Elsa Kristiansen

Perception of and coping with organizational and media stress in elite sport: Does the coach matter?
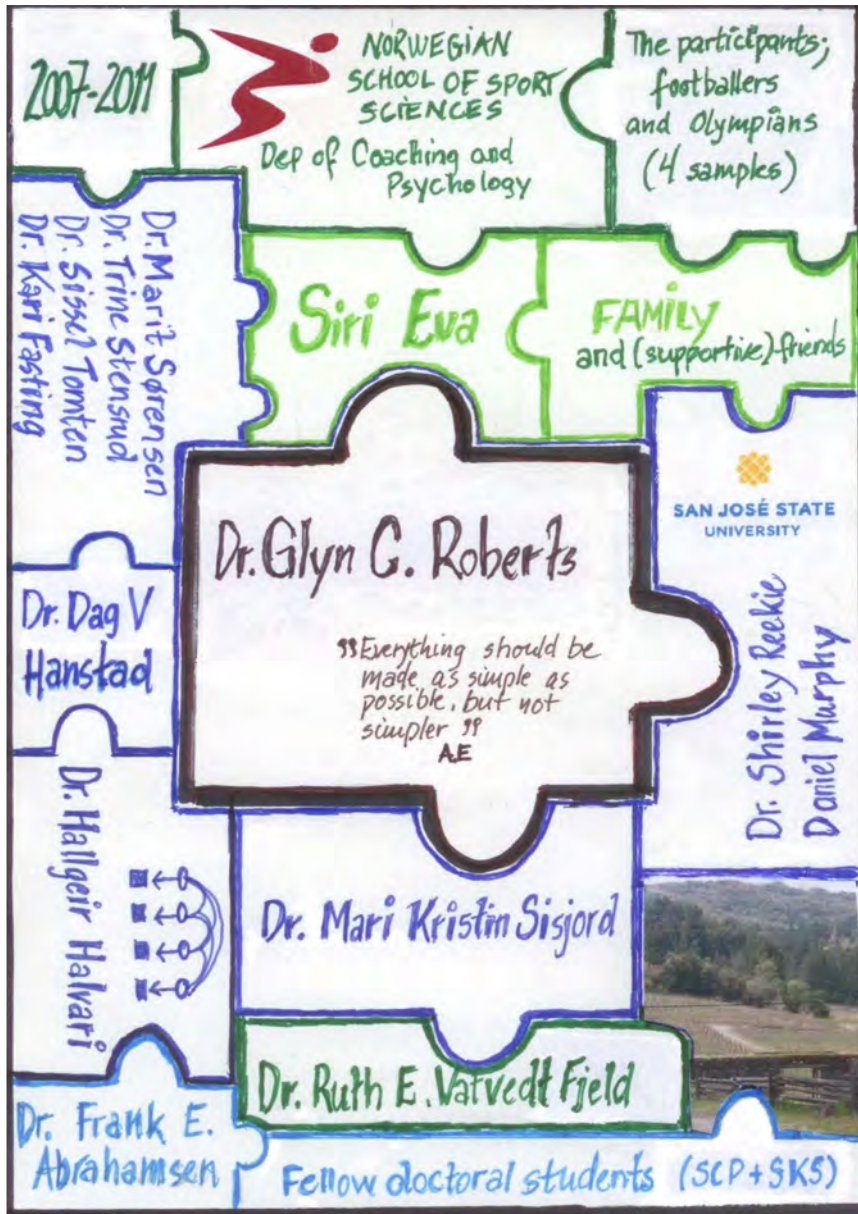
Acknowledgements

Figure 1

The PhD-puzzle

List of papers

Paper 1   **Young elite athletes and social support: Coping with competitive and organizational stress in "Olympic" competition.**
Elsa Kristiansen & Glyn C. Roberts
Scandinavian Journal of Medicine Science in Sports, 20, 686-695

Paper 2   **Coping with stress in American soccer**
Elsa Kristiansen, Daniel Murphy, & Glyn C. Roberts
Accepted pending revision, *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*

Paper 3   **Organizational and media stress among professional football players: Testing an Achievement Goal Theory model**
Elsa Kristiansen, Hallgeir Halvari, & Glyn C. Roberts
In press, *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine Science in Sports*

Paper 4   **Coping with negative media content: The experiences of professional football goalkeepers**
Elsa Kristiansen, Glyn C. Roberts, & Mari Kristin Sisjord
In press, *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology, 9 (4), 2011*

Paper 5   **Media exposure and adaptive coping in elite football**
Elsa Kristiansen & Glyn C. Roberts
In press, *International Journal of Sport Psychology*

Paper 6   **Coping with the media at the Vancouver Winter Olympics: "We all make a living out of this"**
Elsa Kristiansen, Dag Vidar Hanstad, & Glyn C. Roberts
Accepted pending revision, *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*

List of other publications based on the dissertation

2011   *FEPSAC, Madeira, Portugal*
Kristiansen, E., Hanstad, D. V., & Roberts, G. C.: "Elite Norwegian athletes coping with the media at the Vancouver Winter Olympics" (poster).

2010   *AASP, Providence, USA*
Kristiansen E., & Roberts, G. C.: "Motivation and goalkeeping: Coping with negative media reporting"

2009   Kristiansen, E. Coping with stressors in youth sport events. Contribution published in the first volume of the *Virtual Olympic Congress 2009 proceedings* (pp. 656-657).

2009   *ECSS, Oslo, Norway*
Kristiansen, E., & Roberts, G. C.: "Motivation and goalkeeping: Coping with media reporting of saves and failures".

2008   *AASP, St. Louis, USA*
Kristiansen, E., Roberts, G. C., & Abrahamsen, F. E.: "Young elite athletes coping with "Olympic" demands" (poster).

Abstract

Grounded within the motivational framework of Achievement Goal Theory (AGT) and the transactional stress perspective, the purpose of the present dissertation was to investigate how elite athletes perceive and cope with organizational and media stressors.

Paper I functioned primarily as a pre-test for development of a questionnaire measuring stress. Participants were elite adolescent athletes (N=29, *Mage = 16.6*) participating in EYOF (European Youth Olympic Festival). They experienced both competitive stressors (size and importance of the competition), and organizational stressors (exacerbated by the extreme heat in July at the competitive site). Analysis of data results revealed that experienced *coaches* and coach support were important factors that enhanced the chances of success for the participants. To cope with stressors, the athletes relied on combinations of different type of social support and cognitive coping strategies.

Paper II examined various categories of organizational stressors experienced by American football players (N=8, *Mage = 28.4*). A wide array of organizational stressors were reported by participants including coping with the drafting process, contracts, travel, team issues, and coach-player relationship. To cope with these stressors, the players used problem-focused and avoidance strategies coupled with extensive use of social support coping strategies. Similar to data results in Paper I, not only do adolescents athletes' depended on coach support, but also do mature elite athletes. An examination of the *cultural implications* of the total stress experience was also highlighted in this study.

Paper III tested the AGT stress model with elite footballers (N=82, *Mage = 25.2*). Informed by the qualitative findings in Paper I, two new questionnaires were developed and used in this study: *Coach-athlete Stress in Football Questionnaire* (CASFQ) and *Media Stress in Football Questionnaire* (MSFQ). The findings in Paper III support some of the key postulates of AGT: For elite football players in a Premier Football Division in Europe, a mastery climate reduced the perception of stress among the players, and the inverse was true for a performance climate. Further, the motivational climate was more important than the personal goal orientations; this highlights and supports previous evidence regarding the ability of the coach to defuse organizational and media stress.

Paper IV examined how three football goalkeepers experienced and coped with the media stress. Three major categories of coping found were *social support*, *avoidance,* and *problem-focused*. Further evidence pointed toward the importance of coach-player relationship, in that the evaluation of the coach meant more to the players than the game

reports printed in the press. The participants avoided buying, reading, or watching news reports, or giving interviews on match day in order to avoid pressure. In line with the other findings, *experience* was crucial for coping with this specialist position in the team.

Paper V investigated coping with media stress within three professional football teams (N=82, *Mage* = 25.2). A mixed methodological design used to gain in-depth information about media stress to emerge. The major finding was that media exposure was associated with the enhancement of the performance criteria for the footballers. Moreover, both individual coping and collective team coping with media stressors were important. A coach created *mastery climate* functioned as a team coping strategy. The data also reinforced that the intrusion of journalists a serious source of stress for the participants.

Informed by the data findings in the Paper V, **Paper VI** was a more thorough examination of the journalist-athlete relationship stress as experienced by 10 Norwegian Olympians (*Mage* = 27.7) during 2010 Vancouver Olympics. For elite athletes, media contact is part of the job, even though intrusive questioning may negatively affect the athlete's preparation and self-confidence. Consequently, these elite athletes had learned to *cope* with the journalists' presence and were understanding of their need for stories and inside information. One way of coping was the use of social support within a mastery climate. Further, the Olympians used problem-focused strategies, avoidance coping and on occasion taking a "media break".

The evidence from all six papers supports the usefulness of the transactional stress perspective to study stress perceived by *elite* athletes'. Categories of *organizational stressors* (core categories such as coach and team issues *and* also cultural peculiarities) and *media stress* (positive and negative coverage as well as the journalists) were perceived as stressful in the 6 papers. Use of coping strategies such as coach support, social support, problem-focused strategies, and avoidance coping were used by participants to cope with both organizational and media stressors. Data analysis revealed further evidence that elite athletes' perceptions of stress may be influenced by the motivational climate created by the *coach*; hence, creating and maintaining *mastery oriented* climates *can reduce stress* as an adaptive coping strategy.

Contents

List of tables

List of figures

INTRODUCTION

Athletes must learn to cope with stressors if they are to pursue a professional sports career (Holt & Dunn, 2004a), and unfortunately, a failure to cope may lead to decreased performance (Lazarus, 2000). Furthermore, for the truly elite athlete, the competitive situation is constantly becoming more complex because of the increased popularity of elite sport, and the development of sophisticated visual technology with which elite sport is reported. Therefore, the aim of this dissertation was to explore two stressors that are particularly relevant to *elite* athletes; organizational demands and extensive media attention. In what way do these two factors affect the perception of stress of performers?

My interest in this subject was initiated by my interest in the Tour de France (TdF). At the 17th stage of the 2005 version, Norwegian Kurt Asle Arvesen almost won a stage but he ended second after Savoldelli from Lance Armstrong's team Discovery Channel. In the newspapers it was called a nightmare[1].

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[1] Facsimile from *VG,* July 21, 2005 – Arvesen left. Heading in English: "Nightmare"

Any follower of Norwegian professional bike racing probably felt that Kurt Asle deserved a win, but before finishing that thought, we actually got him live on TV. His politeness when answering the questions about *how it felt to be beaten* was amazing. He had no time of recovery, and the "press conference" started almost before he was off his bike. The number of journalists surrounding him was incredible. This prompted the question: How do the elite athletes of this calibre cope with organizational demands (you have to be there for the sponsors and the team), media attention (there is nowhere to hide from the camera) and maybe some disappointment with losing (you must be human after all?). The way bike rider Arvesen coped with these issues after the stage of 239.5 kilometres which took him and Savoldelli 5 hours and 41 minutes and 19 seconds to finish, is notable. In the aftermath of such an incident and media questioning about winning and losing, how do elite athletes feel about their own abilities and successful performance?

In many ways the *Olympians* make an interesting research sample as they get massive attention for a short period of time, this attention being comparable with the bike riders participating in TdF. The media coverage of these sports events may unite nations, but criticism can be particularly devastating when national heroes disappoint. In addition, Olympians are also interesting from the organizational point of view, as the participation is collaboration between the national Olympic Committee, National federations, clubs and sponsors. Sometimes conflicting interests might cause the athletes extra stress, and the pressure of performance and pleasing the nation is tough for these athletes.

Elite footballers[2] on the other hand, are *scrutinised daily* – not every fourth year. In other words, football must be considered (from a European viewpoint) a perfect sample to investigate with regard to the origin of stress from the organization and the media. There is a constant focus on personal and professional issues in addition to a constant turnover of players and coaches with a demand for results. Interestingly enough, these organizational issues often tend to be very public and are extensively reported in the media.

While we constantly gain more knowledge of the *organization* as a stressor (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009), the *media* is an understudied topic in sport psychological research. The first joy of fame may result in a problematic relationship to media personnel, due to the fact that elite athletes are forced to be responsive to the media's demands as well as the demands of the organization. The media make some athletes superstars, though fame usually comes gradually. Fame is related both to the popularity of the sport or the event and the money

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[2] Throughout this dissertation football will be used to cover the sport named soccer within the US. Hence, soccer will be used in article 2 due the Americans use of this term when talking about their own sport.

involved, as well as results. Both types of stressors have the potential to create a very ego-involving social context that the athlete must cope with (Roberts, in press), almost on a daily basis for the truly elite (the "Beckham syndrome") in order to maintain the competitive focus and perform to expectations.

Given that variations in groups and their environmental demands can give rise to groups of individuals interpreting the same event differently (Lazarus, 1999), this thorough understanding of perceived origins of stress and the consequent coping strategies also requires consideration of the unique experiences of subgroups of individuals (McKay, Niven, Lavallee, & White, 2008). Therefore, there is a need to examine the stress experiences of athletes from sport contexts not yet investigated (Giacobbi, Foore, & Weinberg, 2004), and the focus here has been on two groups of Olympians and two groups of footballers in order to examine both individual and teams sports. How these environmental stressors are interpreted and coped with is illustrated in the narrative of an elite football player below.

An illustrative story about coping with environmental stressors

One of the reasons that I have been so successful in this sport is due to my ability to not getting excited or stressed out by minor incidents, and there are many of them in this "business". If the neighbours tell me "you really sucked yesterday", "bad game yesterday", or "will you ever start winning again" and in addition you (of course) get a low ranking playing score in the newspapers, I don't let it affect me. But I can see that this sort of criticism gets to the younger guys on my team.

The media coverage can sometimes be cruel, but you must learn to live with this sort of criticism. And even though you are constantly criticized, it is important to always stay polite towards journalists. You must make your own rules on how you will behave, and always question their (i.e., the journalists) motives so they don't catch you off guard. When asked about other players and things you have (or should not have) any knowledge or opinion about; refuse to comment upon it. During these past few years the journalists have never asked me any such questions, my strategy (of giving short, objective and boring answers) worked. Actually, it is a pretty good coping strategy! I guess I have become media wise, and I did not give journalists the answers they wanted about team conflicts, conflicts with the coach and other types of "scandals". Team conflicts must be, after coverage of superb victories, the media's favourite theme.

There is enough stress during the long seasons without the media. Every week is about a game the coach (and/or management) wants us to win, and the closer one gets to the end of season, the

more concern and focus is placed on the win-loss statistics. I try to focus on my tasks, and do my job satisfactorily. I put a lot of pressure on myself, and it is an awful feeling when you know you can do better. I have to go out there and do my part, and expect the other 10 players to do the same. We have to have cohesion and create a play. We make each other look good; so many players forget that this is a team sport… They will keep the ball and not send it to you… It gets even worse if you play for a losing team, and then everybody is playing for themselves and their next contract. In addition, you'll lose if you go out there and are afraid of losing. A team must approach games as a team. However, the teams are not something constant as there is, unfortunately, a turnover of people and coaches.

To survive in this ever-changing environment, the best is to stay "normal", always remember who you are, and don't let fame or disappointment affect you. I have seen guys using an hour in front of the mirror before press conferences in order to take care of their "image" and "look". I don't know… Well, I did have an incident as a younger player in Europe that put things in perspective for me. For the first time in my life I had earned a large amount of money, and we were at a casino. I have never been a tough player, but I had just won so much money and wanted to order some expensive champagne. The waiter looked at me and asked if I knew how expensive it was. I then showed him the money I had won and said "it doesn't matter". He then looked at me and said: "GET BACK TO EARTH". The way the waiter said this to me, the way I felt when he said it, I can still feel the awful shame. For me this was a wake-up call, I can't believe I was that stupid… Fame does things like this to you, you know…. Again, stay normal and try to live a normal life; I guess that is the only way to get old in this show business. [Experienced football player, printed with his permission].

THEORETICAL AND RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

You can't wait for inspiration. You have to go after it with a club
(Jack London)

Previous research has highlighted the potentially stressful nature of being involved in sport (Giacobbi et al., 2004; Noblet & Gifford, 2002), which makes knowledge about the process paramount. A *stressful* situation starts with a set of circumstances in the socio-physical environment, when there is a mismatch between an individual's resources and the perceived challenge that the athlete has to *cope* with. In a dynamic process, an athlete will interact with the environment during performances and evaluate any given situation according to personal goals, situation intentions and so forth while attempting to cope with the situation if necessary (Hanton, Fletcher, & Coughlan, 2005). In short, the individual's cognitive appraisals of a stressful situation is split into two interdependent processes; *primary* appraisal (identifying the situation as harmful) and *secondary* appraisal (what can be done in order to minimize stress). According to Puente-Díaz and Anshel (2005) appraisal is concerned with "goal relevance, congruence and type of ego involvement, and it identifies whether the stressful situation is relevant to one's well-being, self-beliefs, and personal goals" (p. 431). Appraisal then becomes the evaluation of stressful events in reference to one's well-being (Lazarus, 2000).

The stress model used in the present study is the *transactional model* that asserts that emotional and behavioural responses/coping strategies will result following the initial appraisal process. Hence, a "stressful encounter is a dynamic unfolding process, not a static unitary event" (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985, p. 167). As a result, the transactional perspective recognizes the recursive principle that a person, the environment, and psychological reactions all mutually affect another (Fletcher, Hanton, & Mellalieu, 2006; Lazarus, 1981), and is the dominant model today (Hardy, Jones, & Gould, 1996; McKay et al., 2008; Nicholls & Polman, 2007a). Following this line of thought, stress and coping research should be studied simultaneously (Pearlin, 1991).

What is a stressor?

First of all, *stress* is often defined as an imbalance between the perceived demands in the situation and a person/athlete's resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The misuse and imprecision of the term has been debated since the 1970s (McGrath, 1970, 1982), and continues up to the present (for further discussion see Aldwin, 2007; Fletcher et al., 2006;

Hardy et al., 1996). As a solution to this debate, Fletcher and colleagues suggest to make stress represent the overall *process* incorporating stressors, strains, appraisals and coping responses (Fletcher et al., 2006). In this framework, *strain* is defined as "an individual's negative psychological, physical and behavioural responses to stressors" (p. 329), making strain the received demand (Kahn, 1970). Further, *stressors* are the environmental demands or stimuli encountered by an individual (Fletcher et al., 2006).

There are immense numbers of stressors to be experienced by an elite athlete. Fletcher and colleagues (2006) suggested that recognizing and clearly differentiating between the main types of stress in sport may be useful and proposed three major categories of stress including competitive, organizational and personal stress. Previous research has revealed that the organizational category contained considerably more dimensions than the competitive and personal ones (Hanton et al., 2005). When defining these three major types of stressors, it is the individual's ongoing transaction with environmental demands associated with "competitive performance", "the organization which he she operates within" and finally "personal life events" respectively (see McKay et al., 2008). Fletcher and colleagues underline that personal and "nonsporting" life events like family "should not be considered aspects of the organizational stress process" (2006, p. 329; see also Fletcher & Hanton, 2003; Hanton et al., 2005; Woodman & Hardy, 2001).

In the current investigation, two types of environmental stressors were examined more closely; categories of organizational and media stressors. Previous research usually treats stress emanating from the media as one of several categories of organizational stressors (e.g., McKay et al., 2008); however, here it will be treated as a separate source of strain for elite athletes due to its complexity.

Categories of organizational stressors

Organizational stressors (e.g., sport organization politics, coaches, team selection criteria and planning) have been investigated, and the attention has been on "critical issues surrounding, and cognitive processes underpinning, a performer's relationship with his or her sport organization" (Fletcher et al., 2006, p. 327). This research on organizational stress started in the early 1990s when some of the organizational stressors that elite athletes had to cope with were unearthed (Gould, Jackson, & Finch, 1993a; Scanlan, Stein, & Ravizza, 1991; Scanlan, Ravizza, & Stein, 1989). Moreover, this research was followed by a more recent interest in Britain and the US. Papers 1-3 in the present research address categories of organizational stressors in elite sport.

Today, researchers argue that it is essential for sport organizations to adopt a systematic and strategic approach to better understand the role they play in preparing elite athletes for competition (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Houlihan & Green, 2008). Consequently, the understanding of organizational issues becomes pivotal. By doing so, we overcome the limitations of earlier research on psychological preparation focusing on only individual performers (Hardy et al., 1996), failing to see that group dynamics, social and organizational factors might influence performance as well.

Following the above mentioned suggestions, the organizational impact on elite athletes' well-being and performance has recently been highlighted in several studies (Fletcher & Hanton, 2003; Fletcher et al., 2006; Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Levy et al., 2009; McKay et al., 2008; Woodman & Hardy, 2001). This research has been grouped into 6 lines of inquiry by Fletcher and Flagstaff (2009), though only two lines will be addressed here[3]. The first line of inquiry concerns Olympic performance factors. Several studies have looked into American athletes and their Olympic experiences during several Olympics (Gould, Greenleaf, Chung, & Guinan, 2002; Gould et al., 1998, 2000; Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, Medberty, & Peterson, 1999; Greenleaf, Gould, & Dieffenbach, 2001). A consistent finding in this research is that management of organizational-related issues is pivotal to achieving Olympic success. The teams that "failed" perceived planning and team cohesion problems, faced travel problems, and coaching problems (Gould et al., 1999).

The second line of inquiry concerns organizational stress in elite sport. Woodman and Hardy (2001) were the first to identify the impact of organizational stressors on preparing for competition. Subsequently, British sport psychologists have identified a wide range of factors encountered by elite athletes (some of the recent ones; Levy et al., 2009; McKay et al., 2008; Mellalieu, Neil, Hanton, & Fletcher, 2009; Reeves, Nicholls, & McKenna, 2009; Thelwell, Weston, Greenlees, & Hutchings, 2008a, 2008b; Weston, Thelwell, Bond, & Hutchings, 2009). This research has highlighted that professionals working with elite athletes need to broaden their competencies in order to address the overall stress experience (Hanton & Fletcher, 2005), this because that categories of organizational stressors can disrupt performance (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009).

It is important to consider the cultural fabric of a given sport in order to understand the circumstances that may be particularly stressful for elite athletes (Noblet & Gifford, 2002). Naturally, different sports organization may affect athletes differently and lead to perception

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[3] The 4 lines not mentioned are: perceptions of roles within sports teams, organizational success factors in sport and business, performance environments in elite sport, and organizational citizenship behaviour in sport (p. 428).

of diverse categories of stressors, and from cross-cultural research there is evidence that culture may influence both appraisal and the respective use of coping strategies (Puente-Díaz & Anshel, 2005). Hence, a thorough cultural knowledge of the elite athletes' sports environment situation is mandatory for a complete understanding.

The coach – one organisational component. The recent research has mainly focused upon the experiences of athletes (Hanton et al., 2005), but there are exceptions that focus on the stress coping processes of coaches (Frey, 2007; Olusoga, Butt, Maynard, & Hays, 2010; Olusoga, Butt, Hays, & Maynard, 2009; Thelwell et al., 2008a). Olympic athletes have pointed out that the inability of coaches to handle pressure is a stressor for athletes (Gould et al., 1999), hence, it has been argued that coaches should be considered "performers" themselves (Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, & Chung, 2002).

Coaches need to be aware that the changes in their behaviour during times of stress are potential sources of strain for their athletes (Olusoga et al., 2010). There are a lot of organizational situations coaches are required to deal with while at the same time they manage to be supportive towards their athletes. As we know that much of the stress perceived by the athletes emanate from the coach (Holt & Hogg, 2002; Noblet & Gifford, 2002; Pensgaard & Roberts, 2000; Thelwell, Weston, & Greenlees, 2007) or leadership issues (Hanton et al., 2005), what the coach struggles to cope with is an important backdrop in order to understand the athletes' perceived experience of stress. Further, Pensgaard and Roberts (2002) argue that an elite athlete's perception of stress is related to the perceived motivational climate. Hence, the coach should focus on creating a mastery climate for elite athletes. Pensgaard and Roberts (2002) argue that even elite athletes prefer their coaches to have a more mastery approach to performance as it alleviates stress. This finding is important when turning to how elite athletes cope with different sources of strain later.

The media as a stressor

Given the huge media coverage of elite sport, research into the impact of this environmental stressor in our modern, globalized society on sportsmen and women is needed. Nowhere is this global process so evident as in the Olympic movement and, especially, world football (Amara, Henry, Jin Liang, & Uchiumi, 2005). The rise of mass media has expanded the previously narrow focus on results into an institutional complex of enormous social, cultural, political and economic importance (Rowe, 2004). As a result, Maguire and colleagues argue that *mediated sport* plays an important part in our existence (Maguire,

Jarvie, Mansfield, & Bradley, 2002, p. 48) because this mediated sport spectacle is also perceived as exciting entertainment for the public at large.

Clearly, this development has an impact on the lives of those at the centre of the media exposure. First of all, the elite athlete depends on the media for publicity, and star athletes are given a public face in their communities. Fans develop heroes, follow their careers and in team sports wear their jersey numbers (Woods, 2007). But as both athletes and role models, they get scrutinized. Hence, the media can negatively affect the sport by the way it is presented to the audience, and can affect the preparation and the self-confidence of the athlete in question. Papers 3-6 of the current research addresses questions related to the media as a stressor.

How do the media become a stressor for elite athletes? Sociologists have looked into the messages of media texts for decades. According to Hargreaves, a British sociologist, mass media's coverage of sport has to do with "skilled, exciting and above all entertaining leisure activity" (1986, p. 138). In his opinion, the media is building up and even preparing the audience on how to react with their stereotypical depicting of athletes. This is obvious in the language used in the media texts; they are about athletic *heroes* and *villains,* and Hargreaves criticizes the "notoriously stereotyped" use of language among journalists (Hargreaves, 1986, p. 151). One example used is the sport coverage of football in Britain, which was extensive also in the 80s. He reflects on the focus of the stories:

> We have seen that even in a game like football where team-work is so important, attention is, nevertheless, focused on the individual, through the routine practice in British TV coverage of making frequent close-ups of players, showing their problems, achievements and failures. The press treatment is substantially the same, except that personalization and dramatization are carried further in competition with TV and rival newspapers (Hargreaves, 1986, p. 150).

The end result of these different presentations of the elite athletes is that the media may "create a celebratory sporting spectacle or it can destroy sporting careers" (Jarvie, 2006, p. 140). Furthermore, the media often "sensationalize, particularize and humorize" not only the sports results, but everything about how the athletes perceived the game, the opponents, and the referee (Sisjord & Kristiansen, 2008). Even details about their private lives seem to find its way into the press (Hargreaves, 1986), as the media following often goes beyond the strictly professional (Dosil, 2006).

To sum up, Giddens has on several occasions commented on the *mediated* experience of elite athletes and its influence on both self-identity and the basic organisation of social relations (Giddens, 2006). For Giddens, the person's identity is bound up with the fragile

nature of the narrative biography that the individual constantly provides about herself/himself. Unfortunately, these mediated inputs might be in conflict with the athlete's own narrative about him/herself, and his/her self-identity could then be influenced by the perspectives that he/she adopts from the media (Gauntlett, 2008; Giddens, 2006). From this perspective one might assume that an athlete's satisfactory "story" about herself/himself as a successful athlete might be changed to a lesser or more radical degree by negative media input.

What do we know from sport psychological research? Several studies have reported that media attention is a major stressor when athletes strive for excellence (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Gould et al., 1999; Greenleaf et al., 2001). Greenleaf and colleagues argue that media attention both before and during competition is experienced as a stressor, and that the proximity between the media and the athletes contributes to the stress. The media "is in your face" (2001, p. 173), and makes it harder to focus on the event. More, Cresswell and Eklund (2007) found that some New Zealand rugby players perceived inaccurate assessments and criticisms by the media to be an ongoing source of strain, and the media was referred to as a *rare* source of stress for referees (Anshel & Weinberg, 1996). Similarly, McKay and colleagues (2008) points out that the questions of reporters the athletes have to answer is a source of strain. Noblet and Gifford (2002) underline how stressful Australian footballers experienced the constant negative media scrutiny in day-to day life. Finally, Richardson, Anderson and Morris (2008) also make a few notes of media exposure as stressful in connection with (negative) performance and overtraining.

Of course, media attention may be a truly positive factor as well; Holt and Hogg (2002) did not find media attention as a distraction for female football players preparing for the World Cup. Instead, the footballers welcomed some media attention in their preparation as their performances are not mentioned normally or given much attention in the press. For them, this was an excellent opportunity to present the sport. In summary, from the limited research undertaken so far, both the amount and content of media coverage may have an impact on the experience of athletes and how they cope with the media attention.

How to cope with stressors

The process approach to *coping* emphasizes the stress managing efforts, and it is a concept from the 1960s that came along with the burgeoning interest in stress (Lazarus, 1993). In its simplest form, coping is the way athletes attempt to deal with demands such as choking, stress, injury, high expectations and time management – just to mention a few when

striving for consistent excellence. Coping consists of learned behavioural responses that successfully lower arousal by neutralizing or minimizing the importance of a threatening condition (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). According to the transactional perspective, Lazarus and Folkman define coping as "constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 141).

Broader categories of coping. The difference in responses and interventions used to cope with the perceived stressor is a major component in the overall transactional stress process. Numerous coping behaviours or strategies can be exhibited as a response, and there is a "bewildering richness of behaviour relevant to it" (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978, p. 4). As a result, broader categories of coping behaviours have been developed to lend a hand in discussion of research findings. Although, some researchers like Skinner and colleagues argue against groupings of general dimensions of coping behaviours due to simplification (Skinner, Edge, Altman, & Sherwood, 2003), and instead recommend use of hierarchical systems of action types (e.g., proximity seeking and accommodation).

With this recent critique in mind, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) made a basic distinction between the widely used *problem-focused* and *emotion-focused* coping categories (Hardy et al., 1996). These two fundamental types of coping are based on the intention or function of coping efforts (Compas, Banez, Maclarne, & Worsham, 1991). The distinction has been used by many researchers (e.g., Crocker & Graham, 1995; Crocker & Isaak, 1997; Giacobbi et al., 2004; McLeod, Kirby, & Madden, 1994; Pensgaard & Roberts, 2003). The problem-focused strategies manage or alter the problem in person-environment relationship by acting on the environment or oneself (Lazarus, 1993). In contrast, the emotion-focused strategies help the athlete to maintain hope and optimism, in some way deny both fact and implication (by use of denial avoidance and distancing). Hence, the athletes cope with the meaning of a stressful transaction without distorting reality (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Lazarus (1993) also underscores that it has been a strong tendency in western values to distrust emotion-focused strategies.

This split into two types of coping is approximate, and has been debated continuously because of unclear borders. Skinner and colleagues argue that "categories of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping are not conceptually clear, mutually exclusive, or exhaustive" (2003, p. 227). To make it even more complex, problem-focused coping also includes strategies that are directed inward; they are not typically problem-solving, however,

motivational changes and altering resources may also help the athlete to solve the problem. Moreover, when investigating coping behaviour in competition, researchers quickly discovered that two dimensions were inadequate to describe and measure the complexity of coping (e.g., Crocker & Graham, 1995).

As a result, other higher order dichotomies, such as approach and avoidance coping have been introduced and used as well (Roth & Cohen, 1986). This dichotomy was further developed and used by Anshel and colleagues (Anshel, Kim, Kim, Chang, & Eom, 2001). Avoidance coping can consist of both behavioural (remove from situation) and cognitive blocking strategies (Krohne, 1993), and conversely, approach coping involves confronting the stressor and deliberately attempting to reduce it via strategies that enable the taking of direct action, increased effort and planning (see Holt & Dunn, 2004b). The use of avoidance coping has previously been reported in sport (Giacobbi et al., 2004; Kowalski & Crocker, 2001).

More complex models have also been introduced. Endler and Parker (1990) proposed a three-factor classification which includes task-oriented[4] coping, emotion-oriented coping and also avoidance coping. It is further predicted that avoidance coping would be more effective for short-term stress where the consequences would go away or change at a later time, while non-avoidance would be more effective for dealing with long-term stress because the consequences would not necessarily dissipate by themselves. The conceptual distinctions of the three coping functions have been supported by Kowalski and Crocker (2001) and continue to being used in sport research (e.g., Nicholls, Holt, Polman, & James, 2005; Sagar, Busch, & Jowett, 2010).

Hence, there is a constant discussion of how to classify coping. A recent review (Nicholls & Polman, 2007a) revealed that over 80% of published studies adhered to the framework and dichotomy proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). However, categorizing coping into dimensions should be related to the conceptual framework and research questions approached in the investigation.

Coping and development. Previous research has revealed that age (and probably experience) is a factor influencing the choice and repertoire of coping. Older athletes are better prepared to cope with adversity due to their use of problem-focused strategies (Bebetsos & Antoniou, 2003; Madden & Kirkby, 1989; Madden, Summers, & Brown, 1990). Moreover, older athletes respond more frequently with concentration and focusing on what

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[4] Task-oriented and emotion-oriented coping are equivalent to Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) conceptualization of problem-focused and emotion-focused, respectively.

has to be done in order to cope, and they are more able to control their negative emotions following stressful events (Goyen & Anshel, 1998).

Adolescence turns out to be an interesting period for development of coping strategies. Here the more frequently used strategies such as seeking social support, mental disengagement and active coping become complemented with the more cognitive efforts found among older adolescents (Holt, Hoar, & Fraser, 2005). The variety among the older adolescents may be explained by the total stress perceived due to schooling, career and peer group stressors (Compas, Connor-Smith, Saltzman, Harding Thomsen, & Wadsworth, 2001). Further, research supports that in early adolescence the opponents (e.g., concern over famous teams or bigger players) and family are reported as major stressors, whereas in middle adolescence coaches and selection criteria are reported as prominent stressors (Anshel & Delany, 2001; Nicholls & Polman, 2007b; Reeves et al., 2009).

In concord with experienced demands, previous research has also pointed out that older adolescents have a greater range of coping strategies than younger ones (Reeves et al., 2009), which includes more use of problem-focused coping strategies. In addition, use of social support also tends to increase with age (Reeves et al., 2009; Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007), especially from peers during middle adolescence. Skinner and Zimmer-Gembeck (2003) argue that this finding indicates increased maturity of players to seek support from others, but also reflects changes in the socio-cultural influences on players. As young people mature they increasingly draw upon both behavioural and cognitive strategies, and by the age of 19-21 years they are able to regulate and monitor their own emotional states (Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007). Hence, use of a wider coping repertoire is generally considered adaptive (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978), as it helps the athletes to manage more important episodes in more difficult environmental circumstances.

Next, experience may lead to automaticity of coping. This has been strongly related to coping effectiveness and superior performance (Dugdale, Eklund, & Gordon, 2002; Gould, Eklund, & Jackson, 1993). Evidence supports that elite athletes can deploy their coping strategies much more quickly based on amount of practice they have had at deploying coping strategies (Nicholls & Polman, 2007a).

Two types of resources contributing to adaptive coping

Whilst the social environment includes stressors, it also provides the athletes with resources that help them to cope. In short, Lazarus and Folkman argue that a person (or athlete) is resourceful when he/she has "many resources and/or is clever in finding ways of using them to counter demands" (1984, p. 158). These resources may be both something one athlete draws upon such as money and people to help, or what the researchers consider as competencies for finding needed resources not yet available. Due to this definition, one might argue that social support and motivational impact on the athlete might be considered "things one does that make the most differences" when sustaining sources of strain arising from the environment over which they have little control (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978, p. 13).

Social support. Nestled into Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) theoretical framework of stress and coping, social support is considered to be a coping resource intended to facilitate problem-focused and emotion-focused coping (Bianco & Eklund, 2001). In simple words, social support is defined by Rosenfeld and Richman (1997) as behaviours perceived by the recipient to enhance well-being, and Sarason and colleagues add love and the knowledge of receiving help when problems arise (Sarason, Sarason, & Pierce, 1990). Used in the sport setting, Bianco and Eklund define it as "social interactions aimed at inducing positive outcomes" (2001, p. 85). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) also state that social support is the opposite side of the coin of social demands, and both the demands and the social resources vary in their severity and intractability.

The multidimensional construct may further be divided into *structural* (interconnections between social ties) and *functional* (perceived-received) aspects (Bianco & Eklund, 2001). Moreover, two models offer an explanation on this process which makes sense in sport. The *main effect* model proposes that social resources have a beneficial effect irrespective of whether persons are under stress, while on the other hand, the *buffering* model posits that support" protects persons from the potential stressful event (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Rees & Hardy, 2004).

Holt and Hoar have given a conceptual model of the social support process in sport (2006, p. 202), and both the buffering and main effect model are included. In addition, they have integrated three social support dimensions; structural (social support networks), functional (received social support) and perceptual (perceived social support). According to

some researchers all three dimensions should be examined simultaneously in order to get a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms (Bianco & Eklund, 2001; Sarason et al., 1990). However, Holt and Hoar (2006) were unable to locate any published studies in sport psychology which examined all three dimensions of social support. Moreover, they also argue that it is evidence in favour of both the main effect and the buffering model, though; the main effect model is linked to perceived support while buffering is linked to received support. Usually, it is people's perception of their social support that has been noted as crucial (Rees & Freeman, 2010).

Providers of social support exist in the competitive environment and they are not only family, friends, spouse, relatives, the coach and team members, but also can be members of the clergy, and medical and mental health professionals associated with the organisation. As the providers can be related to the athlete in many different ways, social support can be given in different ways or *dimensions* as well. Cutrona and Russell (1990) argued for five dimensions while Rees and Hardy (2004) argued for four. Finally, the old division made by Schaefer and colleagues distinguish between three types of functions of social support also makes sense: emotional, informative or tangible support (Schaefer, Coyne, & Lazarus, 1982). The essence of *emotional support* is to feel loved and cared about, that one achieves through reliance and confidence in other persons. *Tangible support* involves more direct aid through loans, gifts, driving one to venues and so forth. *Informational support* is when one provides information or advice and gives feedback to the athlete. In this regard it is important to note that different types of social support may be valued from different individuals in one's network (e.g., Bianco & Eklund, 2001; Dakof & Taylor, 1990), and the same researchers also point out that individuals may prefer different kinds of support for the same stressor.

Based on this short literature review on the concept of social support, one may conclude that it is complex and the research literature is inconsistent in reporting the construct. Some consider social support a coping *resource* which compromises a wide variety of behaviours (Williams, 2001). This resource is available in the social environment, but which the person must "cultivate and use" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 250). On the other hand, when developing their Coping Function Questionnaire, Kowalski and Crocker (2001) discuss whether social support should be considered a coping strategy or separate coping function. Hence, social support ended up as forming its own coping dimension on various instruments due to a strong theoretical framework (e.g., Amirkhan, 1990; Kowalski & Crocker, 2001).

In sport, social support is often considered among the emotion-focused coping strategies after the Lazarus and Folkman dichotomy. Crocker (1992) stated that social support is an important *coping strategy* in sport for dealing with competitive stress, and this has been supported empirically (Gould et al., 1999; Holt & Hogg, 2002; Rees & Hardy, 2004; Rees, Hardy, & Freeman, 2007; Reeves et al., 2009). It has even been found to be important for mature Olympic medallists (Greenleaf et al., 2001; Kristiansen, Roberts, & Abrahamsen, 2008). Further, coach social support has been found to relate to athletes' satisfaction with their athletic experience (Weiss & Friedrichs, 1986), the ability to adapt to new challenges (Petrie & Stoever, 1997; Weiss & Friedrichs, 1986), and improvements in performance (Rees & Freeman, 2010).

…and two supportive coaches are even better…   ©E.K.2010

The lack of social support from a coach may be perceived as stressful (McKay et al., 2008). If the coach is not able to provide the necessary support, athletes will most likely seek support from someone else they feel close to (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). Furthermore, the coaches themselves also need social support in order to cope with the perceived stress in their rapidly changing sports environments (Fletcher & Scott, 2010). As a result, there is evidence that social support is of major importance whether it is labelled as a coping strategy or as a coping resource for the athletes.

To examine the importance of the motivational climate extant is a natural extension to the above. In accord with this view, Reeves and colleagues recently argued that it is important that parents and coaches understand and promote a "task-oriented motivational climate that facilitates social support for players at all ages. Sport psychologist should work with young performers to develop social support networks that provide informational and emotional support to help players cope with stressors" (2009, p. 46). Similarly, Balaguer and associates found that a mastery climate was related to the view that perceived social support was provided (Balaguer, Crespo, & Duda, 1996). As a result, one might expect an association between social support and motivation to be important for athletes' perception of environmental stressors and subsequent coping.

Motivational impact. According to the transactional theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), there is a "mutually, bi-directional relationship" between the person and the environment (p. 325), and the ongoing appraisal and reappraisal is a dynamic process in the shifting person-environment relationship. This makes motivational theories an approach worth investigating in relation to stress-coping research. While motivation may be partially understood in terms of the context (the goals others may have for the person), it is the impact of the environment on personal assessments that is important (Treasure, 2001). With that in mind, the backdrop in this investigation is the Achievement Goal Theory (Ames, 1992; Duda & Hall, 2001; Nicholls, 1984, 1989; Roberts, 2001, in press; Roberts, Treasure, & Conroy, 2007).

Motivational *processes* can be defined by the psychological constructs that *energize, direct and regulate* achievement behaviour (Roberts, 2001). Motivation refers to how the person assesses what is needed in order to succeed; it is future oriented and helps athletes to anticipate and predict future events and consequences that are meaningful to them (Roberts, 2001). The overall goal is to demonstrate competence and/or avoid demonstrating incompetence (Nicholls, 1984). In relation to elite sport, the individual moves forward to reach desired goals related to *gold medals* and *winning* important games. Hence, AGT is easily applied to the sport context because not only are the goals clearly achievement goals most of the time, "but success and failure, and personal competence tend to be unambiguous to all participants, players, and spectators" (Roberts, 2001, p. 17).

Undoubtedly, some of the stress elite athletes perceive is caused by their struggle to achieve their goals. Due to the subjectivity of defining the goals, success and failure in

obtaining the goal is a subjective state based on assessment of the outcome of the achievement behaviour by the participants (e.g., Maehr & Nicholls, 1980). In other words, motivation processes are evaluative in character. The individual develops personal goals (e.g., through being exposed to them by family and friends, or from being exposed to institutional agents such as coaches) within any achievement context, and it is these personal goals that give meaning to achievement striving and energize subsequent action (Roberts & Kristiansen, in press). Personal goals reside in the person, but they may be derived from context cues or through instructions given by significant others.

Following the line outlined above, when motivation is considered within the *social cognitive paradigm*, the individual becomes motivated, or demotivated, through assessments of one's competencies within the achievement context and the meaning of the context to the person. This demonstration of competence is the energizing construct of AGT (Roberts et al., 2007). In achievement situations, individuals are assumed to function in either a state of *task* or *ego* goal involvement at any one time, and the usual assumption is that an athlete can only be in one state of involvement at a time (Nicholls, 1989; Roberts, 2001; Williams, 1998). Further, Nicholls argues that one's state of involvement lies on a continuum from task to ego involvement (see Roberts; 2001, in press). The state of involvement may change quickly (Gernigon, d'Arripe-Longueville, Delignieres, & Ninot, 2004), and the state of involvement has been proposed to fluctuate in accordance with specific aspects of each competitive situation. One example being verbal information prior to the competition, like a coach telling an athlete to win, may affect his/her state of involvement and be detrimental to performance as a change from task to ego might be the result. As a result, the athlete will actually switch from one goal state to another based on the stream of events in the context.

