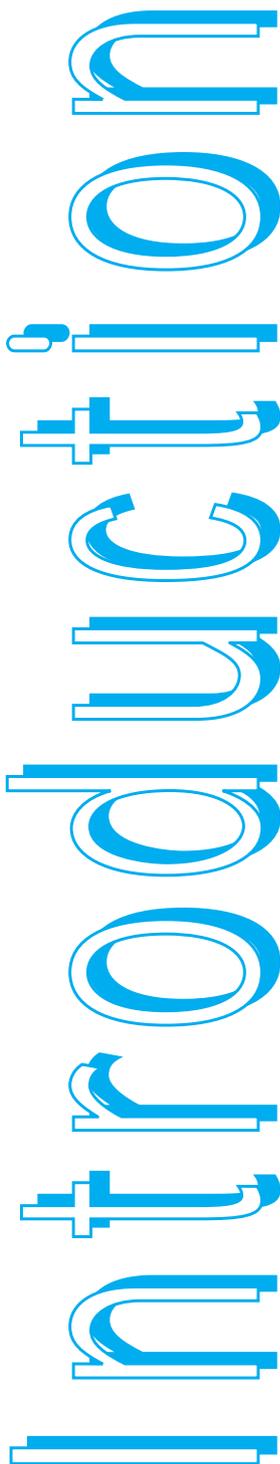


SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

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The launching of the Psychology of Sport and Physical Exercise Professional Division has been recently approved by the General Council of Associations of Psychologists of Spain. It is evidently a significant event, as it comes to demonstrate that, despite being a relatively recent area, more than other areas such as educational psychology or clinical psychology, sport psychology possesses sufficient entity and presence, as well as an important historical background, to become consolidated as a specific area. The professional fields of actuation have historically been shaped in the continuous dialectical process between daily social practice and progress in research. The social dynamic of the accumulation of knowledge implies development and advances in basic and technical knowledge that usually produces an increasing division of the different areas of knowledge. This growing division is what serves as a base for specialized professional practice with a view to achieving the maximum levels of effectiveness and efficiency possible and always with the objective of benefiting the client to the maximum, both individually and collectively. However, it also seems evident that professional specialization is not detached from pressures and social changes that go in the opposite direction, searching for a greater uniformity and interchangeability between the actuations and those who conduct them. Precisely, in the last few years, a strong impulse toward professional disregularization has become evident, justified on facilitating a greater number of persons into the job market with the capacity and competencies to perform similar tasks and who have more options for working in different jobs. This whole process, which is, on the one hand, not at all novel in the history of labor relations since the construction of the first factories, implies that part of the task specialization can be included in the technical components and that, although these are very specific tasks, they do not require specialized knowledge or skills and are based on basic and ample knowledge that allows them to be understood and included in a more comprehensive and overall context. This apparent paradox between the increasing necessity of knowing tasks in depth and in a great detail and the supposed unnecessary professional specialization to perform these, could perhaps be understood if we distinguish between that way of understanding an expert as one who basically knows how to do something, from one who knows how to do it but also knows why he/she does it, the possible alternatives, its potential risks and the conditions that can make it advisable to maintain or modify the task and the best way of carrying it out. More specifically, some examples of sport psychology can be offered: a coach could learn what basic strategies for contingency management are the most adequate for motivating his/her athletes without understanding basic human psychological processes that explain why these

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are efficient, or without comprehending as a function of which environmental or personal aspects some contingencies will have the desirable effect or why this will not happen in all cases or in the same manner. It is also possible that some reaction will arise that he/she does arrive at understanding, and that he/she does not very well know how to re-conduct, and even, that without proper counseling, could generate some involuntary negative effect for performing a standard application. To sum up, the work is specific and the task is very explicit, but the specialization that is required to adequately perform it (or to counsel in its application) with maximum guarantees, especially implies solid knowledge of psychology and, preferably, qualified professional specialization in this area of actuation.

