CHAPTER

22

Athlete Burnout: An Individual and Organizational Phenomenon

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Big dreams are so damn tiring.

—Former professional tennis player Andre Agassi in his autobiography, Open

Athlete burnout can be perplexing and frustrating for coaches, sport psychology consultants, and athletes alike due to the wide range of meanings of the term in popular culture, the negative impact it has on athletes, and the complexity in understanding what causes it (Eklund & Cresswell, 2007; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). The vast array of potential individual and environmental contributors to burnout, along with the consequences associated with it, can be difficult to fully comprehend and ultimately address with effective interventions. Understanding athlete burnout as well as its key psychosocial antecedents is important for those who wish to combat this maladaptive athlete experience and to safeguard athlete performance and enhance well-being.

In this chapter we provide an overview of scholarship on athlete burnout to inform evidence-based practice. Specifically, we summarize existing theory and research on athlete burnout with an emphasis on how theory can inform practice. We strive to arm sport psychology consultants with the knowledge to pursue evidence-based athlete burnout interventions that consider both the individual and the organization.

What Is Athlete Burnout?

Before gaining empirical interest in sport, Freudenberger (1974) first described burnout among highly dedicated social workers who became exhausted due to the chronic strain associated with their role. Around the same time, Maslach (1976, 1978) recognized a similar phenomenon in health care professionals and in 1982 operationalized burnout as a multidimensional psychological syndrome involving emotional exhaustion, depersonalization,

Table 22-1 **Athlete Burnout Dimensions, Definitions, and Symptoms**

Dimensions	Definitions	Symptoms
Emotional & Physical Exhaustion	Emotional and physical fatigue stemming from the psychological and physical demands associated with training and competing	Excessively tired or lethargic Emotionally "drained" Unable to perform nonsport activities due to fatigue
Reduced Sense of Accomplishment	Inefficacy and a tendency to evaluate oneself negatively in terms of sport performance and accomplishments	Decreased feelings of sport achievement Performing below personal standards Consistent negative self-evaluation
Sport Devaluation	Negative, detached attitude toward sport reflected by lack of concern for sport and performance quality	Reduced concern for sport and performance quality Question the value/meaning of sport Resentful attitude toward sport

and reduced personal accomplishment among individuals who work in human service settings (e.g., social workers, nurses, teachers). Because sport is a highly effort-driven activity and was a source of anecdotal accounts of burnout in the media, sport scientists recognized the need to systematically understand this phenomenon in sport as well (Dale & Weinberg, 1990; Fender, 1989).

To understand athlete burnout, a clear operational definition was needed. Adapting Maslach's (1982) framework to sport, Raedeke (1997; Raedeke & Smith, 2001, 2009) defined athlete burnout as a multidimensional, cognitive-affective syndrome characterized by emotional and physical exhaustion, reduced sense of accomplishment, and sport devaluation. Definitions for these dimensions are found in Table 22-1. Physical exhaustion was incorporated into Maslach's worker burnout definition to account for the physical demands of sport participation. Depersonalization was adapted to devaluation because the athlete–sport (rather than the worker–patient) connection is of principal interest in competitive sport. Raedeke's definition addressed the multifaceted nature of athlete burnout and enabled researchers to best coordinate their efforts to measure and understand this athlete experience.

How Prevalent Is Athlete Burnout?

The prevalence of athlete burnout is not well understood, allowing only for very tentative estimates ranging from approximately 1 to 10 percent of athletes (see Eklund & Cresswell, 2007; Gustafsson, Kenttä, Hassmén, & Lundqvist, 2007; Raedeke & Smith, 2009). The lack of consistent diagnostic criteria is a key limitation of efforts to assess athlete burnout prevalence, as is the lack of large-scale epidemiological work on athlete burnout (Smith, Pacewicz, & Raedeke, 2019). This noted, even at a low prevalence burnout would have public health significance when considered in light of the high number of sport participants worldwide and its negative impact on athletes experiencing it. The negative impact of burnout includes performance decrements, decreased motivation, and potential dropout. Burnout also can negatively affect mental (anxiety, depression, eating disorders) and physical (illness susceptibility, substance abuse) health

(Gustafsson, Hassmén, Kenttä, & Johansson, 2008). Beyond these effects specific to the individual, burnout can be associated with troubled social relations that more broadly reflect negatively team climate (Smith et al., 2019). Thus, capturing the number of individuals experiencing the burnout syndrome (i.e., prevalence) may underestimate the potential broader negative impact of burnout within sport. Altogether, this suggests that athlete burnout warrants education, research, and practice efforts.