It is important to note that each state of goal involvement has both *dispositional* and *situational* determinants (see Figure 2). The dispositional factors are termed achievement goal orientations, and the individual develops personal goals within any achievement context (see above). As a result, it is these personal (and/or socially valued) goals that are the psychological constructs that energize, direct and regulate activity. Further, these individual difference variables reflect task or ego involving criteria of success. When an athlete is task oriented, the focus is on demonstrating mastery of tasks, and perceptions of ability are typically self-referenced. An ego oriented athlete, on the other hand, is preoccupied with winning and therefore interested in demonstrating superior ability to others and perceived ability is characteristically normatively referenced.
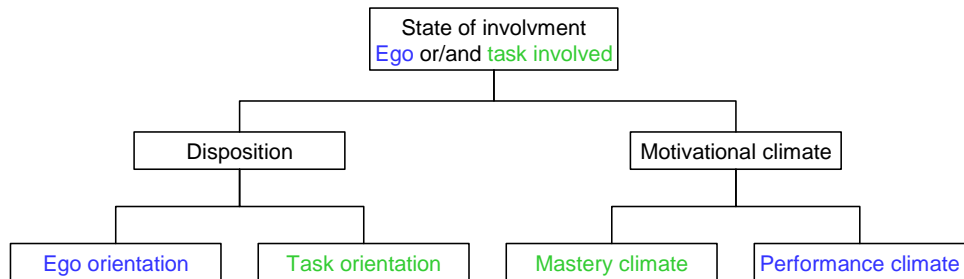
Figure 2

Motivational states of involvement (adapted after Roberts, 2001)

The perceived motivational climate (Ames & Archer, 1988) is the athlete's perception of the situational cues or the perception of the motivational emphases of other individuals on the team, such as the coach and the team-members. Situational factors also influence whether an athlete adopts a state of task involvement or ego involvement (Ames, 1992; Nicholls, 1984, 1989), and research has indicated that situational goal structures may supersede one's goal orientation regarding the influence on affect and behaviour in competitive sport (Cervelló, Rosa, Calvo, Jiménez, & Iglesias, 2007; Roberts, 2001). Similar to goal orientations, perceptions of the motivational climate are assumed to reflect task and/or ego involving criteria of success and failure, and are termed *mastery* (task-involving) and *performance* (ego-involving) climate, respectively. When a mastery climate is perceived, then the athlete is more likely to be task involved which optimizes positive factors such as well-being, sportspersonship, persistence, task perseverance and adaptive achievement strategies (Roberts et al., 2007), and conversely, when a performance climate is perceived, the athlete is more likely to be ego involved in sport.

The motivational climate will undoubtedly differ according to the social context; hence, it is imperative to refer to the individual's perception of the motivational climate in a specified moment and try to understand which general situational and contextual cues that affect and influence the athlete's state of involvement (Roberts, 2001). Furthermore, in contexts where the situational criteria is particularly salient it is possible that perceptions of the climate may override an individual's dispositional goal orientations and be a stronger predictor of behavioural, cognitive and affective outcomes (Roberts, in press). This is even truer with children and adolescents as they are more susceptible to the influence of situational variables than older athletes (Roberts & Treasure, 1992).

In conclusion, AGT research has indicated that outcomes such as exerted effort, performance, moral behaviour and cheating, peer relationships, coping with stress and burnout are affected by whether one is task or ego involved, and research unequivocally recommends being task involved (for a more thorough understanding, see Roberts, in press; Roberts et al., 2007).

A coherent conceptual framework for the dissertation

The current dissertation attempts to conduct research on stress and coping with motivation theory as a backdrop in an attempt to more fully understand the socio-cultural and social cognitive determinants of stress and coping. Such an endeavour is needed; especially as the theoretical links between AGT, stress *and* coping are still at an early stage of development in sport (Harwood & Chan, 2010). Based on the theoretical tenants presented in this chapter, the manner in which the motivational climate likely may feed into the perception of stress and subsequent coping is outlined next.

Previous research. In general, most research conducted this past two decades has assumed and found that being task involved is an advantage in the competitive situation when confronted with heightened perception of *stress*. In contrast, being ego involved has been associated with cognitive sources of distress (Pensgaard & Roberts, 2000). Pensgaard and Roberts argued that an elite athlete's perception of stress is related to the perceived motivational climate and in order to reduce the perception of stress, the coach should focus on creating a mastery climate for elite athletes because it has the potential to alleviate stress (Pensgaard & Roberts, 2002).

The conceptual explanation for these findings is that we know that ego oriented people are normatively referenced (e.g., Roberts, Abrahamsen, & Lemyre, 2009; Roberts et al., 2007). Thus, they may more easily lose belief in their own ability as an athlete because elite sport is all about winning in many situations. When there is less perceived coach support, negative headlines in the news, a team struggling for money, or struggling for selection on the team, then the perception of stress is exacerbated. In other words, when an athlete perceives the context as being an overwhelming stressor, the context is seen as a performance climate setting that intensifies the need to normatively compare themselves to each other. This may enhance the competitive climate in a team or a group. Such incidences could make athletes

more susceptible to these normative cues and increase the degree of ego involvement towards sports participation.

Therefore, coaches should carefully monitor the ego oriented athletes and the motivational climate in order to keep it more mastery oriented. This may sometimes be a difficult task, as the coach may act as a source of distress himself/herself to the athlete (Pensgaard & Roberts, 2000). The higher the elite athletes are in ego orientation, then the more he/she reacts to the normative pressure when the coach becomes more ego-involved too. This is in accord with AGT theory (Roberts et al., 2007).

Undoubtedly, *coping* is crucial in this process, and AGT has previously been used successfully on research on coping and stress (Kim & Duda, 1998; Kim & Duda, 2003; Kristiansen et al., 2008; Ntoumanis et al., 1999; Pensgaard & Roberts, 2003; Roberts, Treasure, & Kavussanu, 1997). Kim and Duda (1998) were the first ones to look into the relationship between goal orientations, motivational climate and use of coping strategies in competitive sport. They found that the perceived motivational climate was associated with various forms of adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies, with a mastery climate being preferable for adaptive coping.

Subsequent research has found that task involvement is an attribute that seems to be associated with adaptive coping strategies (mostly problem-focused) that help the athlete to overcome distractions and develop the ability to focus on the essential performance aspects of competing successfully (Kim & Duda, 1998; Kristiansen et al., 2008; Ntoumanis et al., 1999; Pensgaard & Roberts, 2003). Conversely, research has demonstrated that high ego-involving climate and ego orientation predicted emotional (avoidance) coping (Ntoumanis et al., 1999), i.e., more maladaptive coping. However, caution should be exercised when dealing with concepts such as adaptive and maladaptive coping. While problem-focused coping is deemed more adaptive in the long term, avoidance coping might be helpful when dealing with immediate threats (Anshel & Kaissidis, 1997; Kim & Duda, 2003). Qualitative research has also found evidence for social support being an important and adaptive coping strategy for elite athletes (Kristiansen et al., 2008) when linked to a mastery climate. Therefore, to examine more closely how social support exerts its influence on the stressor-strain relationship is important (Fletcher & Scott, 2010). The evidence suggests that nurturing task involvement by setting criteria of success that are self referenced and task involving better enables the athletes to cope adaptively with stress.

The research questions. Based on the coherent conceptual framework outlined above, two overarching and 5 minor research questions/hypotheses are presented to attempt to add understanding to the current state of knowledge on how elite athletes perceive and cope with categories of organizational and media stressors:

OVERARCHING RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. *How are the media and organizational demands perceived as stressors for elite athletes*

2. *How do athletes cope with the media and organizational demands?*

More specific research questions:

1a. What categories of organizational issues are perceived as most stressful by elite athletes?

1b. How are factors related to the media perceived as stressful by elite athletes?

2a. What type of coping categories are most useful for coping with the media and organizational demands?

Research hypotheses:

1c A performance climate and ego orientation increase the perception of media and organizational stress?

1d. A mastery climate and task orientation decrease the perception of media and organizational stress?

MIXED METHODS

Equations and measurements are useful when and only when they are related to proof: but proof or disproof comes first and is in fact strongest when it is absolutely convincing without any quantitative measurement (Platt, 1964, p. 352).

The design for this mixed methods research project has been a complex *sequential* continuing from July 2007 until May 2010. Typical of this approach is that one method prominently informs the next (Greene, 2008; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The dissertation consists of four major strands, and a strand of a research design is "a phase of a study that includes three stages: conceptualization stage, experimental stage (methodological/analytical), and inferential stage" (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 345). Also, the second strand has a parallel (or concurrent) mixed method design (see especially paper 5), where triangulation of results from the separate quantitative and qualitative components may validate and corroborate findings within the same study – and answer related aspects of the same question. This is probably the most used combination of mixed methods research. In order to get an overview, Table 1 demonstrates this conglomerate and the way the three strands are related to each other.

Table 1

Overview of year of data collection, sampling strategy and participants in this sequential mixed methods design

2007	$\rightarrow$	**2008**	$\rightarrow$	**2010**
Qualitative strategy	$\rightarrow$	Concurrent Qualitative and Quantitative strategy	$\rightarrow$	Qualitative strategy
Norwegian Youth Olympians **(Sample 1)**	*Inference drawn from qualitative data* $\rightarrow$	European Footballers **(Sample 2)**	*Inference drawn from quantitative and qualitative data* $\rightarrow$	American footballers **(Sample 3)**
			$\rightarrow$	Norwegian Olympians **(Sample 4)**

Because one of the stressors under examination was the media, the participants used in this research needed to be truly elite athletes in order to have some media experience to share.

Four samples of *elite* athletes

First of all, the concept *elite* is a problematic and much debated one in research literature. Auweele and colleagues (Auweele, De Cuyper, Van Mele, & Rzewnicki, 1993) use "elite" on athletes "who are eligible for competition at the national, international, or Olympic level, or who are professional sportspersons" (p. 257). This definition has also recently been used by (Van Yperen, 2009). In the same line of thinking, Fletcher and Hanton (2003) propose to describe as "elite" only athletes who have performed at the highest competitive level in their sport (e.g., Olympic Games or World Championships). However, this makes the elite athlete part of a very selective group, something Treasure and colleagues also have commented upon; "By definition, elite-level performers represent a very small segment of the general population. This segment can quickly shrink depending on how limiting, strict, or literal a definition of "elite" one chooses to invoke" (Treasure, Lemyre, Kuczak, & Standage, 2007, pp. 153-154). In other words, they are few which make research into this population quite challenging.

The second and third sample (footballers in a premier European division and the American MLS division) may be more problematic to consider *elite* according to the aforementioned definitions. Only 1/10 of them had actually participated in a competition at the highest level in their sport (The World Cup). But the World Cup is held only once every four years, and the knockout games take two years to complete to select the final group of 32 teams. Without doubt, these athletes are highly professional. They are paid well, it is their job to play, and due to football's popularity, they are considered celebrities in their respective countries. The number participating in the major competitions are limited, 32 nations in the World Cup, and 16 nations in the Olympic Games; make it very hard to actually get there. Consequently, football players who play in a Premier Division in Europe, or in the MLS/WPS should be considered elite.

Sample 1 (paper 1). The 29 adolescent athletes aged 14-17 (M_{age} = 16.6 years, SD = 0.77) represented Norway in the 2007 European Youth Olympic Festival (EYOF) in Belgrade, Serbia, were the first sample. The Norwegian Summer "Olympians" (21 female and 8 male athletes) competed in judo, track and field, swimming and handball. Being qualified for the national team required a certain level of competence at their age level. In other words, they were *elite* within their age group. However, there are no "guarantees" that these athletes will be elite adult athletes of the future (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). The Norwegian adolescent

athletes competed together with athletes from 49 different countries in a context similar to the Olympics.

Sample 2 (paper 3, 4 and 5). Participants were 82 elite football players (M_{age} = 25.17 years, SD = 5.19). Three different professional male teams in a Premier Division in Europe were contacted with the help of the national Football Association. As in any Premier Division of professional football in Europe, there were international players from several countries on the teams. Many of the players had experience with their respective national teams, most during the season when the data were collected in 2008.

Sample 3 (paper 2). Participants were 8 elite soccer players currently playing in the Premier Division of American soccer. Four female players in the WPS (Women's Professional League) and four male players in the MLS (Major League Soccer) agreed to participate. These were both American as well as international players, and some of the American players had experience in European Football leagues. They ranged in age from 24 years old up to 37 years old (M_{age} = 28.38 years, SD = 5.45), so it was a highly experienced group with experience within their respective national teams. The data were collected during the 2010 season.

Sample 4 (paper 6). Participants were 10 Norwegian Vancouver winter Olympians with extensive media experience. Both genders and all the different sports in the Norwegian team were included. In addition, nine within the sample were medallists (with one ice-hockey player being the exception). The participants were all in their 20s and beginning of the 30s (Mage = 27.7 years, SD = 4.41) and half of them had previous Olympic experience. It was a very elite sample; the Norwegian Olympic team took 23 medals during the weeks in Vancouver, our participants were involved in 13 of them.

Ethical standards and procedures with the four samples. The four investigations were approved by the Norwegian Research Committee[5]. Additional consent was obtained from all participants before conducting face-to-face interviews, and the participants were informed that the information they provided would remain confidential, and that they could terminate the interview at any time. When finishing the different papers, the

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[5] In addition, IRB (Internal Review Board) approval was obtained from San Jose State University for sample 2.

participants have been sent (via email) the first draft of the articles in order to augment answers, clarify responses, and provide additional comment and narrative. The integration of participants in the research process helped to ensure the participants' voices were clearly represented in this research. Some identified a few mistakes, accepted the use of quotations, but did not offer any additional information and/or changes. Consequently, it was concluded that the themes accurately represented their experiences of coping.

Furthermore, the teams contributing in the research was sent feedback relative to the findings and offered follow-ups which some accepted and received.

How to measure coping with stress – mixed methods

In most scientific research, there is, and should be, an ongoing debate regarding the methods used. This must be viewed as a natural part of the development to test out new theories, explanations, etc., in order to gain new knowledge and insight into interesting research questions. Further, conceptual and measurement issues are intimately linked (Hoar, Kowalski, Gaudreau, & Crocker, 2006). Both quantitative and qualitative measures have previously been used in this research field, although many of the quantitative methods (through questionnaires) have relied on self-referenced measures (e.g., Hoar et al., 2006; Todd, Tennen, Carney, Armeli, & Affleck, 2004). In many ways much of the research conducted within sport psychology continues to operate within a predominantly positivist view of science (Krane & Baird, 2005), though more recent research has used qualitative methods as well – especially in the research on organizational stress. This research field is novel and debated, and choices of methods are not given per se. As a consequence, it is necessary to use both fresh thinking as well as theoretical anchoring. This point of view is supported by a 20-year-old claim from Rainer Martens: "Methods must be created as necessary. There are no rules as such. The only requirement is to do the best you can with the problem at the time and under the circumstances" (1987, p. 47).

Consequently, over the past few decades, there has been a growing acknowledgement that complex social and psychological phenomena can best be understood in a more useful way by looking at them both quantitatively and qualitatively (e.g., Brannen, 1992; Dewe, Cox, & Leiter, 1999; Evans & Hardy, 2002). With the growing acceptance for qualitative research in sport psychology, the need for increased methodological diversity is consequently supported (e.g., Biddle, Markland, Gilbourne, Chatzisarantis, & Sparkes, 2001; Culver, Gilbert, & Trudel, 2003; Krane & Baird, 2005). Similarly, Hoar and colleagues have argued for "creative approaches to coping assessment" (Hoar et al., 2006, p. 78), and Aldwin has

stated that "we need as many different ways of assessing stress as possible"(2007, p. 83), a position also supported by Skinner and colleagues (2003) – *and* in this research project as well. Subsequently, by complementing the quantitative with qualitative data, one may be able to capture the conceptual models that are erected to describe psychological functioning – and to gain the true complexities of both the individuals' cognitive sets and the sport environment. As a result, choice of methodology should always be determined by the research question, this study being no exception.

Four different methods have been used in this investigation when sampling four sets of data; interviews, qualitative open-ended questionnaires, analyses of media texts and finally questionnaire packages.

Interviews. Qualitative semi-structured interviews are the only methods used in all four samples in order to gain an overall impression of some of the personal experiences of individuals. Interview technique has previously been deemed the most appropriate methodology in studies with stress (Jones, 1995), and Fletcher and Hanton (2003) underline the advantage of detailed information that helps to understand how athletes function within the complex system of club, organization and society as a whole. Because the theoretical framework used in this investigation recognized that sport takes place within a social context, methodologies that captured this was vital in the research planning.

All together, *33 elite* athletes have been interviewed in the four samples, which resulted in *347 pages* of transcribed data. Unfortunately, qualitative analysis lacks the parsimonious statistical significance tests of inferential statistics of quantitative data (Patton, 2002), instead they demand some sort of confidence when stating "these are the themes I found, and this it what I think it means". Hence, collecting several samples is one way of finding more general themes of stressors and coping within the elite athlete population.

In general, the adolescent athletes (paper 1), football players (paper 2, 4, 5) and Olympic athletes (paper 6) have been asked about categories of stressors and additionally how they coped with them. With sample 2 and 4, all the interviews have been conducted after the major competition/season ended, hence discussion of media headlines during the season was a natural part of the different interviews. With sample 3 (paper 2), the interviews were conducted with the American football players in the pre-season. Consequently, a focus on organizational categories of stressors and a more specific focus on the socio-cultural differences were obvious additional questions to include.

Qualitative open-ended questionnaire. As the main focus was on how the young athletes experienced participation in major competition, open-ended questionnaires were chosen as the most appropriate methodology for sample 1 (paper 1) because: First, this investigation had an exploratory aim, second, because I wanted the responses from the entire national team as close as possible after their participation in their respective event. The adolescents athletes were asked about how they experienced being at a large European competition, and how they coped with competitive stressors. In addition, questions were asked about organizational stressors and how they coped with them. The team responses revealed that the method was well suited to the sample under these circumstances.

Media texts. As one of the stressors under investigation was the media, it was natural to incorporate analyses of media texts to shed light on the athletes' experiences of media coverage. First of all, two of the largest national circulation newspapers in the country were collected during the football season of sample 2. One newspaper is a broadsheet with detailed news and articles, and the other is a more subjective tabloid with big headlines. Next, both quantitative and qualitative content analyses of the newspaper papers were conducted. First, I used a quantitative coding system that coded the articles into number of one-page, half-page notices, and so forth of the teams. Additionally, I had a deductive content coding system that divided the texts to highlight the various elements; goalkeeper, coach, team/game, athlete and total number of pages. Parts of this analysis were included when discussing the goalkeepers' experiences of the media (paper 4) and the mixed methods paper when talking about the coverage of the different teams (paper 5). Content analysis may simplify very large documents into enumerative information, and it also helps to combine different methods (Grbich, 2007).

Second, major newspaper articles or particular incidents were used as *illustrative examples* (Patton, 2002) with sample 2 and 4 (paper 4, 5 and 6). Use of articles is a clarifying strategy after having begun with simple, straightforward, and open-ended questions in an interview setting. Then the articles may be used to facilitate responses by discussing some of the headlines from incidences and framings that occurred during the football season or the Olympics.

Questionnaire package. Sample 2 (82 football players) also filled out a questionnaire package including measures for motivation, stress and coping, and quantitative

data are presented in paper 3 and 4. Hence, in paper 3 an Achievement Goal Theory stress model was tested, so that paper is solely quantitative with use of the motivational and stress measurements. Further, paper 4 has a complex mixing of methods, different analysis and material is used in that paper as the footballers' use of coping strategies was included in the analyses.

To measure motivation is pretty straight forward, there are well known scales to measure motivational variables (Roberts, in press). Dispositional goal orientations were measured with the *Perception of Success Questionnaire* (POSQ; Roberts, Treasure, & Balague, 1998). POSQ is a 12-item questionnaire which measures task (6 items) and ego (6 items) goal orientations in sport as two sub dimensions, with phrases such as "I work hard" and "I win" to reflect the criteria of success used by the participants. Responses were indicated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5).

The motivational climate was measured with the *Perceived Motivational Climate in Sport Questionnaire* (PMCSQ; Seifriz, Duda, & Chi, 1992), and it consists of two valid and reliable subscales; the mastery and performance climate scales. The athletes were told to reflect upon how they experience the climate in their team, and phrases such as "Players feel good when they do better than team-mates" and "The coach wants us to try new skills" to reflect the criteria of success the players perceived used by the coach(s). The stem "on this team…" preceded each item to make it team specific. Responses were indicated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5).

In order to measure organizational and media stress in sport, two new scales were developed. The need for such measures is recognized within the organizational stress literature (Fletcher & Hanton, 2003; Fletcher et al., 2006; Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009), but is so far non existent. Instead, most research on organizational stress in sport has been through qualitative interviews (Fletcher & Hanton, 2003; Fletcher et al., 2006; Levy et al., 2009; McKay et al., 2008; Olusoga et al., 2010; Thelwell et al., 2008a; Woodman & Hardy, 2001). This is partly because when measuring an ongoing transaction between performer and environment, research must "utilize methods that capture the contextual richness of such processes and the idiographic nature of the stress experience" (Fletcher et al., 2006, p. 353). As a result, scales specifically designed to assess these two categories of stressors were developed, one scale to measure perceived organizational stress and one scale to measure perceived media stress (see paper 3 for a more exhaustive reference to the work with the questionnaires). Needless to state, these are preliminary scales and future research will develop them further.

Organizational stress was measured with the *Coach-athlete Stressors in Football Questionnaire* (CASFQ, see appendix A). This is a 7-item questionnaire and included phrases such as: "The coach and team agree on the strategy for the team", and "The coach is good at communicating with us players". In other words, the coach-athlete relationship and the way the coaching staff dealt with the players as a group were captured. Responses from both stress questionnaires were also indicated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5).

Media stress was measured with *Media Stress in Football Questionnaire* (MSFQ, see appendix A). This is a 6 item questionnaire were MSFQ measures experience of negative media coverage and outcome coverage. Phrases such as "I take what media writes about my team and me personally", and "media creates a pressure for winning which I find stressful" captured negative content, while outcome more asked for amount experienced. In paper 3 only the negative media subscale was used (due to their ability to be experienced as a strain by footballers which was in accord with hypotheses), while in paper four both media stress subscales were included in the statistical analyses.

Finally, how elite athletes cope with stress is not measured in a straight forward manner either. Pearlin and Schooler (1978) recognised the problem with the coping construct very well when they stated that: "Coping, in sum, is certainly not unidimensional behaviour. It functions at a number of levels and is attained by a plethora of behaviors, cognitions, and perceptions" (pp.7-8). Susan Folkman said it more parsimoniously: "Coping is a complex phenomenon. Coping research is no less so" (1992, p. 46). Of course, this research challenge is due to the fact that coping is both an antecedent and consequence variable in the dynamically unfolding stress process (Hoar et al., 2006). Hence, some argue that coping is best measured by using a qualitative approach that focuses on the stress that evokes it (Erera-Weatherley, 1996).

Coping questionnaires have existed for decades, however, little consensus can be found about how to conceptualize or measure the central constructs the ways of coping (Skinner et al., 2003). One of the first attempts to measure coping was Ways of Coping Checklists (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988). This original version was a 68-item yes-no checklist, and it was later revised to a Likert-type scale. Due to the first scale's limitations and the complexity of actually measuring coping strategies, other scales have been developed over the years such as COPE (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989), Multidimensional Coping Inventory (Endler & Parker, 1990), Brief-COPE (Carver, 1997), the Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28 (Smith, Schutz, Smoll, & Ptacek, 1995) and the Coping Function Questionnaire

(Kowalski & Crocker, 2001) just to mention a few used in sport research. There is a general agreement about collecting data as close as possible to a specific event (Weston et al., 2009, p. 473) in order to avoid memory distortion (e.g., Smith, Leffingwell, & Ptacek, 1999) and increase validity (Giacobbi & Weinberg, 2000).

In the current investigation, coping strategies were measured by *Brief COPE* (Carver, 1997). It consists of 14 scales of different coping strategies with two items per scale, for a total of 28 items. Each item is scored on a 4-point Likert scale and they responded to "how often" they had used the different coping strategies to cope with stress (1= I haven't been doing this at all, to 4= I have been doing this a lot). The Brief COPE is a shortened version of the COPE inventory (Carver et al., 1989). In order to make the research protocol shorter, Carver (1997) regards Brief-COPE to be an adequate replacement. In addition, only the subscales from social support and problem-focused coping were included into the statistical analysis (see paper 5).

SUMMARY

Overview of the 6 papers

Table 2

Overview of method, participants, focus, and type of stress investigated.

	Paper 1 EYOF	Paper 2 American soccer	Paper 3 Model	Paper 4 Goalkeepers	Paper 5 Mixed methods	Paper 6 Olympic media
Co authors	Roberts	Murphy Roberts	Halvari Roberts	Roberts Sisjord	Roberts	Hanstad Roberts
Journal	**SJMSS**	**JASP**	**SJMSS**	**IJSEP**	**IJSP**	**JASP**
Date of acceptance	Feb 24th, 2009	In review	Oct, 25th 2010	Aug 16th, 2010	Jan 4th, 2011	Accepted pending rev.
Sample	**1**	**3**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**4**
Gender	8male/21female	4male/4 female	elite	Male	elite	7 male/ 3female
Number	N=29	N=8	N=82	N=3	N=82	N=10
Age	14-17, M=16.6	23-38, M=28.6	M=25.17	29-37	M=25.17	22-30, M=27.7
Nationality	**Norwegian**	**American**	European	European	European	**Norwegian**
Interviews	3	8	0	3	12	10
Quantitative	NO	NO	**YES**	NO	**YES**	NO
Qualitative	YES	YES	**NO**	YES	YES	YES
Media texts	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES
Type of stressors	**Competitive & Organizational**	**Organizational**	**Organizational & media**	Media	Media	Media
Coping	Table	Table/ narrative	NO	Table	Table	Quotes
Motivation	Discussion	Discussion	Testing model	Discussion	Important	Discussion
Social support	Imp, 3 types	Important	NO	Imp, 3 types	Important	NO
Major theme	Youth experience org stress & coach coping	American soccer Sociological angle	Importance of mastery climate	Scapegoats experience and coping	Thorough of Media Team coping – mastery climate	Athlete -journalist Major competition
Coach theme	Important support	Major stressor	climate	support	support	Not important

Brief description of each paper

Paper 1: The purpose of this investigation was to examine how the Norwegian Olympic Youth Team experienced competitive and organizational stress and how they coped during the European Youth Olympic Festival (EYOF) in July 2007. The findings revealed that the athletes experienced competitive stressors because of the size and importance of the competition, and organizational stressors (e.g., housing, lining up for food, and transportation) exacerbated by the extreme heat during the EYOF. The elite competitive experience was overwhelming for some of the more "inexperienced" athletes. The athletes used cognitive coping strategies to some extent as well as different types of social support. Data results and analysis suggested that the adolescents' perception of how they coped with these novel and complex competitive demands was flavoured by their concern about the availability of social support. Informational and emotional support seemed to matter most with relieving competitive stress, tangible support was also important when coping with organizational stress. As a result, positive coach-athlete psychosocial relationships are pertinent for young elite athletes to learn how to cope with "the big time" and mature as an adult elite athlete.

Paper 2: The study was an exploration of organizational stressors perceived by US professional soccer players, and the coping strategies they employed to manage these stressors. In an effort to better understand the perception of stress and the coping mechanisms, narrative analyses of participants' interviews were conducted. Data results revealed the structure of contracts, geographical distances between the teams in the leagues, the number of athletes fighting for a spot, and living in the shadow of more entrenched *American* sports were typical features of US professional soccer. Additional stressors including coach issues and team issues cited by participants belonged to a core group of categories found in previous research on soccer players and players participating in other team sports. Participants used avoidance, problem-focused, and social support coping strategies to manage the organizational stressors. Coach support and his/her ability to create a mastery climate was pivotal to help manage the cited stressors.

Paper 3: The focus of this paper was to investigate media and coach-athlete stress experienced by professional football players and their relationship to motivational variables by testing an AGT stress model. New scales were developed, and correlations and

bootstrapping were used as primary statistical analyses, supplemented by LISREL, to test the hypotheses. Results revealed that a mastery climate was directly and negatively associated with coach-athlete stress, while a performance climate was directly and positively associated with coach-athlete stress. In addition, an indirect positive path between the performance climate and media stress was revealed through ego orientation. Clearly, it was the ego oriented athletes who experienced media as a stressor due to being normatively referenced and getting public acknowledgment. These findings support some of the key postulates of AGT: A mastery climate reduces the perception of stress among athletes, and the inverse is true for a performance climate.

Paper 4: The aim of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of how three football goalkeepers coped with negative media coverage. Goalkeepers are often blamed for losses by the media due to the unique demands of the goalkeeping position. The first category of coping mechanism used was avoidance-coping. The goalkeepers coped with perceived negative content in the media in a variety of ways including, *avoided* buying, reading, or watching news reports, and not giving interviews on match day. The second category used was *social support*; the evaluation of the coach (and his subsequent support) meant more than the game reports printed in the press. The third major category of coping strategies found was *problem-focused* strategies. With experience, the goalkeepers reported coping with stress by focusing on the next task, the next move, and not to worry as much about the match reports.

Paper 5: In this paper, a thorough investigation, by means of mixed methods, was conducted on how football players in a Premier Division in Europe experienced media coverage (both outcome and negative content) during one season. The football players coped with the media by using strategies such as social support, avoidance and problem-focused coping. The development of mastery oriented climate seemed pivotal, especially when a coach/team leader wanted to avoid negative media coverage to affect an entire team. Both individual coping strategies and team coping (mastery climate) seemed necessary to protect and maintain self-confidence among the football players and maintain team effort to perform. The results supported the hypothesis that a performance climate increases the perception of negative media exposure.

Paper 6: In this final paper, an examination of the journalist-athlete relationship during the Vancouver Olympic Winter Games was conducted. Media contact is considered to

be part of the job of being an elite athlete, and the inexperienced younger athletes struggled more and got affected easier. There are *media rules* to follow, even though intrusive questioning may negatively affect the athlete's preparation and self-confidence. Consequently, elite athletes must learn to *cope* with the journalists' presence. Whilst the best advice is to be understanding of the journalists' need for stories and inside information, the athletes need to keep their distance because the media coverage turns out to be a *constant* stress factor. To stay focused and task involved becomes crucial, together with use of problem-focused strategies, social support, and avoidance coping and taking a media break.

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

Continuous effort - not strength or intelligence - is the key to unlocking our potential
(Winston Churchill)

A mixed method approach has been used in the write-up of the results. Greene (2007) suggests that "the mixing could be in voice, perspective, language, as well as in representational form. […] And the mixing should be responsibly and artfully crafted in ways that maximize the clarity and persuasiveness of the inquiry story being told" (pp. 185-187). In many ways the two sets of analyses (from different samples) have been "talking to each other", and more, each provides an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). In a mixed methods design, inferences may both answer research questions and develop new understanding which was the aim of this research project (and also led to a third and fourth data collection). Consequently, the results presented here in the discussion are a *meta-inference* (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 266)*,* it is discussions and conclusions generated through an integration of *all* the four different data collections conducted in the work with this dissertation and also presented in the 6 papers.

Given the above, the write-up itself was not a straight forward process: *Form mattered*. Some argue that content and form cannot be separated, and that "how one says something is part and parcel of what is said" (Eisner, 2001, p. 138). As a result, the *realist tale* seems as an appealing choice. The realist tale is characterised by an absent author/researcher, underlining of the participants' voices, and these voices support the themes identified and claimed by the researcher (Sparkes, 2002). This approach also functions as one way to establish credibility for the researcher, as the more objective scientific tale is presumably kept. Moreover, the realist tale is strikingly like the scientific which is the most common one to use, and then an objective tone may be kept in all parts of the write-up. Such a choice was compatible with following the continuously stated guidelines of my advisor to *tell a story,* together with the APA guidelines to present the results by the use of "clear communication" ("Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association," 2010, p. 65).

Finally, this way of writing-up the dissertation also allows using the themes as major chapters (the categories of competitive stressors, organizational stressors and the media stress – and then including how the elite athletes coped with it respectively), quantitative tables,

voices, narratives and interpretation of qualitative findings together contributes to a thorough presentation of the results.

The perceived categories of stressors in elite sport

Three different sources of stressors have been investigated in this research project: Categories of competitive stressors (paper 1), categories of organizational stressors (paper 1-3) and the media as a stressor (paper 3-6). There is some overlap between paper 1 and paper 3, as both looked into stressors emanating from two different origins. These three categories are not the same as the three suggested by Fletcher and colleagues (2006), personal stressors have not been investigated in the current research.

Due to its complexity, media stress has been separated from being considered one of several categories of organizational stressors (McKay et al., 2008). More, it seems that the stress originating from the media has the power to affect and exacerbate the entire interplay between competitive, organizational and personal stressors. The support of such an argument is the wide array of topics covered by the media for the truly elite athlete. The Tiger Woods headlines during Christmas 2009 may serve as a good illustration on how negative private revelations may end up affecting two other realms (losing sponsors and withdrawing from participation in competitions for a period) for some popular and exceptional athletes. Consequently, the media is considered as a separate entity and dealt with extensively due to the lack of knowledge of this source of strain on elite athletes.

Hence, this research project covers categories of stressors originating from *competition, organizational demands* and the *media*, and the stress-coping process for each major stressor is discussed *separately*. I start with stressors originating from competition per se and the consequent coping. This is in accord with the transtheoretical framework of coping (e.g., Lazarus, 1993): Coping changes over time and in accordance with the situational context in which it occurs. There is now a fair amount of evidence showing that individuals do respond differently to different stressors (see Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004).

Coping with the competition

> My coach totally changed focus as soon as we arrived in Belgrade. He told me that I had to reach the finals, "*I had to prove that I deserved to be in* [the event]", and he told me "*you must win*". That totally blew it for me; usually he is such a good coach always focusing on the task ahead. But in major competitions he becomes another person, he takes off. His comments affected my results, everything went wrong and it was hard to concentrate. It took me a few days to get the right task focus back.
> [Adolescent Youth Olympic athlete, individual sport]

Only the first paper in this dissertation, the pre-study covering adolescents' experience of a youth Olympics, has evidence of athletes' experiences of stress emanating from competition. *Bigger* was the keyword when they talked about their experiences; it was a higher level of competition, better opponents, bigger venues, larger crowds watching the event – many of these adolescents were overwhelmed by this novel experience. Moreover, the fact that it was "the Olympics" made the framing of the competition different and they experienced performance pressure which tends to evolve and be intensified when exposed to higher standards of competition (Hanton et al., 2005). When explaining the results, one athlete used the words *bad luck* to shed light on negative results, however, those with more *experienced* coaches succeeded better. Hence, their use of coping strategies was interesting to notice (see Table 3).

Table 3

Sources of competitive strain and coping among EYOF participants

COMPETITIVE STRESSORS	➜	COPING STRATEGIES
High level of competitors More audience watching and cheering Unable to stick to pre-competitive routines	Informational	reframing of routines & preparations in advance
Pressure to perform well from others Inner pressure to perform well	Emotional	coach/family/leaders help to calm down and keep confident
Lost routines because of size of venues Bad planning, bad luck Coach made technique changes	Cognitive strategies	visualization, self-talk, refocusing and distraction

Besides some use of cognitive problem-focused strategies such as visualization and refocusing, the use of informational and emotional support was highlighted. Several of the adolescent elite athletes mentioned informational support from the *coach* as a success factor. The coach helped them to reframe their routines and adapt to the intense heat at the venue and the size of the competition: "my coach was with me, and told me what to do during every step of the warm up; he had previous experience from competitions in such an extreme heat". Those who had their coach present to guide them, felt "privileged". This coach support available for the athletes with experienced coaches has been supported by previous research (e.g., Rees et al., 2007).

Coach importance. The focus on coach-athlete relationship makes the EYOF study an interesting one, as the adolescent athletes were clear on the importance of an experienced and supportive coach in order to succeed at major events. But for some of the participants, this key coping resource for the perception of competitive stress and maintenance of controllability over the situation, ended up being the foremost category of organizational *stressor*! This was due to some coaches' lack of ability to stay task involved when it mattered the most (see also paper 2 with the adult experience of coaches).

From motivational research we know that the climate in which the athlete is supposed to perform should have minimal focus on the competitive outcome and pressure (e.g., Pensgaard & Duda, 2002). This is due to adolescents being more susceptible to the influence of the motivational climate (created by the coach) than older adolescents and adults (Roberts & Treasure, 1992). Moreover, younger athletes may be more sensitive to the perceived criteria inherent in the motivational climate; this was illustrated by the introductory quote.

From an athlete perspective, it might be hard to control coach reactions. Therefore, researchers have underlined the importance of teaching adolescent athletes strategies to cope with competitive stress (Nicholls et al., 2005). In fact, one might assume the higher the competition, the more the athlete has to cope with different requirements: performance, financial and public expectations. These uncontrollable factors might require use of avoidance strategies (Philippe, Seiler, & Mengisen, 2004), or maybe they should expand their coping repertoire to use more problem-focused coping strategies as Reeves and colleagues have suggested (2009). Therefore, the importance of the coach among these young "Olympians" underlined why considering organizational stressors in research on the competitive environment (Mellalieu et al., 2009), which should be turned to next.

Coping with categories of organizational stressors

> I think it changes, it changes as you … at what age you are at, I mean you are obviously… your confidence level and your experience changes, I think… there is obviously always, regardless of what level you are at, the pressure to win… I don't know, that depends *… you can look at that as a stressor, or motivator, it really depends on how you look at that, ahm…* I think the biggest stressor, the biggest stressor obviously as a youth player is trying to continue to get selected … Obviously to be on somebody's team, so you can qualify and get a scholarship. Again then, when you are at college, the primary stressor is balancing schoolwork and performing well, and then doing well enough to get drafted to the pros, and then in your early young professional career, your biggest stress is just finding a way to make it in the pros, and then, I think as you get older, you probably start having family and kids, is job security, so I think the stress changes at different levels and different ages.
> [Experienced male football player]

Categories of organizational stressors are an expansive category of stressors; and it is important to note that the table below has no purpose other than giving an overview. Even though the categories of organizational stressors are totally different depending on the sport, competition/daily routines, individual/team sport, professional or amateur athletes, and across different age groups, there are a group of core stressors that seem to be universal. Table 4 gives an overview of the results from two samples in the present research concerning competition for adolescent athletes (paper 1) and everyday life for American football players (paper 2). The results from paper 3 are *not* included in Table 4 as coping was not included in the quantitative analyses. The association between stress and coping is outlined.

Table 4

*Overview of results of categories of organizational stressors and coping strategies used from American football and EYOF (**in bold**).*

ORGANIZATIONAL STRESSORS ➔	COPING STRATEGIES
Travel	Problem-focused & Emotional support
Drafting and contracts	Problem-focused & Informational and emotional support
Team issues	Problem-focused & Emotional support & Avoidance
Coach issues	Problem-focused & Emotional and informational support & Avoidance
Housing, busses, menu	**Tangible support**
Different venue & competitive facilities	**Informational support & Problem-focused**
Coach problems and lack of support	**Emotional support**

Overall, the findings support previous research that has reported that organizational stressors are more varied than performance related stressors (Hanton et al., 2005). Moreover, it was also obvious that athletes experienced and recalled more stressors associated with the sport organization than with competitive performance in their day-to-day activities (see paper 1), also reported previously (e.g., Hanton et al., 2005; Mellalieu et al., 2009).

Core categories of organizational stressors. Papers 1 and 2 reported evidence for a core group of organizational stressors such as travel, housing and coach issues. These categories of core stressors turned out to be stressful in the present research no matter what age, level or setting, and these categories of organizational issues should probably always be

monitored by team leaders (or anyone else working with these athletes). This finding supports previous research that has found coach issues (and team issues) to belong to a core group of categories of organizational stressors (McKay et al., 2008; Mellalieu et al., 2009; Reeves et al., 2009). Travel has also been noted as a negative factor for performance (Gould et al., 1999).

The perception of contractual issues as a stressor found in paper 2 has been pointed out in football previously. Reeves and colleagues found it to have importance in the study of adolescent football players in England (Reeves et al., 2009). In their study, only the older football players experienced this as a stressor. Therefore, contractual issues may be considered a core category of stressors for football players that have reached a certain elite level where one has to negotiate contracts and fight for playing time.

Culturally determined categories of stressors. In Paper 2, drafting was a major issue for American footballers, but this is a peculiarity for Americans as drafting does not occur in European football. Obviously, cultural aspects do affect the American football players' perception of stress. In a similar fashion, the EYOF participants (paper 1) experienced sources of strain due to the location, the intense heat wave that was occurring at the time, the lack of air conditioning, and the necessity to wait in line for almost everything associated with competing (eating, buses to venues, credential checks, etc). For this reason, cultural awareness is important when discussing the findings.

Cultural background usually refers to a set of behaviours, attitudes, and traditions that are shared by a group of people and passed down from one generation to the next (Myers, 2005). Therefore, extensive knowledge about organizing aspects is helpful background for understanding. For example, football played in the US and Europe face different organizational stressors that may influence the football players perception of stress and coping[6]. This was referred to several times by the Americans (paper 2).

First of all, football in Europe is a gigantic and successful business with massive media coverage. In the US, unsustainable business models, over-priced players, and a lack of developmental systems, led to the decline and eventual contraction of the NASL in the early 1980s and gave rise to Major League Soccer (MLS) in 1996. In contrast to Europe, the league operates as a single-entity corporation where player contracts are owned by the league rather than individual teams. As a result, the MLS players do not have the freedom to negotiate with any club once their contract has expired, the ability to negotiate longer guaranteed contracts, a

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[6] The write-up of the categories of organizational stressors in the European data is a work in progress

retirement plan, an increase in the league-mandated minimum salary, or a larger salary cap. These labour demands and operating procedures are standard in the other US professional sport leagues as well as in European football, and turned out to be major categories of stressors for the MLS players.

Second, geographical distances may also create stress, and the American footballers underlined that North America is a lot different than Europe. In the US, you may have to take a plane more often due to the size of the continent (they reported that they envied the short bus trips between cities in Europe). For the younger players, this travelling may be an exciting part of the professional life; however, for an athlete with family obligations, 3 or 4 day trips becomes a source of strain when unable to take part in daily family life.

A third and final point made by the American football players was the fact that most American professional players have completed college and hold at least a bachelor degree. Undoubtedly, an education may come in handy if injured; but also, to be part of a college team is the best way to become a professional player. In comparison, European footballers tend to lack formal education, only 20% of the players have an education beyond high school (Bergli, 2010). Hence, they do not have this security net when injured or ending a professional career.

The points made above were based on the Americans' own comparisons when describing their situation. As several of them had played in Europe (with the interviewer being Norwegian), such a comparison was inevitable in the interview setting. Obviously, some factors are unique to different subgroups, and some stressors are related to the money involved in the sport. For example, neither the EYOF participants nor the American footballers mentioned the media as a stressor; hence, the media may be a flip side of popularity.

The coach as a stressor. As already stated (paper 1), a coach may change the competitive situation for a young athlete simply by saying the wrong words and creating a more performance oriented climate. From being a helpful figure in the coping process with other categories of organizational stressors outlined in papers 1 and 2, he/she might turn out to be *the* major source of strain, in other words a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde figure. As an example, this may happen when the coach feels pressure from upper management. As he/she is supposed to be "the organizer, the motivator … he can directly affect the team" as one footballer reported in paper 2. Therefore, pressure from above may affect coaches and in turn the athletes. A good coach should know how to disguise the pressure from management and

not let it affect the team as the footballers admitted that the coach decided the tone and behaviour of the team. Hence, the coach created climate is central when coping with categories of organizational stressors.

In the same vein, the more mature athletes (in paper 2) talked extensively about the attributes a good coach should have; most of all it was agreed that it was essential that he/she be a healthy individual. Then, he/she would more likely be able to treat the athletes "fairly and equally in doing the right thing for each and every player". The ideal is a healthy and fair coach who supports his/her players sufficiently, and appreciates the entire group of athletes. This evidence is supported by Becker (2009), the provision of fair and equitable treatment is one major factor that separates the great coach from the average one.

Communication was also a key word emerging from the present findings in the coach-athlete relationship (paper 1 and 2), and research on enhanced communication is warranted (see e.g., Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). Furthermore, the coaches need to hide their own feelings when addressing the athletes if they want to be resourceful and help them in their coping process.

To sum up, the ambiguity in coach-athlete relationships is transparent in the research literature in that some researchers point to the fact that coaches are a stressor for athletes (e.g., Giacobbi et al., 2004; Gould, Jackson, & Finch, 1993b), while other researchers report that both coaches and athletes find the partnership stressful (e.g., Olusoga et al., 2009). No wonder the widest range of coping responses were displayed in coping with the communication styles used by coaches and the social interactions situated in the context of the team environment (Holt & Hogg, 2002), which is an important point when turning to the motivational climate.