On the other hand, professional specialization cannot logically be absolute and excessively reductionist. Precisely, as it is convenient to have a sufficient base of knowledge and techniques to offer the best service, limits have to be established so that coherent and solid groups of competencies can be formed, also knowing that it is a dynamic and changeable process, which is subjected to transformations throughout time. In this regard, the professional work of Psychology is being configured in different social spheres, some of which are sufficiently developed to become a differentiated field, both internally within the discipline and with respect to other areas of knowledge with which it can partially share its object of intervention. All specialists coincide in indicating that Sport Psychology has been internationally formalized for more than half a century, with traceable antecedents from the beginnings of the twentieth century, and it is now a specialty that, in the case of Spain, is being practiced in a multitude of physical-sport entities and organizations, as well as in many different sports at all levels, ages and characteristics. Taking everything into account, it essentially still remains the responsibility of our collective of professionals to bring our specialty closer and make it known to potential users as well as to the different professionals with whom we have to work, including, of course, our own professional collective, and to do this, what better way than to use the media available to us?

Thus, the work of the specialists and professionals of the area itself is important, along with that of researchers, to contribute to the promotion and clarification of the characteristics, spheres, applications, and procedures pertaining to the Psychology of Sport and Physical Exercise; therefore, this Dossier has been designed with the contributions made by some people who are directly linked

to professional associations, with broad experience in different spheres of application and an active participation in the current development of this discipline. The dossier begins with a first article of a more general nature, "*Sport Psychology as a specialized occupation*" in which I defend the specificity of this professional field, distinguishing it from other areas with which it has clear links, such as Clinical Psychology or Health Psychology, but with which it does not overlap or is included. Likewise, I describe some of the keys in its development that support the affirmation that it is a specialized area which is sufficiently mature and has a social presence, and, to conclude, I mention some future challenges still remaining. A second paper by M^a Carmen Sánchez-Gombau and Francisco Javier Sánchez is entitled: "*Functions, tasks and professional profile of the sport psychologist in sports organizations*". In this article, a detailed and deep reflection on the situation of the professional practice of Sport psychology is offered, clearly showing the different spheres or subfields of intervention, explaining them didactically using a recent example, such as that of sports organizations in which they also indicate the profile of competencies and capacitation that would be adequate for practice as a specialist in the field. In a third article by María Dolores González entitled "*Psychological evaluation in sport: methodological and practical aspects*", the assessment instruments and procedures that are usually used in this field are presented. The need to increase the number and improve the availability of instruments well adapted to our language and culture is highlighted. In a critical manner, it concludes with some indications directed at the improvement of the evaluation processes and the rigor of its scientific base which, on the other hand, does not only affect this discipline.

This dossier includes papers focused on some of the subfields of applications with the greatest tradition starting with an article by Alejo García ("*High-performance sport psychologist: inputs and future challenges*"), which is centered on the work of psychological preparation and training for maximum sport performance, not only showing the main elements that this professional work entails but also focusing on the present and the future and in the contributions that may be provided by other specialties and areas of knowledge. In addition, it reflects on the requirements for scientific, technical and ethical training in this applied field, and the necessity of institutional organizational support and development to facilitate its adequate praxis, such as the creation of a professional Division and the subsequent accreditation process. Another





traditional subfield of work in this discipline is that with minors who are beginning their physical-sport practice, as described in the paper by Eugenio Pérez and Rosana Llamas about the “*Applications of psychological knowledge in sport initiation*”. They begin by pointing out the characteristics specific to this area of application of Sport psychology, to subsequently show the intervention strategies logically focused on these minors, but that also include those who surround the minors, such as trainers or family members. In this case, they also indicate some of the main competencies and skills that would be adequate for a professional who is practicing in this field. This intervention is usually centered preferably on the educational and healthy developmental aspects, but it can also entail objectives that seek technification for possible future high-performance.

Lastly, the dossier is completed with a paper regarding one of aspects specific across the different subfields of application, which is the psychological approach to sport

injuries. In the article by Francisco Ortiz, Enrique Garcés, Aurelio Olmedilla and M. Dolores Hidalgo entitled: “*The influence of psychological factors in sport injuries*”, the role of psychological variables is presented in the genesis of many injuries and their relationship with the severity and type of these. Based on a specific case of high-performance soccer players, the data show a clear relationship between the strategies used to cope with stress and the risk or vulnerability toward the development of sport injuries.

All together, it is a Dossier that can serve to bring us closer to Sport psychology in its professional application and which, evidently, “does not include all there are”, but, of course, “all those included are there”. We hope that other professionals and specialists will continue to be encouraged to contribute their experience and knowledge with a view to promoting and consolidating this interesting, and, undoubtedly, future area of applied psychology.