To fully understand the prevalence and impact of burnout also requires attention to what athlete burnout is not. Athlete burnout is distinct from depression. Confusion between the psychological outcomes of burnout and depression is not surprising, as both represent negative affective experiences (Cresswell & Eklund, 2006a). However, carefully designed research has shown these two maladaptive outcomes to be related yet distinct psychological constructs (Cresswell & Eklund, 2006b; Raedeke, Arce, de Francisco, Seoane, & Ferraces, 2013). Depression is distinguished from burnout by its more pervasive affective symptomology, as opposed to burnout's central (but not sole) link to the sport experience (Cresswell & Eklund, 2006b). This distinction noted, athletes suffering from burnout may be at risk for experiencing depression (Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012). Thus, it is important to consider the potential existence of depressive symptoms (see Chapter 20 when assessing and treating athlete burnout).

As an additional important point, athlete burnout and sport dropout should not be confounded. Though burnout will cause some athletes to quit sport, not all burned-out athletes will respond in this way (Raedeke, 1997). Moreover, sport dropout can result from reasons other than burnout. These reasons include time constraints, personal choice, switching sports, or pursuing alternative activities. Accordingly, differentiating athlete burnout and sport dropout is important for practitioners, as burned-out athletes may not outwardly manifest behaviors or attitudes that suggest a desire to leave sport.

Why Does Burnout Occur? A Review of Theoretically Informed Burnout Antecedents

Understanding what causes burnout is necessary to develop effective prevention and treatment strategies. Burnout is considered a reaction to chronic stress and therefore has been explained within overtraining and psychosocial stress perspectives. Burnout also is considered a motivational phenomenon and has been examined within self-determination and entrapment frameworks. A brief review of these prominent conceptualizations highlights key antecedents of athlete burnout (Eklund & Cresswell, 2007; Gould & Whitley, 2009). Notably, such a review points to both individual and organizational contributors to this maladaptive syndrome.

Overtraining

One explanation for athlete burnout may be that it is a maladaptive psychophysiological response to overtraining, especially in conditioning-intensive sports. Overtraining commonly is viewed as an imbalance between training and recovery, often combined with other nontraining stressors. Within the overtraining perspective, athletes are considered to be in a state of **overreaching** when they experience elevated fatigue and performance decrements that they can recover from within days to a few weeks. Overreaching can be intentional as part of training periodization. However, when not carefully planned or when athletes respond to performance plateaus caused by overreaching with intensified training, the overtraining syndrome can develop. The **overtraining syndrome** is characterized by performance decrements and exhaustion that fail to improve even with rest or reduced training. It represents the repeated failure of the body's adaptive mechanisms to cope with chronic training stress (for reviews see Meeusen et al., 2013; Raglin & Wilson, 2000). The overtraining syndrome can take months to years to recover from, and presently there is no evidence that the overtraining syndrome can be treated

aside from prolonged rest and taking time away from sport (Meeusen et al., 2013). Thus, one pathway to burnout might be through the development of the overtraining syndrome.

Although coaches and athletes attend carefully to training loads, they often overlook recovery processes. **Recovery** is integral to training periodization and represents the mechanism by which a higher level of function is achieved following intense training by reducing fatigue and regaining vitality (Kenttä & Hassmén, 2002). It is important to maintain a balance between rest and training stress in sport. In fact, some scholars highlight that underrecovery, rather than excessive training per se, results in the overtraining syndrome (Budgett, 1998; Kellmann, 2002). Thus, it is important to monitor not only athlete training loads but also what athletes do to recover. The most common forms of recovery are passive activities like rest, yet recovery is multifaceted and involves more than passive rest and time away from sport. It also involves active strategies including light activity, proper nutrition, hydration, quality sleep, mental and physical relaxation, stretching, and warm-down. Recovery also can involve interacting with supportive others (e.g., peers, family members) or engaging in experiences (e.g., spending time in nature, hobbies) that contribute to life balance, increase feelings of vitality, and provide a mental break from sport (Kellmann, 2002; Kenttä & Hassmén, 2002).