The advantage of keeping the motivational climate mastery oriented. Evidently, the coach may be a source of strain for elite athletes (paper 1 and 2), therefore the aim of paper 3 was to examine the AGT stress model and two hypotheses were tested; (a) Does a performance climate and ego orientation increase the perception of media and organizational stress (i.e., coach-athlete), and (b) Does a mastery climate and task orientation negatively correlate with the experience of media and organizational stress (i.e., coach-athlete)?

However, it was necessary to develop a tool to investigate coach-athlete stress in the present research: Coach-athlete stress in Football Questionnaire (CASFQ). The CASFQ was designed to assess subjectively experienced coach-athlete stressors independent of a specific and objective occasion. In addition to the evidence found in papers 1 and 2, the importance of

this relationship has been demonstrated *qualitatively* from both the coach perspective (e.g., Frey, 2007; Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2007; Olusoga et al., 2009) and the athlete perspective (Gould et al., 1999). It would seem that leadership and team organization issues appear to be crucial in the athlete's perception of coach-athlete stress (Fletcher & Hanton, 2003; Hanton & Fletcher, 2005). Thus, a scale measuring the coach-athlete relationship has empirical and conceptual support.

In order to test these two hypotheses, correlational analyses, bootstrapping and structural equation modeling statistical processes were considered relevant due to the low number of participants (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). It has previously been argued that structural equation modelling techniques may be particularly useful in studying the transactional stress and coping process (Endler, Parker, & Summerfeldt, 1993).
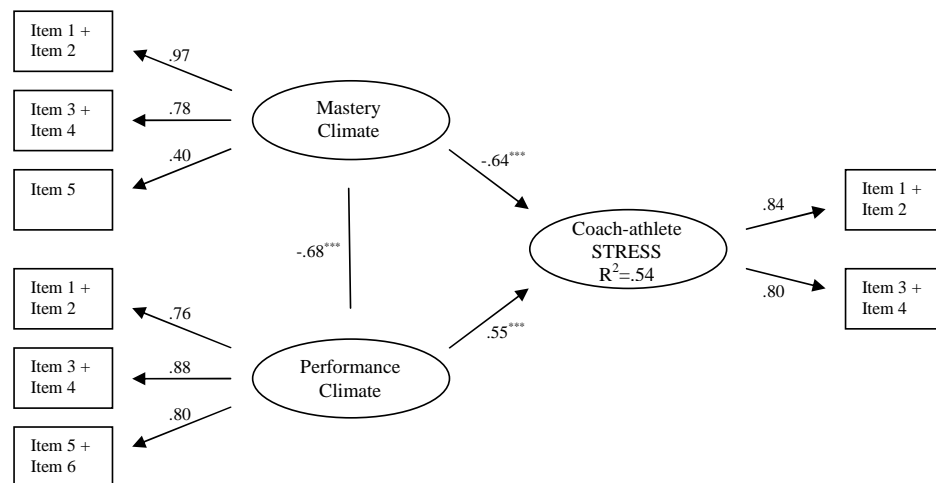
Figure 3

Motivational Climate Model of Organizational Stress [X^2 ($df = 17$, $N = 82$) = 24.39, $p = .11$; SRMR = .064; CFI = 0.98; RMSEA = .073]

The correlational analyses supported the hypothesized relationship, a performance climate and ego orientation were positively associated to coach-athlete stress. Further testing by means of bootstrapping (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) in order to reveal the paths between the stress and motivation variables, were conducted. Then LISREL was used for secondary analyses as a supplement to correlations and the bootstrapping procedures, and the number of variables tested was reduced. Based on the other analyses, a model investigating the paths

between mastery climate, performance climate and coach-athlete stress was tested (see Figure 3). Findings revealed that performance climate and mastery climate together explained 54% of perceived coach-athlete stress, and the climate was more important than personal goal orientations. The findings suggest that a mastery climate may protect elite football players from the worst rigours of coach-athlete stress, and that the perception of a performance climate may lead to a higher experience of coach-athlete stress (see paper 3). For the European football players in question, the motivational climate created by the coach and to some extent the management of the club, was more important than personal orientations when coping with coach-athlete stress.

Consistent with the basic tenets of achievement goal theory, these findings may be explained through the criteria of success adopted by the coach. The coach may be a performance oriented coach by conviction or through circumstances. This may happen in one of two ways: First, the coach may sincerely believe in normative referenced comparisons, and believe he is being an effective coach by emphasizing performance criteria (as there are examples of in paper 2). When the results are not going the way the coach believes are required, he may re-emphasize performance criteria and demand "results". The coach may publically make performance statements and increase the performance criteria more than what the players are comfortable with (see paper 5). However, in accord with AGT theory, when a performance climate becomes the norm in a team, then it may indeed influence the personal orientations of the players as well over time. As an example, in a recent interview a coach claimed that emphasized competition at every training session between the players on the team for positions "makes them all better" (Jonas, 2010). The evidence suggests that because of the importance of the coach at the professional level in football when the criteria of success of the coach becomes performance related, then the criteria of success of the coach become the criteria of success of the players over time (see papers 2 and 5).

The second reason a team's climate may be performance oriented may be due to the close relationship between the perceived climate and the criteria emphasised by the organization (the owners, sponsors and management). The organisation may start to put pressure on the coach to produce results when a team is perceived to be underperforming. The coach then simply transfers this pressure to the players and starts to demand better results and use performance criteria of success. This may change the perception of the motivational dynamics of the climate relatively quickly for the players (see paper 1), but probably too quickly to influence the personal orientations of the players in the short term. When the

pressure is on the coach and the coaching staff, then this may explain why the personal orientations of the players are less important in explaining perception of coach-athlete stress.

The findings from paper 3 suggest that a motivational approach to perceived strain in football may combat and reduce the quantity, frequency and/or intensity of coach-athlete stressors. Being able to cope with perceived stress is an important part of playing elite football in particular or for an elite athlete in general. Previous research has reported that elite athletes are both task and ego involved in their sport participation, hence, the motivational climate becomes pivotal (Pensgaard & Roberts, 2002; Roberts, 2001). When coaches are subjected to organizational pressures such as the negotiation of contracts, salaries, and pressure to keep the team in the elite division due to the financial repercussions (which is a constant stressor for some teams in football), then the coach becomes more focused on the outcomes of the competitive process (Fletcher & Scott, 2010). This in turn is likely to increase the pressure on the players to "deliver" the performances that satisfy the coaches and management, and make the athletes worry more with an increase in ego involvement as a result. For coach-athlete stress to be related to a performance climate, is in accord with AGT theory, and it makes conceptual sense (Roberts et al., 2007).

In addition to the stress reducing advantage, when coaches create a mastery climate within the team, elite athletes may learn how to utilize their mental preparation routines in a consistent manner to gain control and facilitate more adaptive coping (Kristiansen et al., 2008; Ntoumanis & Biddle, 1999; Pensgaard & Roberts, 2003). This is the issue that is addressed next.

Coping with categories of organizational stressors.   Naturally, one will get a different answer if one asks a 14 year old in his/her first major competition when compared to a 37 year old professional athlete dealing with a professional sport that he/she perceives as a key category of organizational stressor. This becomes even more pertinent when looking into the coping strategies used by the different subgroups of elite athletes in the present research (see Table 4, p. 49).

The use of *social support* was consistent in paper 1 and 2: Social support was reported as vital. It was the one type of support mentioned as a coping strategy within all categories of stressors reported. Further, in paper 2, *avoidance* coping was reported as a strategy used with coach created stress. However, this strategy was not reported among the adolescent athletes (paper 1). In both papers the use of *problem-focused* strategies was reported. While use of this strategy was only reported in relation to venues and facilities in paper 1, this strategy was

reported as used in relation to all the main categories of stressors in paper 2 (travel, drafting, team and coach issues). In other words, it might appear that the more mature athletes use a more varied and broader coping repertoire.

In paper 2, it was argued that we need to use narratives in order to fully explain the transactional process of coping. Athletes cope in a variety of ways in various situations, and coping involves several strategies often used in combination (Gould, Eklund, & Jackson, 1993). In many ways, one might argue that Table 4 fails to give an impression of the impact organizational issues may have on the development of an athlete. Hence, the use of narrative might give a better illustration of the daily coping process as used in paper 2. An example of the narrative follows:

> And how you cope in dealing with that, but you might have different feelings that you cope with, that you have to… how I cope is that I *confront* it head on, inside me, with my *support group*, with my *therapist*, anything that has been a challenge, or hurdle, or depression, or disappointments, or sadness or anger, I confront it head on, I have to, and you know, that's how I cope. If I have an argument with a team-mate, I'll go to them and… when the timing is right, maybe not that second, but when the timing is right. And confront them and ask the, for again, you have people who are willing to be … you just have to know people to, you have to *let some stuff go*, you have to be willing to confront people and *defend yourself*, and … again, ultimately it is a very strong sense of self, and a very strong sense of *you are the only one that is going to, that cares about you*, and again… some days you can deal with that just fine, and some days you need a lot of help in order to put yourself in that position. And continue to move forward.
> [Experienced footballer]

The narrative underlines the complexity of coping, and the daily struggle it is at this elite level. The significance of *coach support* is underlined, obviously a key coping strategy for different categories of organizational stressors. Coaches might function as "problem solvers" (Frey, 2007), and the use of informational support from the coach is an important mechanism for athletes:

> I really appreciate support from the coach, like last year when he told me that I would play regardless of the number of mistakes I made…I knew that I most likely would not make so many more mistakes. I did not make any mistakes for three games in a row. I got confidence from him, it helped.
> [Experienced goalkeeper]

When the coach is unable to give this support, the athlete is put in a position detrimental to performance and negative development (paper 4). Moreover, in paper 2 the participants' perceptions of the categories of organizational stressors were often related to the perceived quality of their relationship with the coach; if they felt secure and appreciated, their experience of the categories of stressors was reduced and vice versa. This finding is supported in paper 3 by the stress reducing effect of the motivational climate.

To sum up, the evidence in papers 1 and 2 is in accord with previous results. Age has been found to correlate with use of problem-focused coping strategies, older athletes more often using these strategies (Madden & Kirkby, 1989; Madden et al., 1990). Table 4 discloses that the older sample of athletes were better prepared to cope with adversity due to their use of problem-focused strategies in addition to support (Bebetsos & Antoniou, 2003), and respond more frequently with concentration and focusing on what has to be done in order to cope (Goyen & Anshel, 1998). In addition, they have also learned to use less energy and avoidance coping to solve issues beyond the athletes' control (Sagar et al., 2010). Use of avoidance coping is often associated with poor psychological adjustment like negative emotional and motivational outcomes (Compas et al., 2001; Sagar et al., 2010). Therefore, the frequent use of avoidance coping in relation to *media* stress in papers 4-6, is a natural turn in order to gain more knowledge concerning coping with issues out of one's control.

Coping with media created stress

One of the findings of the present research is that the media can be a source of intense stress for elite athletes, a source they must learn to deal with. Football goalkeepers (paper 4) make an interesting case, as they usually have less media attention than some of the other key players on the team. As a goalkeeper, if you do the job competently, apparently you are not noticed very much. But once you make a mistake, then the media spotlight gets turned on. The following narrative illustrates this:

> I think… the goalkeeper is a very specialized and unique position, and it is obviously only normal, because you are the last line of defence, but I think for myself, it has changed throughout my career. I had… early when I was kind of making a name for myself, you know, you really think it is special when media talks about you, and you think that it is a big deal, and this and that, but as you get older, and maybe you hide and there is a scenario, once, when a coach he… spoke out publicly against me on a TV show… you know… he said things that were not meant to be in the interview, but that was something that really bothered me, and I remember that it really affected our relationship from that day on, ahm… what I found is that change, now that I am older and have had media to say both good and bad things about me, what I have realized is that you really have to take it all with a **grain of salt**, because, when they are saying really good things about you, you know, there has been games where I had a very normal game, and the media was very praising towards me, saying I had a amazing game, and for me that reads that article it is like: REALLY? I had a very basic and simple game. And then there have been times where … I maybe have let in a bad goal, but had a really solid game, and I took a lot of media scrutiny, and so… I think the key is, at least for me, you have to take it with a grain of salt, you have to know that most of these people that are writing, they never played the game, … they never played the game at a high level, and so… they don't know what they are talking about, you have to focus on staying in … You know, when they say good things you need to brush it off, and when they say bad things, you have to brush it off too. That is

> easier said than done, when you are going through it... but, that is what you have to accept, and in the end of the day, as a goalkeeper, the bottom line is this, and I can say this because I have played now almost 14 years, is... as the goalkeeper whether it is media, ... team mates, coaches or fan, if you are overly concerned about what other people think about you, you are going to have a tough time. You will not last as a goalkeeper if you are very concerned about what other people are thinking.
> [Experienced goalkeeper reflecting on the best way to cope with media demands]

Elite athletes accept that it is part of their job to make themselves available for journalists and to respond to their questioning (see especially paper 6). The media attention is more important for some than others, and the amount of attention differs according to the popularity of the sport and the role of the athlete in the sport: Strikers get more attention than defensive players in the same sport, and footballers in general get more attention than elite athletes in minor sports. This may also influence the total stress experience perceived by elite athletes.

Even so, the media is often perceived as a source of strain for the most popular athletes. They may react to negative content, organizational issues publicly revealed, massive (and also positive) exposure with a focus on winning. The athletes also have to deal with the interviews with the journalists. These issues are elaborated upon in papers 4, 5 and 6, but first the association between media stress and motivation will be highlighted.

Performance climate, ego orientation and the media. Apparently, media attention can be fun in the beginning for the neophyte elite athlete. The footballers (paper 5) would talk about themselves running out early in the morning for newspapers after games when they were younger, but (usually with a laugh about such youthful naivety) they did not do it any more! Perhaps "comparable" with the inverted U-hypothesis of anxiety and performance (e.g., Landers & Arent, 2001), media attention is a positive factor up to a certain point. Athletes from more minor sports as well as young athletes in the major sports seem to really want attention when emerging as elite athletes. But after a certain point, the media attention becomes a stressor that may serve as a distraction. The narrative below says something about the type of pressure elite athletes may put upon themselves and the consequence they may believe that a game has for people:

> The pressure is high in football... and that leads you to focus a lot on yourself, because you are convinced that you are part of something that you believe is of major importance... that in turn makes you think that your performance is decisive both for the team and the action on the field ... *and for the health and happiness of people*, so to speak.
> [Young elite footballer]

Age and inexperience may be important factors related to the degree of media stress perceived by elite athletes, while older athletes have a reduced perception of the media as a stressor (see negative association between amount of media stress and age; paper 5). However, when testing the AGT stress model in paper 3, evidence was found that when the footballers perceived both a performance climate and were high in ego orientation, then this was associated with experiencing media stress. The testing of the AGT model revealed that the performance climate explained 42% of ego orientation, whereas ego orientation explained 24% of media stress (see Figure 4).
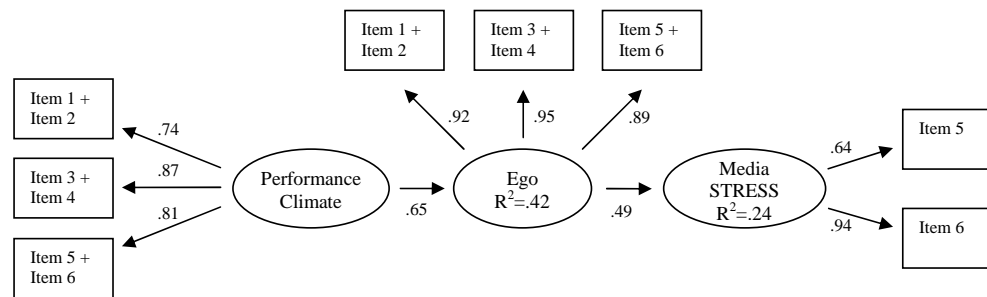
Figure 4

AGT Media Stress Model [X^2 (df = 18, N = 82) = 17.83, p = .47; SRMR = .036; CFI = 1.00; RMSEA = .001]

This relationship may be explained by AGT theory (e.g., Roberts, 2001). Clearly, it is the ego oriented athletes who experience media as a stressor. The conceptual explanation for this is that we know that ego oriented people are normatively referenced (Roberts et al., 2009; Roberts et al., 2007), therefore getting public acknowledgment for their performance is important. No media exposure, or negative media exposure may be detrimental to their self-confidence and they may lose belief in their own ability as an athlete. Consequently, being ego oriented is a central factor in the athlete's subjective perception of whether the media is perceived as a stressor or not. The story about "Pete" in paper 5 is an excellent example of this, the intense amount of positive coverage he got as a young player, made it hard for him to adapt to not always getting this attention later in his career.

When a team has several "stars" competing for media attention in a performance climate setting, as often happens both in football (paper 5) and at a national team level (paper 6), this may exacerbate the need to normatively compare themselves to each other that enhances the competitive climate in the team. This makes the impact of media criticism of

individual athletes even more salient, and illustrates the importance of the *coach* in defusing these potentially destructive perceptions (team 2, in paper 5). Coaches should carefully monitor the climate and their ego-oriented athletes when there is a "media storm" about a team, as was graphically illustrated in the 2010 World Cup when both Italy and France were eliminated early in the competition. When such a storm occurs, then players are susceptible to perceive the media exposure as ego involving.

As expressed both in paper 5 and 6, being in the *shadow* of these apparently more ego oriented athletes is also preferable for the more task oriented athletes who prefer focusing upon an upcoming events. This was clearly expressed in article 6, when a media storm occurred and one athlete got all the attention as expressed in this narrative:

> It is so great to have someone like him on the team. He was out there talking to the press, and I could quietly go away and prepare myself for the upcoming event. No one expected anything of me, no pressure at all. In contrast they [the journalists] expected him to win, and probably that the rest of us hopefully would not fail too much. It was perfect; I tried to hide from the media (and the journalists) as much as I could.
> [Olympic medal winner]

The media may act as a source of real stress during major competitive events or during entire seasons like in football when the results are avidly followed by spectators around the world. The huge media presence is in addition to the competitive pressure that accompanies athletes when they compete against the best in the world. This underlines the importance of a mastery climate. In this research, a mastery climate was *not* associated with media stress in paper 3. In other words, the findings suggest that a mastery climate may protect against the perception of media as being stressful as it helps the athletes to focus on the task at hand and avoid inter and/ or intra team comparisons with other athletes.

Media content as a stressor. Apparently, *negative media coverage* was a major stressor for all elite athletes (papers 4-6). The goalkeepers clearly pointed out the effect of negative framing had on their performance (paper 4). However, because of their relative low percentage of actual column inch coverage in the media reports, it is obvious that a few words that had a negative connotation had a large impact on the perception of players (see also paper 5). All the three goalkeepers underlined the unfairness of this treatment by powerful journalists, and the goalkeepers used terms such as "scapegoat", "a piece of meat", and "sleepy" to describe how the media described them. The media reports were clear that the goalkeeper was the "usual" reason why games were lost, and the goalkeepers seemed bonded as a group by this often unfair public treatment. The experience of the goalkeepers was in

accord with Peter Shilton's (2005) biography when he wrote that he distrusted every element of the press. These statements about negative framing were also echoed in the other papers (5 and 6) with extensive examples[7].

When a sport becomes popular, and experiences a large infusion of money, media attention increases, and the individual performances of athletes comes under intense media scrutiny In paper 5, analyses of media texts collected during an entire season were analysed and a quantitative content analysis conducted in order to relate the amount of coverage with how the players experienced the media coverage for that year. These results were discussed with all the selected players from the three different teams. In general, winning teams are more popular than losing teams, although organizational issues inside a team were popular among journalists too. Players may accept less media attention when they are not doing well, however, if they suddenly get extra scrutiny due to unexpected positive results, then the climate may easily change to become performance oriented. The teams that are ranked among the top three get used to the daily media scrutiny that follows. When teams rise in the rankings, this will increase the media scrutiny, but it may disrupt the team's rhythm so that

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[7] Facsimile from *Dagbladet*, September 15, 2008. The translated heading is "Massacre" and this illustrates the negative reporting this particular goalkeeper received.

team leaders should carefully monitor the players and keep the climate mastery oriented (team 1 in paper 5).

However, not only personal orientation may be affected by media exposure. The media describes sport contests in great detail, and the journalists often create heroes (or villains) that we relate to (Hargreaves, 1986), through the drama rules from popular culture (Jarvie, 2006). Naturally, these "dramatic" stories may affect the athlete's self-confidence (Gauntlett, 2008; Giddens, 2006) – if repeated enough times. This is in accord with football psychologist Nesti who argues that "one of the most helpful psychological qualities at a moment like this is the ability to trust your own self-image rather than being distracted by the image constructed by others" (Nesti, 2010, p. 139). In other words, the athlete may need some help in this process.

Evidence was found that also *team performance* was affected by negative media coverage. Paper 5 gave confirmation of when things got "rough" around the team, when administrators made public announcements about the poor performance of the team, and the coach focused on outcomes, then the players began to care more about their own futures and wonder where they could get a better contract, etc. Team administrators need to understand that publically calling for "change of results" increases the pressure on the coach who, in turn, increases the pressure on the players. This is hardly the recipe for enhanced team performance! Team effort might be lost as a result of a more performance oriented climate when winning becomes so paramount. In situations like this, special care should be taken to keep *organizational issues* inside the team as well, in order not to elevate stress levels in a struggling team.

Massive media attention from journalists may also disturb the performance of athletes before major tournaments and competitive events both for teams (paper 5) and individuals (paper 6). The media attention before an event such as the Olympic Games may be perceived as stressful as it completely changed daily routines (paper 6). One of the winter athletes interviewed in paper 6 declared that he felt fortunate not being a footballer in one of the premier football divisions in Europe, his season was short and most of the competition took place abroad. For football players, the media attention is constant. Interestingly, he believed that in the long run such an interest would simply be too much to cope with.

… and the journalists themselves are a stressor. Finally, the evidence demonstrated that the *journalist-athlete relationship* was also a potential stressor before and during competition. Based on the findings from papers 4-5, a further investigation on how the

presence of the journalists and the content of the questions asked may function as a distraction and negatively affect performance was conducted in paper 6. In general, the Winter Olympians were irritated by the journalists' apparent *lack of knowledge* of their respective sport. The footballers in paper 5 had a similar observation. Due to the nationalistic overtones occurring during an Olympic Games, the athletes often questioned the agenda of the journalists. One of the observations was why would the journalist want to reduce his/her chances for reaching his/her goal by these obvious distractions. One example that was mentioned concerned journalists' eagerness to ask about *injuries*, questions that may lead the athlete to focus more upon the injury than necessary. In addition, when commenting upon the result of an event, the journalists seemed to lack respect for any performance that did not result in a medal. Happiness in a job well done was easily turned into a feeling of disappointment simply by the framing of the questions asked seconds after completing an event.

As these major events have prearranged press briefings, there is nowhere to "hide" for the athletes. For this reason, athletes quickly realize that a relationship with a trustworthy journalist may be one way to control what is written about them. In addition, creativity may come in handy! Other support personnel may function as a lightening rod for athletes during press briefings, and non performance related distractions may be effective. As an example, the Norwegian team's curling pants at the 2010 Olympics gave the journalists their story without compromising the focus of athletes on the task (paper 6). The story about the pants even made the headlines in the international press covering the Olympics. But for those who don't have creative strategies to give journalists their story, how do they cope with this media attention?

Coping with media stress: Quantitative findings. To better determine the conceptual relationship between AGT, stress and coping, analyses of the responses of 82 elite footballers were conducted (paper 5). In fact, access to 82 elite footballers was one of the strengths of this study, because it is often considered problematic to get access to these highly public athletes. Thus, the ecological validity of the study is very high because I was given this possibility! However, 82 participants are not many when considering the number of variables included in order to conduct certain statistical analyses.

Table 5

Pearson correlations among motivational, stress and coping variables

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
1. Mastery climate	--									
2. Performance climate	.12	--								
3. Task orientation	**.68**	**.31**	--							
4. Ego orientation	.14	**.58**	**.25**	--						
5. Organizational stress	**-.36**	**.35**	.09	.01	--					
6. Media stress – neg. content	-.19	**.25**	.00	**.36**	**.22**	--				
7. Media stress – neutral/amount	.10	-.05	.02	-.04	-.15	.07	--			
8. Coping – social support	.08	.00	-.02	.15	-.20	**.24**	.13	--		
9. Coping – probl. focused think	.03	.01	.07	.16	-.22	**.29**	.00	**.48**	--	
10. Age of athletes	-.07	-.02	-.02	-.06	**.21**	-.09	**-.33**	-.11	.20	--

The important finding of the correlational analyses was that the footballers use *social support* and *problem-focused* thinking to cope with negative media coverage (see Table 5). In other words, coping with bad press was a personal strategy, and the elite players had learned to use different types of coping to reduce the perception of stress. Furthermore, there was no significant association between coping and mastery climate and task orientation, hence, the hypothesized association between a mastery climate and adaptive coping was not supported in paper 5. Use of social support and problem-focused coping may occur concurrently in the coping process. To get someone to help you with a reinterpretation of the situation may be interpreted as the best way to cope.

There was no evidence of use of social support and problem-focused coping in relation to coach-athlete stress, which was unexpected. But as argued in the previous chapter, creation of a mastery motivational climate is probably the best way to reduce elite athletes' perception of organizational stress.

Coping with media stress: Qualitative findings. The above results only report the limited quantitative findings. Based on the results from papers 4-6, one additional category of coping together with elaboration of the two reported ones have been identified throughout this investigation; social support, avoidance coping and problem-focused coping strategies (see Table 6).

First of all, *social support* was important, a strategy underlined as crucial when coping with categories of organizational stressors as well. For the elite athletes participating in sports where a lot of money is involved, *tangible* support was never mentioned as essential. On the other hand, *informational* support was frequently mentioned. For the goalkeepers in our

research, informational support after a failure helped them to feel safe again (paper 4). The coach is critical in this rebuilding of self-confidence, and it was evident that what he/she thinks was more important than the media reports, or more precisely – the public version. In addition, *emotional* support from family and friends helped the athlete to ventilate and put incidents into perspective (see papers 4 and 5). Hence, it is important to match the correct type of support person (coach, family and/or friends) with the stressor in question (Cutrona & Russell, 1990).

Table 6

Overview of type of coping strategies used to cope with the media.

Social support (coach, family, friends)	Avoidance strategies	Problem-focused strategies
Coach support (informational and emotional)	Avoid buying newspapers or reading at internet	Rationalize what they (the journalists) write about you
Tangible support from team leaders and family	Give "boring" answers and not draw attention to your person	Focus on next task and plan ahead (also during game)
Emotional support from family (and help with avoidance)	Avoid giving interviews that will appear on game day	Team debriefing and analyse of the game
Mastery climate as team support	Avoid journalists=media break	See things in perspective

However, media stress may easily turn out to be a chronic stressor. Research has found that perceived availability of *support* "would work in the face of acute stressors, but not in the face of ongoing chronic strains" (Cohen & Wills, 1985, p. 349). In order to cope more effectively with the media as a chronic stressor, other and more long-term coping strategies should also be employed.

Second and underlined as an adaptive coping strategy, *avoidance* coping was crucial to avoid the media influencing the athletes thinking. However, the goalkeepers underlined that you need help from family in order to avoid reading/listening/watching media reports (paper 4). Family, friends and the fans want to discuss your performance, and often their "knowledge" of the performance is drawn from media reports, therefore it not easy to stay ignorant about what is reported about your performance (paper 5). To avoid contact with journalists is even harder. Of course, an athlete can be dull and grey so not even the most eager journalist finds him/her interesting to talk to (paper 4).

If that does not help, a *media break*[8] might be a solution (paper 6). However, you need the media's approval to be able to accomplish such a task. If an athlete walks away from the press conference to avoid being questioned, the media will most likely be even more critical of him/her. Such a strategy will not help the athlete to cope with the situation; it simply facilitates more stress. The media does not easily accept violation of the media rules previously agreed upon with the governing sport organization. However, avoidance coping is an *adaptive* strategy for coping with media stress, and it might be even more adaptive if it is used in combination with social support and problem-focused coping.

Third, to take whatever happens to you with a "*grain of salt*", as the goalkeepers said in the narrative above (see pp. 57-58), is clearly a *problem-focused* coping strategy. This strategy was highlighted as adaptive, both by use of Brief COPE (paper 5) and also when interviewing the footballers (papers 4 and 5) and winter Olympians (paper 6). When reaching a certain elite international level, coping with the media is a part of the job – and in order to succeed it is advantageous to believe in one self and not get affected my minor distracters. Of course, age, some sort of automatization and experience teach athletes how to rationalize what is happening to them, in addition to understand the importance of being prepared for everything! Therefore, do not to speak with the press until you have got your breath back (and normal pulse and restored sensible thinking) was a universal recommendation from all the athletes interviewed.

The use of avoidance coping as an adaptive coping strategy was an interesting finding. Previous research has shown a relationship between avoidance coping and an ego-involving climate (e.g., Ntoumanis et al., 1999), but the interviews here link the use with well-functioning mastery climates in teams. This is because in the short term, the use of avoidance coping actually protects the player's self-confidence as he avoids conflicting narratives about his own performance (e.g., Giddens, 2006). This refutes the claim of Roth and Cohen (1986) that the use of this strategy may decrease self-confidence. In the long run, however, some sort of acceptance of the situation and adopting other strategies to fight disruptive thoughts may be needed. Avoidance coping has been commonly employed concurrently with problem-focused strategies (Reeves et al., 2009). Problem-focused coping strategies are usually considered to facilitate performance (e.g., Ntoumanis & Biddle, 1998). From the extant literature, it has been argued that avoidance coping strategies are beneficial in the initial stages of coping, with problem-focused strategies being beneficial at the latter stages of coping (e.g., Roth & Cohen,

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[8] Defined in paper 6 as "getting time off from the media attention in order to focus on an upcoming event".

1986). Further, use of avoidance strategies may also facilitate problem-focused strategies when they serve as a "time-out" to refocus (Aldwin, 2007). In the present case, it would appear that avoidance coping might be a useful strategy when the media is the stressor that cause unnecessary distractions with framing of teams and athletes.

Team coping and mastery climate. In paper 5, a correlational association between the use of two coping strategies (social support and problem-focused coping) and a mastery climate was found. Further, canonical correlational analyses were conducted to test whether there were any multivariate relationships between the perceived motivational climate (predictor variable) and the stress and coping strategies (criterion variables). The MANOVA revealed that the overall multivariate relationship between the two functions was significant. The first canonical function (high performance/low mastery) had a canonical correlation of .79 (R^2=.63) with a redundancy index of 32%, and the second canonical function (high mastery/low performance climate) had a canonical correlation of .42 (R^2=.17) with a redundancy index 8 %.

In the first canonical function (high performance climate/ low mastery climate), the predictor variables of performance climate (.93) and mastery climate (-.44) had meaningful loadings, with the performance climate being a strong predictor. The first function supports the assumption that a perceived performance climate is associated with experiencing relatively high levels of environmental stress when three criterion variables (ego orientation, coach-athlete stress and media stress) had reliable and meaningful canonical loadings (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996).

In the second canonical function (high mastery climate/moderate performance climate), the predictor variables of mastery climate (.90) and performance climate (.41) had meaningful loadings, with the mastery climate being a strong predictor. The results from the second canonical function may be interpreted as supporting the assumption that a predominantly mastery climate is associated with lower levels of perceived environmental stress, albeit that the players also perceived the coach wanting to win. The important finding is that both organizational stress as illustrated by coach-athlete issues (-.43), and media stress negative content (-.32) were meaningfully associated with the mastery climate. In addition, social support was marginally associated (.28), an association that would have made sense due the personal correlations discussed previously discussed (see Table 5, p. 64). Taken together, these findings support the importance of creating a mastery motivational climate for mature elite athletes in order to minimize the perception of environmental stress.

The participants in the results reported above are footballers. Football is a team sport, and sometimes individual coping strategies are not enough when an entire team has to cope with negative media exposure. This was clearly reported in the interviews (paper 5) that the media may create additional negative feelings when things were getting rough:

> In the beginning, when we lost, the media tried to explain why. When they had done that a few times, they started speculating about the need to buy new players, get a new coach and made up stories about us. And we were only half way through the season…
> [Experienced footballer]

This sort of media framing is probably not meant as a contribution to solve the problems within the team. Rather, such exposure may lead to two outcomes for the football players: First, it may reduce their self-confidence; and second, there is an increase in perceived ego orientation because of the constant normative evaluation in the press, and an increase in the perceived performance climate because the coach and management start to focus on "turning things around" and winning. These have the potential to become disruptive factors for performance.

In circumstances as described above, the coach has an extra responsibility and has to act as the "glue" in the team by constant *informational support* whatever happens. The coach and his focus on the team climate seemed to stand out as vital (paper 5). Some footballers talked about one highly admired coach who was known to use strategies to take the focus away from the team when they lost a game by saying something "stupid" or totally irrelevant to the press. The result was that the media would focus on him instead of the team. By this intentional approach, the coach created a supportive climate for the next game with his team rather than having the players dwell too much over their mistakes. However, when they won important games, "he would always step back and let us take the credit". By this action, this coach also protected the self-confidence of players and taught them to trust themselves. In the present context, this coach understood that a task focus, as defined within AGT, was the best focus for the individual players to adopt to overcome a performance slump together with extensive use of social support:

> Every player wants to win; you don't need to tell him. You should focus on your task, on how to win the game. […] Leaders and coaches make these types of mistakes all the time, I don't know why. Maybe it is because they don't know better; it is easier just to tell the players to win.
> [Experienced footballer]

This quotation underlines the importance of keeping the climate mastery focused as is argued by AGT (e.g., Roberts, 2001), even for elite players. It has been suggested that such a focus

may almost function as a coping strategy for athletes when being faced with the negative content coverage of the media. This strategy is especially important when coping with mediated organizational issues and the social interactions situated in the context of the team environment (Holt & Hogg, 2002).

In addition, helping the team to keep a task focus by constant debriefing may be the best way for the individual players to overcome a performance slump. In other words, a concept like *team coping* through the resources of a mastery climate may be crucial for the extra coping effort needed in team sport besides use of their individual coping strategies.

CONCLUSION

The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing.
(Albert Einstein)

Elite athletes need to be prepared for the *total* competitive experience when approaching major events or performing in the highest team leagues. This investigation illustrates that organizational pressure and media attention add their own contribution to performance pressure from the athletes themselves, team and/or national federations. In this setting, the subtitle of this dissertation was: *Does the coach matter?* The answer is: "yes, of course"! But how the coach matters is dependent on the source of the stress! Hence, it is important for coaches to know which coping strategies are adaptive when dealing with these more specific stressors when giving advice to athletes (Nicholls & Polman, 2007a).

First of all, there is a direct link between perceived motivational climate and organizational (measured as coach-athlete) stress. Evidence both in paper 3 and paper 5 underlined that a coach created mastery climate may protect athletes and reduce the perception of organizational stress: In contrast, a performance climate directly led to heightened perception of organizational stress. The correlational analyses did not find any association between specific coping strategies and organizational stress; hence, a mastery climate may be the best way to "protect" elite athletes from the perception of organizational stress.

In terms of how the *coach matters* in relation to coping with *organizational stress*, he or she should monitor, inform, and "protect" the players as much as possible from the organizational stressors. As the sport organizations expand, so do also the number of people working in the organizations, and the athlete's off-duty responsibilities for the team. Paper 2 highlights the coach's human skills (being a "healthy individual"), which is an advantage when he/she should create and foster a mastery climate for his/her team. If he/she is unavailable to do so, the coach may easily become the major source of strain for the athletes (papers 1 and 2), as the coach simply "personifies" the organization he represents. The findings of Paper 5 revealed that teams can play well through organizational turbulence, as long as coaches stay calm and take the "heat off their shoulders". Evidence for such an argument was supported in the interviews, whenever asking the players about coping, issues concerning the coach were the answers. As a researcher, one really had to ask specific

questions in order to get more precise descriptions of coping strategies used to deal with this stressor.

Perception of *media* stress on the other hand, was coped with by the elite athletes through using different types of learned coping behaviours. Social support and problem-focused strategies were reported in the quantitative findings (paper 5), and the qualitative interviews identified avoidance as a strategy (papers 4, 5, 6). In particular, informational support from the coach was highlighted among the goalkeepers (paper 4) as being crucial in order to counteract the opinions of journalists, especially when the journalist was considered to have little knowledge about the sport (paper 4 and 6).

In paper 5, a positive correlation between media stress *negative content* and a performance climate was found (see Table 5, p. 64), a finding indicating that the *coach matters* here too! When a coach or the team culture stresses the outcome aspect of sport, then the media coverage was perceived to be more stressful (paper 5). Unexpected, and/or a large amount of media exposure may change the climate. Therefore, when the players should be focusing on their tasks within the game, the media exposure makes them aware of their own contributions, or lack of contribution, to the team outcome. It is clear that even successful elite athletes experience pressure from the coach and management to "deliver" the performances that promote the club, and this is exacerbated by negative media exposure. The media coverage contributes to the perception of a performance climate being extant in the team and may add to the perceived need of each athlete to get the positive media headlines to maximize their contribution to the team "product." In addition, the qualitative interviews revealed that in such a context (paper 5), the players began to play for themselves to enhance their marketability to possibly obtain contracts from other teams. Such a development may be crucial for the performance of the team, and the coach has to reduce the forces inside the team that might exaggerate the need to normatively compare themselves to each other that enhances the competitive climate in the team.

To sum up, the coach matters for the athletes both when they have to cope with organizational and media stress. It is probably easier to help with the media stressors due to them being an outside disturbance for performance. As the research into media stress grows, with articles and evidence produced through sources such as this dissertation, knowledge about how to cope with media stress is being distributed and acted on. As an example, during the European Championship in handball (December, 2010), the media were informed that they would have less access to the Norwegian athletes during the championship. In interviews, the players explained why they wanted to avoid reading media text as much as

possible during the competition, have less contact with journalists in order to control the effect of both the media coverage and the journalists' questions (Overvik, 2010). Naturally, the policy created a lot of debate about the role of the media (see also the successful example mentioned in paper 6). However, knowledge that in the pursuit of stories, journalists can affect the performance of athletes is an important aspect in the overall planning for major competitive events. Journalists have to be managed and athlete interviews given when the athlete is ready.

Obviously, it is more demanding to be a *great* coach (Becker, 2009), create a mastery climate, and be the constant support person and lightening rod for all types of organizational demands. However, the importance of the coach being a source of social support emerged from the data. A thorough examination of social support was not the primary goal of this dissertation, but it turned out to be important from the first data sample and onward. Social support emerged as being more important than expected, however the importance of this resource or coping strategy has been previously highlighted (e.g., Bianco & Eklund, 2001; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Holt & Hoar, 2006; Rees & Hardy, 2004). From the evidence in the present study, it seems that high expectations and the huge demands of elite sport create a constant "need" to cope with new and different sources of strain. The more experienced athletes were also the most open about their need of social support and daily reassurance to cope with their "elite life". Clearly, coach support is crucial. However, other professionals working with elite athletes and personnel working within the organizations themselves, at the individual team level and national sporting organization level, must be informed about the need for providing social support for athletes. For athletes to successfully cope with the demands of an elite environment, all coaches and organisational personnel should be sensitive to providing social support (Olusoga et al., 2010). In an ideal world, they should also understand the need to provide a mastery climate when training, undergoing physical therapy, and so on.

In conclusion, informed by the transactional framework (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), this dissertation extends organizational and media stress research. Based on the evidence, future research should continue to investigate and gain more knowledge about the links between stress, coping and motivation. Obviously, perception of stress differs, and in order to help athletes in their striving for excellence, the motivational climate created by the coach matters (see article with this exact title by Pensgaard & Roberts, 2002). As a result, when investigating how elite athletes cope with stress; it is possible to gain a more complete picture

and develop a better conceptual understanding of the stress and coping transaction with the inclusion of a motivational framework.

Epilogue

In the write-up of the dissertation, I emailed the introduction to **Kurt Asle Arvesen** and later phoned him in order to hear his version of the incident that initiated the questions that prompted this dissertation. I was intrigued by his stoic calmness in 2005, and was curious how he managed to appear relative unaffected during the interviews? It is important to remember that in bike racing, the mixed zone starts when the riders are still in motion. Someone (usually from the team), grabs the bike to help riders to stop forward progress, and then immediately, the riders are surrounded by journalists.

As a researcher, can I rely on Arvesen's recall of a story that happened 6 years ago? The use of retrospective recall is often criticized when it comes to interviewing athletes about their coping moments (Smith et al., 1999), however some argue that they are able to recall specific moments (Gould et al., 1999) and that when given time to reflect they may provide a more complete and ecologically valid account (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). The 17th stage was probably a specific moment, so Arvesen did recall it. However, from his recall it is obvious that the media put more into his loss (being second in the stage) than himself (see the headline from the facsimile on p. 9)!

What he was thinking 6 years ago? First of all, he was disappointed, "but dinner is served everyday no matter what, I know that from experience!!!" From his elaboration of the race, the use of problem-focused coping helped him in the coping process. Fame may easily get to you, but it was crucial for him to remember who he is and rationalize over what is important. Arvesen underlined that: "It is vital to understand that sport is just something minor in a bigger picture, for me it is about passion of doing my favourite sport and the following lifestyle that I love and am able to live". This contrasts strongly with one of the footballers feeling that his team's success was crucial for people's health and happiness. That is a heavy burden to carry for an elite athlete – and if he truly believes it, may create more stress than necessary.

Secondly, Arvesen underlined his personality as a helping factor in coping with such a "disappointment". In the language of AGT, he might be considered task involved. Arvesen considered his success to be a result of hard work: "I was not an extreme talent winning every competition at a young age, so I don't need to win in order to feel successful. Maybe I lack the winner instinct that can make you do and say foolish things to the press. Instead I am happy for every achievement I have accomplished, and I have never taken anything for

granted throughout my career". Arvesen did not let such a minor incident affect him, kept on working, and three years later he won a stage in Tour de France.

In summary, elite athletes are by no means a special breed, independent of the population as a whole. However, they do lead a unique life style, a life style that exposes them to specific types of stress and forces them to cope with that stress by using unique coping methods. There is not a single coping method that will successfully serve all athletes in all situations, although the more diverse an athlete's repertoire of coping skills are, the better. Also, the more coaches know about the motivational processes taking place, stress reducing strategies may be exercised. As people do not exist in a vacuum, consideration of the role that the social contexts play is crucial to sport psychology work. When dealing with elite athletes, the motivational climate created by the coaching staff, the management of the organization, the level of the competitive event, popularity in the media, and national popularity of the sport are only a few factors that should be considered when studying how athletes cope with stress. The coach matters!

Task involved and prepared © T.W. Ruud

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PAPER 1

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Young elite athletes and social support: coping with competitive and organizational stress in "Olympic" competition

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Elite adolescent sport is a relatively unexplored research field. The purpose of this investigation was to examine how the Norwegian Olympic Youth Team ($N = 29$) experienced competitive and organizational stress during the European Youth Olympic Festival in July 2007 and how they coped with the stressors. Participants were aged 14–17 and competed in handball, track and field, swimming, and judo. We used a qualitative methodology with interviews and open-ended questionnaires. Qualitative content analyses revealed that the athletes experienced competitive stressors because of the size and importance of the com-petition, and organizational stressors (e.g., housing, lining up for food, and transportation) exacerbated by the extreme heat during the Festival. The elite competitive experience was novel to all and overwhelming for some of the more "inexperienced" athletes. The athletes used cognitive coping strategies to some extent in addition to relying on different types of social support. The findings revealed the need for social support for adolescent athletes, and underlined the importance of a good coach–athlete relation-ship in order to perform well and enjoy the competitive experience.

In applied research, considerable attention has been paid to the effect of competitive stress on sporting performance, and recently organizational stress has been introduced as a novel research area among adult athletes (Fletcher et al., 2006). However, far less is known about the effect of competitive and organizational stress on adolescent athletes (Green-leaf et al., 2001; Smith et al., 2001). Research suggests that older athletes are better prepared than younger athletes to cope with adversity (Bebetsos & Anto-niou, 2003) and to control their negative emotions following stressful events. Older athletes focus less on opponents than younger athletes, and respond more frequently with concentration and focusing on what has to be done to cope (Goyen & Anshel, 1998).

When introducing adolescents to the same types of competitive events as mature athletes, is it important to understand in which ways the younger elite athletes cope with the stressors they encounter in sport (Crocker et al., 2004). When conducting a review of the studies from 1980 to 2004, Holt et al. (2005) found that adolescents most frequently use strategies such as seeking social support, mental disengagement, and active coping. However, the older adolescents used more cognitive-based coping efforts. Consequently, social support and behavioral strategies might be more important for younger athletes when one considers the novelty of the elite competitive experience. Recently, Nicholls et al. (2005) have underlined the importance of teaching adolescents to cope with competitive stress and that coping effectiveness among adolescents is related to the competitive level and the demands of the sport on the athletes' ability (Nicholls, 2007). However, how elite adolescent athletes cope with organizational stressors is still an understudied topic. Therefore, the purpose of this investigation was to gain more insight into how adolescent "elite" athletes cope with competitive *and* organizational stressors in a major competitive event [the European Youth Olympic Festival (EYOF), Belgrade, 2007].

Coping with competitive and organizational demands

Coping has been defined in a number of different ways, but the dominant model today is the transac-tional process perspective (Giacobbi et al., 2004; Nicholls & Polman, 2007). Coping is viewed as a dynamic process following appraisal because of a situation (identified as threatening, challenging, etc.) where an individual perceives an imbalance between the situation and his/her resources. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), there exist eight underlying properties of athletes' stress appraisals, which are: novelty, predictability, event uncertainty,

imminence, duration, temporal uncertainty, ambiguity and timing of events in relation to the life cycle. In a novel study by Thatcher and Day (2008), all eight properties were revealed to be pertinent to the sporting domain.

The transactional process perspective also focuses on personal factors as well as on an understanding of the situation or the context in which the coping takes place. Many (e.g., Roberts, 1986; Lazarus, 1991) have underscored the motivational implications of the person–environment relationship: "How the person copes depends not only on the coping possibilities and how they are appraised but also on what a person wants to accomplish in the encounter" (Lazarus, 1991, p. 115). The transactional model of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) places importance on the "mutually, bi-directional relationship" between the person and the environment (p. 325). In other words, the goals that athletes seek in a particular context influence their coping options and strategies.

In a competitive event, an athlete may face both competitive and organizational stressors that he/she has to cope with using a variety of coping strategies (Nicholls & Polman, 2007). Competitive stressors are well understood, but organizational stressors are not so well understood (Fletcher et al., 2006). However, organizational stressors have been found to have a greater impact on performance than competitive issues (Jones, 2002; Hanton et al., 2005). Organizational stressors (e.g., sport organization politics, selection of coaches, selection criteria for participation and planning) can disrupt athletic performance (Gould et al., 1999; Woodman & Hardy, 2001). Further, the demands from different sources such as one's National Olympic Committee, National Federation and club are interwoven together and may have a large impact on how an athlete copes with competitive events, especially adolescent athletes. In addition, Fletcher et al. (2006) argue that there is some evidence that different coping strategies are used to deal with organizational stressors compared with competitive stressors.

The importance of social support for coping with competitive stressors has been noted previously (Gould et al., 1999; Holt & Hogg, 2002; Rees et al., 2007), and the potential stress-buffering effect has been pointed out (Rees & Hardy, 2004). Further, coach social support has been found to relate to athletes' satisfaction with their athletic experience (Weiss & Friedrichs, 1986), and it has been related to important outcomes in sport and the ability to adapt to new challenges (e.g., Weiss & Friedrichs, 1986; Petrie & Stoever, 1997). It has even been found to be important for mature Olympic medallists (e.g., Greenleaf et al., 2001; Kristiansen et al., 2008). Rosenfeld and Richman (1997) defined social support as behaviors perceived by the recipient to enhance well-being, and Sarason et al. (1990) add love and the knowledge of receiving help when problems arise. Providers of social support exist in the competitive environment and they are not only family, friends, spouse, relatives, the coach, and team members, but can also be members of the clergy, and medical and mental health professionals associated with the organization.

Social support is a multidimensional construct and may be divided into different types. Cutrona and Russell (1990) argued for five dimensions while Rees and Hardy (2004) argued for four. However, Schaefer et al. (1982) distinguish between three types of functions of social support: emotional support, tangible support, and informational support. The essence of *emotional support* is to feel loved and cared for, which one achieves through reliance and confidence in other persons. *Tangible support* involves more direct aid through loans, gifts, driving one to venues and so forth. *Informational support* is when one provides information or advice and gives feedback to the athlete. To perform well, athletes, and especially adolescent athletes without much experience, must recognize and manage competitive and organizational demands constantly, as well as recognize and use the social resources available to them.

The purpose of this investigation, therefore, was first of all to gain more insight into how adolescent "Olympic" athletes perceive stress (competitive and organizational) in a major adolescent competitive event, and how they cope with these stressors. Second, it is assumed that their coping is dependent on the stressors experienced (Anshel & Delany, 2001) and that they might use different coping strategies according to the nature of the stressor. Knowledge about adolescent athletes has become highly pertinent since the International Olympic Committee (April 2007; http://www.olympic.org/uk/news/olympic_news/full_story_uk.asp?id=2143) has decided to implement further Youth Olympic Competition in 2010 (Summer Games) and 2012 (Winter Games).

Method

Participants

The investigation was conducted in the summer of 2007, and participants were Norwegian Summer "Olympians" competing in the EYOF in Belgrade, Serbia. EYOF takes place every second year. For the 2007 EYOF, the participants came from 49 different countries, and they competed in track and field, basketball, cycling, gymnastics, handball, judo, swimming, table tennis, tennis, volleyball, and water polo. The Norwegian team consisted of 34 athletes, and 29 of them took part in the investigation, which amounted to an 85% participation rate. The participants were 21 female and eight male athletes ranging in age from 14 to 17 years ($M = 16.6$, $SD = 0.77$), and they competed in judo, track and field, swimming, and handball. We were able to recruit the Norwegian National Team with the help of the Norwegian Olympic Training Centre.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants and the investigation was conducted in accordance with ethical research guidelines.

Data collection and procedure

Qualitative inquiry includes methods adapted for particular disciplines such as psychology (Kopala & Suzuki, 1999) and is an alternative line of investigation that may help advance knowledge of coping (Crocker et al., 1998; Lazarus, 1999; Holt et al., 2005). This type of research may further contribute toward in-depth understandings of the person–environment interaction of the coping process. Knowledge of the sport is also helpful and both authors have past experience and are familiar with the demands from some of the sports competed in at an international level, and in addition the second author has worked as a consulting sport psychologist with adolescent athletes for over two decades.

In order to reach the entire group without perturbing their preparation or Olympic experience, and to gather as much data formulated in the participant's own words as possible, qualitative methods were chosen. Subsequently, we used a questionnaire with structured open-ended questions in addition to interviews with three of the athletes. As the first author was accredited to the Olympic Village and the competition venues, it was easy to get in touch with the athletes and schedule the interviews with the three athletes. For these three athletes, the questionnaires were collected at the time the interviews were conducted. For the other 26 athletes, arrangements were made to ensure that all athletes received the questionnaire on the day they finished their competitive event. The athletes completed the questionnaire alone and in their own time. They were placed in envelopes and one of the administrators collected the anonymous questionnaires on the plane on their way home from Belgrade as the first author went home before the end of the competition. Consequently, the often-cited limitation of asking about coping in retrospect (e.g., Gould et al., 1999; Nicholls & Polman, 2007) was thus minimized as much as possible. Also, being present at the venues gave the first author further opportunity to build confidence inside the group. The first author was present at the village, the event venues as well as a dinner held outside the Olympic Village. In accordance with Giacobbi et al. (2004), trust was established, which is important for the strength of qualitative research.

Questionnaires

Briefly, in the questionnaire, the adolescent athletes were asked about: (a) How they experienced being at a large European competition; (b) what they found stressful; (c) how they coped with the different stressors they identified; (d) how they perceived their performance; (e) whether they were satisfied with their results; and (g) what they thought may explain the results. In order to keep the questionnaire anonymous, the participants only included gender and age. Most of them were reflective and wrote extensive and quotable sentences. This supports the use of this technique when investigating coping with novel stressors.

Interviews

In addition to the questionnaire with open-ended questions, three athletes (two female and one male) were interviewed face to face about the same issues in order to expand on the issues touched upon by all the athletes coping with stress. We conducted a purposeful sampling procedure (Strauss & Cor-

bin, 1998) according to three criteria: first, the athletes had to be finished with their competitive participation as we did not want to perturb their performance, and we interviewed them within 24 h of the their last participation in their event; second, we interviewed athletes representing different sports, as we then would get their experiences from different sport organizations; and finally, we wanted both genders represented among the athletes. The athletes were chosen after discussions with the administrators and their respective coaches, and all three agreed to participate. The interviews were conducted outdoor in the Olympic Village in an informal setting late in the evening (because of the heat).

The semi-structured interviews were developed and conducted according to ethical guidelines and criteria stated by Patton (2002) and Kvale (1997). The interviews started with: (a) general questions about their own previous experiences; (b) preparation for their competitive event; (c) their experience with the present competition; (d) whether they experienced stress; and (e) how they coped with the different stressors they had experienced during the competition. The athletes were not given any definitions of terms like stress and coping, but if there were words in the questions they did not understand it was promptly explained to them. The interview guide mirrored the questionnaire and functioned as a starting point; however, the athletes were free to proceed in the direction dictated by the flow of the conversation. When they talked about stressors, follow-up questions were asked about how they coped with the stressors, and clarification probes were made to ensure accurate understanding. In all three interviews, the athletes perceived the opportunity to tell their story on how they coped with stress during the "Olympic" competition as positive and the interviews lasted between 45 and 60 min.

Data analysis

We used question-focused analyses as the starting point when organizing the raw data (Patton, 2002). Main categories such as competitive and organizational stressors functioned as main categories where associated sub-categories were placed in this deductive analysis (Kondracki et al., 2002). After organizing the questionnaires, the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Both researchers read and coded the raw material in main categories guided by topics from the interview guide and elaborated subcategories. At the first coding, the authors had about 60–70% similar categorization; the remaining cases were discussed and agreed upon before the final coding. Further, the data have been cross-case analyzed (Patton, 2002) in order to verify athlete's opinions and meanings on stressors and how they coped with them. The answers have been grouped together, which keeps the athletes anonymous. Consequently, the specific sport is kept out of the presentation of the data as much as possible when the athlete mentioned matters that revealed their sport. The administrative leaders and the athletes were sent a copy of the study and consented to the content. One of the administrative leaders wrote back: "Great to read something that supports my experience." The following qualitative content analyses organized the entire amount of data into stressors (competitive and organizational) and subsequent coping strategies (cognitive or social support). Figure 1 illustrates how the athletes coped according to the stressor experienced.

Discussion

The EYOF has the same concept as the "real thing." The Festival started with an Opening Ceremony, and

STRESSORS	➔	COPING STRATEGIES	
COMPETITIVE STRESSORS	➔	**SOCIAL SUPPORT & COGNITIVE STRATEGIES**	
High level of competitors		Informational	reframing of routines &
More audience watching and cheering			preparations in advance
Unable to stick to pre-competitive routines			
Pressure to perform well from others		Emotional	coach/family/leaders help to calm
Inner pressure to perform well			down and keep confident
Lost routines because of size of venues		Cognitive strategies	visualization, self-talk, refocusing
Bad planning, bad luck			and distraction
Coach made technique changes			
ORGANIZATIONAL STRESSORS	➔	**SOCIAL SUPPORT**	
Housing and the heat		Tangible:	Provide enough cold water
Busses and the heat			Taxis to avoid heat
Lack of healthy food			Provide extra food
Larger venues and number of call-rooms		Informational:	Experienced coaches guided and
Lack of locker-rooms and showers			reframed the athletes routines
Compete late at night			
Communication problems with coach		Emotional:	Family, team-leaders, coaches,
Lack of access to personal/specialized			and other team-members
coach			
Missed usual team and team-mates			

Fig. 1. Stressors and coping strategies used by the European Youth Olympic Festival (EYOF) participants.

ended with a Closing Ceremony 6 days later. These additional aspects, together with the experience of living in an "Olympic Village," made this a special competition for all the Norwegian participants, but it added new organizational features. The findings from both the questionnaires and interviews on how adolescent elite athletes experienced stress and coped with their first "Olympics" are presented in three parts: how they coped with competitive stressors and organizational hazards, respectively, and finally a case story is included as a more thorough example. The competitive and organizational stressors and the subsequent coping strategies are displayed in Fig. 1. Three categorizing aspects of social support have been used according to previous qualitative research (Holt & Morris, 2004). The figure is not meant to capture the true complexity of these issues; it is a rather simple overview of the findings and the individual responses elaborating on the issues and function as a process/outcomes matrix (Patton, 2002).

Without doubt, the most stressful experiences of the athletes during their week in Belgrade were related to the perceived novelty of the competitive experience, one of Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) properties. Similar to Dugdale et al. (2002), unexpected or "perceived" unexpected stressors were the hardest to cope with for the adolescent Norwegian athletes. For the athletes, their perception of how they coped with their competitive event was colored by their concern about their performance in the extreme heat (it was +40 °C to 45 °C for the entire week). The athletes wrote a great deal about behavioral strategies on how to "survive" and compete well, and cognitive strategies were given less attention under these circumstances, or they were not helpful when trying to cope. Those interviewed talked a great deal about their use of psychological

skills such as positive self-talk, maintaining concentration, focusing, and controlling anxiety and activation. However, almost everybody wrote "getting water" when asked how they dealt with stressors during their participation in EYOF. The findings support the claim of Holt et al. (2005) that adolescent athletes use cognitive coping strategies less than more mature athletes. In addition, over half the Norwegian group were members of teams (e.g., European Handball), and previous research has found team players to use less coping strategies than athletes in individual sports (e.g., Holt & Hogg, 2002; Holt & Dunn, 2004).

Competitive stressors and coping

The size of this major competition with all its attendant aspects was a novel and stressful element for most of the participants (Thatcher & Day, 2008), even though almost everybody had previous international experience. Issues related to their competitive event were elaborated on both in the questionnaires and in the interviews. Everything was experienced as being "bigger," especially the venues, with bigger crowds watching the athletes compete in some of the sports. One of the athletes pointed out that the number of spectators was a very stressful aspect of the competition, especially without much apparent support for the Norwegian team:

> Germany and Russia had these really big teams with lots of athletes, coaches and leaders, and finally they had *drums!* They made so much noise, and in the midst of that I hear this lone voice: "Go Norway", it was a bummer.

The athletes experienced EYOF as both "immense" and "pretty scary" and some of the more inexperienced athletes found it hard to focus on the task

689

when faced with the high caliber of competitors. One athlete expressed that he/she "found it hard to plan my own race because of the high level of competence of my competitors. When would they speed up, and if someone started early, would they make it all the way in?" Others were used to the high level of competence of participants because of previous experience in major competitions. However, the fact that it was "the Olympics" made the framing of the competition different and they experienced performance pressure that tends to evolve and be intensified when exposed to the higher standards of competition (Hanton et al., 2005). That it was "interesting to see new techniques," and to "see so many talented athletes competing" was mentioned as a positive experience by some.

The adolescent athletes coped with competitive stress by using both social support and cognitive strategies. In the questionnaire, athletes mentioned different types of social support mostly as a strategy to cope with the novel experiences. One of the most effective sources of social support was the coach. The coach helped them to reframe their routines and adapt to the heat and the size of the competition. They had to find a new way to prepare themselves for the event without losing too much energy, which meant, for example, shorter warm-ups and using different clothing both in competition and in warming-up. This is where the presence of personal coaches was important. As one of the athletes expressed it: "my coach was with me, and told me what to do during every step of the warm up; he had previous experience from competitions in such an extreme heat." Those who had their coach present to guide them felt "privileged." This informational support provided by experienced coaches and leaders seems essential with athletes of the age and experience of the athletes in this investigation, as has been supported by previous research (e.g., Rees, 2007).

However, in contrast to the questionnaires where the focus was on social support, those athletes interviewed talked about *cognitive coping strategies*. The importance of mental skills for effective performing in elite competition was first discussed in the seminal work by Orlick and Partington (1988). It has been further elaborated in several studies by Gould et al. (1993) and other researchers (e.g., Vernacchi et al., 2000; Greenleaf et al., 2001). The strategies mentioned in this investigation did not differ from those that have been found to be effective previously. One athlete advocated not thinking about the importance of the competition. To focus on the task was also a common coping strategy to use: "I try to think about technical issues in my sport, it helps me to relax." Visualization of the event before competition was also underlined as a part of pre-competitive

performance preparation. Athletes at this level have learned how to mentally prepare for a major competition. One of them highly recommended self-talk as a helpful coping strategy before competing: "I talk to myself; I tell myself that it will be all right. I do it both to calm down and to prepare myself for the race, to be ready." This athlete found it very effective throughout the Festival, and especially when making final preparations in the call-room without coach support. This again underscores the importance of social support for this age group when considering competitive stress, both informational as well as emotional social support.

Not everybody succeeded or performed up to their expectations. Performance pressure was mentioned as a reason for the lack of success. To participate in an "Olympics" was a once in a lifetime experience for most of the athletes in this study, and they really wanted to do well. Consequently, the athletes put a lot of pressure on themselves: "I felt a lot of pressure, but that was mostly from myself, I really wanted to do well." To compete for one's country was also experienced as a stressor. But the size of the Festival, the pressure and the experience of being there made them think differently about their performance in advance. It is hard to keep self-confidence high "when the others look so good," and they had so much respect for their competitors.

Some also called their lack of success bad luck:
It was not different to compete here [in EYOF], only a higher level of competitors. But I did not focus on their level, I guess everybody in the Norwegian Team [in one sport] were just out of luck [...] I guess we were inexperienced, we screwed up. I am not sure how it happened; it was both immature and unprofessional of me and us.

By immature, the athlete meant that they had a few seconds of lack of concentration. However, his/her reason for the lack of success as being determined by luck is debateable. As it happened, the coach for this event was inexperienced and this may have contributed to the loss. Three other athletes also pointed to bad luck as an explanation for the results. Another one openly admitted that he/she lost concentration for a few seconds and consequently lost his/her chance. A third athlete talked about not having a good day, he/she felt it as soon as he/she started to warm-up and the body did not want to do what the brain told it to. He/she concluded by saying: "the legs did not want to run; they are the ones in charge." One waited for the killer instinct to click in: "You need to have a killer instinct, need to fight. Sometimes I just don't have it, and then I try to relax, have some fun." Finally, one found it hard to focus when the coach told him that the opponent would be an easy match (and he lost the match).

Perhaps more education and experience with using mental skills would be an advantage for some athletes, especially those who went to the Festival with less experienced coaches or without their usual personal coach. These issues will be dealt with more thoroughly under organizational stressors and in the case story below.

Organizational stressors and coping

The most obvious organizational hazard for the athletes in this investigation was related to the memorable experience of living together with other sports participants and nations in the Olympic Village. This made issues such as housing, busses, venues, and food important. Housing, probably exacerbated by the hot weather, was one of the adolescent athletes' major concerns during the event. The dormitory-type rooms, without air conditioning, were considered inadequate in the heat. Further, simply getting food was found to be stressful by five of the Norwegian adolescents. As one said in the interview: "One really stressing aspect was to stand in line for breakfast, lunch and dinner. It was so hot to stand in the line." The whole Olympic Village lacked air conditioning. As a consequence, 10 athletes wrote that they drank water all the time, they also tried to stay in the shadow and eight used cold showers, anything to remain fit to compete in the heat. One *tangible support* function for coaches (and administrative leaders) was simply to provide enough cold water.

To move physically from the village to a venue was also a hot experience, and buses were crucial in getting everywhere, even for short distances: "We had only a five minutes walk to the competition venue; it was not a problem to get there. But we took the bus because it was too hot to walk." The other venues were further away from the Olympic Village, and so buses were required: "The busses went when scheduled, but they were extremely hot. But there was nothing we could do about it." It was not only the heat that the athletes reacted to; to many athletes it seemed that not every bus driver knew the roads well. The entire handball team commented on the fact that they drove in a different direction whenever they went to the venue and that they never knew whether it would take 15 or 30 min. In addition, a handful of athletes commented that it was great to take a taxi before the final in order to reduce the bus stress.

When participating in major competitions such as EYOF, where sport federations, the national teams and clubs work together with the Olympic Organization in the planning phase before the event, the environment imposes numerous demands on sport performers and on coaches and the coaching staff

(Fletcher et al., 2006). Track and field only had two coaches with their athletes. Four athletes who were without their specialized personal coach claimed that it affected their performance and training before their event. The length of the competition made the lack of a personal coach even more apparent: "I trained alone for five days prior to my event" stated one athlete. Unfortunately, two athletes experienced communication problems with their coaches: "The communication between me and my coach was not great; I totally disagreed with him in things he said and did. That influenced my performance." Considering that the coach should be a support person contributing with *informational* support and guidance during an event such as this, especially with inexperienced athletes, the communication problem became a stressor that undoubtedly affected performance. The findings underlined the fact that the athletes with the more skilled coaches coped better with the stress and pressure (Greenleaf et al., 2001).

Before the competition, the Norwegian athletes went through three pre-camps to better prepare them to cope with the competition. Ten athletes mentioned the usefulness of these pre-camps. The experiences, such as a drill to learn how a doping control session works, made them more conscious about staying healthy and using their mental preparation before competition. This made them use less energy to adapt and adjust their routines to the Olympic environment.However, the need for *informational* support provided by the coaches was nevertheless apparent. Several athletes mentioned that not being able to keep to their normal pre-competitive routines was stressful, and detrimental to performance. Seven athletes wrote that they found it hard to warm up properly in the extreme heat, and three mentioned the lack of locker rooms and showers as stressful. These were organizational issues that disrupted their usual routines. Two instead of the expected one call-room was also experienced as a stressor by two athletes. Time schedules at the competitive venues were changed without much notice. In other sports, the finals were arranged late in the evening and some athletes were not used to late performances:

> I found it stressful that my event was late in the evening. I am used to competing between noon and 3 pm, but they delayed it because of the heat. It was hard to stay in the room all day and wait for the event. But I guess I must get used to coping with the heat if I want to stay in this game!!

Competing outside their normal setting was pointed out as affecting their performance by some of the athletes. Several athletes mentioned that the lack of teammates they usually hung around with during warm-up before an event was seen as stressful. Clearly, these athletes need to be taught a more

691

coping framing of the common habits they engage in when preparing for an event. One athlete in particular elaborated on the lack of teammates and emotional support. Teammates can be a helpful source of coping motivation with pre-competition nerves and doubts:

> I found it stressful being part of such a small team. Usually I try not to think so much about my race, I like to talk to people, laugh and have fun prior to it. But this time, there were not enough people to hang out with, I went too much by myself and then I started to think about my race. And then everything turned wrong . . . I wished some of my friends could have been there, that would have made the experience to participate in EYOF different and turned it into something positive. [. . .] I was not prepared that this would be such a problem, how does one prepare for something like this?

The use of humor as a coping strategy is often underestimated and was unavailable to some of these athletes because of the lack of teammates. In addition, the use of humor, together with social support, is important with novel experiences (Giacobbi et al., 2004). Further evidence for the importance of teammates is emphasized by the fact that thirteen athletes mentioned team spirit as a performance factor. Handball had an advantage as a team; their collective effort was underlined as a key factor of their success, together with the help of their coaching staff. But the other athletes also commented upon team support as important, and that it was a help when "the (Norwegian) handball team came and watched us." The importance of *emotional* support was repeatedly underlined in this investigation.

In addition, administrative leaders, physiotherapists and family represented other support persons providing *emotional* support that helped the athletes better to cope with stress (Greenleaf et al., 2001). One athlete reflected in the interview: "damn it – it was the 'Olympics' and I throw my chance away . . . I was very disappointed for 30 min, but then I talked to my parents – and they reminded me of my goal for this season – that was to participate in the Olympics." However, parents did not have any access to the Olympic Village. One athlete commented upon this: "It's a shame that we could not meet them, I am used to having them around me." The goodbye scenes were very noticeable when the handball team bus left the venue after matches and took the team back to the Village! The importance of family and friends as support was mentioned as a positive performance factor for teams that met or exceeded their expectation at the Atlanta Olympics in 1996 (Gould et al., 1999). In the Gould and colleagues's study, it is also worth noting that the best team also made the most out of this resource in that they had plans to educate family and friends about the demands on the athletes and how best they could enhance the athlete's Olympic experience.

The effect of motivational climate and support on a coach–athlete relationship: a case study

Not only athletes, but coaches may be intimidated by participation in a major competition. In the Woodman and Hardy study (2001), one athlete described it as the coaches "start to act a bit funny when they go into an international environment" (p. 224). More mature and experienced athletes may have developed better resources to cope with this change in coaching style and behavior, but for rather inexperienced adolescent athletes such a change may turn out to be detrimental for performance. Unfortunately, there is little research on this perceived inconsistent coaching behavior (Woodman & Hardy, 2001). However, such change in the behaviors of team leaders and coaches has previously been noticed in the Olympic setting (e.g., Greenleaf et al., 2001), and the findings of the present study include a quintessential example of a change in coaching behavior.

As it turned out, one athlete reported that he/she believed that the coach felt pressure from the club and the National Federation. After being selected for EYOF, the coach changed his normal behavior toward the athlete during the week of the Olympic Festival because of this pressure:

> My coach totally changed focus as soon as we arrived in Belgrade. He told me that I had to reach the finals, "*I had to prove that I deserved to be in* [the event]", and he told me "*you must win*". That totally blew it for me; usually he is such a good coach always focusing on the task ahead. But in major competitions he becomes another person, he takes off. His comments affected my results, everything went wrong and it was hard to concentrate. It took me a few days to get the right task focus back.

In addition to the novelty of the situation, organizational hazards and inner pressure to perform well, this athlete experienced that the coach changed his criteria of what constituted success when the coach was at the Olympic Festival. The coach normally was very task involved, but at the competitive venue, the coach suddenly became very results oriented. To explain what may have happened, and why the athlete was so affected, we turn to the research that has been based on achievement goal theory (AGT; see Roberts et al., 2007).

According to AGT (e.g., Roberts et al., 2007), what may have happened in this case is that the coach shifted the perceived motivational climate from mastery-based criteria of success to performance-based criteria of success. The perceived motivational climate (Ames & Archer, 1988) is the

athlete's perception of the situational cues or the perceived criteria of success that prevail within the team, or are perceived to be emphasized by the *coach*. The perceived motivational climate leads the athlete to adopt the criteria of success perceived to be extant, so that the athlete has a motivational state of involvement consistent with the perceived criteria of success emphasized. The research states that when a mastery climate prevails, the criteria of success are based on effort and self-referenced demonstration of athletic competence. When a performance climate prevails, the criteria of success are based on normative competence and the demonstration of superiority to others (Nicholls, 1989; Roberts et al., 2007). However, the state of involvement may change quickly (Gernigon et al., 2004) depending on the athlete's reading of the ebb and flow of the coach's criteria of success in a competitive context. One example may be a coach who has mastery criteria of success in practice, suddenly emphasizing performance criteria when the competitive event begins. In this case, with our athlete, the coach apparently was a mastery-oriented coach up until the time he arrived at the competitive venue and informed the athlete that he/she "must win." This clearly affected the athlete who found it difficult to adjust. In addition, adolescents may be more susceptible to the influence of the motivational climate than older adolescents and adults (Roberts & Treasure, 1992), and may make younger elite athletes more sensitive to the perceived criteria inherent in the motivational climate. In line with this cognitive motivational theory, one might argue that this is exactly what happened to this adolescent athlete.

The athletes' immediate reaction to this perceived change of success criteria was to turn away from the coach because of the extra stress that it created. The coach's innocent, or not so innocent, comment or intention to "motivate" the athlete actually had the effect of destroying the athlete's focus, confidence and trust in the coach. "I started to ignore my coach; I guess I was too rude towards him, but what ever he said after that [the comment] stressed me." This supports Roberts and Treasure's (1992) claim that younger athletes are more susceptible to the change in perceived climate, and this shift toward performance criteria of success experienced by the athlete led to an extra stress reaction within the athlete and became detrimental to performance (Lazarus, 1999).

Clearly, coaches may demotivate athletes, or at least increase the level of perceived stress when they shift their criteria of what it takes to be successful. Team support could have been a good thing in this situation in that it may have acted as a prophylactic to the perceived stress. However, few athletes had qualified, and as a result there were fewer people around them who could serve as buffers and provide

social support and to facilitate adaptive coping. In addition, as the motivational implications also influence the coping options and strategies used (Roberts, 1986; Lazarus, 1991), fewer options were simply available to the athlete as a consequence of this climate change. However, the team leaders (national federation administrative personnel) understood the situation and took some of the load off the athlete's shoulders by telling him/her that he/she deserved to be there as he/she had qualified for the competition:

> I needed to hear it from them [The administrative leaders of the Norwegian team]. They were very helpful, they asked me 'what have you learned' when I didn't do too well? I was not especially satisfied with one event, but then they told me to focus on one detail and make it better in the afternoon [in the final]. And I managed to do that, and I managed to change my thinking from winning to technique details again and felt better about my race [. . .].

The athlete managed to reconcile his/her criteria of success with that of the coach with the supportive help of the team leaders who followed up closely the rest of the competition. As a result, the athlete focused on achieving technique goals when competing, which resulted in better performances the last two days of the competition, but the athlete was still slightly behind his/her personal best for that season.

Conclusion

The use of a qualitative method used in this exploratory investigation was designed to yield information and provide a descriptive basis for understanding how adolescent athletes cope with stressors in major competitive events. Overall, the strength of this method is the use of the adolescents' own wording when describing the different stressors and the use of different coping strategies in order to perform well. Further, the investigation provided access to a very select group of elite athletes – adolescents who are still an understudied group, even though much more work is on-going (e.g., Nicholls et al., 2005).

The first purpose of this investigation was to examine competitive and organizational stressors experienced by participants in the European version of the Youth Olympics. Their most stressful experiences during their week in Belgrade were related to the perceived novelty of both the size of the competition and the weather. In addition, many of the adolescent athletes were overloaded. They had typical performance pressure from themselves and national federations, but it was the added pressure from the novel issues that led to lack of concentration, anxiety and lost self-confidence (Gould et al., 1999). In addition, the organizational stressors were apparent in the data, and the elite adolescents recalled and experienced

more demands associated with organizational stressors rather than competitive ones. One explanation is of course the fact that organizational stressors are environmentally diverse and temporally unstable compared with competitive stressors (Hanton et al., 2005). And in this case, being from Norway and experiencing +45 °C was a novel and stressful experience.

In examining the second purpose of this investigation, how the athletes cope with competitive and organizational stressors, it became apparent that the athletes needed to be prepared for the *total* competitive experience that includes organizational stressors as well as competitive stressors. Further, the significance placed on social support as a coping strategy in this investigation is interesting, and it is in accord with the importance of support services and support facilitation among adult elite athletes (e.g., Gould et al., 1999; Vernacchi et al., 2000; Greenleaf et al., 2001; Rees et al., 2007; Kristiansen et al., 2008) and the importance of different types of support (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002). Both informational and emotional support, together with cognitive strategies, was mentioned as important in order to cope effectively with competitive stress in the investigation. As informational and emotional support seems to matter most with competitive stress, tangible support was important when coping with organizational stress. Further, coach support turned out to be important to cope with both competitive and organizational stressors. However, athletes are more likely to seek support and advice from people they feel close to (Jowett & Cockrill, 2003). Undoubtedly, the coach matters for the athlete (Pensgaard & Roberts, 2002), and the case story in this study illustrates that coaches need to be careful about maintaining their perspective of what criteria of success are extant and keeping the motivational climate stable in order to provide the support needed for the athlete to cope with the stressors. Adolescent athletes are still going through their developmental programs and the most likely focus is on mastery criteria. Thus, being put into the cauldron of elite competition with a focus on winning may be perceived as a stressor for adolescents, especially when their coping repertoire is limited. There is evidence that even mature athletes who have won World Championships and Olympic Medals and who are able to set their own criteria of success emphasize the importance of the coach in setting a supportive and a confidence-building climate (e.g., Gould et al., 1999; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Pensgaard & Roberts, 2002).

Perspectives

This investigation supports the proposal of Holt et al. (2005) that younger athletes have a smaller coping repertoire. This is a critical issue as adolescent athletes may perceive more matters as stressors due to their inexperience. In light of these findings, we have two recommendations we want to advocate to coaches and administrative leaders of adolescent athletes: first, adolescent athletes need to be better prepared to cope with a *variety* of stressors (competitive and organizational). They need to learn a *variety* of coping strategies as well, and if the used coping strategy is of no help, adolescent athletes must be taught to use others (Nicholls, 2007). Second, a supportive coach–athlete relationship is highly recommended when considering the importance of social support in order to cope with novel stressors. It is worth noting that this investigation demonstrated that family and significant others such as administrative team leaders "have the potential to be a tremendous source of social support for the athlete" (Gould et al., 1999, p. 390). This was obvious in this investigation as emotional, tangible and informational support all turned out to be important coping strategies. Providing the pertinent social support is crucial for adolescent athletes if coaches/administrative leaders want their continuing long-term competitive participation.

Key words: adolescent elite athletes, coping, social support, competitive and organizational stress.

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PAPER 2

Organizational Stress and Coping in US Professional Soccer

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Abstract

The present study was an exploration of organizational stressors perceived by US professional soccer players, and the coping strategies they employed to manage these stressors. Eight players (4 female and 4 male) were interviewed during pre-season training camps. Results of data analysis revealed that contracts, draft, league and team structure, coach-athlete interaction, and travel demands were the most commonly cited areas of stress. Participants used avoidance, problem-focused, and social support coping strategies to manage these organizational stressors. In conclusion, more concern should be placed on the impact these stressors can have on athletic performances.

Keywords: coach-athlete relationship, social support, mastery climate

Organizational Stress and Coping in US Professional Soccer

An athlete 's ability to cope with stressors is vital in order to succeed in a career in professional sport (Holt & Dunn, 2004), yet further critical investigation and analysis are needed to better understand the impact that stressors can have on individual and team cohesion and performance (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009). Previous researchers have argued the need to determine the origins of the environmental demands (stressors) of situations (Fletcher, Hanton, & Mellalieu, 2006), and whether these stressors emanate from competitive, organizational, or personal sources (Hanton, Fletcher, & Coughlan, 2005; McKay, Niven, Lavallee, & White, 2008; Mellalieu, Neil, Hanton, & Fletcher, 2009; Thelwell, Weston, & Greenlees, 2007). In addition, past research has revealed that, in their day-to-day lives, athletes experienced and recalled greater amounts of stressors associated with sport organization than with competitive performance (e.g., Hanton et al., 2005; Mellalieu et al., 2009): Hence, the need to examine the negative responses to organizational stressors that impact performance (Fletcher et al., 2006).

In an effort to further examine the impact that stressors can have on individual and team performance, the authors in the present study engaged in interviews with eight professional soccer players who played in the highest division in the United States. The purpose of the present study was to collect and examine player narratives regarding stress and coping; particular attention was paid to perceived categories of organizational stressors and reported coping strategies used by the participants to manage perceived sources of strain.

Given the cultural space soccer occupies on the US sport landscape, special attention here was paid to the perception of environmental stressors intrinsic to US professional soccer. As noted by Noblet and Gifford (2002), it is important to consider the cultural fabric of a given sport in order to understand the circumstances that may be particularly stressful for the athletes. Even though soccer [known as football outside the US] is "the most successful and

wealthiest sport in the world" (Nesti, 2010, p. 2), the experiences of professional athletes in this team sport are under-reported in previous research (Noblet & Gifford, 2002). Hence, this investigation on professional soccer in the US may expand research and discussion on stress and coping in team sports.

Conceptual Framework

Recent sport psychology research on *organizational stressors* (e.g. sport organization politics, coach strategies, team selection criteria and planning) has focused on the "critical issues surrounding, and cognitive processes underpinning, a performer's relationship with his or her sport organization" (Fletcher et al., 2006, p. 327). This research on organizational stress started in the early 1990s, and in particular British sport has been examined from this angle (e.g., Fletcher & Hanton, 2003; Fletcher et al., 2006; Levy, Nicholls, Marchant, Polman, Fletcher, & Hanin, 2009; McKay et al., 2008; Mellalieu et al., 2009; Thelwell, Weston, Greenlees, & Hutchings, 2008a; Weston, Thelwell, Bond, & Hutchings, 2009; Woodman & Hardy, 2001). In general, the evidence suggests that categories of organizational stressors can disrupt athletic performance (see Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009, for an overview).

For the present investigation, Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress appraisal and coping relationship provides the theoretical framework, which is the dominant model today (Nicholls & Polman, 2007). Further, Nicholls and Polman asserted the importance of examining coping strategies together with the specific stressors causing harm/loss, threat or challenge in a given situation. Following their lead, Weston and colleagues outlined the need to examine the specific links between stressors and coping in order to provide "accurate sport-specific practical information to guide practitioners, coaches, and support staff" (Weston et al., 2009, p. 473).

The coping strategies used by people to manage different stressors change over time, in accordance with the situational contexts in which the stressors occur (Lazarus, 1993).

Numerous coping behaviours or strategies may be exhibited as responses to stressors, packaged with a "bewildering richness of behaviour relevant to it" (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978, p. 4). While some researchers tend to group them in two dimensions (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), or three (e.g., Kowalski & Crocker, 2001), current research (Nicholls & Polman, 2007; Weston et al., 2009) suggests five general dimensions of coping strategies (problem, emotion, approach, avoidance, and social/personal). Additionally, it is important to note that some researchers have argued against groupings of coping behaviours into general dimensions because classification may oversimplify the dynamic ways in which coping strategies are used (Skinner, Edge, Altman, & Sherwood, 2003). In other words, there exists also a "bewildering richness" in *classification* of the coping strategies, especially when using quantitative measurement.

In a qualitative research study of players' experiences with stress and coping at a FIFA Women's World Cup, Holt and Hogg (2002) reported that the female players used reappraising, use of social resources, performance behaviours, and blocking when coping with categories of organizational stressors such as the coach-athlete relationship. In another study, soccer players coped with media stress by using coping strategies such as social support, avoidance and problem-focused strategies (Kristiansen, Roberts, & Sisjord, in press-b). Interpretation and labelling of concepts might make qualitative results more different than they actually are, and may cause the apparent inconsistencies in the research literature.

It has been argued that elite athletes need to learn a *variety* of coping strategies (e.g., Gould & Maynard, 2009; Nicholls & Polman, 2007) and some seem to be more important in relation to organizational stressors than others. *Problem-focused* strategies manage or alter stressors in person-environment relationships by acting on the environment or oneself (Lazarus, 1993). A wide array of problem-solving strategies, and strategies that are directed inwards, are used to cope with stressors (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Athletes use a variety of

these coping strategies to manage stressors related to elite performance (Ntoumanis & Biddle, 1998). Further, *avoidance* coping strategies can consist of both behavioural blocking strategies (removal from situation) and cognitive blocking strategies (avoiding thinking about a stressor) (see Krohne, 1993). In addition, *social support* is considered to be a buffer to stress, as well as being a coping resource (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) that helps people to manage the negative effect of stress (see Holt & Hoar, 2006). Crocker (1992) argued that social support is an important coping strategy in sport for dealing with competitive stress. This has been verified by subsequent research on coping and social support (Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, Medberty, & Peterson, 1999; Holt & Hogg, 2002; Rees & Hardy, 2004; Rees, Hardy, & Freeman, 2007). In addition, social support is a complex construct and Schaefer and colleagues (Schaefer, Coyne, & Lazarus, 1982) divide the concept into *emotional support* (love and care), *tangible support* (direct aid through loans and driving to competitive venues, etc), and *informational support* (feedback).

Brief Sociological History of Soccer in the US

As asserted earlier, because of the unique space soccer occupies in the US sport landscape, it is important to attend to the environmental stressors unique to US professional soccer. Critical sport studies scholars have suggested that *limited sport space theory* and U.S. cultural nativism are important constructs in accounting for professional soccer's relegation to the sidelines of the U.S. sport market, and practice/consumption within primarily ethnic communities during the 18th and 19th centuries (Markovits, 1990; Sugden, 1994). According to this approach, soccer was marginalized during the late eighteenth century due to a collision of factors including mainstream social identification of soccer as a foreign sport, U.S. cultural nativism, and a limited space in U.S. society for public consumption of team ball sports.

As a result, there have been numerous soccer leagues that have grown and declined over the past 150 years of the game being played in the US. The professional game was

incubated in early ethnic immigrant communities in the US throughout the early-to-middle 20th century (Oliver, 1996; Waddington & Roderick, 1996). In the late 1960s, the North American Soccer League (NASL) was developed, that brought professional soccer to mainstream audiences in the United States. Unsustainable business models, over-priced players, and lack of developmental systems, in the main part led to the decline and eventual contraction of the NASL in the early 1980s. In 1996, the current top flight men's domestic league, Major League Soccer (MLS) completed its inaugural season, and has since operated on a slow growth model with a focus on sustainability and sponsorship. MLS has now entered its 16th season of operation and is by far the most profitable and long-lasting professional soccer league in the United States over the past century.

Not as yet profitable, the Women's Professional Soccer (WPS) began play on March 29, 2009. In its second season, the WPS replaced the now defunct Women's United Soccer Association (WUSA) that operated from 2001-2003. The development of soccer-specific stadia, tours from marquee international professional club soccer teams, growing television coverage of the domestic game on cable sports networks, and expansive coverage of FIFA 2010 World Cup in South Africa, all collectively point toward the slow, but growing presence of professional soccer in the US.

Leading into the 2010 season, MLS and the MLS Players Union were engaged in protracted contract negotiations at the end of a five-year collective bargaining agreement (CBA) that was scheduled to expire January 31, 2010. The CBA negotiations almost led to a MLS player strike prior to the beginning of the 2010 season. The league operates as a single-entity corporation where player contracts are owned by the league rather than individual teams. The purpose of the league's strategy was to control player contract spending in order to ensure that salaries did not outweigh traditional forms of revenue including game day ticket sales, merchandise, sponsorships, and television contracts – reasons why the NASL failed

twenty years previously. The MLS Players Union wanted players to have the freedom to negotiate with any club once their contract expired, the ability to negotiate longer guaranteed contracts, a retirement plan, an increase in the league-mandated minimum salary, and a larger salary cap for each of the league's 15 teams ("Major League Soccer", 2010). These labor demands and operating procedures are standard in the other US professional sport leagues.

The purposes of the present study were two-fold: (a) to analyse the complex relationship between stress and coping through the experiences of elite soccer players who work in the unique operating environment of US professional soccer; (b) and to critically analyse narratives in an effort to develop a deeper understanding of the coping mechanisms used by professional players to manage stressors in the dynamic environment of professional sport.

Methods

Participants

A convenient and purposeful sampling procedure was conducted (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), to recruit eight elite soccer players from two US professional soccer leagues. Four male soccer players from Major League Soccer (MLS), and four female players from Women's Professional Soccer League (WPS), volunteered to take part in this investigation. They ranged in age from 23 to 37 (M_{age} = 28.38 years, SD = 5.45). Three of the eight players had played professional soccer in European premier divisions; four of eight players had represented their respective national teams.

Ethical Standards and Procedures

After obtaining university IRB approval for the study, as well as approval from the Norwegian Research Committee, informed consent was obtained from all participants before conducting face-to-face interviews during pre-season training camps of the 2010 season. At the beginning of each interview, participants were informed that the information they

provided would remain confidential, and that they could terminate the interviews at any time. The interviews were carried out at the training location for each team. Guidelines of the semi-structured in-depth interviews were in accordance with criteria stated by Patton (2002). The interviews ended with a process feedback question, "what should I have asked you about, and do you have anything to add". Every interview lasted between 45-80 minutes.

Interview Guide

The semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with interview guide prompts and questions developed from previous research on stress and coping literature (Fletcher & Hanton, 2003; Hanton et al., 2005; Thelwell et al., 2007; Woodman & Hardy, 2001). The interview guide consisted of four main sections: (a) demographic background; (b), experiences of playing soccer in the US ("what are the unique stressors related to playing soccer in the US"?); (c) types of organizational stressors perceived by the players ("what do you perceive to be the main demands of professional athletes"); and (d), coping with the aforementioned stressors ("how do you cope with this/these demands"?). In the interview guide, there was a flexibility to change the order of questions and probe areas that arose to follow the participants' perspectives. Probes and follow-up questions were also used in order to deepen the responses.