Beyond excessive training and inadequate recovery, life stress outside of sport can affect how athletes respond to intense training according to the overtraining perspective. Athletes who experience high amounts of stress outside of sport are less able to handle high training volumes compared to those experiencing less outside stress (Tenenbaum, Jones, Kitsantas, Sacks, & Berwick, 2003). Thus, training volume, recovery, and life stress are important considerations when seeking to address burnout.

Psychosocial Sport Stress

Although overtraining can be a contributor, burnout also is thought to be a reaction to chronic sport-based psychosocial stressors (Smith, 1986). **Psychosocial stress** occurs when athletes perceive an imbalance between sport demands and their ability to meet those demands. Athletes with high sport demands, yet insufficient resources to meet those demands, experience elevated stress and are more susceptible to burnout. Supporting this perspective, a systematic review of the burnout literature found perceived stress to consistently and positively associate with athlete burnout (Goodger, Gorely, Lavallee, & Harwood, 2007). In sum, stress is a salient burnout antecedent.

Many potential sources of athlete stress have been described in interviews with coaches and athletes, including high training and competitive demands and the time requirements of sport participation (Gould, Tuffey, Udry, & Loehr, 1997; Raedeke, Lunney, & Venables, 2002). Stress can also stem from interpersonal sources such as social interactions and the performance emphasis of sport (e.g., pressure from coaches/teammates, family dynamics surrounding sport). Indeed, research supports an association between negative sport-based social interactions and athlete burnout (DeFreese & Smith, 2014; Smith, Gustafsson, & Hassmén, 2010; Udry, Gould, Bridges, & Tuffey, 1997). In addition to negative interactions, social influences can be subtle, such as when parents are supportive, but family dynamics revolve excessively around sport (Raedeke et al., 2002).

Beyond outside sources, high demands can come from within the athlete. An athlete's self-esteem being based on performance accomplishments, trait anxiety, and perfectionism, characterized by overly high performance expectations, along with concerns about others' evaluations and critical self-evaluations, can contribute to athlete burnout perceptions (DeFreese & Smith, 2014; Goodger et al., 2007; Hall, Hill, & Appleton, 2012). Importantly, these dispositional factors can create psychological vulnerability to burnout, whereas more adaptive factors such as optimism, hope, and resiliency can reduce vulnerability to stress and burnout. Indeed, a litany of cross-sectional and

longitudinal studies demonstrate that maladaptive aspects of perfectionism associate with greater athlete burnout perceptions (Hill & Appleton, 2011; Madigan, Stoeber, & Passfield, 2015).

Cumulatively, the psychosocial sport stress perspective asserts the importance of individual and environmental resources in decreasing stress and alleviating burnout for athletes. For example, coping resources including lifestyle management (e.g., proper nutrition, adequate sleep; Raedeke & Smith, 2004) and social support (e.g., from teammates, parents, coaches; Cresswell, 2009; DeFreese & Smith, 2013b), are inversely associated with athlete burnout perceptions. This suggests that beyond lowering sport-based demands, increasing individual and environmental resources can be effective in deterring athlete burnout.

Self-Determination Theory

Athlete burnout is closely intertwined with motivational processes, and therefore motivation theory can inform understanding of why burnout occurs. **Self-determination theory** (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000) is a prominent theory of human motivation that has been used to understand athlete burnout. According to SDT, psychological well-being is influenced by the nature of one's motivation. The most adaptive motivation is self-determined in nature, meaning that it results predominantly from individual choice rather than internal pressures (e.g., guilt, obligation) or external pressures (e.g., rewards, punishments, expectations of others). More self-determined motivation is associated with lower burnout risk, whereas less self-determined motivation is associated with greater burnout risk. SDT further posits that motivation is influenced by the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

- Autonomy – feelings of personal choice or control
- Competence – sense of success and being effective in one's environment
- Relatedness – social connection to others reflected by feelings of acceptance and belonging

When needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met by the social environment of sport, more self-determined motivation is expected. This yields the most adaptive outcomes for athletes. Athletes who do not feel autonomous, competent, or related with others in sport will be motivated for less self-determined reasons and more likely to experience burnout.