Data Coding, Theming, & Analysis Procedures

The interviews were transcribed verbatim, which resulted in 97 pages of single spaced raw text. Question-focused analyses were used as the starting point when organizing the raw data (Patton, 2002). Segments that had similar themes and represented the same stressor were grouped together. Stressor is the environmental demands or stimuli encountered by an individual, and accordingly, organizational stressors are "the environmental demand associated primarily and directly with the organization within an individual is operating"

(Fletcher et al., 2006, p. 329). The transcripts were analysed for meaning units according to stressors with an organizational origin (McKay et al., 2008). Associated sub-categories were found (travel, drafting and contract, team issues, and coach issues), and placed into higher order themes using deductive content analysis procedures (Kondracki, Wellman, & Amundson, 2002). The stressor meaning units were then linked with the coping strategies that were employed by participants to deal with specific stressors. This process was in accordance with procedures outlined by Weston and colleagues (Weston et al., 2009).

Table 1 provides an outline of the themes that emerged from the content analysis. The table does not include a frequency count of the different sources of strain (e.g., Hanton et al., 2005; Levy et al., 2009; Mellalieu et al., 2009) and the respective coping strategies (Weston et al., 2009) employed by the players. In order to conduct a frequency count, it would have been necessary to use a less-fluid interview procedure and this may have inhibited participant and interviewer interactions and the collection of rich narrative data. In addition to the table, in-depth quotes were included in the presentation and interpretation of the data which is in accord with the transactional perspective (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Lazarus (1999) advocated the use of narratives to add knowledge and understanding. As a result, the voices of Michael, Katharina, Marie, and Joseph consequently present (and represent) the experience of strain and coping revealed through the use of qualitative research methodologies and narratives analysis. Participants' narratives offer insight into the coping strategies used by athletes use to manage the stressors that affect performance.

In an effort to ensure to accuracy in data collection, participants were sent (via email) the verbatim transcripts of their individual interviews. Participants were able to augment answers, clarify responses, and provide additional comment and narrative. Participants' integration in the research process helped to ensure the participants' voices were clearly represented in this research. The data were cross-case analysed in order to verify athletes'

opinions of stressors and the related coping mechanisms. Anonymity was assured (Patton, 2002). This approach to research data collection, analysis, and presentation was informed by Richardson's (1994) discussion of writing as a method of inquiry, where different forms of writing lead to different forms of knowing that can add depth in the analysis of qualitative data on, in this case, stress and coping. The writing process and narrative analysis consisted of a "back and forthing" process, essential to narrative inquiries (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 167).

<div align="center">

Results and Discussion

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The data analysis procedure revealed five main organizational stressors and 35 higher order themes of coping responses to stressors. Three general coping strategy categories (problem-focused, avoidance coping, and social support) were used to organize participants' coping responses to stress. In order to maintain focus on the *experiences* of the participants, the links between stressors and coping strategies were based on the interviewees' responses to queries. Consistent with previous research approaches, in-depth quotes are included to add rich texture in data presentation (Hanton et al., 2005; Reeves, Nicholls, & McKenna, 2009). These voices are meant to provide greater insights into how soccer players, in US professional soccer leagues, perceived stress and employed coping mechanisms.

Perceived Organizational Stressors and subsequent Coping Processes

It is almost impossible to underline one category of organizational stressor as *the most important* stressor for this group of American soccer players; however, the data were organized into *travel*, *drafting and contracts*, *team issues* and *coach issues*. Moreover, it is also important to remember that a collection of factors influence athletes perceptions of stress including personality, past experience, temperament, playing experience, repertoire of coping strategies, and age. A rookie with no professional experience and a veteran player with 15 years of experience in the league will perceive the sources of strain differently, and

accordingly, what might be considered a stressor will differ based on a number of psycho-social factors. Michael, the most experienced soccer player of the eight interviewed, noted a wide array of stressors and coping strategies used to manage the stress. :

> I think it changes, it changes as you … at what age you are at, I mean you are obviously… your confidence level and your experience changes, I think… there is obviously always, regardless of what level you are at, the pressure to win… I don't know, that depends *... you can look at that as a stressor, or motivator, it really depends on how you look at that, ahm...* I think the biggest stressor, the biggest stressor obviously as a youth player is trying to continue to get selected …. Obviously to be on somebody's team, so you can qualify and get a scholarship. Again then, when you are at college, the primary stressor is balancing schoolwork and performing well, and then doing well enough to get drafted to the pros, and then in your early young professional career, your biggest stress is just finding a way to make it in the pros, and then, I think as you get older, you probably start having family and kids, is job security, so I think the stress changes at different levels and different ages.

These stressors were considered organizational stressors by the eight players of both genders interviewed. Hence, they are dealt with successively together with the choice of coping strategy (see Table 1 for an overview).

Table 1

Interpreted categories of organizational stressors mentioned in the interviews and subsequent coping strategies

Higher order themes stressors →	Stressors: General dimensions	Higher order themes →		Coping strategies: General dimensions
3-4 days Long distances Flight arrangements Hotel arrangements Physical preparation	Travel	Adventure Acceptance Reflection Routines Being together with team mates	→ →	Problem-focused Social support
Scholarships College team Small and big schools Draft Try outs Preseason Part of the roster Physical demands	Drafting and contracts	Support each other Help from coach Love of the game Support from friends and family Fight at every training and competition Concentration Increased effort Positive thinking	→ →	Social support Problem-focused
Playing at a higher level Rookie Spot on team Fighting for the same spot Pass the ball International stars Salaries	Team issues	Step back – perspective Talk to each other Read books Rebuild confidence Communication Friendship Therapist Let it go Relax	→ → →	Problem-focused Social support Avoidance
Communication Yelling Equality Manage stress and team issues Building self-confidence Discussion about tactics Gender of coach Struggle with confidence	Coach issues	Avoidance of critique Blocking Don't trust anyone Informational supp. from team mates Emotional support from family/friends Talk with therapist Reframe	→ → →	Avoidance Social support Problem-focused

   Travel. Travel issues were a major source of stress for the participants. Travel

arrangements, and geographical distances between the different locations of the teams playing

in the MLS and WPS, were mentioned as an organizational stressor by several of the players.

One participant noted that exhaustive long seasons, compounded by pre- and post-season

training and match play, added up to 40% of his time. Time-lags, long flights, and extended

hotel living, were considered intense stressors. While travel issues are a common source of

stress, it can be argued the magnified travel demands placed on American soccer players due

to US geography magnify this stressor. The differences in travel stress between the US and Europe were pointed out by Michael:

> North America is a lot different than Europe; you may have to take a plane a little bit more. In many of the European countries you just take the bus and are back the same day! Or the next day. But in all the trips in the States, you are gone for 3 or 4 days.

This "veteran" elaborated upon how to cope with this stressor. He indicated that for some of the younger players this is an exciting part of professional soccer life. This changes, however, when you have family obligations and are unable to take part in the daily life of one's family. Playing for a family-centred team that includes the family and "sees you as a person and not only as a player helps". In other words, emotional support from the team is helpful together with problem-focused coping when one realizes that there is nothing one can do about geography!

Drafting and contracts. All participants cited drafting and contracts as major sources of organizational stress. For US domestic players, the route to the professional ranks begins in earnest in college soccer. Soccer is found in 91.2 % of all NCAA schools, and over the years it is also the sport which has had the most consistent growth pattern (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010). For younger players, participation in a major college soccer program team is an important step to get drafted into the professional leagues. Intense competition for spots in college programs, coupled with educational demands, is part of the maturation of US domestic soccer players. "Only the top kids, like youth national team players, or very good regional players get scholarships… because each college's soccer team only has ten full scholarships for the whole team". This means that most of American professional soccer players have a college education because of the scholarship system. This contrasts sharply with the European Premier Leagues where only 20% of the players have an education beyond high school (e.g., Bergli, 2010).

This contextual information is important when considering the intensity of draft related stress that players perceive to become a pro player. If one has not attended a university with a soccer team where pro scouts can observe and recommend that a player be drafted, the prospects of being drafted become slim. The intensity of this particular stressor is higher in pre-season when players are competing for roster spots and contracts. Katharina discussed the stressors related to the process of making the team:

> Then during pre-season, every week, there are cuts that are made…and so… on the 31 of March they have to announce the 18 players that are getting paid, and then there are 4 that are developmental players, who get paid a very small amount, but get to train with the team and stuff… so, everybody that is here, could be here at least as a developmental player. None of us will know until the 31st.

The insecurity of making the team was a common stressor among all 8 players; it is always hard to fight for a contract. As noted previously, breakdowns in contract negotiations between the players union and MLS almost caused a strike in January 2010. Needless to say, a variety of factors influence a players' chances to make the roster including technical and tactical athletic ability, intelligence, age, status as an international, previous playing experience, coach desires, and more.

Participants cited the use of a variety of coping strategies to manage stress from this category. Katharina noted the following about coping and factors influencing her strategy: "I think the coach is huge, he is the one making all the decisions." Clearly, coach support is important. Later on she added that it is important to feel "valued and that you have a role on the team". She indicated that it is especially difficult for those who have to fight to be in the line-up for every game. However, there is a challenge in this: "I wanted to play professional soccer because I wanted to learn how to deal with this. I want to control what I can control

and play under pressure – and enjoy myself". In other words, the learning of more problem-focused strategies is both appreciated and necessary in order to cope effectively.

As Michael observed when talking about the US professional system; "the cream rises to the top, and the best players will emerge over time". Several of the players agreed that there is intense competition to make it to the pro league, where an inability to cope with the stress of fighting for a contract had "ended some guys' careers prematurely," even though there were guys that "had some good soccer left". Consequently, both male and female players experienced the competition to get a contract as a difficult one because of the very competitive team environment. This is consistent with other research that has found that the more athletes perceive a performance climate with its attendant emphasis on competition and social evaluation, the more coach- and team-stress will be experienced (e.g., Pensgaard & Roberts, 2000).

Team issues. The intense competition for team places on the roster was indicated as a negative factor by several of the players. This constant competition (and normative comparison) of making the line-up within each team seems to create a performance climate (Kristiansen, Halvari, & Roberts, in press-a; Roberts, 2001) that result in negative consequences for team performance as Marie, an experienced female player noted:

> There are certain people on the field you just connect with better, for whatever reason,
> part of that might be that they don't have the ego that this person has, so I want to play
> to them, or, I want to prove myself to them, so I am going to combine with them, I
> think that stuff happens, … maybe not super consciously.

Because the players are all aware that in order to win games, they need to "be out there and play and work for each other", it is unfortunate that the opposite often happens, as soccer is a game with many individualists:

There have been many times when she didn't pass me the ball because it was me, and right now she doesn't want me to do well. I mean, these things are… maybe we are going to get there, but, that's why we have to have the leader of the team which is the coach, to be a very healthy individual, … in order to facilitate all this competition and … jealousy and talent and or lack of talent and play time, and this stuff that ultimately people are seeking… so desperately.

Marie constantly underlined that you need the right leader "to stay together as a group". It was obvious that the players are *always* aware of the competition in whatever position they are playing, consequently, "if two guys are competing for the same spot, they are not going to be best friends" or play the ball to each other. The best way to cope with it is to have a "handful of guys that you hang out with, and are close with, and you are pretty much respectful with everybody else…". It is clear that emotional support from team mates is important when team issues such as rivalry is pertinent and must be coped with.

In other words, when so much competition is evident on the field, the coach needs to be a "healthy" individual. Coach-support (emotional and informational) and strategy implementation is crucial, "added in with his skills to people-manage". In addition, Marie used several problem-focused strategies including reframing, reading books and sessions with a life-long therapist. Athletes typically use a variety of problem-focused coping strategies (Ntoumanis & Biddle, 1998), and they are often considered adaptive. Further, these strategies seem to be crucial when coping with organizational stressors, especially when coping with team issues. It was also stated that inequitable salaries might cause some tension.

The tension between the players may be credited to the high competitive level of the league and the international players brought in by the different teams in both MLS and WPS. In California, both Marta (Gold Pride) and David Beckham (LA Galaxy) played the 2010 season. In this mix of so much talent, salaries become an issue. The WPS league still

struggles to become an economic success and has a non disclosure payment system for salaries, a system that contributes to speculation. One player stated that salaries are what "all the players talk about, if they don't tell you they are not being honest". The female players claimed that they did not give it much thought; they assumed that international players and national team players were better paid.

In comparison, the MLS salaries have become common knowledge, something the players welcome heartily. However, as Thomas stated in this rather long narrative dealing with the strain and the coping strategies used because he felt it to be a tremendous responsibility to be among the best paid in the league:

> … and that is an interesting dynamic, that… we have in this league, because the salaries are public knowledge, in the league I played before, it was all speculation, we did not know what the guy next to you made, here… we know what they are making, in the locker room you know how much the guys make, and that adds to the competition in practices, when you are fighting for spots… ahm… I kind of have … you know, if this guy makes more than me, *good for him*, it is a higher salary … in reality, the more money you make, the more famous people think you are, that is the way you see baseball and football, they are making millions of dollars, and the fans are like *wow, they make millions of dollars, we are going to watch them,* and if salaries are higher and higher, and that guy make that much money, good for him you know, but… I am getting paid to play, and I never thought I would be doing that. I am happy where I am, I am happy with what I am making, ahm… I know guys make millions of dollars in this league, I am OK with that you know, you kind of want to prove yourself against them, and I am happy with doing that, you know, if you are the highest paid guy, *you have everybody aiming for you*, you know, everybody wants to prove themselves against you, that is tough to deal with, you know..

PAPER 2 **123**

Acceptance and let it go, these were the strategies of Thomas. There are some disadvantages of being well-paid as well, a combination of problem-focused and avoidance coping seem effective in relation to salaries. However, it is worth noting that this category of organizational stressors may potentially affect team cohesion and friendship as described earlier by Michael.

Coach issues. The coach turned out to be a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde figure in this investigation; he might be both a major source of strain if he was making every practice a competition, but he was also perceived to be a really helpful figure in the coping process with other categories of organizational stressors. Years ago Bruce Ogilvy stated that top class coaches "do possess certain qualities in their psychological make-up which distinguish them from other coaches" (cited in Hendry, 1969, p. 303). Further, a good coach is characterized by the understanding of "different athletes require different things from their coaches at different points in their careers" (Gould & Maynard, 2009, p. 1398). And if the coach lacks these qualities, athletes perceive more stress and this affects performance.

In Marie's terminology, the coach must be a *healthy* person in order to fulfil this task. If the coach is *not* a healthy person;

> Then they are not going to be healthy as a coach, either, so again it is all a matter of the kind of person that you get, and how much are they trying to be healthy, for themselves and for their players. So the coach needs to deal fairly and equally in doing the right thing for each and every player.

The coach is in charge of equality and fairness. Becker (2009) further argues that the provision of fair and equitable treatment is one major factor that separates the great coach from the average one. The coach is also expected to see *all* the players and not just the current first team line up if he is aiming for success, something a lot of coaches tend to forget according to Katharina:

He puts more attention right now on the ones he thinks are the starters, but he is completely making a mistake and missing a bone on these other players that are so important too, they are obviously the ones that will have to step in, … or also… what about giving them the right to earn the spot, but also, they are the ones training the other players too. I don't know why this is hard to do… everybody should share in this…

Realizing the importance of the coach, soccer is also a game that constantly has "competition for the spots", as uttered by Joseph. Both the MLS and the WPS are difficult leagues to play in, and it is a dangerous game, if you as a coach, encourage intra team competition for spots in order to make the team tougher. The result might be a performance oriented climate with a focus on outperforming others compared to one's own development in a mastery climate (e.g., Roberts, 2001). Hence, player management is important in order to avoid this, and our eight interviewees were in total agreement that if the coach was not able to conduct this successfully, it would be detrimental. Michael elaborated with stating that "the best coaches I have found know how to deal with whatever the 24 different personalities are", if not the entire team will be negatively affected and other sources of organizational strain become more apparent and accentuated.

However, the coach may feel a pressure to perform from upper management, but a good coach would know how to "disguise that and not let that get to the team". As Joseph pointed out: "I had not realized how important the coach is before the past few years. He sets the standard, and he decides the climate, tone and how we behave towards each other". In addition, he "is the organizer, he is the motivator … he can directly affect the team". As to a focus on winning: "I think we have the players to be the champion, I really think it depends on how the coach can bring us together". Soccer is a team sport, and it seems that equal parts of "moulding" and "chemistry" are needed if success is the criteria of the coach in charge.

Trying to develop as a player and coping with a coach created performance climate is difficult as Joseph elaborated when discussing several coping strategies (problem-focused, social support and avoidance) he used:

> I maybe think about that, ahm… a little more than I should … not anything that would keep me from sleeping at night, ahm …I try to get through it by just *playing simple*, ahm… you have your team out there with you, ahm… you take any *positive feedback* they give you, ahm … what I do is that I get out there and … a little short pass to my team mate, and then … *once I get in I start not to think about it, and then you are in the game and you don't think about it any more.* It is usually just in the beginning of the game, you want to get started, and that is how I do it.

The strategies mentioned by Joseph to get in the game is interesting, and also that he actually makes use of a game situation when explaining how he copes with coach initiated stress. The important question is of course how much extra stress a coach created performance climate may cause athletes. In the Holt and Hogg (2002) study, the widest range and complexity of coping strategies were used to manage the participants' perceptions of *coaches*. This source of strain was also reported among adolescent soccer players by Reeves and colleagues (Reeves et al., 2009). The current investigation is in accord with previous research.

The Complexity of Coping: A Narrative

A qualitative approach to coping often adheres to a systematic analysis as illustrated in Table 1, which is a strength (Crocker, Mosewich, Kowalski, & Besenski, 2010). However, the weakness is that this lacks depth and leads to restriction. Athletes cope in a variety of ways in various situations, and coping involves several strategies often used in combination (Gould, Eklund, & Jackson, 1993). In addition, the table fails to give an impression of the impact organizational issues may have on the development of an athlete. Hence, the use of narrative

might give a better illustration of the daily coping process. As an example, this is how Marie experienced the daily coping of prevalent stressors:

> First of all I get a lot of help *outside of my own head*. I have a support group [i.e. mom, coaches, friends off and on the field], I have a therapist, he is my own personal therapist - a psychologist plus my sports trainer, he is one and the same, a lot of help from that, but you also you draw on your own strength, I mean, in this world *you are only by yourself*, whether your support group is very strong or not, you are the only one out there performing. So, you can only rely on you.

One needs help to cope in order to become mentally strong and keep self-confidence intact. Her statement clearly echoes what Gilbourne and Richardson (2006) point out is the link between performance and caring for sport psychologists. Undoubtedly, caring is important for elite athletes in order to perform at a high level. But you also need help as pointed out when Marie went on talking about both truth and the lack of trust that you have to accept to be able to cope at this level of soccer:

> And those are hard *truths*, and again, every day is different, some days you can deal with that, and it does not affect you, you go yeah, this is life, great; some days it is like – this is life, how depressing and disappointing. I have people that I work with every single day that I *cannot trust* for one second, and that makes you sad, so I think … it is a rollercoaster of emotions and experiences that you have to recognize, you have to know very well, and *you have to be able to deal with them* every single second of every single day.

As Michael pointed out, what you can cope with changes depending on several factors. Hence, there is a need to have a coping repertoire to choose from which is obvious in this part of the monologue from Marie:

And how you cope in dealing with that, but you might have different feelings that you

cope with, that you have to… how I cope is that I *confront* it head on, inside me, with

my *support group*, with my *therapist*, anything that has been a challenge, or hurdle, or

depression, or disappointments, or sadness or anger, I confront it head on, I have to,

and you know, that's how I cope. If I have an argument with a team-mate, I'll go to

them and… when the timing is right, maybe not that second, but when the timing is

right. And confront them and ask the, for again, you have people who are willing to be

… you just have to know people to, you have to *let some stuff go*, you have to be

willing to confront people and *defend yourself*, and … again, ultimately it is a very

strong sense of self, and a very strong sense of *you are the only one that is going to,*

that cares about you, and again… some days you can deal with that just fine, and

some days you need a lot of help in order to put yourself in that position. And continue

to move forward. […]

Marie manages to include all the above coping strategies from Table 1 in this part of

the monologue. In addition, one might argue that this finding supports previous research that

has argued that *team players* actually require *more* coping strategies than individual sports

(Park, 2000). As is obvious in the narrative, coach support is essential (emotional *and*

informational support mixed together). This has also been mentioned by Noblet and Gifford,

they concluded that "footballers may have less direct, one-on-one personal contact with their

coaches and thus may not receive the same level of feedback as golfers and figure skaters"

(2002, p. 11). In other words, the importance of social support is paramount to cope with a

long career:

Support is important, I really trusted this old coach… he just… I just trusted him for

me, everything if it was soccer, you have to understand, like trust in this … you don't

survive if there are people helping you that you really trust, and… you won't survive

without that. Everybody has a different role… everybody has a different opinion and set of eyes, outside of your own head that is very valuable, and some days I might seek out help from this person, or these couple of people, for again they all have different sets of eyes and ears to the situation. It is all valuable… in my early career I didn't rely on anybody, and that's what sunk me sometimes.

Conclusion

Informed by the transactional framework (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), this study extends organizational stress research by examining how professional American soccer players perceive the sources of environmental stress and their related coping strategies, placed in a wider cultural context. Based on the evidence collected in this study, cultural aspects can affect players' levels of play. Stressors unique to US soccer were particularly relevant to this group of elite soccer players. The coach issues and team issues cited by participants belong to a core group of categories of organizational stressors (McKay et al., 2008; Mellalieu et al., 2009; Reeves et al., 2009). The perception of travel and drafting/contracts stress were culturally determined for this group of soccer players. The structure of contracts, geographical distances between the teams in the Leagues, the number of athletes fighting for a spot, and living in the shadow of more entrenched *American* sports (which means less money and more pressure) are typical features of US professional soccer that must be considered when working with this group of athletes.

The interpersonal interaction between athletes and coaches was a stressor for participants. Factors such as team selection, communication, and confidence building emerged in the data in the present study, echoing previous research on interpersonal stress in the form of coach expectations (Kristiansen & Roberts, 2010; Thelwell et al., 2007), poor communication (Holt & Hogg, 2002; Noblet & Gifford, 2002) and leadership issues (Hanton et al., 2005). Previous research supports the findings of the present study that stress may

emanate from the coach (e.g., Thelwell, Weston, Greenlees, & Hutchings, 2008a) and is important when considering the soccer players total perception of stress and use of coping strategies.

Conversely, coach *support* is also a major *coping* strategy used by athletes. Coaches might function as "problem solvers" (e.g., Frey, 2007), and the use of informational support from the coach is an important mechanism for athletes. In this study, participants' perceptions of the categories of organizational stressors were often related to the perceived quality of their relationship with the coach; if they felt secure and appreciated, their experience of the categories of stressors was reduced and vice versa. This finding was supported in a recent study testing an AGT (Achievement goal theory) stress model (Kristiansen et al., in press-a). If the coach manages to keep the motivational climate mastery oriented with less focus on organizational pressures such as the negotiation of contracts, salaries, and pressure to keep the team in the elite division because of the financial repercussions, this will reduce the players experience of stress and enforce adaptive coping (Kristiansen, Roberts & Abrahamsen, 2008; Ntoumanis, Biddle, & Haddock, 1999; Pensgaard & Roberts, 2000). In contrast, if the coach becomes more focused on the outcomes of the competitive process, this in turn is likely to increase the pressure on the players to "deliver" the performances that satisfy the coaches and management (Fletcher & Scott, 2010). The evidence of the current investigation strongly supports the influence of the coach on the total stress experience of these eight players.

The second aim of the study was to critically analyse narratives in an effort to better understand the perception of stress and the coping mechanisms used by these elite soccer players. Inclusion of in-depth interview transcripts of some of the interviewees functions as an additional way to explain the coping process of these soccer players and their use of problem-focused, avoidance and social support coping responses. In narrative thinking, the context makes a difference (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and coping is in many ways about

the cultural resources made available for the athletes in question. Coach support emerged as being especially important for some players, and in the narratives Marie and Michael gave credence to the value of coach support. This choice came from their experience level and reflection, and of course their ability to put words on their emotions. The narratives underline the complexity of coping, and the daily struggle it is at this elite level and the significance of support. Becker found in her study of great coaches that they created a general team environment that "fostered *support, caring* and mutual *trust*" (Becker, 2009, p. 103). When the coach is unable to give this support, the athlete is put in a position that may be detrimental to performance. As Marie concluded when talking about coach support; "you won't survive without that".

Conceptual and Methodological Strengths and Limitations

Knowledge about one of the world's most popular team sports is warranted because it is often neglected (Holt & Hogg, 2002), and this study supports the evidence that certain stressors are unique to certain groups, in this case elite soccer players, and that the ecological context may exact unique stressors (McKay et al., 2008; Noblet & Gifford, 2002). The current investigation may be a descriptive study (Crocker et al., 2010), but it gains new insight into how a group of team athletes cope with their situation. On the other hand, this specific information about American soccer players in the MLS cannot be used to generalize across samples of other team sports or other contexts, which is a limitation.

We avoided the use of retrospection as there is a tendency to forget, underreport, or over-report (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Instead, the interviews were conducted in the middle of the pre-season, which had its own unique stressors. We talked about their experience of stress there and then. The only retrospective reflection was the wisdom shared by the more experienced players! Even so, the timing of the interviews may have elevated and made some of the more American features salient, such as the insecurity of getting a contract

that was overwhelming when compared to other aspects of the organizing of the leagues. As a result, the current data may have a biased over-reporting of these pre-season issues, which may be considered a limitation. However, in support of our findings, Reeves and co-workers found similar evidence and in their study of British adolescent soccer players (Reeves et al., 2009).

Adding a link between stressors and coping strategies as recent research has started to include (Holt & Hogg, 2002; Reeves et al., 2009; Weston et al., 2009), is a complex and important endeavour. With the recent words of Crocker and colleagues in mind; "there is surprisingly little variety in the way research results on coping in sport are presented in the literature" (Crocker et al., 2010, p. 70), we have tried to expand on the presentation of the evidence by including a narrative in addition to the table. Consequently, Table 1 should only be considered a parsimonious interpretation of the results to achieve an overview (and some may consider that a limitation). The long coping quotations in many ways better reveal that coping with stressors in soccer in the US is a complex process based on one's own coping resources and the ability of supportive people to help the athletes to achieve their goals.

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PAPER 3

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Organizational and media stress among professional football players: testing an achievement goal theory model

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The purpose of this study was to investigate media and coach–athlete stress experienced by professional football players and their relationship to motivational variables by testing an achievement goal theory (AGT) stress model. In order to do so, we developed scales specifically designed to assess media and coach–athlete stress. Eighty-two elite football players ($M_{age} = 25.17$ years, SD = 5.19) completed a series of questionnaires. Correlations and bootstrapping were used as primary statistical analyses, supplemented by LISREL, to test the hypotheses. Results revealed that a mastery climate was directly and nega-tively associated with coach–athlete stress, while a performance climate was directly and positively associated with coach–athlete stress. In addition, an indirect positive path between the performance climate and media stress was revealed through ego orientation. These findings support some of the key postulates of AGT; a mastery climate reduces the perception of stress among athletes, and the converse is true for a performance climate. Coaches of elite footballers are advised to try to reduce the emphasis on performance criteria because of its stress-reducing effects.

Sport today reflects the ongoing globalization process. As a result, sport has become a gigantic business enterprise with a focus on making money, and as Smith (2004), a successful manager in American soccer, put it: "The bottom line is that ultimately we are driven to make money, like any other business" (p. 75). This has meant that the leaders and managers of sport organizations have increased the exposure of athletes to organizational pressure and stress in order for the sport to become a successful business enterprise (Fletcher et al., 2006). Parallel to this, the increase in public interest in sport allows the media to scrutinize every move of the organization and the elite athletes within the organization. For athletes, this scrutiny occurs both on and off the playing arena as sport organizations approve of positive media attention of teams for economic reasons. This increased media attention has become another source of stress for the athlete in the public eye.

While research into organizational stressors is increasing (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009), an under-studied topic in sport psychology research is the impact of media coverage on elite athletes. Both seem to have an impact on professional football players' performances (termed soccer in the United States), and more knowledge about these stressors is needed in order to help the athletes to cope with these environmental demands. At present, few studies exist on organizational and media stress and their associa-tion with the other variables in the sport context. The purpose of this study was to investigate the percep-tions of media stress and one type of organizational stress, the coach–athlete relationship. In this study, we used achievement goal theory (AGT) as a con-ceptual base and tested an AGT stress model with professional football players as our sample.

Environmental demands

Stress is often defined as an imbalance between the situation and a person/athlete's resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). According to McGrath (1970), a stressful situation starts with a set of circumstances in the socio-physical environment, and the transac-tional perspective emphasizes that stress neither re-sides in the person nor the environment, but in the relationship between the two. Hence, the misuse and imprecision of the term have been debated since the 1970s (see McGrath 1970, 1982, for overviews), and continued up to the present (Hardy et al., 1996; Fletcher et al., 2006). As a solution to this discussion, Fletcher and colleagues suggest that stress should represent the overall *process* incorporating stressors, appraisals, strains, and coping responses. In this framework, *strain* is defined as an individual's

negative response to stressors. Further, *stressor* is the environmental demand or stimulus encountered by an individual (Fletcher et al., 2006). These external events (or demands) may allow us to label them as organizational stress, media stress, and so forth in order to specify the origin of the stressor encountered.

Recently, *organizational stressors* (e.g., sport organization politics, coaches, team selection criteria, and planning) have been investigated in sport psychology, and the attention has been on "critical issues surrounding, and cognitive processes underpinning a performer's relationship with his or her sport organization" (Fletcher et al., 2006, p. 327). This research on organizational stress started in the early 1990s when some of the organizational stressors, the elite athletes had to cope with, were identified (e.g., Gould et al., 1993; Scanlan et al., 1989, 1991). This research was followed by a more recent interest in Britain on the impact of organizational stress on athletic performance (e.g., Woodman & Hardy, 2001; Fletcher & Hanton, 2003; Fletcher et al., 2006; McKay et al., 2008; Thelwell et al., 2008; Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Levy, et al., 2009; Mellalieu et al., 2009; Weston et al., 2009). In general, the evidence suggests that organizational stressors can disrupt athletic performance, and some even argue that it might have a greater impact on performance than any other single factor (Jones, 2002), even more than competitive stress (Hanton et al., 2005).

From the literature that investigates *media stress*, we discern that athletes feel the presence of the journalists as intrusive and that media reports are not always factual (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002). For footballers, the most popular and media-covered sport in the world, the media spotlight is particularly harsh. Media "sensationalize, particularize, and humorize" not only the sports results (Sisjord & Kristiansen, 2008), but everything about how the athletes perceived the game, the opponents, and the referee. Even details about their private lives seem to find its way into the press (Hargreaves, 1986), as the media following often goes beyond what is strictly professional (Dosil, 2006). There are a few research studies that mention the media as one stressor among personal, competitive, and organizational stressors. Durand-Bush and Salmela reported that World Champions and Olympic winners perceived the media as stressful before, during, and after major events. The winners admitted that they said what they perceived the reporters wanted to hear in order to terminate the interviews, and they felt exhausted because the media followed their every move. Cresswell and Eklund (2007) found that some New Zealand rugby players perceived inaccurate assessments and criticisms by the media to be an ongoing source of

stress. Further, Noblet and Gifford (2002) underline how stressful Australian footballers experienced the constant negative media scrutiny in their day-to-day life. The media can affect the self-confidence of an athlete by making him/her a hero/heroine, or by making him/her insecure simply from the "slant" of the article. Consequently, the constant media attention may turn into a major stressor when athletes strive for excellence within their sport (Gould et al., 1999; Greenleaf et al., 2001).

The athlete's personal beliefs about his/her own competence and the perceived extant psychosocial environment play important roles in how he/she comes to deal with environmental stressors such as media and organizational issues. In this study, we apply AGT (e.g., Nicholls, 1984, 1989; Ames, 1992; Duda & Hall, 2001; Roberts, 2001; Roberts et al., 2007; 2009) to understand the impact of organizational and media stress on professional football players. AGT is easily applied to the sport context because not only are the goals clearly achievement goals most of the time, "but success and failure, and personal competence tend to be unambiguous to all participants, players, and spectators" also (Roberts, 2001, p. 17). Further, we have adopted the classic AGT because of conceptual and measurement problems with the hierarchical model (see Kaplan & Maehr, 2007; Roberts et al., 2007).

AGT and perception of stress

AGT assumes that the individual is an intentional, goal-directed organism that strives to demonstrate ability or competence in achievement situations. In such situations, individuals are assumed to function in either a state of task or ego goal involvement at any one time; however, the state of involvement may change quickly as individuals process the ongoing stream of behavior (Gernigon et al., 2004). The usual assumption is that an athlete can only be in one state of involvement at a time (e.g., Nicholls, 1989; Roberts, 2001). Comprising each state of goal involvement are both dispositional and situational motivational factors. The dispositional factors are termed achievement goal orientations, which are individual difference variables that reflect the person adopting task or ego involving criteria of success. When an athlete is *task oriented*, the focus is on demonstrating mastery of tasks, and perceptions of ability are self-referenced. An *ego oriented* athlete, on the other hand, is interested in demonstrating superior ability to others and is preoccupied with winning, and perceived ability is characteristically normatively referenced.

Similar to goal orientations, perceptions of the motivational climate are assumed to reflect task and/or ego involving criteria of success and failure.

Ames (1992) argued that two dimensions of the motivational climate, namely *mastery* and *performance*, are crucial to understand achievement cognitions and behaviors in achievement contexts such as sport. The focus on mastery criteria as success is more likely to develop a perception that effort and self-referenced accomplishment are valued and important. In turn, a focus on mastery is more likely to lead to positive outcomes such as intrinsically regulated motivation and autonomy in that the intrinsic value of the task is highlighted. As a consequence, players are more likely to experience positive effect and positive consequences of participating in sport. The focus on performance criteria as success is more likely to deny players making the connection between effort and success and may lead to the perception that to be worthy is to beat other players. In turn, a focus on performance is more likely to lead to more negative outcomes such as extrinsically regulated motivation in that the extrinsic nature of evaluation is highlighted. As a consequence, players are more likely to experience negative effect and negative consequences of participating in sport (e.g., Duda & Hall, 2001; Roberts et al., 2007).

Being ego involved has been associated with cognitive sources of distress, with the team and the coach acting as sources of distress (Pensgaard & Roberts, 2000). Pensgaard and Roberts argue that an elite athlete's perception of stress is related to the perceived motivational climate and in order to reduce the perception of stress, the coach should focus on creating a mastery climate for elite athletes. Even elite athletes prefer their coaches to have a more mastery approach to performance because it alleviates stress (Pensgaard & Roberts, 2002). Previous research has found that when coaches shift their criteria of success toward ego involving outcome expectations within a team, the levels of perceived stress increases (Kristiansen & Roberts, 2010). When an organization (or football team) publicly declares that the team should win the championship or the league, etc., this puts the weight of high expectations on the coach and the team, and the coach often translates this pressure to the team. Further, the media's demand for gold medals or championships creates a stress that contrasts sharply with our knowledge about the motivational climate that the athlete or team members are supposed to prefer in order to optimize performance. To optimize the motivation of the athlete or team, the climate should have very little focus on the competitive outcome (Pensgaard & Duda, 2002). For this reason, when the organizations themselves and/or the media focus on competitive outcomes, this may contribute to a change in climate and orientation toward more normative comparisons, a change that might affect performance negatively.

In this current investigation, we wished to test the psychometric properties of an AGT-based model of stress, and we tested the following hypotheses: (1) a performance climate and ego orientation are positively associated with the experience of media and coach–athlete stress; and (2) a mastery climate and task orientation are negatively associated with the experience of media and coach–athlete stress. Finally, we tested an AGT process model for media and coach–athlete stress in which we hypothesized that motivational climate would be indirectly linked to experienced stress through achievement goal orientations.

Materials and methods

Participants

Participants were 82 elite football players ($M_{age} = 25.17$ years, SD = 5.19). Three different professional male teams in a Premier Division in Europe were contacted with the help of the national Football Association. As in any Premier Division of professional football in Europe, there were international players from several countries in the teams. Many of the players had experience with their respective national teams.

Procedure

The athletes were willing to participate after the purpose of the investigation was given by the first author after a practice session, and they then completed a questionnaire package. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and the investigation was conducted in accordance with ethical research guidelines.

Measurement

We used two well-known scales to measure motivational variables. However, to our knowledge, no scales exist to measure organizational and media stress in sport, although the need for such measures is recognized within the organizational stress literature (e.g., Fletcher & Hanton, 2003; Fletcher et al., 2006). As a result, we needed to develop scales specifically designed to assess these two categories of stressors. Consequently, we developed two new scales, one to measure perceived coach–athlete stress, and one to measure perceived media stress. Needless to state, these are preliminary scales and future research will develop them further. Responses from all the four questionnaires were indicated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5).

Questionnaires to measure motivation

Dispositional goal orientations were measured with the Perception of Success Questionnaire (POSQ; Roberts et al., 1998). POSQ is a 12-item questionnaire, which measures task (six items) and ego (six items) goal orientations in sport, with phrases such as "I work hard" and "I win" to reflect the criteria of success used by the participants. The internal consistency of the scales were adequate in the present study, with Cronbach's α for ego orientation ($\alpha = 0.89$) and for task orientation ($\alpha = 0.95$).

The motivational climate was measured with the Perceived Motivational Climate in Sport Questionnaire (Seifriz et al.,

Kristiansen et al.

1992), and it consists of two valid and reliable subscales: the mastery and performance climate scales. The athletes were told to reflect upon how they experience the climate in their team, and phrases such as "Players feel good when they do better than teammates" and "The coach wants us to try new skills" to reflect the criteria of success the players perceived used by the coach(s). The stem "on this team . . ." preceded each item to make it team specific. The internal consistency (Cronbach's α) were adequate for the performance climate scale ($\alpha = 0.84$) and for the mastery climate subscale ($\alpha = 0.86$).

Coach–athlete and media stress questionnaires

Most research on organizational stress in sport has been through qualitative interviews (e.g., Woodman & Hardy, 2001; Fletcher & Hanton, 2003; Hanton et al., 2005; Fletcher et al., 2006). This is partly because when measuring an ongoing transaction between performer and environment, research must "utilize methods that capture the contextual richness of such processes and the idiographic nature of the stress experience" (Fletcher et al., 2006, p. 353). A call for the development of a comprehensive measure of organizational stress has been made for some time (e.g., Fletcher et al., 2006; Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009). Based on previous explorative qualitative research (e.g. Woodman & Hardy, 2001; Fletcher & Hanton, 2003; Hanton et al., 2005; Fletcher et al., 2006; Kristiansen & Roberts, 2010), we developed scales to measure both categories of organizational and media stressors. Owing to the high number of different categories of organizational stressors (e.g., McKay et al., 2008; Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Levy, et al., 2009), we decided to focus on the coach as a stressor for the footballers. In the progress toward measurement, we paid careful attention to the nature and content of the items, the scoring of the response scales, and the manner in which the psychometrics was established (Fletcher et al., 2006).

First, we created a large pool of questions (60) based on the evidence from the extant literature of organizational and media stress in sport. We tried to avoid ambiguous items and lengthy items, and the items used were made football specific. In addition, we used experts ($n = 3$) both in football (same elite level) and stress research to narrow down the list to questions that best captured the essence of organizational and media stressors experienced by football players. This procedure gave us a 23-item Coach–Athlete Stressors in Football Questionnaire (CASFQ) and a six-item Media Stressors in Football Questionnaire (MSFQ). The two questionnaires do not measure frequency, duration, intensity, or meaning; the items simply measure a perceived demand placed on the players from the organization and/or the media.

Coach–athlete stress was measured with the CASFQ that has a focus on the coach–athlete relationship. A preliminary maximum likelihood factor analysis with varimax rotation of

the 23 CASFQ items initially yielded eight factors. The first factor comprised nine items reflecting coach–athlete stress (eigenvalue: 5.17; explained variance: 22.5%; factor loadings from 0.43 to 0.73). From the first factor, a substantial drop in eigenvalues was observed, varying from 2.08 for factor 2 to 1.01 for factor 8. Additionally, all factors from 2 to 8 loaded on only one to two items. Thus, we chose to use the first factor in subsequent analyses. Next, a new factor analysis with the nine items yielded two factors. The first factor comprised seven items (eigenvalue: 3.59; explained variance: 39.89%), and the second factor comprised two items (eigenvalue: 1.29; explained variance: 14.33%). Because of this substantial drop in eigenvalue for factor 2, we chose the seven items illustrated in the Appendix S1 to reflect this category of coach–athlete stress. These seven items loaded on one factor (eigenvalue: 3.40; explained variance: 48.64%; factor loadings varying from 0.44 to 0.79). The internal consistency (Cronbach's α) for this factor was 0.82. The items included phrases such as "The coach and team agree on the strategy for the team," and "The coach is good at communicating with us players." In other words, we were capturing the coach–athlete relationship and the way the coaching staff dealt with the players as a group. Owing to its positive wording, the coach–athlete stress factor items were reverse scored in order to generate the factor score for further analyses.

Media stress was measured by the MSFQ. As with the CASFQ, we first conducted a preliminary maximum likelihood factor analysis with varimax rotation of the six MSFQ items. This yielded two factors. The first factor comprised two items reflecting negative content stress (eigenvalue: 1.38; explained variance: 22.91%; factor loadings from 0.54 to 0.99), and the second factor of four items reflecting the amount of outcome coverage stress (eigenvalue: 1.38; explained variance: 23.1%; factor loadings from 0.45 to 0.73). The internal consistency (Cronbach's α) for both scales were adequate: media negative content subscale ($\alpha = 0.70$); and the outcome coverage subscale ($\alpha = 0.68$). However, the relatively marginal Cronbach's α scores and the few items in each subscale warrant further development for both scales. In the present study, however, we used only the two items of negative content stress (items 5 and 6) because of their ability to be experienced as a strain by footballers, which was in accordance with hypotheses (see Appendix S1 for an overview of items from both MSFQ and CASFQ).

Results

Descriptive statistics

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, ranges, skewness values, and reliability for all variables. In general, relatively high levels of internal consistency (Cronbach's α) that emerged for the

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for motivational climate and orientations, organizational, and media stress ($N = 82$)

Variables	Mean	SD	Observational range	Skew	Cronbach's α
Mastery climate	4.06	0.79	1.4–5.0	− 1.35	0.86
Performance climate	3.27	0.87	1.5–5.0	− 0.21	0.84
Task orientation	4.35	1.02	1.0–5.0	− 2.19	0.95
Ego orientation	3.69	0.96	1.0–5.0	− 0.57	0.89
Coach–athlete stress	2.29	0.72	1.0–3.9	0.13	0.82
Media stress − negative content	2.10	0.91	1.0–4.0	0.50	0.70
Media stress − outcome coverage	3.29	0.83	1.3–5.0	0.20	0.68

4

factor scores and the constructs they represented were accepted as meaningful.

Correlations between motivational variables and stressors

Support for the hypotheses was found in the correlations (Table 2), and there were several significant correlations between the perception of stressors and motivational climate. Coach–athlete stress correlated negatively with mastery climate (-0.36, $P<0.01$) and positively with performance climate (0.35, $P<0.01$) as expected. An interesting finding was that media stress negative content correlated positively with performance climate (0.25, $P<0.05$), ego orientation (0.36, $P<0.01$), and coach–athlete stress (0.22, $P<0.05$).

Testing hypotheses in the AGT model of media and coach–athlete stress

Theoretical model

In order to determine the relationship between the stressors and the climate, we tested the AGT stress model. The hypotheses concerning the relationships among the variables are summarized at the end of introduction. The zero-order correlations that emerged in Table 2 supported the hypotheses of a positive link between performance climate and both media and coach–athlete stress, the positive relation

between ego orientation and media stress, the negative correlation between mastery climate and coach–athlete stress, and the positive link between the two types of stress. In testing the AGT model (Figs 1 and 2), we took a dual approach, using correlation and bootstrapping as the primary analyses because the latter is suggested as suitable for small sample sizes (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Because the n for this study was only 82, LISREL was used as a secondary and supplementary approach to test the fit of the data to the models.