Research on athlete burnout supports these ideas (see Li, Wang, Pyun, & Kee, 2013). Perceptions of exhaustion, reduced accomplishment, and devaluation have been shown to positively associate with less self-determined forms of sport motivation and/or inversely associate with more self-determined motivation (e.g., Cresswell & Eklund, 2005; Curran, Appleton, Hill, & Hall, 2011; Lemyre, Roberts, & Stray-Gundersen, 2007; Lonsdale, Hodge, & Rose, 2009). Additionally, in a longitudinal study of elite swimmers, Lemyre, Treasure, and Roberts (2006) found that shifts from more to less self-determined forms of motivation across a season predicted elevated burnout perceptions. Thus, changes in athlete motivation may precede burnout development. Also consistent with SDT, athlete autonomy, competence, and relatedness perceptions are inversely associated with burnout (Amorose, Anderson-Butcher, & Cooper, 2009; Hodge, Lonsdale, & Ng, 2008; Perreault, Gaudreau, Lapointe, & Lacroix, 2007; Quested & Duda, 2011). Research has also at least partially supported models specifying a sequence whereby psychological needs predict self-determined motivation for sport, which in turn predicts burnout-related perceptions in athletes (Lonsdale et al., 2009). This highlights the importance of understanding athlete need satisfaction and self-determined motivation in tandem as contributors to burnout.

Overall, burnout research within an SDT framework suggests that structuring sport to meet underlying psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as well as increase

self-determined motivation, will help prevent burnout. A variety of social-contextual factors, including the team motivational climate, organizational structure, and coach and parent behaviors, are important because they have the potential to affect need satisfaction and motivation. For that reason, they warrant specific attention in burnout prevention efforts (Isoard-Gautheur, Guillet-Descas, & Lemyre, 2012; see also Chapter 4).

Sport Entrapment

As burnout is both stress and motivation related, a common belief is that it occurs only when highly motivated individuals become disillusioned with their involvement (Pines, 1993). Expanding on this idea, Schmidt and Stein (1991) and Coakley (1992) offer complementary perspectives emphasizing that burnout occurs when individuals feel trapped into the role of being an athlete.

Schmidt and Stein (1991) characterized two faces of commitment underpinning athlete sport involvement. Adaptive commitment is when athletes maintain sport involvement because of passion and intrinsic motivation. These athletes are committed because they want to maintain their sport involvement and report high enjoyment and concomitantly high benefits (positive aspects of being an athlete) and low costs (negative aspects of being an athlete) connected to sport. They also invest a great deal of time and energy into sport because they enjoy it and feel sport is more attractive than other alternatives they could pursue. The other face of commitment is maladaptive and characterized by athletes who feel entrapped by sport and that they "have to" maintain involvement. This occurs when they have decreasing sport attraction corresponding with decreasing benefits and increasing costs. Nonetheless, they maintain involvement because they have too much invested to quit (e.g., potential scholarship), perceive high social constraints (e.g., not wanting to disappoint significant others), and see few, if any, attractive alternatives to being an athlete. From a commitment perspective, burnout occurs when athletes experience **sport entrapment** and maintain involvement not because they *want to,* but because they feel they *have to,* remain in sport.

From a sociological perspective, Coakley (1992) concurs that burnout arises when highly motivated athletes begin to question the value of sport and feel trapped in the role of being an athlete. Athletes believe they are missing out on life opportunities due to the social structure of sport, yet still feel they have to stay in sport. As an integral part of normal adolescent development, young people sample a variety of activities and roles and through that process develop multifaceted identities. However, the social structure of sport may discourage athletes from this exploration and foster unidimensional identities centered on athletics. As a result, some athletes feel trapped in their athletic role. Additionally, adolescence is a developmental period in which athletes seek autonomy and control of their lives. Although athletes may have initially decided to participate in sport, the social structure of sport limits their autonomy because much of their sport experience is controlled by others. From Coakley's perspective, the development of a unidimensional identity combined with low autonomy results in feelings of sport entrapment when athletes begin to question the value of sport in their lives and ultimately results in burnout.