Bootstrapping

We used bootstrapping, a non-parametric resampling procedure, to test the paths between variables and mediations (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Bootstrapping involves sampling from the dataset repeatedly and estimates the indirect paths between an independent variable (IV) and a dependent variable (DV) through mediating variables (MV). Bootstrapping is a statistical tool recommended to be used with low number of participants, and for hypotheses testing bootstrapping can be an approach to statistical inference and reveal the paths between the stress and motivation variables. Performance climate and ego orientation are both significantly positively correlated with media stress. In addition, performance climate and ego orientation are significantly and positively correlated. Thus, this is the only occasion where it is possible to test the indirect path between

Table 2. Pearson correlations among variables

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Mastery climate	–						
2. Performance climate	0.12	–					
3. Task orientation	**0.68**	**0.31**	–				
4. Ego orientation	0.14	**0.58**	**0.25**	–			
5. Coach–athlete stress	**−0.36**	**0.35**	0.09	0.01	–		
6. Media stress – negative content	−0.19	**0.25**	0.00	**0.36**	**0.22**	–	
7. Media stress – outcome coverage	0.10	−0.05	0.02	−0.04	−0.15	0.07	–

Significant correlations ($P<0.05$; two tailed) are in bold.

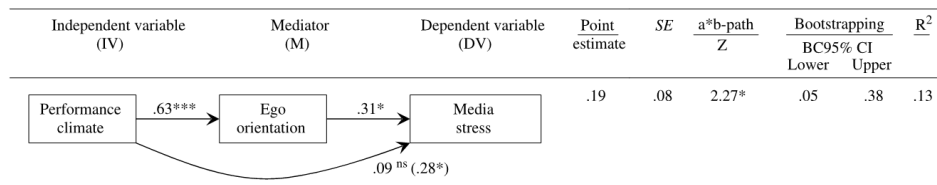| Independent variable (IV)	Mediator (M)	Dependent variable (DV)	Point estimate	SE	a*b-path Z	Bootstrapping BC95% CI Lower Upper	R^2
Performance climate → .63*** → Ego orientation → .31* → Media stress; .09 ns (.28*)			.19	.08	2.27*	.05 .38	.13

Fig. 1. Test of the indirect link between performance climate and media stress through ego orientation. a-path, IV → M; b-path, M → DV, ns, not significant. *$P<0.05$, **$P<0.01$, ***$P<0.001$. The correlation in the parenthesis is the total effect (c-path).
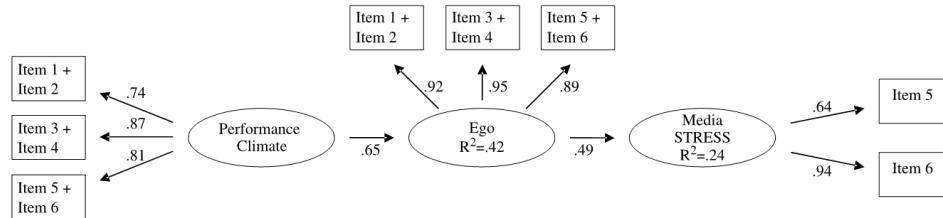
5

Fig. 2. AGT Media Stress Model [χ^2(df = 18, N = 82) = 17.83, P = 0.47; SRMR = 0.036; CFI = 1.00; RMSEA = 0.001].

climate and stress through orientation (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). We used bootstrapping in testing a model including performance climate, ego orientation, and media stress (see Fig. 1).

Performance climate → ego orientation → media stress

The indirect path between performance climate and media stress through ego orientation was positive and significant because the bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals (for the bands of products of coefficients after *n* resamplings) did not include a zero or a negatively valued coefficient (Bias Corrected Confidence Intervals for a-path × b-path: lower = 0.05 and upper = 0.38) (see Fig. 1).

Structural equation modeling

LISREL was used for secondary analyses as a supplement to correlations and the bootstrapping procedure. Owing to the small sample size, we reduced the number of variables in the analyses by testing two models separately by LISREL: (1) a model including performance climate, ego orientation, and media stress (see Fig. 2) to test the fit of the data to the model already presented in Fig. 1; and (2) a model investigating the paths between mastery climate, performance climate, and coach–athlete stress (see Fig. 3) because the bivariate correlations indicate that each motivational climate is important, particularly in relation to coach–athlete stress. In the evaluation of fit indices, we used the chi-square likelihood ratio (χ^2), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the comparative fit index (CFI), and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). These different indices are recommended to evaluate model fit in covariance structure analyses (Bollen, 1989; Hu & Bentler, 1999). A good fit should have a value close to or lower than 0.05 for the RMSEA, a value close to or lower than 0.08 for the SRMR, combined with a value close to or higher than 0.95 for the CFI (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Empirical models

Because of the large number of indicators (items) in relation to the sample size, the AGT model including

performance climate, ego orientation, and media stress was tested on the basis of three latent variables, which were represented by parcels of two items each in order to reduce the number of indicators (Little et al., 2002). Thus, all items were used in these parcels (see factor loadings in Fig. 2). This measurement model included eight indicators and fit the data very well [χ^2(df = 17, N = 82) = 17.92, P = 0.39; SRMR = 0.035; CFI = 1.00; RMSEA = 0.026]. No modifications of this model were indicated. The structural model was tested with this measurement model included and did fit the data equally well [χ^2(df = 18, N = 82) = 17.83, P = 0.47; SRMR = 0.036; CFI = 1.00; RMSEA = 0.001]. The performance climate explained 42% of ego orientation, whereas ego orientation explained 24% of perceived media stress. The standardized parameter estimates are shown in Fig. 2. (Interactions of climates and goals were also analyzed in relation to media and organizational stress. They were all non-significant.)

The model investigating the paths between mastery climate, performance climate, and coach–athlete stress (see Fig. 3) was also tested on the basis of three latent variables that were represented by parcels of two items each in order to reduce the number of indicators. Thus, all items were used in these parcels (see factor loadings in Fig. 3). The *a priori* measurement model included eight indicators and fit the data well for SRMR, but not for the other indices [χ^2(df = 17, N = 82) = 47.03, P = 0.0001; SRMR = 0.086; CFI = 0.88; RMSEA = 0.15]. However, the model could be improved because modification indices indicated adding a positive error covariance between mastery climate parcels 2 and 3, and a negative covariance between the performance climate parcel 1, and the mastery climate parcel 2. We added these two covariances because they were evaluated as reasonable according to the theory, resulting in a final measurement model that fit the data well [χ^2(df = 17, N = 82) = 24.39, P = 0.11; SRMR = 0.064; CFI = 0.98; RMSEA = 0.073]. No modifications of this model were indicated. The structural model was tested with this measurement model included and did fit the data equally well [χ^2(df = 17, N = 82) = 24.39, P = 0.11; SRMR =
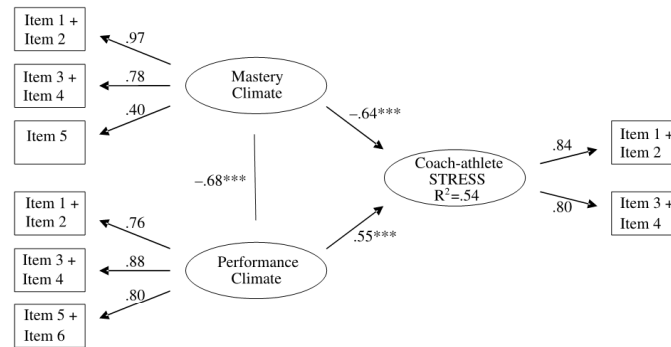
Fig. 3. Motivational Climate Model of Organizational Stress [χ^2(df = 17, N = 82) = 24.39, P = 0.11; SRMR = 0.064; CFI = 0.98; RMSEA = 0.073].

0.064; CFI = 0.98; RMSEA = 0.073]. No modifications of this model were indicated. Performance and mastery climate together explained 54% of perceived coach–athlete stress. The standardized parameter estimates are shown in Fig. 3.

Discussion

The purpose of this investigation was to test an AGT stress model, in order to determine whether environmental stress in the form of media exposure and organizational pressure was mediated by the personal achievement goals and/or the motivational climate created by the coaching staff with elite football players. In order to do so, we first developed a tool for stress research, which would assess subjectively experienced media and coach–athlete stressors independent of a specific and objective occasion. Through factor analyses, seven-item CASFQ and two-item media stressors (negative) in Football questionnaire (MSFQ) were developed and demonstrated acceptable internal reliabilities.

The CASFQ focused on the coach–athlete relationship, and the importance of this relationship has been demonstrated both from the coach perspective (e.g., Frey, 2007; Olusoga et al., 2009) and the athlete perspective (e.g., Gould et al., 1999; Kristiansen & Roberts, 2010). It would seem that leadership and team organization issues appear to be crucial in the athletes' perception of coach–athlete stress (Fletcher & Hanton, 2003; Hanton et al., 2005; Kristiansen & Roberts, 2010). In addition, Weinberg and McDermott (2002) found evidence that performance leadership and the coach's managerial skills, including the ability to inspire and motivate others, is of major importance for a successful organization. Thus, our scale measuring the coach–athlete relation-

ship has empirical and conceptual support as being important among several categories of coach–athlete stressors. In our case, the coach–athlete stressor factor was reverse scored for analysis purposes due to its positive framing of the stress questions. The MSFQ-negative media scale consisted of two items only and covered the experience of the perceived negative content of media coverage of themselves and the team. However, these two items cover both the experience of strain as well as the pressure on winning, factors found previously to make media a stressor for elite athletes (e.g., Noblet & Gifford, 2002; Cresswell & Eklund, 2007). The two categories of stressor scales were reliable and adequate for our purpose in this study, and the factor scores were used in further analyses. Thus, the dispositional (task and ego goal orientations) and the situational motivational (mastery and performance climate) factors as well as the developed scales for categories of organizational and media stressors were the constructs used in this study.

The correlational analyses supported the first two hypotheses under investigation: a performance climate and ego orientation are positively associated with experience of media and coach–athlete stress; and a mastery climate and task orientation are negatively associated with the experience of media and coach–athlete stress. The results of the correlational analyses were generally as predicted: the performance climate and ego orientation were positively correlated with experience of organizational and media stress; conversely, the mastery climate was negatively correlated with coach–athlete stress. However, the mastery climate was not associated with media stress. The findings suggest that a mastery climate may protect elite football players from the worst rigours of coach–athlete stress. Unexpectedly, task orientation was not correlated significantly with

7

the two types of stressors. This made us suspect that the impact of the motivational climate may be more important than personal goal orientation when organization and media stress are under investigation. This illustrates the importance of the coach in defusing organizational and media stress. To further investigate these findings, we tested the AGT process model consisting of the paths between mastery climate, performance climate, and the two categories of stressors.

Addressing the third hypothesis of the study, further analyses were conducted by using separate AGT models for media and coach–athlete stress. The theoretical model was built upon the relationships found in the correlational analyses (see Table 2), and there are several findings in the model worth discussing from a conceptual and applied perspective. Results of testing the indirect path between performance climate and media stress (negative content) through ego orientation are illustrated in Figs 1 and 2. Both the perception of a performance climate and when the footballer was high on ego orientation are associated with experience of media stress. This relationship may be explained by the AGT theory (e.g., Roberts, 2001). Clearly, it is the ego oriented athletes who experience media as a stressor. The conceptual explanation for this is that we know that egooriented people are normatively referenced (e.g., Roberts et al., 2007; 2009); therefore, getting public acknowledgment for their performance is important. No media exposure, or negative media exposure as illustrated in this study, may be detrimental to their self-confidence and they may lose belief in own ability as a football player. Consequently, being ego oriented is a central factor in the athlete's subjective perception of whether the media is perceived as a stressor or not. When a team has several "stars" competing for media attention in a performance climate setting, then this may exacerbate the need to normatively compare themselves with each other that enhances the competitive climate in the team. This makes the impact of media criticism of individual players even more salient, and illustrates the importance of the coach in defusing these potentially destructive perceptions. Coaches should carefully monitor the climate and their ego oriented athletes when there is a "media storm" about a team, as we have had graphically illustrated in the 2010 World Cup when both Italy and France were eliminated early in the competition. When such a storm occurs, then players are susceptible to perceive the media exposure as ego involving.

Consistent with our hypotheses, a second model investigating the paths among mastery climate, performance climate, and coach–athlete stress was tested (see Fig. 3). As the correlational bivariate analyses indicated that the motivational climate is important for athletes' perception of coach–athlete stress, this was further supported by the use of structural equation modeling. It was only in the first model we tested that personal orientation (ego) had any influence on perception of media stress. In the case of coach–athlete stress, only motivational climate was associated with the perception of stress where perception of a performance climate may lead to a higher experience of coach–athlete stress. Conversely, a mastery climate will reduce the perception of coach–athlete stress.

This emphasizes the importance of the perception of the motivational climate on the part of the players and illustrates the influence of coaches. When coaches are subjected to organizational pressures such as the negotiation of contracts, salaries, and pressure to keep the team in the elite division because of the financial repercussions, then the coach becomes more focused on the outcomes of the competitive process (Fletcher & Scott, 2010). This in turn is likely to increase the pressure on the players to "deliver" the performances that satisfy the coaches and management. These organizational issues may result in each team player worrying about his/her own benefits, how to get the positive headlines, score the goals, show the competence that merits the salary negotiated on his or her behalf, and so on (E. Kristiansen & G. C. Roberts, unpublished observation). This increases the perception of the climate being focused on outcomes and in demonstrating superiority over other teams. In other words, there is an increase in ego involvement on the part of the players. The higher the player is in ego orientation, then the more he/she reacts to the pressure when the coach becomes more ego involved too. This is in accordance with the AGT theory, and it makes conceptual sense for coach–athlete stress to be related to a performance climate (e.g., Roberts et al., 2007).

For these football players, the motivational climate created by the coach and to some extent the management of the club is more important than personal orientations when coping with coach–athlete stress. Evidence has revealed that football players are both task and ego involved in playing football (E. Kristiansen & G. C. Roberts, unpublished observation); hence, the motivational climate becomes pivotal (Roberts, 2001; Pensgaard & Roberts, 2002). Further, we may explain this through the criteria of success adopted by the coach. The coach may be a performance-oriented coach by conviction or through circumstances. This may happen in one of two ways: first, the coach may sincerely believe in normative referenced comparisons, and believe he is being an effective coach by emphasizing performance criteria. When the results are not going in the way the coach believes are required, he may reemphasize performance criteria and demand "re-

sults." The coach may publicly make performance statements and increase the performance criteria more than the players are comfortable with (E. Kristiansen & G. C. Roberts, unpublished observation). However, in accordance with the AGT theory, when a performance climate becomes the norm in a team, then it may indeed influence the personal orientations of the players as well over time. As an example, in a news interview recently, a coach claimed that emphasized competition at every training session between the players on the team as the competition for positions "makes them all better" (Jonas, 2010). The evidence suggests that because of the importance of the coach at the professional level in football when the criteria of success of the coach becomes performance related, then the criteria of success of the coach become the criteria of success of the players over time (E. Kristiansen & G. C. Roberts, unpublished observation).

The second reason may be concerned with the close relationship between the perceived climate and the criteria emphasized by the organization (as a football team). The organization (the owners, sponsors, and management) may start to put pressure on the coach to produce results when a team is perceived to be underperforming. The coach then simply transfers this pressure to the players and starts to demand better results and uses performance criteria of success. This may change the perception of the motivational dynamics of the climate relatively quickly (Kristiansen & Roberts, 2010), but probably too quickly to influence the personal orientations of the players in the short term. When the pressure is on the coach and the coaching staff, then this may explain why the personal orientations of the players are less important in explaining perception of coach–athlete stress. It is important to remember that coaches can be both "problem solvers" (Frey, 2007), but they can also be perceived as a source of strain for athletes (Giacobbi et al., 2004; Kristiansen & Roberts, 2010).

For elite footballers, coping with different categories of stressors becomes an important factor in order to succeed in the league, and this is true in elite sport in general (e.g., Gould et al., 1999; Dugdale et al., 2002; Harwood & Chan, 2010). Within this study, we demonstrated that the transactional perspective allows us to investigate the interplay among motivation, stress, and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). However, these theoretical links between AGT, stress, and coping are still at an early stage of development in sport (Harwood & Chan, 2010). We know that a mastery climate often is associated with adaptive coping in elite sport (see Ntoumanis et al., 1999; Pensgaard & Roberts, 2003; Kristiansen et al., 2008). Intuitively, you are able to cope with a situation when you are able to control some of the

variables that contribute to stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In many ways, the two categories of stressors measured in this current investigation are out of control for football players. The media may treat you as a "piece of meat" and simply discard you as a player if you fail on the field (Kristiansen et al., in press). The one element of control lies with the coach when the reaction of the coach toward a football player's performance is more considerate and planned. This means that when the coach uses the criteria of mastery and creates a mastery climate within the team, football players may learn how to utilize their mental preparation routines in a consistent manner to gain control and cope with the stress, whether it be organizational of media related, of being a Premier Division football player.

Limitations

The present investigation has a number of strengths, and limitations, due to the vagaries of developing a new research direction. First, the fact that we were able to have access to 82 elite footballers was a strength of this study, because it is often considered problematic to get access to these highly public athletes. Thus, the ecological validity of the study is very high because we were given this possibility! However, 82 participants are not many with the statistical procedures we would have liked to conduct. Hence, we used appropriate statistical methods (e.g., bootstrapping) because of the low number of elite participants. The limited number of participants is also an issue when trying to determine the psychometric properties of the two new stress questionnaires. While our psychometric statistics allowed us to proceed with the study, much more research into the items that make up the two sources of stress, and the psychometric properties of the two questionnaires is needed. This study is cross sectional and does not capture the dynamics of the transaction process between the performer and the environment (Fletcher et al., 2006); therefore, the use of longitudinal methods will serve this purpose better (see Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009).

Idealistically, an organizational stressor questionnaire that includes issues such as both the training and competition environment, finances, roles, team atmosphere, travel and accommodation, and so forth would contribute to a better understanding of athletes' perception of organizational stress (Fletcher & Hanton, 2003; Hanton et al., 2005; McKay et al., 2008). The current coach–athlete stressors in football questionnaire only cover a limited part of what might be considered organizational stressors by elite football players. Hence, when considering the importance of the coach in sport when coping with stress (e.g., Kristiansen et al., in press), this measurement tech-

nology in addition to other quantitative measures or qualitative procedures may contribute to more knowledge. Further, to tap to what extent organizational stress and media stress are perceived as a factor influencing performance, well-designed inventories will provide a useful aid in the future (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009). With this in mind, despite the limitations, the results are interesting and should be followed up. The instruments designed for this investigation extend our knowledge and our possibilities for understanding organizational and media stressors.

Perspectives

The current study examined the links between motivational climate, achievement goals, and media and organizational stress among elite European football players. The findings of this study suggest that a motivational approach to perceived strain in football may combat and reduce the quantity, frequency, and/or intensity of coach–athlete and media stressors. Being able to cope with perceived stress is an important part of playing elite football. Consequently, those working with players need to have an awareness of the motivational processes extant in the context to better understand organizational and/or media stress. The evidence suggests that nurturing task involvement by setting criteria of success that are self-referenced and task involving better enables the athletes to cope with the two sources of stress. In addition, this study illustrates that organizational pressure and media attention add their own contribution to the more typical competitive stress experienced by football players playing in front of large crowds with large television audiences. This knowledge is not only important for coaches and other professionals dealing with professional football players but also for the organizations themselves both at the individual team level and national sporting organization level. As a result, this evidence may be used to broaden our competencies in order to understand the overall stress experience of elite athletic performers (Hanton & Fletcher, 2005).

Supporting Information

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article:

Appendix S1. Items of CASFQ (Coach-athlete Stressors in Football Questionnaire) and MSFQ (Media Stressors in Football Questionnaire).

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Key words: motivational climate, goal orientations, coach–athlete relationship.

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11

PAPER 4

Coping with negative media content: The experiences of professional football goalkeepers

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Abstract

The present study explored the experiences of three football goalkeepers coping with negative media coverage. Goalkeeping is a hard position to play as you become scrutinized from all angles, and keepers are often blamed for losses by the media. The study of the media as a stressor is a relatively unexplored field. In this investigation, we chose qualitative semi-structured interviews as an explorative method. The respondents who were interviewed came from three different teams in a European Premier Division. Results revealed that the coping strategies used by the three goalkeepers may be organized into three major categories; social support, avoidance and problem-focused coping. The evaluation of the coach meant more than the game reports printed in the press. To cope with the perceived negative content in the media, the goalkeepers avoided buying, reading or watching news reports, or giving interviews on match day. With experience, the goalkeepers reported getting better in focusing on the task and the next move, and did not worry as much about the match reports. Experience seemed to be crucial for this specialist position.

Key words: Coach support, avoidance coping, problem-focused coping

Coping with negative media coverage: The experiences of professional football goalkeepers

Life as an elite athlete in a popular sport includes massive media focus. For footballers, the most popular and media covered sport in the World, the media spotlight is particularly harsh. Media "sensationalize, particularize, and humorize" not only the sports results (Sisjord & Kristiansen, 2008), but everything about how the athletes perceived the game, the opponents, and the referee. The media reporting often goes beyond the strictly professional, even details about their private lives seem to find its way into the press (Dosil, 2006). Newspapers report their whereabouts on vacation; wives and girlfriends (termed WAGS in the press) become celebrities, and so on. Further, for elite footballers there is no "off season"! With the regular season lasting 9 to 10 months, and with major international tournaments in the summer, elite players are in the media spotlight the whole year round. However, we know little about the impact of the media on the athlete, or how the athletes cope with the constant media attention. Therefore, it is the focus of this investigation to determine whether this intense media attention is perceived as a stressor and how the athletes cope with it. In this study, we looked at football goalkeepers as they are very visible athletes in the world of football.

In football, it is the strikers who score the goals and end up as the media superstars. Goalkeepers, as the last line of defence, also get media attention, but not always positive media attention. Famous goalkeepers who reflect on their experiences in their biographies have addressed this issue. David Seaman (2001) points out that concentration is one of the most difficult aspects of a goalkeeper's game. He used all types of mental skills, because being a goalkeeper means that you have to cope with and accept that "you can make ten fantastic saves but then drop one through your legs and that will be the one everyone remembers" (p. 297). Being exposed to this type of criticism affects the relationship between

football players and journalists. Peter Shilton (2005) commented that sports writers made players very cautious, in some cases "distrusting every element of the press" (p. 194). Or as David Seaman (2001) remarked when he discussed one of his "infamous" mistakes: "if you believe the reporters, I had thrown the ball in the net myself" (p. 7). Interestingly, the athletes often experience something totally different to the substance of the story the journalists tell when reviewing a game; the athletes feel that the story told may be both constructed and distorted. To make things worse, it is this media version of events that they have to defend and discuss with family, friends, neighbours and fans. It is the version with which they must cope.

Coping with the media

The psychological term *coping* has been defined in a number of different ways, but the dominant model today is the transactional process perspective (Giacobbi, Lynn, Wetherington, Jenkins, Bodendorf, & Langley, 2004; Nicholls & Polman, 2007). Coping is viewed as a dynamic process following appraisal because of a situation (identified as threatening, challenging, etc) where an individual perceives an imbalance between the situation and his/her resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This imbalance is often referred to as stress, and McGrath's (1970) process definition underlines that stress is a "substantial imbalance between (environmental) demand and response capability, under conditions where failure to meet the demand has important consequences" (p. 20). Further, the transactional perspective emphasizes that stress neither resides in the person nor the environment, but in the relationship between the two. Environmental demands or external events encountered by an individual may be termed stressors (Fletcher, Hanton, & Mellalieu, 2006). The reports in the media may be considered an environmental stressor for elite athletes. However, how the elite athletes cope changes over time and in accordance with the situational contexts in which it occurs (Lazarus, 1993). The process of coping and adaption in turn affects environmental

conditions, personal resources, and future reactions (Fletcher et al., 2006). The difference in responses and interventions used to cope with the perceived stressor is a major component in the overall transactional stress process.

We do not know much about how athletes cope with negative media coverage. We do know that they feel the presence of the journalists as intrusive and that media reports are not always factual (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002). In their study, Durand-Bush and Salmela reported that World Champions and Olympic winners perceived the media as stressful before, during, and after major events. The winners admitted that they said what they perceived the reporters wanted to hear in order to terminate the interview, and they felt exhausted because the media followed their every move. The media can affect the self-confidence of an athlete by making him/her a hero, or by making him/her insecure simply from the "slant" of the article. Several studies have reported that media attention is a major stressor when athletes strive for excellence (e.g., Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, Medbery, & Peterson, 1999; Greenleaf, Gould, & Dieffenbach, 2001). Greenleaf and colleagues argue that media attention both before and during competition is experienced as a stressor, and that the proximity between the media and the athletes contributes to the stress. The media "is in your face" (1999, p. 173) and makes it harder to focus on the event.

It is interesting that so little attention has been paid to how the actors behind the presentations react to the way they are portrayed by the media. Because goalkeepers are singled out for media criticism more than any other player on their respective teams, players in this specialist position in football may serve as an illustrative example of how actors react to the media portrayals. As American goalkeeper Hahnemann playing in the British Premier League (Wolverhampton) recently said in an interview: "No one wanted to play back here. Part of the reason is, the press is so ruthless with us. Anything happens, and they blame the keepers" (Longman, 2010, p. D1). Unfortunately, Germany's goalkeeper Enke's recent tragic

death only emphasizes this perception and underlines the importance of gaining more knowledge about this topic. Throughout his career, Enke had been "subjected to a level of abuse which he had found it hard to cope with" (Connolly, 2009). Being pelted with mobile phones and beer bottles when making errors that proved decisive in games did not help Robert Enke to fight his depression and *fear of failure* that he struggled with during his entire career as goalkeeper, according to father and sport psychologist Dirk Enke (The Guardian, 2009).To what extent media scrutiny added additional pressure upon him is speculative. It was the purpose of this study, therefore, to explore how elite goalkeepers cope with the constant media attention and the strategies they use to cope with perceived negative media coverage.

Methods

We have focused on three goalkeepers in an elite Premier Division in Europe in this investigation[10], and a qualitative approach was chosen because we wanted to explore how the goalkeepers experience negative content by using their own words. Further, an examination through content analysis of the stressor and coping mechanisms was deemed preferable. Such an indirect examination provides a more independent mechanism for ensuring the link between perception of the media content and coping, and it expresses its transactional nature and exposes meaning rather than imposing it (Erera-Weatherly, 1996). In short, content analysis is a process for systematically analyzing all types of messages, and a technique which lies at the crossroads of qualitative and quantitative method (Kondracki, Wellman, & Amundson, 2002). The coding of raw messages is done according to a classification scheme, and it can be used to unobtrusively explore large amounts of textual information in order to ascertain the trends and patterns of the words used, their frequency, their relationships and the

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[10] This investigation is part of a larger study on two environmental stressors; media and organization, conducted in 2008 on three football teams in an elite Premier Division in Europe. As the three goalkeepers from the respective teams were so willing to share their stories, and that their experience of the media turned out to be so special from the rest of the team, extra attention to this specialized position were given.

structures and discourses of communication (Grbich, 2007). We will present two types of content analyses; 1) newspaper article coverage of goalkeepers; and 2) multiple case stories to illustrate the use of the main categories revealed in the interviews. The multiple case stories are considered useful when a number of cases may be studied jointly in order to investigate a phenomenon (Stake, 2005).

Participants

We conducted a purposeful sampling procedure (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) according to three criteria in order to get goalkeepers with media experience: First, the football players had to be goalkeepers in a Premier Division in Europe; second, they had to have represented their country and national team at least once that season; and third, they had to have experience from several teams in Europe. They ranged in age from 27 up to 34. All three elite goalkeepers ('Steven', 'Owen' and 'Daniel') agreed to participate. Several measures have been taken to protect the confidentiality of the goalkeepers. They were given pseudonyms, team, year of season, and nationality is left out in order to protect their anonymity. Hence, this concern with protecting the confidentiality of our three interviewees constrained us in presenting some of the data, and may have reduced the presented findings.

Data Collection

Newspaper articles. The content analysis was based on all articles concerning the three elite division teams of Steven, Owen and Daniel from two of the largest national circulation newspapers in the country collected during the football season. One newspaper is a broadsheet with detailed news and articles, and the other is a more subjective tabloid with big headlines.

Interview guide and procedure. The semi-structured interviews were developed and conducted according to ethical guidelines and criteria stated by Patton (2002) and Kvale (1997). The interviews started with: (a) General introduction about how it is to be a football

goalkeeper; (b) perception of media coverage; (c) how they coped with the constant media attention; and (d) illustrative examples of media texts were discussed. Patton (2002) suggests using illustrative examples as a clarifying strategy after having begun with simple, straightforward, and open-ended questions. Here they were used to facilitate responses by discussing a few recent media articles and their headlines. By the framing of the questions, we opened up for them to mention articles they had reacted to during the season. For each keeper, the interviewer also mentioned two news texts and asked for an opinion. Interestingly, there was no need to show the texts, all three goal keepers were familiar with the examples chosen and two keepers spoke about the specific articles without us prompting them. We then talked about the content, the headlines and possible impact on the team/athlete as a strategy to reveal some of the complex interaction between the person and environmental antecedents. In the interview guide, there was a flexibility to change the order of questions and probe interesting areas that arose to follow the participant's perspective. Probes and follow-up questions were also used in order to deepen the responses. The athletes were not given any definitions of terms such as stress and coping, but if there were words in the questions they did not understand it was promptly explained to them. The first author carried out the interviews at the location of the different teams. In all three interviews, the athletes perceived that the opportunity to tell how they coped with the media was positive, and some even discussed other aspects after we finished. Every interview lasted between 47-65 minutes.

Data analysis

     Newspaper articles. We conducted both quantitative and qualitative content analyses of the newspaper articles. First, we used a quantitative coding system that coded the articles into number of one-page, half-page notices, and so forth of the teams. Additionally, we had a deductive content coding system that divided the texts to highlight the various elements; goalkeeper, coach, team/game, athlete and total number of pages. Finally, the few major

newspaper articles specifically about goalkeepers were content analysed more closely in order to characterize them and get an overview of the media coverage for these goalkeepers.

Interviews. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, which resulted in 45 pages of single spaced raw text. The research team discussed categories before the first author used MAXQDA and coded the raw material into main coping categories, and associated sub-categories were placed within this deductive analysis (Kondracki et al., 2002). In cases of uncertainty, we discussed the coding within the research team. Further, the data have been cross-case analyzed (Patton, 2002) in order to verify athlete's opinions and meanings on stressors and how they coped with them. The process of placing categories in themes included both a deductive and inductive analysis: Deductive, (e.g., when categorizing social support into three functions according to Schaefer, Coyne, and Lazarus, 1982); and inductive (when grouping aspects together when they reflected similar meanings). The following qualitative content analyses organized the entire amount of data into one stressor (media) and into three main categories of coping strategies. As a case study is both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry as well, we have chosen to let the three goalkeepers present (and represent) the use of the different coping strategies found in the interviews. As a result, each case story represented one coping strategy. Lastly, the three goalkeepers were sent a copy of the first draft of the article for comments. They identified a few mistakes, accepted the use of quotations, but did not offer any additional information and/or changes. Consequently, it was concluded that the themes accurately represented their experiences of coping with negative media content.

Results

Before beginning the analysis of the goalkeepers' perception of the media content and their coping responses, a more thorough description of the media's coverage of the goalkeepers is needed and serves as a backdrop to the study. This description comes from the

content analysis of the newspapers in this study. Evidently, there are two aspects of media coverage that athletes have to cope with: *Outcome (amount);* and *negative content.* The amount of media coverage may not necessarily cause stress as long as the media attention is perceived as positive. However, in periods with extensive coverage, even positive coverage may turn out to be a source of strain for the goalkeepers. Negative content, on the other hand, may be experienced as being disruptive for football players. The concern is with the media's fascination with presenting sport images that exaggerate the spectacular, focusing on rivalries, and "manufacturing reasons" for audience interest in sporting events. The perception of the goalkeepers to this negative content is covered in the case stories.

Media coverage of goal keepers.

In total, the three teams had 681 articles and short notices in all sizes which amounted to approximately 283 newspaper pages. *Back page A* means getting the headlines on the back page of the broad sheet, which may be interpreted as being *the* most important sport news that day in the country. Interestingly, the goalkeepers did not get one back page headline. Table 1 gives an overview of the coverage.

Table 1

Amount (vertical) and content (horizontal) of media coverage during one season

	Goalkeeper	Coach	Team/game	Athlete	Total
1/1 Page	**7**	11	103	70	191
½ Page	**2**	9	46	28	85
1/4 Page	**2**	2	29	12	47
Back page A	**-**	2	16	10	28
Notice	**15**	33	136	148	332

First, being a goalkeeper means that you have less media attention than some of the other key players on the team. As a goalkeeper, if you do the job competently, apparently you are not noticed very much. But once you make a mistake, then the media spotlight gets turned on. Further, table 1 reveals that goalkeeping is not normally a headline story in the coverage of the football teams (at least this season). It is difficult to summarize how much is written

about these three goalkeepers as most often they get a few lines reflecting their performance during a match within an article. This lack of interest may be interpreted that the newspaper sports pages are not open to them as only seven out of 191 one-page stories were about goalkeeping. In total, this means that goalkeepers receive only 3 % of media football coverage despite the position being important to the team.

Usually, newspaper journalists write two to three lines with a phrase such as "goalkeeper X was good", or most likely: "he made a mistake which resulted in a goal for X-team". When the team lost the match, the focus was on the winning team. Often the only person mentioned in a newspaper article from the losing team may be the goalkeeper who "contributed" to the victory of the opposing team by making a mistake. An additional twist is that the journalists often take the perspective of the opposing team and "thank" the goalkeeper for the victory with a comment such as: "goalkeeper X was in charge of splitting the points yesterday". This implies that the team drew in this particular match because of the goalkeeper's mistake. The journalists frame the story as if the goalkeeper made a wrong decision that placed his team at risk of losing.

Second, the framing of the goalkeepers in the major articles about goalkeepers was mostly negative. The goalkeepers would get the headlines and a major article for two reasons in our sample. Firstly, when the goalkeeper made a mistake and the opposing team scored. The framing is often completed with photographs of the goalkeeper lying down and the celebrations of the goal scorer. This is often accompanied by headlines such as: *MASSACRE*, *Made a fool of, Sleepy Goalkeeper,* and so forth. This framing may contribute to an interpretation of the goalkeeper as being the scapegoat and the person to blame for a loss. The photographs maintain this dramatic image of the goalkeeper often alone with his teammates nowhere in sight! Secondly, goalkeepers are visible when they are selected for their respective

national team. It is a hard position to play, and being selected meant being scrutinized from all angles and having the selection debated both before and after any performance.

To summarize, when Steven, Owen and Daniel perceived the media as a stressor, they referred mostly to the negative content of journal articles. How they coped with this negative exposure is discussed through the case studies of each goalkeeper.

Steven

When asked about his experiences with the media, Steven stated that he often felt he "had not been to the same game" as the journalists. He opined that the journalists seemed to be "without knowledge beyond junior football". Steven also added: "it is important to remember that you are never as good or as bad as the papers write, you are something in-between". However, when discussing his relationship to journalists, it became obvious that the one person he trusted to know better than the journalists was the coach:

> I really appreciate support from the coach, like last year when he told me that I would play regardless of the number of mistakes I made…I knew that I most likely would not make so many more mistakes. I did not make any mistakes for three games in a row. I got confidence from him, it helped.

The coach provided *informational* support that was very essential for Steven to put what the media wrote about him in perspective! An important aspect of being a successful goalkeeper is to keep self-confidence high and "to feel safe" when doing your job. Because it can be stress provoking when the press criticizes the goalkeeper, the importance of the coach to give supportive and constructive criticisms, such as being more offensive in the "box" is experienced as being helpful. "Then I feel safe again. I think that if a coach shows that he has confidence in a player, he can improve 10-15%". As the goalkeepers learn how to minimize the importance of each individual game, they also learn to cope with the media. And as

Steven added: "I don't think that what the media writes affects me any more, at least not these two past years".

Steven's statement that he was not affected as much as he used to be by media coverage was further confirmed when talking about the media coverage of goalkeepers in the division that season. It was not "his" coverage that was discussed, but the coverage of some of the other goalkeepers in the League. It was fascinating to listen to stories about other goalkeepers and of the perceived unfair treatment by coaches and the media:

> He (a goalkeeper on another team) is now blamed for the goals, but at the time it happened I think they were hard goals to save. I feel sorry for him, I think the coach should have had more confidence in him, supported him until he felt safe in the goal.

The perceived unfair media treatment of goalkeepers seems to unite them because Daniel and Owen also spoke empathically about their "colleagues" on other teams. This was an unexpected finding.

The family is also an important support resource. The family is the caretaker of *emotional* support. Because of previous injuries (from which he had recovered well), Steven talked a lot about his family as being important when being faced with questions about performance and his ability as a goalkeeper. His wife and family function as discussion partners that helps to keep his focus straight and to trust his own feelings and evaluations: "I talk a little with my wife … I don't want to include too many of the things going on. It is actually enough to talk to her, and then think a little… I don't need to talk to more people". The importance of talking to wives (and children) was also supported by Daniel and Owen.

Owen

Owen, Steven, and Daniel all discussed how they avoided the media; hence, Owen's reflection on the use of *avoidance* coping is worth noting. When asked about his experiences

with the media, Owen instantly talked about his use of avoidance coping, he simply tried to avoid journalists, and thereby avoided some media coverage. The general theme was that he used all means possible to avoid contact with media coverage. First of all, he avoided buying newspapers and reading them. The only exception was when he had done a longer interview, and then it was appropriate to check what the journalist had actually written. However, Owen pointed out that he was more concerned about the write ups in the press when he was a younger player, and then he was eager to buy the newspapers. Becoming more experienced had made him more confident in himself and less likely to read press reports. Becoming more mature and moving away from the family home had also been an advantage:

> I have started to relax more, but it was harder when I still lived with my parents. They read the newspapers and they wanted to know and asked me because they wanted the "truth". […] I tried to explain to them that the article was only the journalist's point of view… I turned inward and did not say much.

In this sense, the closest circle around a goalkeeper not only provided social support, but the social support also facilitated avoidance coping.

To completely avoid media sports reporting is not always possible, therefore Owen had a strategy to make himself "unattractive":

> When people want to congratulate you, you tell them that there are some tough games left and we don't have the championship yet, next game will be tough and some teams are getting better and better. It is all about giving [journalists] *boring answers*, the type of answer they don't want to hear. They would rather hear that you are the Champion. I think this is ridiculous, and I feel sorry for the readers of the newspapers, for they must be fed up reading these interviews. At least those not interested in football!

This quotation is rather interesting: In order to avoid attention or coverage that may cause negative stress, Owen tried to be dull, "grey" and boring in his answers. The message seems to be: If you don't want to be the next headline, be dull and boring! By taking charge of one's responses, this strategy has elements of problem-focused coping. However, this may not be a coping strategy approved by team leaders and sponsors: "It is good to be without media attention, even though my team and sponsors probably would want me to be more in the front line". Owen admitted to have a responsibility to talk to the press: "We are in show business; we must give of ourselves to the newspapers. It's our job, people come to see us play and pay for it, and we must never forget that". Being there and available, but being "grey" seems to be a compromise favoured by Daniel and Steven as well.

Owens' team had done well during the season when the data were collected, so he had been exposed to extra attention and focus from the media because of team results. However, he was not pleased about using too much time on journalists before important games, and he had recently made a "rule" about not giving any interviews that would appear on game day because of a recent incident. An article appeared on game day and he felt it had put extra pressure on him, and he believed that the end result for him was to make several mistakes that day. When asked if the article was perceived as stressful and had a debilitating effect on his performance, Owen responded positively:

> I hoped and believed that it would not happen, and I also believed that it would be OK; we had done so well early in the season. But this was the first game after the vacation, and I guess that a little unconsciously I was thinking about the newspaper article about me… and then it actually happened [an error…]. And then it happened again the next game, and there were so many that wanted to talk to me […]. *I cannot say that it didn't affect me, even though I wished it hadn't*, […] but when a newspaper wanted to

make a pre-match interview with me before the next game, I told them that I only wanted to do it if it would be published after the game.

Coping with journalists and the use of avoidance is based on experience. As it is not possible to change what is written, the goalkeepers focused about what they say to journalists.

Daniel

In contrast to the other two, Daniel first joked about his relationship with the media and how he coped with the media coverage when asked about his experiences. He uttered that he first "put on sunglasses" before he read anything. That might be one way of minimizing and rationalizing the importance of mistakes they made in difficult situations. For Daniel, it seems that the use of *problem-focused* strategies was essential for adaptive coping, and rationalization was important:

> I have not been exposed to many of those types of articles … but the newspapers make the goalkeeper the scapegoat, *here he is!* …and of course, I often suffer together with the other goalkeepers when things like that happen … I don't get annoyed by it, but I feel sorry for them when I read stuff like that, that the newspaper really makes a scapegoat out of them…they [the journalists] should know that in football the goalkeeper is a very visible position. And if you have a bad day at work, then things may get ugly. I think everybody is entitled to have a bad day at work… Often I wonder, why don't they blame the striker for not scoring goals?

Having a bad day at work may make the goalkeeper rationalize his mistakes, but the importance placed on football may make this hard for those involved. Daniel said with a sigh; "it's a lot of responsibility on our shoulders" [i.e., being a goalkeeper].

Mistakes do happen and Daniel explained that he simply had to have "strategies that make you continue and focus on what's coming up next". The key was to think ahead and

adopt a task involved focus. One good example of this coping strategy came when Daniel reflected over the media coverage he got when he had made several "mistakes" (according to the press) with the following statement of how he constantly worked on how to put things behind him:

> The game wasn't that bad. I let in a lot of goals, but *I was not to blame*, it was boring [hinting to the media coverage]. On a really good day I could have taken two of them, but the goals were very difficult to save. It's just like that.

Finally, Daniel gave several examples where problem-focused thinking was mixed with informational support. As with Steven, he relied on team debriefing after games. This source of information (and support) helped and protected the goalkeepers from being too affected by the media articles. They learned to realize what the "truth" was behind the coverage. However, mental toughness is required in connection with a coping strategy such as this; the goalkeepers need to be mentally strong to stand both the competitive stress of failure and to be blamed for the team losing by the media. This was commented upon by Daniel: "They [other people] say that goalies are very special, [points to the head], they have to be mentally stronger". This standpoint was also supported by Steven and Owen. In addition, constructive debriefing is helpful to recuperate for the upcoming game.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to examine how football goalkeepers experience and cope with media exposure. We first evaluated the media coverage of the football games of the three teams of the goalkeepers involved by content analyzing the media reports of each team in the columns of two national newspapers over the whole season. We then interviewed the actors of the same coverage. The newspaper quantitative content analyses revealed that goalkeepers only get a small percent of the total team outcome coverage (see Table 1).

Goalkeepers featured only when they made a "miraculous" save, or failed to save a shot that ought to have been saved, most frequently the latter. This finding was further confirmed by Steven, Owen and Daniel in the interviews. In addition, they also stated that the better the team performed the more coverage the team had to cope with.

However, failure is also "news", and after making several mistakes during the course of the season, "I was subsequently thrown away as bad meat", Daniel uttered. As a result, he concluded: "The media has a lot of power; they really have a lot of power" and the footballers were only "a piece of meat" to journalists. This perception of being discriminated against in football media coverage was a common view of the goalkeepers *and* worth noting. The comments of these three goalkeepers echo biographies written by previous goalkeepers such as David Seaman (2001): "I wonder if they [i.e., the media] realise how much their constant criticism can affect the confidence of individual players and of the team as a whole. I can't believe that this is what they want to achieve, but maybe it is?" (p. 21).

As a result, coping is important. Taken collectively, three main coping strategies emanated from the data; social support, avoidance and problem-focused coping strategies. In our study, the goalkeepers used several strategies concurrently to make coping effective (Nicholls, Holt, & Polman, 2005). Our findings in the present study are in many ways consistent with the dimensions measured by the Coping Function Questionnaire (Kowalski & Crocker, 2001). However, Kowalski and Crocker use the term emotional-focused coping instead of social support (which is one of many emotion-focused strategies). The evidence from the current investigation makes it more correct to label the category social support due to the specific focus placed on it by the participants of the study.

Table 2

Overview of type of coping strategies used to cope with the media.