Though few investigators have examined them, entrapment-based perspectives have received empirical support (e.g., Black & Smith, 2007; Raedeke, 1997). For example, Raedeke (1997) examined athlete burnout via the integration of Schmidt and Stein's (1991) commitment model and Coakley's (1992) sociological perspective. In competitive age-group swimmers, Raedeke found that athletes showing entrapment profiles of sport commitment exhibited higher burnout compared to those experiencing more adaptive or low sport commitment profiles. Entrapment-based perspectives highlight that athlete burnout experiences are most appropriately considered within psychosocial sport structures.

Integrating the Burnout Knowledge Base: How the Individual and Organization Fit

Ultimately, the experience of burnout is neither the sole result of an individual problem nor exclusively charged to the organizational (or team) environment. The fit of these elements is important for understanding burnout development. Much contemporary research on worker burnout has been framed within the job-person fit model of burnout and engagement (see Leiter & Maslach, 2004; Maslach & Leiter, 1997; 1999). According to the model, the perceived congruence of individual needs and organizational resources couched within these six domains is critical to outcomes of psychological well-being. These domains are described as follows:

- Workload – demands relative to one's personal limits and resources
- Control – ability to influence decisions, autonomy, and access to the resources necessary for performance
- Reward – incentives (monetary, social, intrinsic) consistent with expectations
- Community – social interaction in the form of closeness, teamwork, and lack of conflict
- Fairness – fairness and respectfulness of decisions and treatment
- Values – correspondence between personal and organizational goals and behavioral expectations

Less congruence of individual (e.g., athlete) needs and organizational (e.g., team) resources is expected to increase the likelihood of experiencing burnout. Conversely, with greater congruence, the likelihood of experiencing engagement is increased. As compared to burnout, engagement is a positive psychological experience characterized by (a) confidence in contrast to a reduced sense of accomplishment, (b) dedication in contrast to devaluation, and (c) vigor and enthusiasm in contrast to exhaustion (Lonsdale, Hodge, & Jackson, 2007). Creating sport experiences that foster engagement not only will prevent burnout but will also result in positive benefits for athletes, including enhanced motivation, performance, and well-being.

Investigation of the areas of worklife and engagement in sport is in its infancy. Adopting a positive psychology approach (Gould, 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), DeFreese and Smith (2013a) examined the areas of worklife as they relate to athlete burnout and engagement in a sample of collegiate athletes. Consistent with theoretical expectations, athlete endorsement of athlete-team congruence on the variables of workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values was positively associated with athlete engagement and negatively associated with athlete burnout. Thus, striving to foster athlete-team congruence in these domains appears to be a promising approach that is innovative and comprehensive for enhancing engagement as well as preventing burnout.

Preventing Athlete Burnout: Individual and Organizational Intervention Strategies

Effective intervention targeting burnout should be individualized, given the multifaceted nature of the burnout process (Gould et al., 1997; Gustafsson, Kenttä, Hassmén, Lundqvist, & Durand-Bush, 2007). Each of the theoretical perspectives reviewed in this chapter provides guidance on developing evidence-based interventions targeting key variables associated with burnout, as shown in Table 22-2. The table also includes example intervention strategies based on each aforementioned burnout theory. Finally, given the chronic nature of burnout, the most effective interventions will have a prevention, rather than treatment, focus. Within such a multifaceted intervention strategy, individual and organizational antecedents should jointly be considered for each case. Indeed, adopting a framework of individual-organization fit may be especially fruitful for the prevention of burnout and the promotion of adaptive psychosocial outcomes in athletes.

Table 22-2 **Athlete Burnout Perspectives, Key Variables, and Intervention Strategies**

Perspectives	Key Variables	Intervention Strategies
Overtraining	Training Volume	Ensure developmentally appropriate training loads based on athlete age, physical maturity, and skill level.
		Continuously monitor individual athlete training responses and feeling states. Prolonged fatigue and mood disturbance are warning signs.
		Avoid a "one size fits all" approach to the design of athlete training programs.
	Recovery	Reduce training loads after a period of intense training or if athletes are experiencing prolonged fatigue.
		Educate athletes about maladaptive responses to training and emphasize the importance of recovery.
		Ensure that athletes receive adequate recovery, including passive rest and more active forms of recovery.
		Ensure that athletes engage in pursuits outside of sport that increase vitality.
	Nonsport Stress	Provide resources and training in strategies to cope with sources of stress beyond sport (e.g., schoolwork, family life, romantic relationships).
		Do not increase training loads when nonsport stressors are on the rise.
Psychosocial Sport Stress	Demands	Identify key stressors and develop a plan for dealing effectively with them.
		Adopt a positive coaching style and help parents maintain realistic expectations and positive support of their children.
		Emphasize that skill development is a continuous process with highs and lows.
	Resources	Increase coping resources such as through effective lifestyle management.
		Encourage athletes to form strong social support networks.
		Build self-regulation skills through mental skills training.
Self-Determination Theory	Self-Determined Motivation	Promote a stimulating sport climate that emphasizes effort, learning, accomplishment, and enjoyment of the sport.
	Autonomy	Allow athletes choices in their practice, competition, and treatment plans.
		Provide a rationale for decisions so athletes understand why they are doing things a certain way.
		Employ democratic coaching that involves group decisions when appropriate.
	Competence	Structure sport so athletes have opportunities to succeed with effort.
		Aid athletes in focusing on successes as well as areas in need of improvement.
		Establish effective goal-setting strategies.
		Continuously develop fundamental physical and mental sport skills by reinforcing effort, learning, and improvement, as well as treating mistakes as part of the learning process.

(*continued*)

Perspectives	Key Variables	Intervention Strategies
	Relatedness	Foster a productive and supportive coach–athlete relationship as well as positive relationships between athletes.
		Provide pre- and during-season programming that builds teammate relationships and supports positive social interactions.
		Incorporate team building activities within the practice structure and encourage outside social activities.
Sport Entrapment	Benefits	Help athletes recognize the benefits of their sport involvement that may not be evident to them or that they overlook.
		Assess what makes sport rewarding to athletes and incorporate those elements into the sport experience.
	Costs	Acknowledge personal costs of sport involvement and help athletes develop strategies for managing them effectively.
		Explore alternatives for athletes in dysfunctional training or competition environments.
	Enjoyment	Ensure practice variety and limit the monotony of training.
		Structure sport to be exciting and to foster competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Refer to self-determination theory in the earlier section of the table.
	Investments	While recognizing the time and energy required by sport, encourage athletes to maintain nonsport interests and hobbies so they do not feel that they are missing out on other important life opportunities.
	Social Constraints	Promote athlete social relationships with both sport and nonsport associates.
		Ensure that coaches, parents, and peers are sources of support and not pressure.
	Attractiveness of Alternative Activities	Support athlete exploration of other sport and nonsport activities as a means of personal exploration and validation of sport involvement.
		Encourage athletes to reflect on the meaning and value of sport in their lives, including what they would miss if not an athlete.
	Athletic Identity	Communicate that one can strongly identify with multiple roles (e.g., athlete, student, responsible citizen).
		Encourage athletes to develop other aspects of their lives beyond sport and support their doing so.
		Help athletes put sport performance into proper life perspective.
	Sport Control	Refer to autonomy in the earlier section of the table.

In spite of the wealth of information on potential burnout antecedents derived from theory and research, an important question remains for the practitioner: How can all of this information be used to recognize, prevent, and treat burnout in competitive athletes? We recommend an evidence-based approach that targets both individual and organizational burnout antecedents (see Table 22-2) and considers the fit between the individual (athlete) and organization (team or club). Specific antecedents and issues of fit will be more or less relevant to individual athlete cases. Therefore, rather than suggesting a "one size fits all" approach to athlete burnout intervention, we offer a guiding framework designed to help practitioners appropriately tailor prevention and/or treatment strategies.

Step 1: **Assess the situation.** It is important to establish whether burnout may be occurring or has the potential to develop. First, evaluate whether potential symptoms of burnout exist. Then, determine the individual and organizational factors that may contribute to risk of burnout. This is crucial for the design of an effective intervention plan.

Step 2: **Design an intervention plan.** The intervention plan should be multifaceted and target salient factors grounded in motivation and stress theory. Based on the concept of athlete–organization fit, the congruence of individual characteristics with organizational structures affecting demands and resources should be targeted.

Step 3: **Evaluate intervention effectiveness.** Consistent with best practice, intervention strategies should be continuously evaluated to ensure their effectiveness. In the event specific strategies are unsuccessful or undesirable, they should be altered or new strategies (potentially targeting different burnout factors) should be implemented.