Social support (coach, family, friends)	Avoidance strategies	Problem-focused strategies
Trust from coach is important before and after mistakes	Avoid buying newspapers or reading at internet	Rationalize what they (the journalists) write about you
Discuss your experiences with other goalkeepers	Give "boring" answers and not draw attention to your person	Focus on next task and plan ahead (also during game)
Talk with and support from wife and family (and help with avoidance)	Avoid giving interviews that will appear on game day	Team debriefing and analysis of the game

To use social support in order to keep the self-confidence high was a common theme that became evident in the interviews with the three goalkeepers. Social support is a multidimensional construct and may be divided into different types and number of dimensions. In order to avoid overlap, we have chosen to use the system of Schaefer et al. (1982). Previous research has demonstrated that social support *per se* has proved important in health psychology, as well as being an important factor influencing ways in which people cope with daily hassles and major life events (Aldwin, 2007). As a result, social support is considered to be a buffer to stress as well as being a coping resource (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Social support as a coping resource helps people to manage the negative effect of stress (see Holt & Hoar, 2006 for an extensive discussion). Further, Crocker (1992) has stated that social support is an important coping strategy in sport for dealing with competitive stress, and this has been supported empirically (e.g., Gould et al., 1999; Holt & Hogg, 2002; Kristiansen & Roberts, 2010; Rees & Hardy, 2004). However, the use of this coping strategy to cope with negative media coverage is a novel finding in the present study. The importance of informational and emotional support was underlined extensively by the goalkeepers. Steven in particular gave illustrative examples of the use of informational and emotional support.

Another common theme was the use of avoidance coping in order to cope with the daily media "struggle"; meaning the daily worry about being negatively framed. Avoidance coping can consist of both behavioural (remove from situation) and cognitive blocking strategies (Krohne, 1993). The use of avoidance coping has previously been reported in sport (e.g., Kowalski & Crocker, 2001; Giacobbi et al. 2004). Our three goalkeepers argued for the importance of this strategy as an adaptive one, consistent with Anshel and Weinberg (1996) who also reported avoidance as useful when coping with negative media coverage. As underlined by Owen, it was important to not only avoid the coverage, but also use strategies to stand out as colourless or "grey." It was noted, however, that being in "show business" makes this a hard call. Daniel confessed that elite athletes have a responsibility to talk to the press because it is expected of them. Avoidance coping also has been commonly employed concurrently with problem-focused strategies (Reeves, Nicholls, & McKenna, 2009). Problem-focused coping strategies are usually considered to facilitate performance (e.g., Ntoumanis & Biddle, 1998). Consequently, one might argue that the use of avoidance coping may be adaptive depending on the stressor, especially if it is used in combination with other coping strategies. From the extant literature, it has been argued that avoidance coping strategies are beneficial in the initial stages of coping, with problem-focused strategies being beneficial at the latter stages of coping (e.g., Roth & Cohen, 1986). Further, use of avoidance strategies may also facilitate problem-focused strategies when they serve as a "time-out" to refocus (Aldwin, 2007). In the present case, it would appear that avoidance coping might be a useful strategy when the media is the stressor.

This hypothesis was further supported by the use of problem-focused coping strategies by Steven, Owen and Daniel. With age and experience, the use of problem-focused strategies seems to be the coping strategy of choice! Problem-focused coping strategies embrace a wide array of problem-solving strategies and strategies that are directed inwards (Lazarus &

Folkman, 1984). Athletes typically use a variety of these coping strategies (e.g., Ntoumanis & Biddle, 1998). However, the use of problem-focused strategies is to a certain extent dependent on the types of problems being dealt with, which makes transsituational comparisons harder to make (Giacobbi et al., 2004; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In the present context, the goalkeepers used several types of problem-focused strategies to cope with perceived negative media exposure. Steven talked about the importance of post game team debriefing and analysis of the game with the coach in charge. All three goalkeepers talked about rationalizing their perception of media coverage, and Owen and Daniel added that they preferred using their energy on focusing on the next game instead. The same sentiment has previously been reported by Seaman (2001) during his playing days.

Finally, and as an endnote, the three goalkeepers were adamant in their criticism of the Annual National Football Banquet at the end of the season highlighting an award termed *the goal of the year*. They admitted being nervous to see if they were the goalkeeper letting in the goal, as the goalkeeper always appeared to be well beaten. "There should be an award category with *the best save of the year* at the annual banquet as well" stated Daniel so that the work of goalkeepers was more fully recognized. Such a public recognition of goalkeeping prowess would probably contribute positively and make it easier to cope with being a goalkeeper.

Conclusion

The findings from this investigation may have several applied implications for other high visibility sports, and add insight into coping with negative media content. First, coaches should recognize the importance of informational and emotional support when working with athletes who have to cope with negative media exposure. The opinion of the coach meant more to the goalkeepers in this study than the evaluation of the journalists. In addition, it is important to stay together as a team when confronted with the media and not blame each other

when matches are lost. The goalkeeper may have made a mistake (often hard to judge in the heat of the moment), but the coach should realize how critical his public support is for the player.

Second, coping with negative media content is an important factor to control. It might be practical to have media training as a preventive strategy, as some teams do. The media "feeds" on the player who speaks without thinking, or makes inflammatory comments, providing the headlines for the next issue. When you are angry, tired, and have just lost an important game, it is too easy to blame someone, and it results in increased stress for the one blamed. It is important for the coach to keep these issues within the locker room (Becker, 2009). Media exposure may easily elevate competitive stress when you feel that your performance is being scrutinized both from within (coach, owners, team mates) and by outside sources (media and fans).

From the present findings, two factors seem to act as a prophylactic to negative media exposure: Age, and experience. Elite goalkeepers learn to adjust to what they deem as unfair criticism, and they become a better, more self-confident and stable goalkeeper with age (Nicholls & Polman, 2007). This echoes the argument made by previous goalkeepers such as David Seaman (2001) and Peter Shilton (2005) who argue that it takes eight to nine years to teach a goalkeeper the high standards necessary at the elite level. It is a specialist position, and goalkeepers are in their prime around the age of 30-32. To learn to deal with the extra media scrutiny is probably also an important part of this process. Further, this is in accord with the evidence emanating from the transactional perspective (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Goalkeepers need to have the self belief and confidence to maintain performance during the 90 minutes of a football match and protect themselves from the ensuing media exposure.

Limitations and future research directions

Undoubtedly, when only interviewing 3 athletes from one sport there are several obvious methodological limitations. The descriptive nature of this study may be one. However, we wanted to provide insight into these footballers' experiences. Therefore, only players with a certain expertise level were chosen to add richness in the information obtained, though this unique elite population is limited. Moreover, this small and specialized sample of European football goalkeepers may reduce the generalizibility of these findings to other football positions, football in other cultures, and of course consistency across other sports.

Conversely, the strength of this investigation is that it provides one of the first systematic examinations of the influence of media stress on elite athletes. An additional strength is that the findings demonstrate that the coping strategies are directly linked to origin of the stress from the media (Fletcher et al., 2006). Yet, this study only deals very superficially with some important issues in the coverage of the media on major sports such as the where the power lies in the journalist-athlete relationship, the major cultural differences that occur, the importance of the sport, the financial resources behind the sport and what will be the best way to cope with these issues. However, within the constraints of this research, we demonstrate that coping with media coverage when one is an elite athlete is a viable area of research. We need more knowledge about how to cope with (negative) media coverage as well as how to protect elite athletes against journalists and media attention. We urge more attention to this issue and a multi-method approach to study coping with media, for example ideographic longitudinal research, narrative analyses, and quantitative measurement.

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PAPER 5

Media exposure and adaptive coping in elite football

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Abstract

The purpose of this investigation was to examine how football players in a Premier Division in Europe experience media coverage (both outcome and negative content) during one season. We used sequential mixed methods in order to detect the different layers in this exploratory study. The results supported the hypothesis that a performance climate increases the perception of negative media exposure. Further, the football players coped with the media by using coping strategies such as social support, avoidance and problem-focused strategies. In addition, keeping the climate mastery oriented seemed pivotal, especially when a coach/team leader wanted to avoid negative media coverage to affect an entire team. Both individual coping strategies and team coping (mastery climate) seemed necessary to keep and protect a stable self-confidence among the football players and maintain team effort to perform.

Key words: media stress, team coping, motivational climate

Media exposure and adaptive coping in elite football

An understudied topic in sport psychology research is the impact of media coverage on elite athletes. There are a few research studies that mention media as one stressor among personal, competitive and organizational stressors. For example, Cresswell and Eklund (2007) found that some New Zealand rugby players perceived inaccurate assessments and criticisms by the media to be an ongoing source of stress, and the media was referred to as a *rare* source of stress for referees (Anshel & Weinberg, 1996). Further, Noblet and Gifford (2002) underline how stressful Australian footballers experienced the daily negative media scrutiny. Richardson, Anderson and Morris (2008) also state that media exposure is one stress factor that may lead to negative performance and overtraining. Given the huge media coverage of elite sport, research into the impact of this environmental stressor on athletes in our modern, globalized society on sportsmen and women is needed. Nowhere is this global media coverage so evident as in the Olympic movement and, especially, world football (Amara, Henry, Liang, & Uchiumi, 2005).

When coping with the media coverage they garner, we imply that negative media coverage may be harmful to the athletes' self-confidence and perceptions of own abilities and skills. Giddens has on several occasions (e.g., 1991) commented upon the *mediated* experience and its influence on both self-identity and the basic organisation of social relations. For him, the person's identity is bound up with the fragile nature of the narrative biography that the individual constantly provides about herself/himself. Unfortunately, these mediated inputs might be in conflict with the athlete's own narrative, and his/her self-identity could then be influenced by the perspectives that he/she adopts from the media (Gauntlett, 2008; Giddens, 1991). Any new incident, such as missing a penalty in an important football shoot out, will instantly be integrated together with the reactions from others with which the

person maintains regular interaction. Not only does one feel bad about not converting the penalty, but when one is also made the media scapegoat (as Beckham once was, McNulty, 2004), one might assume that an athlete's satisfactory "story" about herself/himself as a successful athlete might be changed.

A recent study of goalkeepers revealed that making yourselves "grey" and relatively "dull" and avoiding the media as much as possible may be one coping strategy for negative reporting (Kristiansen, Roberts, & Sisjord, in press-b). However, it might be a hard call considering the "show business" nature of elite football. As a result, the findings suggest that the use of avoidance coping may be adaptive depending on the stressor, with media stress being one where avoidance coping makes sense. In this way one may prevent the media from interfering with one's self-confidence. However, when owners, investors and sponsors want you to be visible and promote the club and the "brand", other strategies such as problem-focused coping needs to be included in the coping repertoire. Therefore, an investigation on how elite athletes cope with media coverage seems to be warranted.

Conceptual framework for this investigation

Forty years ago, McGrath (1970) noted that past exposure to stress, practice, and training to deal with a situation could reduce uncertainty and therefore modify how a person reacts to the stressor. In addition, individuals may experience the same event differently (Lazarus, 1999). Later research (Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, Medbery, & Peterson, 1999; Dugdale, Eklund & Gordon, 2002; Orlick & Partington, 1988) has emphasized the importance of planning, preparation and automated routines to manage stressors and to cope in a competitive environment. The psychological term *coping* has been defined in a number of different ways, but the dominant model today is the transactional process perspective (e.g., Nicholls & Polman, 2007). Coping is viewed as a dynamic process following appraisal within a situation where an individual perceives an imbalance between the demands of the context

and his/her resources. This may be labelled as being threatening and/or challenging (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This imbalance is often referred to as stress, and is based on McGrath's (1970) process definition that underlines that stress is a "substantial imbalance between (environmental) demand and response capability, under conditions where failure to meet the demand has important consequences" (p. 20). The transactional perspective emphasizes that stress resides neither in the person nor the environment, but in the relationship between the two. Environmental demands or external events encountered by an individual may be termed stressors (Fletcher, Hanton, & Mellalieu, 2006).

Sports reporting in the media may be considered an environmental stressor for elite athletes. However, how the elite athletes cope with media stressors changes over time in accordance with the situational contexts in which it occurs (Lazarus, 1993). The process of coping and adaption in turn affects environmental conditions, personal resources, and future reactions (Fletcher et al., 2006). The difference in responses and interventions used to cope with the perceived stressor is a major component in the overall transactional stress process.

It was initially recognized that motivation was important in this process (Lazarus, Deese, & Osler, 1952; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), but motivation has been almost totally ignored in subsequent theory and research (Lazarus, 1993). One motivational theory appears to embed itself neatly into this conceptual model: Achievement goal theory (Harwood & Chan, 2010). Achievement goal theory (AGT; e.g., Ames, 1992; Duda & Hall, 2001; Nicholls, 1989; Roberts, 2001, in press; Roberts, Treasure, & Conroy, 2007) is easily applied to the sport context because not only are the goals in sport clearly achievement goals most of the time, "but success and failure, and personal competence tend to be unambiguous to all participants, players, and spectators" (Roberts, 2001, p. 17). In addition, AGT has previously been used successfully on research on coping and stress (e.g., Kim & Duda, 1998;

Kristiansen, Roberts, & Abrahamsen, 2008; Ntoumanis, Biddle, & Haddock, 1999; Pensgaard, & Roberts, 2003).

In brief, the theory assumes that the individual is an intentional, goal-directed organism that strives to demonstrate ability or competence, or avoid demonstrating incompetence, in achievement situations. In such situations, individuals are assumed to function in either a state of task or ego goal involvement at any one time. When an athlete is task involved, the focus is on demonstrating mastery of tasks, and perceptions of ability are typically self-referenced. When ego involved, on the other hand, the athlete is preoccupied with winning and in demonstrating superior ability to others where perceived ability is characteristically normatively referenced. However, the state of involvement may change quickly from one to the other (Gernigon, d'Arripe-Longueville, Delignières, & Ninot, 2004). Determining each state of goal involvement are both dispositional and situational motivational factors (as in the transactional perspective). The dispositional factors are termed achievement goal orientations, where one is predisposed to use task (task orientation) or ego (ego orientation) involved criteria of demonstrating competence.

Similar to goal orientations, perceptions of the motivational climate are assumed to reflect task and/or ego involving criteria of success and failure. Ames (1992) argued that two dimensions of the motivational climate, namely mastery and performance are crucial to understand achievement cognitions and behaviors in achievement contexts such as sport. Ames argued that when parents, teachers, and/or coaches use task involving criteria of success when giving feedback within that achievement task, then a mastery climate is created. Similarly, when giving ego involving criteria of success when giving feedback, then a performance climate is created. The evidence is quite clear that when we adopt ego involving criteria in sport achievement contexts, then athletes experience more anxiety and stress (e.g., Abrahamsen, Roberts, & Pensgaard, 2008).

The argument made in this research is that the media may act as an environmental stressor (Fletcher et al., 2006) that impacts the perceived motivational climate of the athlete as well as their goal orientation. One example is the heightened expectations for gold medals or championships made by sports reporters. We know from previous research that athletes prefer to compete with a minimal focus on the competitive outcome (e.g., Pensgaard & Duda, 2002; Pensgaard & Roberts, 2002). When journalists constantly question athletes about the likelihood of winning medals in an upcoming Olympic event, this is perceived as stressful (Kristiansen et al., in press-b). The media attention may affect how the coach handles the situation as well as the athletes' focus (Kristiansen & Roberts, 2010). According to AGT theory, media coverage, even positive coverage, makes the outcome more salient and this in itself is likely to make the upcoming competition more ego involving. Not only are one's goals and expectations made public which increases ego orientation and makes the competitive setting more performance oriented, but competitive stressors may be exacerbated when the media reports discuss the consequences of the competitive outcome. A performance climate exacerbates the perception of media and organizational stress, while a mastery focus in the climate has a buffering effect on media and organizational stress (e.g., Kristiansen, Halvari, & Roberts, in press-a).

Being task involved is an attribute that seems to be associated with adaptive coping strategies (mostly problem-focused) that help the athlete to overcome distractions and develop the ability to focus on the essential performance aspects of competing successfully (e.g., Ntoumanis et al., 1999; Pensgaard & Roberts, 2003). In addition, there is evidence from qualitative research that avoidance coping strategies are effective when coping with the stress perceived to be caused by the media (e.g., Kristiansen et al., in press-b). While problem-focused coping is deemed more adaptive in the long term, avoidance coping might be helpful when dealing with immediate threats (Anshel & Kaissidis, 1997; Kim & Duda, 2003). In addition, social support is considered to be a buffer to stress as well as being a coping

resource (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Social support as a coping resource helps people to manage the negative effect of stress (see Holt & Hoar, 2006 for an extensive discussion). Further, Crocker (1992) stated that social support is an important coping strategy in sport when dealing with competitive stress, and this has subsequently been supported empirically (e.g., Gould et al., 1999; Holt & Hogg, 2002; Kristiansen & Roberts, 2010; Rees & Hardy, 2004).

The transactional perspective makes it possible to demonstrate the interplay between motivation, stress and coping. However, these theoretical links between AGT, stress and coping are still at an early stage of development in sport (Harwood & Chan, 2010). Clearly, the athlete's personal beliefs about the demonstration of competence and the psychosocial environment play relevant roles in how he/she deals with environmental stressors such as the media. Based on the arguments above, we might expect that a task oriented athlete performing in a mastery climate is associated with more adaptive coping responses in the face of threats, challenges, and setbacks. Therefore, to better determine the conceptual relationships between AGT, stress and coping, we investigated how a sample of elite football players experienced the media as a stressor and how they spontaneously coped with media exposure? The research questions were: (1) Does a performance climate increase the perception of media stress; (2) how do football players cope with negative media exposure; and (3) does the perception of the media as a stressor affect an entire team?

Mixed Methods

We decided to use mixed methods in this investigation (e.g., Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009), because we wanted to look at actual media coverage of the players and their perception of it. As a result, quantitative questionnaires, qualitative interviews and collection of all articles from two newspapers during one season were collected for the three teams in the study. Accordingly, we have data that covers three layers of knowledge about this novel

research field: Quantitatively derived relationships between motivation, stress and coping; case stories where different data were discussed with the players; and finally, a more detailed qualitative examination of the aforementioned relationships. The design was a *sequential* mixed method design (Greene, 2008; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Typical of this approach is that one method prominently informs the next. Due to the sequential design, theory is first used in a manner consistent with the component that comes first. We have conducted three strands, and a strand of a research design is "a phase of a study that includes three stages: conceptualization stage, experimental stage (methodological/analytical), and inferential stage" (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 345).

Strand 1: Associations between motivational climate, stress and coping

   Participants. Participants were 82 elite football players (M_{age} = 25.17 years, SD = 5.19). Three different professional male teams in a Premier Division in Europe were contacted with the help of the national Football Association. As in any Premier Division of professional football in Europe, there were international players from several countries on the teams. Many of the players had experience with their respective national teams.

   Procedure. The football players completed a questionnaire package. The teams were visited after morning training when they were gathered to eat lunch in the beginning of the season. The athletes were willing to participate after the purpose of the investigation was given. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and the investigation was conducted in accordance with ethical research guidelines.

   Measurement. The specific questionnaires were Perception of Success Questionnaire (POSQ; Roberts & Balague, 1989; Roberts, Treasure, & Balague, 1998), Perceived Motivational Climate Questionnaire (PMCSQ; Seifriz, Duda, & Chi, 1992), Brief COPE (Carver, 1997), and two constructed stress questionnaires to measure organizational (defined as Coach-athlete issues) and media stress. The questionnaires were termed Coach-athlete

Stressors in Football Questionnaire (CASFQ) and Media Stress in Football Questionnaire (MSFQ). The two new questionnaires were developed specifically for the present research as questionnaires do not currently exist. The development and psychometric properties are reported elsewhere, and they have demonstrated adequate validity and reliability (Kristiansen et al, in press-a). The 7 items of the CASFQ focuses on the coach-athlete relationship, while the 6 items of the MSFQ measures experience of negative media coverage and outcome coverage. Responses from all the scales were indicated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5) with the exception of the Brief COPE which indicates responses on a 4-point scale.

In addition, a question concerning the degree the players from the three teams felt that the media coverage framed their team correctly was also included. This question is presented in the results together with the media text analyses in strand 2.

Analysis. We first conducted a preliminary maximum likelihood factor analysis with varimax rotation of the different questionnaires in order to check internal consistency. For the motivational scales and their subscales the internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) were adequate and ranging from $\alpha = .84 -.95$, see Table 1. For CASFQ, the internal consistency was $\alpha = .82$. For the two subscales of MSFQ, the internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) for the media negative content subscale ($\alpha = .70$) and for the outcome coverage subscale ($\alpha = .68$) were considered adequate. Factor analysis of Brief COPE (Carver, 1997) yielded 5 factors. The first two factors comprised 4 items each. Factor one reflected problem-focused thinking and had an internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) that was adequate ($\alpha = .77$). Factor 2 reflected social support as a coping strategy and was also adequate ($\alpha = .72$). These two factors had also eigenvalue over 1.3 and factor loadings ranging from .48-.71. Only two items loaded on the three other factors. As a result, only social support and problem-focused thinking were used in further analyses of the present study.

Second, we used bivariate correlations test to determine the relationships between the variables (see Table 2), and lastly, a multivariate canonical correlation analysis was also conducted (see Table 3).

Strand II: Analyses of texts from two newspapers

Procedure. The content analysis is based on all articles concerning these three elite division teams from two National newspapers collected during the season. The newspaper articles collected were from the two largest national circulation newspapers; one is a broadsheet with detailed news and articles, and one is a more subjective tabloid with big headlines.

Analysis. We conducted a quantitative coding system and coded the articles into number of one-page, half-page notices and so forth of the teams (see Table 4). Content analysis may simplify very large documents into enumerative information, and it also helps to combine different methods (Grbich, 2007).

Strand III: Interviews with focus on adaptive coping

Participants. By conducting a convenience and purposeful sampling procedure (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), we recruited 12 football players from the three different teams. They ranged in age from 23 up to 37 (M_{age} = 28.4 years, SD = 4.89). The football players had experience from several teams in Europe and, with two exceptions; they had all served on their respective national teams during the season when the data were collected. In other words, these were elite players.

Procedure. These face to face interviews were conducted after the season by the first author. The interviews were carried out at the location of the different teams. In all the twelve interviews, the athletes perceived that the opportunity to tell how they coped with the media was welcomed, and some even discussed other aspects after we finished. The interviews

ended with a process feedback question, "what should I have asked you about, and do you have anything to add". Every interview lasted between 45-65 minutes.

   Interview guide. The semi-structured in-depth interviews were developed and conducted according to ethical guidelines and criteria stated by Patton (2002). The interviews started with: (a) General introduction about how it is to be a football player; (b) media as a stressor; (c) how they coped with the media in a developmental perspective, and; (d) how they experienced the team reaction to the different types of media coverage (outcome/negative content). In the interview guide, there was a flexibility to change the order of questions and probe interesting areas that arose to follow the participant's perspective. Probes and follow-up questions were also used in order to deepen the responses.

   Analysis. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, which resulted in 145 pages singled spaced raw text. Then we conducted a qualitative content analysis of the interviews following the procedures of Scanlan, Stein and Ravizza (1989, 1991). Content analysis is a systematic coding and categorising approach used to explore unobtrusively large amounts of textual information in order to ascertain the trends and their frequencies in the material. Further, the data has been cross-case analyzed (Patton, 2002). Lastly, some of the football players from all the three teams agreed to read a first draft of the article for comments. We believe this procedure gave more information compared to sending them the transcripts of their own interviews (see also Holt & Hogg, 2002). The feedback supported our analysis and minor errors were corrected. Therefore, it was concluded that the themes accurately represented their experiences of coping with media stress.

Results

In this investigation, the quantitative and the qualitative research strands were planned and implemented to answer related layers of the research questions regarding how elite football players cope with media exposure.

Strand I: Quantitative relationships between motivation, stress and coping

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, ranges, skewness values, and reliability for all variables. In general, relatively high levels of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) emerged with the exception of media stress (.70 and .68), but these were deemed acceptable and meaningful (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Motivational Climate and Orientations, organizational and media stress, social support, problem-focused thinking and age (N=82)

Variables	M	SD	Obs. Range	Skew	Cronbach's alpha
Mastery climate	4.06	0.79	1.4 – 5.0	-1.35	.86
Performance climate	3.27	0.87	1.5 – 5.0	-0.21	.84
Task orientation	4.35	1.02	1.0 – 5.0	-2.19	.95
Ego orientation	3.69	0.96	1.0 – 5.0	-0.57	.89
Organizational stress	2.29	0.72	1.0 – 3.9	0.13	.82
Media stress – negative content	2.10	0.91	1.0 – 4.0	0.50	.70
Media stress – outcome coverage	3.29	0.83	1.3 – 5.0	0.20	.68
Brief COPE – social support	2.40	0.60	1.0 – 4.0	0.01	.72
Brief COPE – problem-focused think	2.26	0.68	1.0 – 4.0	0.20	.77
Age of athletes	25.17	5.19	16 – 37	0.13	--

There were several significant and meaningful correlations between the perception of media stress, motivational climate and use of social support and problem-focused thinking as coping strategies (Table 2). As expected, an ego orientation and a performance climate were positively correlated (.58, $p<.01$) and task orientation was associated with mastery climate (.68, $p<.01$). In addition, the analyses revealed a positive correlation between ego and task orientation (.25, $p<.05$), and also a positive correlation between task orientation and a performance climate (.31, $p<.01$). More interesting for the research questions were the

positive correlations between media stress *negative content* and performance climate (.25, p<.05), ego orientation (.36, p<.01) and organizational stress related to the coach-athlete relationship (.22, p<.05). However, negative media content also correlated positively with problem-focused thinking (.29, p<.01) and social support (.24, p<.05). Further, media stress *outcome coverage* correlated negatively with age (-.33, p<.01). Social support and problem-focused thinking, the two coping strategies used to explain how athletes cope with the media coverage, correlated positively (.48, p<.01).

Table 2

Pearson Correlations among Variables

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
1. Mastery climate	--									
2. Performance climate	.12	--								
3. Task orientation	**.68**	**.31**	--							
4. Ego orientation	.14	**.58**	**.25**	--						
5. Organizational stress	**-.36**	**.35**	.09	.01	--					
6. Media stress – neg. content	-.19	**.25**	.00	**.36**	**.22**	--				
7. Media stress – neutral/amount	.10	-.05	.02	-.04	-.15	.07	--			
8. Coping – social support	.08	.00	-.02	.15	-.20	**.24**	.13	--		
9. Coping – probl. focused think	.03	.01	.07	.16	-.22	**.29**	.00	**.48**	--	
10. Age of athletes	-.07	-.02	-.02	-.06	**.21**	-.09	**-.33**	-.11	.20	--

Significant correlations (p <. 05; two-tailed), are in bold.

Multivariate relationships between motivational climate, achievement goals, stress and coping. To determine whether there were any multivariate relationships between the perceived motivational climate and the stress and coping strategies, we conducted canonical correlation analyses. Performance and mastery climate were used as predictor variables, while ego and task orientation, organizational stress (coach-athlete issues), media stress (negative content and amount), social support and problem-focused thinking served as the criterion variables. The MANOVA revealed that the overall multivariate relationship between the two functions were significant, Wilk's Lambda = .31, F (2; 67) =1.39, P<.001. Further, two unique and meaningful canonical functions were found to best describe and

explain the relationship between the canonical variates. The first canonical function (high

performance/low mastery) had a canonical correlation of .79 (R^2=.63) with a redundancy

index of 32%, and the second canonical function (high mastery/low performance climate) had

a canonical correlation of .42 (R^2=.17) with a redundancy index 8 %. According to

Tabachnick and Fidell (1996) only canonical correlations above .30 are deemed to be

meaningful and acceptable criteria for interpretation purposes. Both values in the present

analysis met this standard.

Table 3

Canonical loadings of performance climate and mastery climate & achievement orientations, stress and coping

	Canonical loadings	
	Function 1	**Function 2**
Climate		
Performance climate	.93	.41
Mastery climate	-.44	.90
Orientation, stress and coping responses		
Task orientation	.09	.53
Ego orientation	.82	.34
Organizational stress	.58	-.43
Media stress – neg. content	.45	-.32
Media stress – neutral/amount	-.18	.17
Coping – social support	.03	.28
Coping – problem-focused thinking	.12	-.09

In the first canonical function (high performance climate/ low mastery climate), the

predictor variables of performance climate (.93) and mastery climate (-.44) had meaningful

loadings, with the performance climate being a strong predictor. With the moderate negative

loading on the mastery climate, this function can be interpreted as a strong performance

climate function. The criterion variables of ego orientation (.82), organizational stress as

illustrated by coach-athlete issues (.58) and media stress negative content (.45) had reliable

positive loadings. The other variables did not reach meaningful canonical loadings

(Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). The first function supports the assumption that a perceived

performance climate is associated with experiencing relatively high levels of environmental

stress.

In the second canonical function (high mastery climate/low performance climate), the predictor variables of mastery climate (.90) and performance climate (.41) had meaningful loadings, with the mastery climate being a strong predictor. With the positive loading on the performance climate, this function can be interpreted as *predominantly* a mastery climate albeit that the players also perceived the coach wanting to win. The criterion variables of task (.53) and ego orientation (.34) both loaded reliably, which demonstrated that the players were both task and ego involved in playing football. The important finding is that both organizational stress as illustrated by coach-athlete issues (-.43) and media stress negative content (-.32) were meaningfully associated with the mastery climate. The results from this second canonical function may be interpreted as supporting the assumption that a predominantly mastery climate is associated with lower levels of perceived environmental stress. This supports the importance of creating a mastery motivational climate for mature elite athletes in order to negate the perception of environmental stress. Taken together, the redundancy indices of the two canonical functions reveal that perception of stress and personal orientation accounted for 40% of the variance in the perception of the extant motivational climate generated by teams and coaches.

Strand II: Newspaper texts: The effect of media attention on three teams

During the entire football season, we collected newspaper articles about the three teams from two different national newspapers and categorized them according to team and theme. Next, we conducted a quantitative content analysis in order to relate the amount of coverage with how the players experienced the media coverage for that year. We discussed this topic with all the 12 players we selected for the interviews. As a result, the focus of strand II was inter-team differences of perception of the media texts and the individual experiences of the football players are woven into this analysis. The starting point in table 4 is amount of total coverage collected about these three teams. In general, winning teams are more "hot"

than losing teams, although organizational issues inside a team were popular among

journalists too.

Table 4

Amount of coverage (of the total) and their experience of fairness related to content

	TEAM 1	TEAM 2	TEAM 3
Amount of coverage from two newspapers of the 3 teams (100 % is total)	16%	29%	55%
Open-ended question: Have the newspapers given a fair coverage of the team this season? (% of answering yes inside each team)	61%	25%	100%

Team 1 ended the season among the lowest in the league, this was underscored by the

relative low amount of outcome coverage for this team (16% of the total of the three teams in

this investigation). However, 61 % of the players felt that the coverage of them was fair when

compared to their results. This may be interpreted as an acceptance of the media's

dispositions and choices. Interestingly, the team did very well in the first part of the season

and won a few matches they were expected to lose, hence, they performed much better than

they or the media expected. Even though this team started the season with clear mastery goals

and they concentrated on the tasks within their specific roles on the team for each match, the

media's focus on them as a winning team changed their focus and became a "burden" to

them. Over the course of the season, the players changed their goals and became more

concerned with the outcome of each match rather than on their role within the team. That the

media played a role in their change of perception of themselves and their abilities was

admitted by the interviewees. One of the players commented:

> We did so well before the summer, and we started to aim for the top… which was
>
> possible as we were number 6 [in the league standings] for a while. But I think we
>
> started to aim high too early, and the upcoming losses became much harder than they
>
> should have been for the team's self-confidence… we did not make it, and the guys
>
> started to "hang their heads." There was less laughter in the locker room, and in the

end all we could think of was: "We have to stay in the Elite Division".
The change from a mastery to a more performance goal led to a perceived catastrophe for the team. Probably their heightened expectations, the organizational pressure, and the expectations of the media contributed to this effect. This shift of focus contributed to a disruption in their rhythm and each loss meant that they were failing and that caused them to become more despondent. The subsequent negative self-presentations they were confronted with may have reduced their self-confidence (Giddens, 1991), and they actually had to fight to prevent being relegated from the Elite Division by the end of the season.

Team 2 got more coverage than Team 1, and their results were better as they ended in the middle of the Division. However, this team had a lot of "past" organizational issues not directly related to their performance in the current season (though still a "hot" topic for the media). This may explain why only 25% of the players felt that the coverage of them was fair. However, these newspaper articles were not included in the total coverage for the team as they do not relate directly to the performance of the players for that season (which we used as an inclusion criterion), although they might have affected the players negatively. As one of them remarked with a dry sense of humour in the interview: "The coverage of us could have been the manuscript for a "soap opera", I guess everything has happened this year". They dealt with the issues remarkably well, even though this was the team that had subjectively experienced the most organizational and media stress. The importance of the coach was underlined by the team players, he kept the team fairly well together. He had also advised them to be moderate in their comments to the media because of the situation in the team. This advice is often given by good coaches as illustrated in the Becker study (2009). As a result, the team avoided saying anything that would give the media any extra headlines and refused to elaborate on the organizational issues.

Team 3 received mainly positive coverage with a focus on their positive results during the season (55% of the total media coverage of the three teams). As Table 3 reveals, the football players experienced it as fair (100%). Clearly, few object to good publicity! Still, they all commented on the positive publicity in interviews as being transitory: "We are doing well now, and they write us up [i.e., make us appear better]. Next year, they can as easily write us down again". Good publicity and a huge amount of outcome coverage is not something the players take for granted or believe will be everlasting. Even though positive media coverage is important for the development of self-confidence, team effort and satisfies the sponsors, it was perceived as an intrusion when there was an onslaught of journalists and cameras before important games. A huge amount of outcome coverage may change the entire climate within a football team (i.e., make it more performance oriented) and contribute to a change of focus towards the outcome. "A lot of media attention puts extra pressure on you", one commented. Another sighed: "I was feeling very tired because the media came every day, it was too much". When asked why it made him tired, he responded: "…when the media talks about things, and you think about these things, that certainly affects your mind. You always play poorly afterwards as a result". Unfortunately, this turned out to be true for this team as well.

Strand III: Twelve elite football players' perceptions of and coping with media coverage

The football players selected for the interviews in this study experienced a constant pressure to perform in pursuit of becoming a national star in what is the most popular competitive sport in Europe (Maguire, Jarvie, Mansfield, & Bradly, 2002). As a result, the players believed "everybody" expects them to always do their best for the home team or the nation, and no one raises an eyebrow if their presence at personal anniversaries or the birth of their children has second priority. This constant media attention to feed the appetite of the

fans affects the football players' view of their importance as human beings (i.e., as football players), and as one of them stated in the interviews:

> The pressure is high in football… and that leads you to focus a lot on yourself, because you are convinced that you are part of something you believe is of major importance… that in turn makes you think that your performance is decisive both for the team and the action on the field … *and for the health and happiness of people,* so to speak.

This constant media exposure is perceived as a major source of strain, and the football players had to learn how to cope with this stressor in order to be a successful professional football player. In the data analysis of the coping strategies used by the players in the interviews, we organized the use of coping strategies into three *thematic* headings: Keeping self-confidence stable; maintaining team performance; and the impact of organizational issues. Consistent with previous research on media stress, we found that the players used social support, avoidance strategies and problem-focused strategies (Kristiansen et al., in press-b) when coping with outcome coverage. In addition to these three individual coping strategies, the perceived team climate was pivotal when coping with negatively angled media exposure that affected the entire team (see table 5).

Table 5

Individual and collective coping with the media

Individual coping with the media	Team coping with the media
Social support strategies - informational support from coach - emotional support from friends & families - tangible support from team Avoidance strategies reading, seeing, & talking about their individual or team performances Problem-focused strategies - rationalize what the media presents - focus on your next performance - analyse your own performance - see things in perspective	Mastery climate within team - coach debriefing - keep the players focused on task ahead - help with avoidance coping and distractions - encourage collective effort

The importance of self-confidence. We found that younger football players experienced outcome coverage as more stressful than the more mature players in the quantitative findings reported above. This is an important finding as it demonstrates that experience fosters immunity to press coverage. This issue was elaborated upon in the interviews when the strategies behind this process were outlined. The more experienced football players argued that they could better cope with an extensive amount of coverage about themselves now rather than when they were younger. Several of them made fun of themselves about their eagerness to run out and buy newspapers after games years ago. A former adolescent star "Pete" and his story is an illustration of how coping with media exposure increases with age. This football player was used to a lot of attention and positive outcome coverage when young, when the character of the outcome coverage changed in a negative direction as he grew into the sport, the pleasure of constantly being publicly reviewed decreased. Pete talked extensively about how big press photographs and negatively loaded headlines took his dignity and self-confidence away as a football player. It had been expected that he would become a football icon, and he had had considerable media coverage about his "arrested" development. The media even questioned his return to the national team. Pete stated that he worried about what might be written and said about him, and that he needed to learn how to get out of bed without worrying about what would be written in the newspapers that day. In Pete's case, the skills of reinterpreting (problem-focused coping) the media's coverage was learned in order to cope better with this environmental stressor. Avoidance of newspaper media coverage was not enough in his case, he also needed to learn refocusing strategies to focus on the positive aspects of playing. He considered that social support from his family (especially his father) and from the coach contributed to his "comeback" as an elite football player through being able to refocus on the positive aspects of

his performances. He emphasized in the interview that he still avoided reading/hearing about the media interpretations of his performance.

Interestingly, another football player included *enlightenment* in this age-experience process of coping with outcome coverage. "You suddenly realize how it works. It is easier now when I have family, things other than football are now important". Football players seem to have to learn (through experience) not to put the same importance into every performance on the field as do the fans. To many fans, football means "everything," but football players must approach playing football as a job and be able to shut off the media focus on their performance: "What good comes out of reading the newspapers" was even stated by a player from a successful winning team. One of them also added:

> I think journalists should report and not interpret games; their interpretations tend to be *provocative* [to me]. Because I have reached an elite level due to me now being an experienced player, I tend to think that I have the correct interpretation and version of what happened in the game. I am entitled to have it… As a result it is hard to read something I think is not true.

The "untrue" and unfair aspect of media reporting is what causes the football players the most concern, and they cope with it by using avoidance strategies (avoid reading the press, not discussing it with family, etc). As an aside, it is important to remember that media reporters get stressed too, especially sports announcers who rely on clichés and metaphors when reporting unexpected outcomes by high ranked teams (Wanta & Legget, 1988). In other words, when a team loses, especially if they were expected to win, not only do the football players feel bad about their own performance, they must also prepare themselves for unrealistic and probably negative (and perhaps irrelevant) media coverage of the game and their role within it. As a result, the players avoid reading, watching or listening to the media's

interpretations of their performance. To pay attention to media coverage may be detrimental to their self-confidence. "It [i.e., self-confidence] needs re-creation every day, you have to work on it. If you don't accomplish your daily goals it will be reduced". These words, and the story about Pete echoes in many ways Giddens's (1991) concepts of personal biographies and the constant supply of self-presentations the media provides. For the players, it is hard to totally avoid the media reporting as it is "this version the family discusses with you". This is why the players often find and develop other coping resources such as problem-focused thinking and social support. The older players have probably developed the skill to cope with the constant media pressure through experience (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). It does not mean that they totally master the media pressure, but they have probably learned how to "tolerate, minimize, accept, or ignore what cannot be mastered" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 140). As a result, the older athletes view themselves as a *resource* to the younger ones. The older players may help the more inexperienced ones in the coping process of media reporting by sharing their stories of the use of problem-focused thinking, social support and avoidance coping. These three strategies seem to be used concordantly and together contribute to the athlete's maintenance of own perception of ability and self-confidence as a football player.

Team performance and team climate. Football is a team sport, and sometimes individual coping strategies are not enough when an entire team has to cope with negative media exposure. Almost all the interviewees had experiences and insights to share with regard to the media creating additional negative feelings when things were getting rough:

> In the beginning, when we lost, the media tried to explain why. When they had done
> that a few times, they started speculating about the need to buy new players, get a new
> coach and kind of made up stories about us. And we were only half way through the
> season…

This sort of media framing is probably not meant as a contribution to solve the problems within the team. Rather, such exposure may lead to two outcomes for the football players: First, as discussed above, it may reduce their self-confidence; and second, as revealed in strand 1, there is an increase in perceived ego orientation because of the constant normative evaluation in the press, and an increase in the perceived performance climate because the coach and management starts to focus on "turning things around" and winning. These become disruptive factors for performance. Team administrators need to understand that publically calling for a "change of results" increases the pressure on the coach who, in turn, increases the pressure on the players. As some of the players admitted, when things got "rough" around the team, when administrators made public announcements about the poor performance of the team, and the coach focused on outcomes, the players began to care more about their own futures and began to wonder where they could get a better contract, etc. This was hardly the recipe for enhanced team performance! A losing team struggles to cope with the expectations to win and the perceived lack of resources to turn around the situation. In addition, team effort might be lost as a result of a more performance oriented climate when winning becomes so paramount. Several players mentioned this as a side effect of losing: "it seems like we have many coaches at training, but during the games, everybody just seems to protect their own ass". More than one talked about this and another player added: "it is hard when you start playing the games for yourself and not for the team… You totally need to refocus, or you really play bad".

During the tough times with the accompanying negative media exposure, the coach and his focus on the team climate seemed to stand out as vital and was underlined repeatedly by the interviewees. Some talked about one highly admired coach who was known to use strategies to take the focus away from the team when they lost a game by saying something "stupid" or totally irrelevant to the press. The result was that the media would focus on him

instead of the team. By this intentional approach, the coach created a supportive climate for the next game with his team rather than having the players dwell too much over their mistakes. However, when they won important games, "he would always step back and let us take the credit". By this action, this coach also protected the self-confidence of players and taught them to trust themselves. He was the supportive "glue" in the team by his constant informational support whatever happened. In the present context, this coach understood that a task focus, as we define it within AGT, was the best focus for the individual players to adopt to overcome a performance slump. As one of his previous players explained:

> Every player wants to win; you don't need to tell him. You should focus on your task, on how to win the game. […] Leaders and coaches make these types of mistakes all the time, I don't know why. Maybe it is because they don't know better; it is easier just to tell the players to win.

This quotation underlines the importance of keeping the climate mastery focused as is argued by AGT (e.g., Roberts, 2001), even for elite players. It has been suggested that such a focus may almost function as a coping strategy for athletes when being faced with the negative content coverage of the media (Kristiansen et al., in press-b). As an example, the story about the admired coach above who created a supportive mastery climate where the players could focus on their own performance and not be concerned with the negative press that surrounded dampened expectations is illustrative. This strategy is especially important when coping with mediated organizational issues.

Organizational issues in the media. For the players, the perception of organizational issues may evolve when they become public knowledge through the media. For coaches and club administrators, it is important to remember that organizational issues are always "hot" news for the media. It would be advantageous to keep as much as possible inside the team

(Becker, 2009). It becomes a more ego involving matter when the newspapers discuss the internal working of an organization. Through this, organizational pressure may increase, and foster a focus on outcomes that facilitates a greater focus on performance criteria for the coach and the team. The football players gave several examples of this in the interviews, and one often mentioned example was about an administrator calling the newspaper himself in order to communicate that a stop in contract negotiations with a particular player had occurred. This incident was used as an example of what *not* to do among the players on this team. "I think everybody was affected by that incident, it is an incredible action by an administrative leader", as one of them remarked. He continued: "I guess the leader had to make a statement; we had to start winning again [i.e., in order to continue to discuss money matters]. It was a conscious action, it hurt". It is probably not necessary to add that the team did not start winning, the players considered that they had some issues to deal with inside the team before they could totally focus on playing football again.

However, not only the administrative leaders, but the players may use the media to deal with organizational issues. Some players use the media deliberately when they want other teams to know that they are on the market, they want a wage rise, they want a new coach, or they are simply unhappy with their current situation. The football players in the study were divided in their view on the issue of internal organizational matters being publicly debated. As one commented: "most players are replaceable;" and another one added; "You will only become unpopular inside the team". A rule of thumb for the players seemed to be a policy of not hurting your team mates. But if you are a "Bosman player" [i.e., a term used to describe a journeyman player as opposed to one of the "stars"] and need to be visible, such an action is understood and accepted by the players. It was agreed that media coverage may have a positive affect on one's career, but this does not mean that is it positive for the team as a whole.

Discussion

In this current investigation, we used both quantitative and qualitative research procedures (a mixed methods design) in order to expand upon the literature on coping with negative media exposure. The three different strands of data provided a detailed insight into elite footballers' experiences of one environmental stressor: Media coverage. The three strands supported the first research question: When a perceived performance climate is extant in the team, then it increases the subjective perception of the media as being a stressor.