Based on the many ways individual burnout cases develop, a variety of individual and organizational options for burnout diagnosis, treatment, and prevention exist. In addition to being multifaceted, effective interventions likely will involve not only the athletes but also parents, coaches, and sports medicine staff. We provide case studies next to help practitioners develop their skill in planning effective interventions.

Case Studies as a Training Tool for Practitioners

The following case studies are fictional scenarios designed to simulate situations where sport personnel may encounter burnout when working with athletes. We challenge you to work through these scenarios using the three-step evidence-based approach outlined earlier. First, **assess the situation** to establish whether burnout is occurring or has the potential to develop and what factors are contributing to it. Second, **design an intervention plan** that addresses these targeted factors. Finally, consider how you will **evaluate intervention effectiveness** and then make modifications to intervention strategies as needed.

In these case studies, some symptoms of burnout are presented and many potential factors could be considered as contributing to burnout. A wide variety of potential intervention strategies exist. We offer guidance for addressing the first case and remove guidance for the second case, with the goal of encouraging you to frame the evaluation and discussion of them. In the first case, you are left to consider the symptoms of burnout, but we highlight some important individual and organizational factors and present a few potential solutions. You are encouraged to consider other potential factors and solutions that could have bearing on the case, as ours are not comprehensive. In the second case, we encourage you to use your expertise and creativity as well as your learning of the three-step evidenced-based approach to burnout intervention.

Case Study 1

Manuel

You are a sport psychology consultant with a university athletics program. Manuel is a first-year university soccer player referred to you by the athletic training staff (he has knee tendonitis) because he is struggling with motivation. He is the first "blue chip" recruit of the soccer program, which was formed three years ago, and has a full scholarship. It is early October, and therefore Manuel has been on campus about eight weeks. Preseason and early season conditioning has been rigorous, and the competition schedule will soon heat up as the team plays conference opponents. Manuel's performance has been subpar for him, as he is not playing to the level expected, nor is he improving. He tells you at your first meeting with him that he is "completely fried" from soccer. He also says that he is "going nowhere" with soccer and that he can't imagine surviving the season, let alone the entire four years. Manuel's drive for soccer is not the same as it once was. Although the coach is disappointed with this, given the high expectations held for him, Manuel overall feels the coach and other individuals linked to the team (e.g., administrators, training staff) are largely supportive. They are primarily concerned with improving his "attitude" and overall soccer experience this season. From working with this team and coach in the past, you have a very positive outlook on the way athletes are treated in training and as individuals. How will you proceed?

In brainstorming intervention strategies, we encourage you to recall each theory and the concept of individual–organization fit and to develop a multifaceted intervention that targets the athlete as well as important others (e.g., coaches, parents, organization). We hope that these case studies foster helpful discussion among coaches, sport psychology consultants, and others interested in addressing athlete burnout.

Possible Case Study 1 Solutions

- As the team environment appears positive, potential intervention strategies will primarily address modifiable individual factors to promote an optimal individual–organization fit.
- Key individual burnout factors for Manuel may include overtraining, pressure associated with being a "blue chip" recruit, lack of recognition of sport benefits, low levels of self-determined (i.e., intrinsic) motivation for sport, and transitioning to college.
- Suggest Manuel take some time off from soccer to focus on injury rehabilitation and participate in activities that promote psychological recovery. The benefits of this break will likely outweigh any performance/conditioning decrements. These decisions should be made in collaboration with coaches and sports medicine staff.
- Provide Manuel with training on the use of relaxation techniques (e.g., deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, mindfulness training). This will aid in his ability to cope with sport stress (see Chapters 12 and 17). Additionally, Manuel should identify specific sport and nonsport stressors and construct a plan for dealing with them. This will help him manage the pressures of being a student-athlete.

- Initiate Manuel creating a list of the benefits of his current sport involvement. This list should be exhaustive so as to showcase benefits he may not currently be considering.
- Manuel's self-determined motivation for soccer will be increased by promoting feelings of competence, autonomy, and relatedness (see Chapter 4). Review past successful performances, particularly those in the collegiate environment, to build sport competence. Also, help Manuel realize that plateaus are a natural part of the training process and are normal when making the transition to a new environment.
- Initiate team-building activities such as a mentoring program to provide opportunities for Manuel to develop relatedness with his teammates and to help make the transition to college.

Case Study 2

Judy

Judy is a competitive high school and club swimmer. She is visiting with you in compliance with her team requirement that all athletes meet with the club's sport psychology consultant (with the primary goal of performance enhancement) at least one time during the competitive season. In your initial meeting, Judy commented that she specialized at swimming at a young age where two-a-day practices and near year-round training were common. Although she believes that swimming prevents her from having a normal social life, she used to feel swimming success was worth the sacrifice. Now she is less sure of that. She also hints that she is extremely perfectionistic as well as singularly focused on winning. Even now others are describing her as the next Olympic hopeful. Because of that she feels pressure. She does not want to disappoint her coaches or parents because they have done a lot for her swimming career. Judy states that she continuously gets in extra workouts before and after practice, even when coaches insist that the athletes rest in order to best respond to a designed training taper. Despite her high level of focus and commitment, Judy also mentions that she is feeling much more lethargic than normal and does not seem to be performing as well as she did in previous seasons or even earlier in the present one. Further, she states that she often evaluates herself negatively, while simultaneously maintaining an image of confidence and positivity to her coach, teammates, and parents. Overall, your impression is that swimming is not really something that Judy enjoys, but rather is an activity she views as a way to avoid disappointing others, gain recognition/approval, and maybe receive a college scholarship. From your knowledge of the training environment, you are aware that this particular club team has a very demanding regimen. This has allowed some athletes to excel and reach their goals of swimming in national competitions and receiving college scholarships. However, for others dropout and maladaptive psychological outcomes (e.g., burnout) are common. The coach states that she has a "survival of the fittest" approach to training. She guards her training regimens closely and does not "alter them for any athlete." Judy's parents were both former collegiate athletes and are personal friends with this coach. They believe that pushing Judy hard in swimming will benefit her character as well as help financially by landing her a college scholarship. You work regularly with this team to employ mental skills training for performance enhancement. How will you proceed?

Summary

We have aimed to provide sport psychology consultants with clarity regarding the complex (and sometimes frustrating) phenomenon of athlete burnout. This multidimensional cognitive-affective syndrome is distinct from depression and dropout, and is explained by several sport-based burnout theories. Accordingly, overtraining, psychosocial stress, motivation, and sport entrapment perspectives on burnout highlight key antecedents which inform evidence-based strategies for burnout treatment and prevention. Further, the host of burnout factors emphasized within these perspectives can be integrated within an individual–organization fit framework in sport.

Because burnout is a multifaceted and individualized experience, the design and implementation of effective intervention strategies should be tailored accordingly. To facilitate best practice, we suggest a three-step evidence-based approach to burnout intervention that considers the fit between the athlete and the team on theoretically specified individual and organizational factors important to the athlete's burnout experience. Practitioners should (a) assess the situation, (b) design an intervention plan, and (c) evaluate intervention effectiveness. We hope that this chapter aids sport psychology consultants in conceptualizing how to prevent and treat athlete burnout, which in turn enables athletes to achieve optimal performance and psychological health.

Study Questions

1. How is athlete burnout defined? What are its three dimensions?
2. How is burnout distinct from depression and sport dropout?
3. A coach mentions that burnout does not seem to be a very important issue in sport because it is rare. How would you respond?
4. What key burnout antecedents are highlighted by an overtraining perspective? Can an athlete experience burnout without being overtrained? Why or why not?
5. How does a psychosocial sport stress perspective differ from an overtraining perspective on the causes of burnout?
6. What three psychological needs are showcased in self-determination theory? Describe an example athlete burnout intervention strategy tied to each of these three needs.
7. How does a sport entrapment perspective describe the development of burnout in athletes? Why don't "burned-out" athletes always just leave sport altogether?
8. What is individual–organization fit? How can lack of congruence between the athlete and the team promote burnout and prevent engagement in sport?
9. What three steps should sport psychology consultants consider when designing and implementing athlete burnout prevention or treatment interventions?
10. A coach you work with believes that burnout is a sign of weakness in an athlete. How would you respond to this coach? What information could you provide her?

11. Your initial intervention for an adolescent track athlete experiencing burnout is not working well. You originally suggested a brief (two-week) break from training and competition. However, after returning from this break he is still feeling "burned out." What will you recommend next? What nontraining factors could be playing a role?

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