When a coach or the team culture stresses the outcome aspect of playing football, then the media coverage was perceived to be more stressful. This was evident in each of the strands of data. The correlation analyses in strand I revealed a positive correlation between a performance climate and media stress negative content. The obverse was also true: When a coach or the team culture stressed the mastery aspect of the perceived climate, then this was associated with the perception that a mastery climate seems to reduce the impact of the media coverage as a stressor. The findings from the correlational analyses support the hypothesis that a mastery motivational climate is associated with a stress reducing effect on a team. The canonical correlation analyses supported this finding. When the players perceived that a mastery climate prevailed in the team, then this was associated with the media being perceived as less stressful. And when the players perceived that a performance climate prevailed, then the media coverage was perceived as more stressful. This was reinforced in the player interviews and contributes more insight into the nature of these experiences.

In the interviews with the players, the stories about both Team 1 and Team 3 players support the quantitative evidence that media exposure is associated with enhancing the performance criteria of success and failure for the players. Unexpected or simply a large amount of media exposure may change the climate. When the players should be focusing on their tasks within the game, the media exposure makes them aware of their own contributions,

or lack of contribution, to the team outcome. It is clear that even successful professional football players experience pressure from the coach and management to "deliver" the performances that promote the club, and this is exacerbated by media exposure. The media exposure contributes to the perception of a performance climate being extant in the club and may add to the perceived need of each team player to get the positive media headlines to maximize their contribution to the team "product." When a team has several "stars" competing for media attention in a performance climate setting, then this may exacerbate the need to normatively compare themselves to each other that enhances the competitive climate in the team. This may affect one's performance in a negative direction as evidenced by the interviews in strand III. The players experience the media as a stressor and this exacerbates their ego involvement in the outcome (Kristiansen et al., in press-a).

Illustrating this need to obtain normative feedback is the story of Pete in strand III. His story is an excellent example of the necessity to monitor and guide young athletes when the media make them "superstars" at a young age. Pete emphasised his need to continuously get positive feedback from the coach and the media in order to keep his self-confidence stable. The stories from the other interviewed players support the importance of the coach in creating the environment within the team that protected the players from being exposed to the full brunt of the media coverage. During any period of negative media exposure, the coach and his focus on the team climate was deemed vital by the interviewees. One player gave the example of the highly admired coach who was known to use deliberate strategies to take the focus away from the team. Clearly, the coach created a supportive climate for the next game with his team rather than having the players dwell too much over their media reported "mistakes" and negative reporting. This is important, as we know that the state of involvement may change quickly (Gernigon et al., 2004). The negative consequences of the media being perceived as an environmental stressor may be to impose higher anxiety and stress (e.g.,

Abrahamsen et al., 2008) and/or less adaptive coping (e.g., Pensgaard & Roberts, 2003) among the players.

Second, the football players we interviewed were very vocal about how they coped with the media coverage of their games and individual performances. It was obvious that the footballers in this study felt the need to use their entire coping repertoire in order to cope successfully with the media. Strand I gave support for the use of social support and problem-focused coping, as these categories correlated positively with media stress negative content in the quantitative analyses. In addition, the two coping strategies correlated positively with each other. This may mean they occur concurrently in the coping process, as coach social support may be important to reframe one's own performance.

By using mixed methods in this study, we were able both to detect relationships and to elaborate on the use of the different coping strategies. In our analysis of the interviews in strand III, we organized the adaptive *individual* coping strategies into avoidance, problem-focused and social support coping strategies. The evidence of avoidance coping was impossible to determine in strand I because this scale is not included in the Brief COPE (Carver, 1997). However, these three categories are the same major categories found in Holt and Hogg's (2002) study on female football players, and are congruent with previous investigations (e.g., Gould, Eklund & Jackson, 1993; Scanlan et al., 1991). Consequently, the interviews were important in order to determine the use of avoidance as an important coping strategy towards media stress.

In the interviews in strand III, the footballers were clear in indicating their use of *avoidance* coping. Previous research has shown a relationship between avoidance coping and an ego-involving climate (e.g., Ntoumanis et al., 1999), but whether or not avoidance coping is an adaptive strategy may be debatable. In the short run, the use of avoidance coping

actually protects the player's self-confidence as he avoids conflicting narratives about his own performance (e.g., Giddens, 1991). This refutes the claim of Roth and Cohen that the use of this strategy may decrease self-confidence (e.g., 1986). In the long run, however, some sort of acceptance of the situation and adopting other strategies to fight disruptive thoughts may be needed. However, in this research we are reporting the use of coping strategies rather than the need to intervene with other types of strategies. In our case, the footballers underlined the importance of social support and avoidance and the need to keep the climate task involved. The use of *problem-focused* coping among the football players was supported in both strands I and III. Experience (or enlightenment) gives the players the ability to put things in perspective and refocus on what is important in the game and in their lives. For the experienced, playing football is *just* a job, and they approach it as such. However, coach support as a form of social support was one helpful coping strategy for the players (Schaefer, Coyne, & Lazarus, 1982). In the present study, the importance of the coach giving *informational* support was emphasized by the players in the interviews. Previous research has also underlined the importance of appropriate coach feedback on performance (e.g., Noblet & Gifford, 2002). Perhaps this coping strategy is underestimated in team sport?

Emotional support from family and friends was also highlighted as important, but the well organized teams also give considerable *tangible* support to players (in addition to financial remuneration). Examples of tangible support were physical therapists, sport psychologists, nutritionists, and in some clubs even financial advice. It is important to note that the different types of support are apparently given successfully from these different sources (e.g., Dakof & Taylor, 1990). The findings in this study reinforced past information, but also gave new insights into the complex phenomenon of social support as a coping mechanism.

In this study (Table 5), we separated individual and collective coping with the media, and used the concept *team coping* in order to underline the extra effort needed in team sport. Park (2000) argues that athletes of team sports actually require more coping strategies than individual sports, and that team players face different stressors. As Holt and Hogg (2002) suggest, team sport athletes rely on others to achieve success and it is difficult to disentangle one's own contribution to the team outcome. Team sport athletes also experience less individualized coaching programs. Hence, that may explain the importance of the older players, and the responsibility they felt to teach the younger players how to cope effectively by giving informational support.

Third, there was evidence that the perception of the media as a stressor may affect an entire team. Although we found support for this in both the content analysis of the newspaper reporting (strand II) and in the qualitative interviews (strand III), it is the interviews that are especially interesting and add depth to this research question. When a team is experiencing negative media coverage because the team may not be meeting the pre-season expectations placed on it, the older and more experienced players become pivotal (together with the coach) as they help the rest of the team to use adaptive coping strategies. As we know from strand I, the older athletes better adapt to a higher amount of media exposure than their younger and less skilled peers, evidence in accord with previous research (Neil, Mellalieu & Hanton, 2004). Older athletes simply cope more effectively with stress due to higher self-confidence and a more facilitative interpretation of symptoms associated with worry and perceived stress (Nicholls & Polman, 2007).

Finally, two important points need to be made in regard to strand II. First of all, it is possible for a team to adapt to an increased amount of negative media attention (e.g., team 2). However, the importance of coach support and his advice to cope with the constant intrusion of journalists following negative exposure must be underscored. The evidence reported above

clearly places a great deal of responsibility on the coach to weather such media storms. Second, when the media focuses on the need to win in an upcoming important game, then this narrow focus on the outcome may cause players to become more ego involved because the focus is hard to escape or avoid. Higher expectations created by the media may evolve into increased performance pressure inside a team. This constant focus on high expectations in itself may lead to perceived exhaustion before the actual game and is the negative effect reported by one team in this study (team 3). From the evidence reported above, the role of the coach in keeping the motivational climate within the team as mastery oriented as possible is an investment in team coping with media reporting (as well as individual coping). This is in accord with Pensgaard and Roberts (2002) who found that in the case of elite individual sport athletes, the coach focusing on mastery criteria before important events in the Olympics reduced the perception of stress.

Conclusion

Football is important as a commercial enterprise and as an entertainment source in the world of today. The daily media "news" constantly keeps the players in the public eye, even in the "off season". During each "off season" the sports pages will often include even the vacation photographs of prominent players. Hence, the players are always alert for both professional and private related press coverage, but sometimes it takes them by surprise and becomes an unpredictable environmental threat. This is especially true when the media reports go beyond the strictly professional game related summaries and also include organizational issues (new owners, firing and hiring of coaches, new players signed by teams) and high profile social events (e.g., the wedding of Wayne Rooney of Manchester United) or cheating on wife stories (e.g., John Terry of Chelsea). Clearly, media attention can be highly stressful, and players need to learn how to cope with the attention. As a result, athletes, and especially team athletes (Park 2000), need to demonstrate a range of coping strategies to keep

performing at one's best during an entire season and to avoid the different distractions. In addition, as revealed in the interviews, team coaches and administrative leaders should avoid making the same mistakes as the media by being too focused on outcomes (winning games and championships). The paradox is that in order to win, the focus should not be on winning but on the tasks the players have to complete in order to place themselves in the position to be successful. In addition, the coach should be a source of social support and protect the team from negative media attention and be able to put the media exposure into perspective.

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PAPER 6

Coping with the media at the Vancouver Winter Olympics:

"We all make a living out of this"

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the journalist-athlete relationship at a major competitive event in order to better understand how the media may become a stressor and how elite athletes cope with the press interview demands and the subsequent media presentation. Ten elite participants were interviewed after the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Winter Games. Media contact is considered to be part of the job of being an elite athlete, and there are *media rules* to follow. However, intrusive questioning may negatively affect the athlete's preparation and self-confidence, consequently the use of coping strategies to stay focused and task involved becomes crucial.

Keywords: journalist-athlete relationship, media break, motivational climate

Coping with the media at the Vancouver winter Olympics:

"We all make a living out of this"

During the 2010 Olympic Winter Games (OWG) in Vancouver, almost 10,000 journalists and media personnel entered Canada to cover approximately 2600 athletes representing 82 nations striving for gold medals and national glory. Many national teams send press attachés in order to coordinate the relationship between the media personnel and the athletes. The press attaches organized press meetings/briefings and interviews during the Games. The purpose of this study was to investigate how Norwegian Winter Olympians experience the intense media presence and the interaction with journalists and the media reports that emerge.

The two most media covered sport events are the World Cup in football and the Olympic Games. During these special, global events where the entire world is watching the same sports events, there is no question that the media have the power to create "stories" to meet the appetite of consumers of the media as they are the directors of this *mediated* sport spectacle (Maguire, Jarvie, Mansfield, & Bradley, 2002). Giddens (2006) has defined power as something that is often related to *conflicts* between person or groups, and how much power "an individual or group is able to achieve governs how far they are able to realize their own wishes at the expense of the wishes of others" (2006, p. 1029). People at home are informed about the athletes' success or failure, or what the media defines as such. In short, the media creates conflicts in their striving for stories without worrying about distracting the athletes' preparations or performances.

Moreover, the media coverage of these sports events may unite nations behind heroes, but criticism can be particularly devastating when national heroes disappoint. The experience of the French football team at the 2010 Word Cup is a case in point, where even the President of the country was forced to give his opinion (e.g., Daly, 2010; Gysin, 2010). Doing well in

sport is important for entire nations, and failure may become a national catastrophe. In other words, the intense media coverage and the heightening of pressure through the presence of journalists may serve as a distracter for outstanding sportsmen and women. In particular, this may occur when there is a conflict between what the athletes perceive as important and what the media wish to highlight.

Coping with media stress

How elite athletes cope with these additional stressors over time and the interventions used to cope with them is a question that is now being asked. The psychological term *coping* has been defined in a number of different ways, but the contemporary dominant model is the transactional process perspective (Giacobbi, Lynn, Wetherington, Jenkins, Bodenforf, & Langley, 2004; Nicholls & Polman, 2007). Coping is viewed as a dynamic process following appraisal because of a situation (identified as threatening, challenging, etc) where an individual perceives an imbalance between the situation and his/her resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This imbalance is often referred to as stress, and McGrath's (1970) process definition underlines that stress is a perception that a "substantial imbalance between (environmental) demand and response capability, under conditions where failure to meet the demand has important consequences" (p.20). However, the transactional perspective emphasizes that stress neither resides in the person nor the environment, but in the relationship between the two.

In order to adapt to sport fame, elite athletes need a set of personal attributes that allow them to cope with all the opportunities and demands that face them when they are engaged in highly public competitive events. Several studies have reported that media attention is a major stressor when athletes strive for excellence (e.g., Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, Medbery, & Peterson, 1999; Greenleaf, Gould, & Dieffenbach, 2001). Greenleaf and colleagues argue that media attention both before and during competition is experienced as a stressor, and that the

proximity between the media and the athlete contributes to the stress. Further, the presence of journalists may be felt as intrusive because the media reports are not always factual (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002). In a recent study of the experiences of goalkeepers with negative media coverage in a European Premier Division (Kristiansen, Roberts, & Sisjord, in press-b), the goalkeepers avoided buying, reading or watching news reports, or giving interviews on match day in order to cope with the negative reporting. In addition, family and friends were instructed not to discuss the media coverage with them, in order to not be affected by the opinion of journalists. Apparently, the media can affect the self-confidence of an athlete by making him/her a hero, or by making him/her insecure simply from the "slant" of the article (e.g., Kristiansen et al., in press-b).

From motivational research, we may posit one explanation of why the media is perceived as a source of strain. We have considerable evidence that the perceived criteria of success and failure in the environment in which the athlete performs has an effect on whether the athlete perceives competitive stress (e.g., Roberts, 2001; Roberts, Treasure, & Conroy, 2007). The perceived motivational climate (Ames & Archer, 1988) is the athlete's perception of the situational cues that make the perceived criteria of success pertinent. The cues that are perceived to be emphasised by the coach and the team organisation create a motivational climate where mastery or performance criteria of success are manifested (Ames, 1992). The perceived motivational climate leads the athlete to adopt the criteria of success perceived to be extant, so that the athlete has a motivational state of involvement consistent with the perceived criteria of success emphasised.

Consistent with achievement goal theory (AGT, e.g., Roberts et al., 2007), what may happen when the athlete arrives at the competitive venue is that the sudden intensive focus of the media on outcomes and potential medals changes the perceived motivational climate from mastery based criteria of success to performance based criteria of success. Preferably, the

athlete should have minimal focus on the competitive outcome to perform optimally (e.g., Pensgaard & Duda, 2002). But the media want their stories, and the story often involves speculation of winning and losing, who gets the gold, who is the hero, who is the scapegoat.

The relationship between AGT theory and media stress was investigated in a recent investigation on elite football (Kristiansen, Halvari & Roberts, in press-a). When the footballer was high in ego orientation and perceived a performance climate, then this was associated with experiencing media stress. It is the ego involved athletes who are more likely to experience media as a stressor. Further, the attention of the media enhances the perception of a performance climate which in turn enhances the feeling of stress. In contrast, a mastery motivational climate has a stress reducing effect on a team because the focus of the players is in integrating their own competencies into a team effort. Also, a mastery motivational climate may lead to better use of adaptive coping strategies such as avoidance, problem-focused and social support (Kristiansen et al., in press-a). This is in accord with Pensgaard and Roberts (2002) who found that in the case of elite individual sport athletes, the coach focusing on mastery criteria before important events in the Olympics reduced the perception of stress. This is important for the athletes as probably the 10 000 media representatives (in the 2010 Vancouver Olympics) are more likely to be performance focused.

Focus on the journalists-athlete relationship during a major competition

The journalist-athlete relationship turned out to be stressful for the Norwegian athletes in the 2006 Turin winter Olympics (Hanstad, 2006). To avoid this during the 2010 Olympic Winter Games (OWG), several measures were taken. First of all, the administrators of the Olympic Top Sports program in Norway tried to put as little pressure as possible on the athletes by being more realistic about the number of medals they expected, to avoid exposing the team to external media pressure. Second, and more importantly for the journalist-athlete relationship, rules of agreement for the relationship were improved, established and

committed to before the Games. In short, the *media rules* underlined respect for each other and organized the cooperation between the media and the athletes. The athletes were expected to show up at press conferences two days before events and also shortly after the event. In return, the media should avoid any other contact and let the focus of the athletes be on their respective event(s).

A media incident had an impact on the journalist-athlete relationship during the Games. A few days before the opening ceremony of the 2010 OWG one of the Norwegian athletes, with the pressure of high expectations on her shoulders, revealed in a media interview that extensive media coverage and the slant of the coverage was one of the reasons why she underperformed in previous years. The headline: "the media has dragged me down" was followed by her explanation on how a sport psychologist had taught her how to cope with the media (Lofaldli, 2010). In many ways, this piece of news was a follow up of one press statement sent out six months earlier when she told the Norwegian media that she would not be as available for the press as she had been in previous years (Jarlsbo, 2009). Her main focus for the season was the Olympics, and in order to achieve well she stated that she needed all her energy on that task. Her request was respected by the journalists. Her strategy to avoid any media distraction in order to bring home gold medals was an apparent success at the Vancouver Olympics; however, it was highly debated in the Norwegian media prior to and during the Games.

Despite the "outburst" mentioned above, the journalists experienced improved working conditions during the recent Olympics (Hanstad & Skille, 2010), and were better than expected. One reason for this improvement in the journalist-athlete relationship was the well appreciated job the 5 Norwegian press attaches managed to do during the Olympics, and that both parties managed to follow the media rules agreed upon before departure. Some other results from this study are worth mentioning in relation to the topic of this investigation: Only

39% of the journalists felt that they were well prepared upon the start of the Olympics; the journalists themselves felt that they did not focus only on gold medals; paradoxically, they felt that the other journalists did.

The aim of this present investigation is to gain more knowledge about how the athletes perceived their relationship with the media, and more specifically with the journalists responsible for the press coverage. Hence, the focus was on the journalist-athlete relationship herein defined as the agreed to working conditions where both parties needed to contribute and respect the other in order to make it a positive working relationship. More precisely, we were interested in both what the athletes perceived as sources of strain and how they coped with it was examined within a motivational context.

Method

Participants

We conducted a purposeful sampling procedure (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) according to several criteria in order to get 10 Norwegian winter Olympians with media experience: First, we wanted both genders and all the different sports included. Second, the athletes needed to be a medallist in his/her sport; however, there were one exception of this rule as we wanted to include participants from all the sports in the sample. Third, the interviewees needed to have extensive experience with journalists and different types of media coverages in order to contribute with knowledge on the subject. The participants were all in their 20s and beginning of the 30s (M_{age} = 27.7 years, SD = 4.41) and half of them had previous Olympic experience. It was a very elite sample; the Norwegian Olympic team took 23 medals during the weeks in Vancouver, our participants were involved in 13 of them; 5 gold, 4 silver and 4 bronze medals.

Ethical Standards and Procedure

After obtaining approval from the Norwegian Research Committee, informed consent was obtained from all participants before conducting face-to-face interviews shortly after the 2010 Olympics. At the beginning of each interview, participants were informed that the information they provided would remain confidential, and that they could terminate the interviews at any time. Guidelines of the semi-structured in-depth interviews were in accordance with criteria stated by Patton (2002). The interviews were conducted by two of the authors in different locations according to what the athletes themselves found convenient. In all ten interviews, the athletes perceived that the opportunity to tell how they coped with the media was positive, and some even discussed other aspects after we finished. The interviews ended with a process feedback question, "what should I have asked you about, and do you have anything to add". Every interview lasted between 35-50 minutes.

Interview Guide

The interviews were conducted with interview guide prompts and questions on stress and coping with the transactional perspective literature in mind. The interview guide consisted of four main sections: (a) general questions about the organizing of the respective National Olympic Governing Committee for the different teams demographic background; (b) experiences of journalist-athlete interactions during the Olympics ("Did you perceive your relationship with media as stressful during the OWG"); (c) coping with the aforementioned stressors ("how do you cope with this/these demands"?); and (d) general discussion and advice about how to create a well-functioning relationship with journalists.

In the interview guide, there was a flexibility to change the order of questions and probe areas that arose to follow the participants' perspectives. Probes and follow-up questions were also used in order to deepen the responses. In addition, some media texts were used as *illustrative examples* Patton (2002). Patton suggests using illustrative examples as a clarifying

strategy after having begun with simple, straightforward, and open-ended questions. The interviewees were not shown the actual articles; we just talked about the stories, the content, the headlines and possible impact on the team/athlete. In line with previous media research, such a strategy may facilitate responses more easily and reveal some of the complex interaction between the person and environmental antecedents (Kristiansen et al, in press-a).

Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim, which resulted in 85 pages of single spaced raw text. Question focused analyses were used as the starting point when organizing the raw data (Patton, 2002). Segments that had similar themes and represented the same stressor were grouped together. The stressor is the environmental demands or stimuli encountered by an individual (Fletcher, Hanton & Mellalieu, 2006), and the categories of stressors originating from the journalist-athlete relationship that was used as the main category were analysed for meaning units. Associated sub-categories were found (journalist intrusion, press conferences, media break, shadow of a media storm), and placed into higher order themes using deductive content analysis procedures (Kondracki, Wellman, & Amundson, 2002). The stressor meaning units were then linked with the coping strategies that were employed by participants to deal with specific stressors. This process was in accordance with procedures outlined by Weston and colleagues (Weston, Thelwell, Bond, & Hutchings, 2009). Additionally, a larger section also presents results and discusses the best way of coping with the journalist-athlete relationship. In cases of uncertainty, we discussed the remaining cases within the research team and agreed upon a final coding.

Further, the data have been cross-case analyzed (Patton, 2002) in order to verify athlete's opinions and meanings on how they coped with media stress and the journalist-athlete relationship. The answers have been grouped together, which keeps the athletes anonymous. Consequently, the specific sport is kept out of the presentation of the data as

much as possible when the athlete mentioned matters that revealed their sport. In addition, in-depth quotes are used so participants' voices are *present* and *visible* in the presentation and interpretation of the data. The voices are present in accord with the transactional perspective (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), as Lazarus (1999) advocated the use of narratives to add knowledge and understanding. We conclude with Table 1 that summarizes the best way to cope with the journalist-athlete relationship.

In an effort to ensure accuracy in data collection, participants were sent (via email) a copy of the first draft of the article for comments. They identified a few mistakes, accepted the use of quotations, but did not offer any additional information and/or changes. Consequently, it was concluded that the themes accurately represented their experiences of coping with media content.

Discussion of the Results: Coping with the media during the Vancouver Olympics

The media invasion and intense scrutiny does not make participation in an Olympics a "normal" event (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002). The media attention accompanying being an Olympian made one of our athletes state: "I am happy that I am not a football player in the Premier Division", meaning that having this daily media scrutiny would be too much to cope with, every fourth year was sufficient. Although they interpreted this "new" situation differently, they all felt extra pressure to perform. This was heightened by the media's questioning about results: "For the media it is all about gold medals, everything else is a failure". As a result one of the medal winners claimed: "the joy and fun of doing my sport, which is my biggest motivation, is missing".

This extra focus on results created by the media, made *avoidance* coping an obvious choice for the Olympians, consistent with previous research (e.g., Anshel & Weinberg, 1996; Kowalski & Crocker, 2001; Kristiansen et al., in press-b). All the athletes mentioned that they tried to avoid reading, seeing or hearing anything of what the Norwegian press distributed

during the Olympics about themselves or the team. This strategy contrasted with the one used by the Norwegian Turin Olympic team in 2006, where the athletes had access to Norwegian newspapers in the Olympic Village. As that turned out *not* to be a success, one athlete commented: "I think it negatively affected the entire team", and a Norwegian Olympic staff member called it: "the mistake of the century" (Andersen & Hanstad, 2010). As a result, the Vancouver 2010 team had no newspapers delivered to the athletes (Andersen & Hanstad, 2010). In addition, most of the athletes committed to their own rules with team mates or coaches to avoid the internet articles as well. In other words, they tried very hard to avoid the press releases of the press meetings they had to attend during the Games.

Avoidance Coping as a Strategy

However, it is far more difficult to avoid the journalists' *questions* than the coverage mentioned above due to the agreements committed to prior to the OWG. The importance of help to keep the journalists at a distance was underlined several times in the post-Olympic interviews. Naturally, the different press attachés were mentioned, but also team leaders with knowledge about the sport were highly appreciated by the athletes. One stated that they sent the journalists to the team leader: "Talk to him, and we sent the journalists away. He likes to talk to them and they like him, then we had time to prepare for the next competition". In addition, some team leaders are also former athletes themselves and have "experienced almost every situation before, which helps us". This confirms previous research (e.g., Kristiansen & Roberts, 2010). Consequently, *social support* as a coping strategy is useful as an additional coping strategy when trying to avoid media stress (Kristiansen et al., in press-b).

Not only support persons may be helpful when avoiding questions that may create excessive pressure; the Norwegian curling team unintentionally created a wonderful coping strategy with their 2010 pants, the pants functioned as a distraction. Usually, curling pants are sombre, dark or team-coloured shirts and black pants. In contrast, the Norwegian team

appeared with something colourful. The media used different adjectives to describe the pants, "argyle", "outstanding", the National Post wrote that "Norway praised for clowny curling" (Vallis, 2010), and Time placed them number one on their list of "worst dressed Olympians". Of course, the team immediately got a supporting Facebook group. For the first time, curling pictures were taken from the waist down, not the usual waist up! The pants turned out to be a very successful and neutral thing to talk to the journalists about, and they were able to manage media coverage by controlling the angle of most of the stories written about them. The journalists on the other hand, simply loved them for giving so much in the interview situation (Hanstad & Skille, 2010).

Coping with the press conferences

Due to the agreement with the journalists, the athlete had to talk to the journalist both before and after each event, hence avoidance was not always an option. For some, this was the most problematic part, as one Olympian noted: "I am the type of person that worries about things I have said to journalists". As a result, many of the athletes used *problem-focused* coping strategies to cope with the agreed interviews. Problem-focused coping strategies embrace a wide array of strategies that are directed inwards (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and athletes typically use a variety of these adaptive coping strategies (e.g., Ntoumanis & Biddle, 1998). In the present context, the Olympians used several types of rationalizations of their perception of the intentions of the journalists' questions. Being prepared in advance was also important:

> The journalists don't ask about our goals or what you hope to achieve. All they want is
> to find out the other stuff, things that I am not prepared for, and their questions may
> sweep my focus on task away. You never know […] I guess I was not prepared for
> that as a young athlete, that a second or third place was not good enough for the press.

In their quest for stories, journalists often focus on injuries and questions about unexpected poor performances. Questions such as "why you performed badly" resulted in some athletes dwelling on bad their performance. "Yesterday is another day with lots of possibilities; but they make it hard for us to get there". As a result, "I was a little anxious every time about who wanted to speak to me". The athlete tried to be prepared for everything in order not to be taken by surprise. Another interesting aspect mentioned by one athlete was that it was not necessarily one's disappointing results one was questioned about by the media; an athlete may be used as a spokesperson for the rest of the team's failure. As one athlete commented: "it kind of destroyed my own high-quality performances for me".

The media created stress is caused by the conflict between the athlete's goal and the media's goal for the same athlete. Consequently, what the athlete perceived as a success may have been labeled a failure/scandal/catastrophe by the journalists. Therefore, athletes needed their entire coping repertoire to cope with this type of questioning. As one explained: "Coming among the first ten is not bad if you were 30th in the previous race". The athletes' deplored journalist questions when it was apparently a result of the journalist's lack of knowledge about their sport, and elite sport in general.

> Previous good results creates its own pressure in addition to the media created one, this is something you have to work with, and you have to realize that you cannot always be number one. Then you actually have to be better than the others in all areas, and that is incredibly hard. That is what being an elite athlete all is about.

As some of the journalists seem to be totally unaware about this fact, the athlete's feel that it takes a lot of energy when faced with a lot of problem-focused coping in their meeting with the press:

> I didn't do as well as I expected during the Olympics, certainly not as well as the media expected. It is a lot of stuff going on in the head right after such a

disappointment. My trick is to wait a few minutes (if possible) before entering the mixed zone and answers the questions about "what I feel", "if I am disappointed", or "what went wrong"? Importantly, I wait until I have a normal pulse. As I don't want to be taken for an impolite person, I prefer to put things in perspective before answering any question. You know, things like "It is just sport", "it is not life or death" […] And then, be honest; tell them that it was overkill, and that you were afraid of failure.

Another Olympian used a similar tactic; "Brag about the opponents, don't whine, be polite, then the media will be nice to you and frame you positively. Because when you stand in front of the press, beaten and humble, then the media storm will go away quicker". According to motivation theory, this is the correct thing to do as the motivational climate quickly changes and the athlete has time to focus on the following events (e.g., Gernigon, d'Arripe-Longueville, Delignieres, & Ninot, 2004; Roberts, 2001). This will be elaborated upon next when discussing the concept of taking a media break.

Taking a *media break*: A case story interpreted within a motivational setting.

One way to cope with the journalists intrusive questioning is to take a *media break* [i.e. getting time off from the media attention, in order to focus on an upcoming event]. Such an action may be interpreted as using avoidance coping in order to be able to continue with problem-focused strategies with the intention of improving performance. In many ways, this was a strategy most of the interviewees tried to do to some extant during the Games, with some being more public about it than others. Hence, an important question for Olympic administrators is whether or not athletes should be allowed to take a day off to in order to pull him/herself back on the right track?

This question become very salient as one of "hottest" Norwegian gold candidates, whom the entire nation expected to win several gold medals, had a really disappointing opening to the Olympics and ended up coming in 41st in his event. He was naturally very

despondent. Against the rules agreed upon before the Olympics, he chose to take a media break *without* notifying the press in advance. He simply walked away from the stadium. The team leader was confronted with the journalists claiming that they considered that part of his job as an athlete was to talk to them. The team leader agreed (Skjarli, Vesteng, & Johannessen, 2010). After a while, the skier came back to the press mixed zone in order to answer the questions from the media, probably after some "advice" from the team leaders and coaches. However, this was just the beginning of his Olympic drama.

Some days later his ski pole was broken by a competitor (accidently) and he "only" won a bronze medal. After this incident, he simply walked through the mixed zone and did not turn back to be interviewed. If the media was provoked by his appearance the first day, the second day resulted in a media storm in Norway (e.g., Jensen, 2010). The media break was not at all accepted by the journalists present in Vancouver, and he had to attend a press conference the next morning. There he tried to explain his actions by saying: "this was my way of solving the problem. I needed to evaluate the incident in my own head first, I needed that yesterday […] I was disappointed, I needed to block it out before meeting the journalists" (NTB, 2010). In contrast, the leader of the Norwegian Sport journalists Federation is quoted in the same article: "It [his behaviour] is totally unacceptable. We are talking about common courtesy here". After this interview, he lived up to the pre-Olympic press expectations and won the rest of the events in his discipline.

This particular media break was commented upon by several of the journalists in a post-Olympic survey (Hanstad & Skille, 2010), and he was used as an example as one athlete the press perceived as complicated and difficult to cooperate with during the past Olympics. Hence, the same skier was the one with the highest number of articles in Norway during the Olympics. With or without his participation, he was certainly a "hot" item in the news. In retrospect, one might argue that the Norwegian press created as much stress for the athlete as

his opponents in the sport? But in his preparation for the Olympics, this particular media storm could not have been foreseen and prepared for.

In terms of coping with the stress created by the media, to what extent did this self chosen media break help him to refocus? From the outside, the impression is given that this athlete is very ego oriented, and he is famous for shouting out "this was a kid's race" in joy when winning. Evidence from previous research indicates that it is the ego oriented athletes who experience the media as a stressor. The conceptual explanation for this is that we know that ego oriented people are normatively referenced (e.g., Roberts et al, 2007), therefore getting public acknowledgment for their performance is important. Negative media exposure as illustrated in this case story, may be detrimental to their self-confidence and they may lose belief in their own competence as a skier. In the interview, it was clear this athlete needed time to cope both with the pressure and also his disappointment (NTB, 2010), hence, for him to take a media break may helped to get his head back on track as the media attention added its own contribution to the normal competitive stress.

Competing in the shadow of a media storm

Naturally, the media break and following media storm was mentioned by several of the interviewees when talking about journalists and the Olympics. Hence, their responses may shed some light on the complexity of the journalist-athlete relationship. Interestingly, consistent with public opinion at the time, the interviewees were divided on how they viewed the responses of this athlete. One simply called his behaviour "unacceptable" when seeing it in light of the agreement both journalists and athletes committed to before this Olympics. However, summed up in one statement, this was what the athletes themselves felt about his media neglect: "You cannot walk from the media the way he did. But I can totally understand why he did it". In more detail, one also claimed that it should be a choice and maybe sometimes one should just require a media break in order to refocus:

> I think that is somehow up to him. If he thinks that talking to the journalists will reduce his future chances for getting a medal, I think he should be given a break. He was supposed to do 4 more races, it had been a lot of pressure on him, and I think he should be given the right to be disappointed […]. The journalists may lead you to think about the wrong things, so I totally understand why he avoided talking to them.

In major competitions like this, the media by their question and/or simply by their presence may transfer performance goals onto the athletes by "leading you to think about wrong things", as in the quotation above. Such intrusions may change the perceived motivational climate from mastery based criteria of success to performance based criteria of success. By focusing on questions about "why did you lose", or "how did it happen", the media change the criteria of success to classic other referenced criteria and create demands on an athlete he/she may not be able to respond to well. By definition, this is stress (McGrath, 1970) and is an additional stress that the athlete had not taken into account in his/her pre-event training.

It was interesting to note that an incident such as this that maybe causes one athlete so much extra stress, gave others the opportunity to prepare without intrusion: as one athlete quoted, "I felt very comfortable being left peacefully alone, he got all the attention". Not that the rest of the team hoped for a media storm like this to happen, but one of them was pretty clear on that it was not a disadvantage to being on the same team as him:

> It is so great to have someone like him on the team. He was out there talking to the press, and I could quietly go away and prepare myself for the upcoming event. No one expected anything of me, no pressure at all. In contrast they [the journalists] expected him to win, and probably that the rest of us hopefully would not fail too much. It was perfect; I tried to hide from the media (and the journalists) as much as I could.

Discussion of the Results: The best way to cope with the media/journalists

First of all and based on the above findings, one part of being an elite athlete is to cope with the media and find a way to give the journalists what they want without being distracted; "it is part of the job to fulfill your obligations to the media". Media contact is considered necessary because of their federations' and/or sponsors' expectations of their visibility and showcasing of products, not because they want to have their picture in the paper and make "aunt happy" by reading news about them in the media. As several of the athletes underlined, both they and the journalists are actually in this together; they [the journalists] will write their story no matter what you contribute, and without publicity it is hard to do sport at the elite level. The issue, however, is to decide how much you are willing to give of yourself as an athlete (and private person):

> If you give them what they want, then it is possible to keep a private sphere because they will not examine you to the same extent. It is important to remember that the media (coverage) is the reason why we can continue to do sport, so we all make a living out of this. It is an easy choice to let them have their stories.

Secondly, it seems that if an individual or team did not deliver or take a (preferably gold) medal, then the athletes should prepare themselves for a discussion on what is an acceptable performance. Somehow the journalists seem mindless of the natural swings of sport performance: "Sport is not like that that you are very good and then extremely bad, it swings…naturally… It took me years to cope with their framing". When a terrible day at the Olympics is framed as being comparable to a natural disaster, the media "can in fact take away your entire self-confidence and self worth". The media has the power to write up athletes as easily as they write them down. Obviously, earlier experience (and age) helped the Olympians to cope with unusual and unexpected questions.

Third, all the athletes agreed that the media, in general, focused too much on non-performance and often organizational issues (see also, Kristiansen & Roberts, submitted). The reason for a focus on weight, coach issues, the waxing teams for cross country skiing, money and so forth, were considered to be due to the journalists' interest in sensationalism and "scandals" (Sisjord & Kristiansen, 2008). As a result, the Olympians have learned to walk a fine line of what can be told to the press and what should not be revealed to the press. "I have experienced that I cannot give everything to the media, I must hold back. It may cause a misunderstanding that one will have to go out and debate later". This is especially important when it comes to team and organizational issues (Kristiansen & Roberts, submitted).

> I have learned a lot about commenting upon problematic issues that may become an unnecessary distraction. I have not always been too diplomatic, but I think it is important to discuss problematic issues. I have also learned something about where to discuss what, and that to choose the correct forum is important.

Important values such as "things that happen inside the team should stay there" were mentioned by more than one. This is in accord with previous research as one way to avoid organizational stress (Becker, 2009). But not all questions can be expected:

> There are so many journalists that ask all types of questions, and you may easily not be prepared for what they are going to ask. And you even get the feeling that some of them don't even understand themselves why they are there either; they do not know anything about the sport, or which sport I do! They are totally ignorant, and I guess those are the worst journalists.

This quotation leads to the fourth point; all the Olympians agreed about the fact that the journalists' *lack* of knowledge of their sport. The media representatives lacked not only the technical, tactical or any knowledge of the rules of the sport, but also about the fact that it takes time to reach an elite level as an athlete, and that anyone can have "a bad day at the

office". Further, the Olympians "accusations" is reflected in the journalists' self-reported low level of preparation before the Olympics (Hanstad & Skille, 2010). It might seem as the journalists don't have enough background about the sport to ask the important or sport relevant questions, or they have to cover several sports. From the athletes' point of view, they experience this as ignorance when they have to explain the journalist the basic of their sport whenever they do an interview.

Fifth and finally, the athletes had several pieces of advice on how to make the journalist-athlete relationship a good one. Of the issues mentioned was to answer every question, though try to avoid any type of "home-coverage" that includes the family: Keep a very strict line between the private person and the public person. The athletes also stressed being considerate, polite and understanding of the media's situation that they need a story. They also observed that performing well in competition, of course, helps and seems to be the best way to a successful journalist-athlete relationship (see Table 1).

Table 1

Summarized characteristics of a positive journalist-athlete relationship

Athlete point of view of how to create a positive relationship to journalists:
Accept that both journalists and athletes need a "story": You are in it together
Be on time and stick to appointments
Comment only own performance
Be friendly and polite in your behaviour
Don't give too much of yourself
Establish a good relationship to some journalist that care for your sport
Respect go both ways (can tell things that will not be printed)
Avoid commenting upon inside issues outside the team (organizational issues)
Avoid commenting upon others behaviour
Don't go public with goals
Do not let the media decide what you should think and focus upon
Ask for a media break in advance

In summary, the evidence reveals that it might be easier to cope with what is written about you if you have a positive relationship with journalists: "I read more now than I used to, knowledge is power, you need to know what is going on when asked to comment upon things". Some athletes stated that the journalist-athlete relationship might be an encouraging

one, especially when one has journalists who have followed one's entire career. As one athlete stated: "I know they want me to succeed as well".

Others on the other hand, had not been that fortunate in parts of or through their entire career. Instead, these athletes had experienced being given "nick-names" by the media, had focused on body parts, and/or been ridiculed because of totally irrelevant features of their personality that had nothing to do with their performance. Such negative exposure tends to overshadow their performance and medal tally. It seems to be very difficult to change this image, and one of them pretty drily commented that "there are so many serious and perfect athletes to write about, I guess to write about me is a highly appreciated break for them". Again, the media "clowns" are good fodder to obtain material to comment on (Sisjord & Kristiansen, 2008).

Moreover, to change the media framing seems to be a "mission impossible". And even when successful, "the old articles are still out there on the internet". Consequently, the media is also seen as a constant stress factor. This fact was broadly referred to in the interviews, or as one interviewee put it: "The media is a hidden stress factor, I think many athletes don't realize how invasive it can be, and how much it might affect you". Or more directly: "I am pretty sure that several athletes have had their career smashed, or parts of it, because of the media. Some also probably got addicted to alcohol".

Power in the journalist-athlete relationship

So far, the focus has been on protecting the athletes from the media/journalists, but the athletes also realize that they are in it together with the journalists making a living out of it. In this setting, *power* is more or less openly revealed, and the stress perceived by the athletes is partly caused by this conflict of power in the interview setting/agenda (Giddens, 2006). Moreover, in the journalist-athlete relationship power seems to work in at least two different levels in the data: in the interaction (or relationship) between the journalists and athletes, and

also in the result of this interaction *or* lack of interaction, i.e. the media product that the athletes must cope with in the end.

First, there are obvious differences on how the athletes perceive the journalists, and power is also a theme in the journalist-athlete *relationship* about who is the "strongest" or has the most dominant part. Surprisingly, it is not always the journalist. The younger journalists have a reputation of being more aggressive and are perceived to be after the tabloid stories that sell, while the older ones may be more considerate, trustworthy and respected. Some journalists are even dedicated to the sport, as one athlete reflected:

> You can really feel that he likes your sport, that he really wants you to succeed, and you naturally *love* him more too. More likely, you will answer his questions and not the negative ones of the journalist next to him.

In the end, if a journalist wants something more than rehearsed platitudes, to create a well-functioning relationship might be more fruitful than making up stories (see also Table 1). As a result, the "older" reporters are the ones the TV companies send when there is something special they want the athletes to comment upon. It is easier for the athletes to say "no" to a young and inexperienced journalist. As one athlete stated: "but then they sent X, he is an old fox, and of course I had to give him an interview".

In the same vein, the older and more accomplished athletes have more power than the younger and aspiring ones, or they have earned the journalist's respect by being willing to give and cooperate with the media. One of the most accomplished athletes in our sample told us that he/she had called journalists and complained about several mistakes in articles available on the internet. Checking the net a few hours later, the article had been changed according to his/her comments. In contrast, one new and developing athlete discussed the framing of a story with a journalist, and in the next article, he/she was ridiculed by the same journalist. It appears that in the journalist-athlete relationship, more power and influence is

related to age, experience, and a mutual respect for the other. When athletes manage to keep a good relationship and include the journalists naturally in his/her whereabouts, then he/she also seems to have a better control of the of the angle of the story.

Second, the power theme was very obvious in the athletes' perception of the *media product* [the finished story]. In many ways, **"**The media has the *power* to make little things big, and make you feel like a failure when you have just had a bad day". This power to decide what they should think and worry about and whether the story is framed negatively is what the athletes fear most of all because "it affects you more than you realize". As a result, adolescent athletes should be taught to make neutral and positive comments at the beginning of a career to create a positive first impression to avoid unnecessary distraction that negative framing of youthful arrogance or tactless comments might cause later on. And with maturation and experience, it also seems as the journalist-athlete relationship improves and becomes sounder, and the athletes care less about the coverage: "You will not survive if you take it personally", seems to be important point to remember.

Conclusion

The journalist-athlete relationship is a paradoxical one that the athletes must learn to *cope* with, and the inexperienced younger athletes struggle more and get affected easier. Whilst the best advice is to be understanding of the journalists' need for stories and inside information, the athletes also keep their distance because the media coverages turn out to be a *constant* stress factor. For this reason, the elite athletes need to learn a *variety* of coping strategies (Gould & Maynard, 2009; Nicholls, 2007). We found evidence of problem-focused strategies, social support and avoidance coping (Kristiansen et al., in press-b), and also taking a media break that is the ultimate avoidance coping.

Further, a mastery climate often is associated with reduced experience of stress (Kristiansen et al., in press-a; Pensgaard & Roberts, 2000, 2002), and adaptive coping (see

Kristiansen, Roberts, & Abrahamsen, 2008; Ntoumanis, Biddle, & Haddock 1999; Pensgaard & Roberts, 2003). As a result, an applied recommendation would be to keep the climate mastery oriented, especially during major competitions. Use of social support within a mastery climate is one way of protecting athletes from media demands. Moreover, it may even be productive to have the support-personnel meet the media and become a "lightening rod" to take the attention from the athlete when "catastrophes" happen and give them time to concentrate and refocus. In other words, they must balance "the need/desire for public relations and promotion of the sport and athletes with the athletes' needs for performance preparation and competition" (Gould & Maynard, 2009, p. 1403). When a media break seems to cause as much stress as actually meeting the media, this may be an adaptive approach. In addition, this is a strategy some football coaches adopt in order to protect their athletes when they need them to focus about upcoming events (Kristiansen & Roberts, submitted).

In conclusion, the experience of the Norwegian media and the Norwegian Olympic authorities to manage the access to the athletes to the benefit of each was a success story to some extent, but the fact remains: The media acts as a source of real stress during major competitive events that are avidly followed by spectators around the world. The huge media presence is in addition to the competitive pressure that accompanies athletes when they compete against the best in the world. When the media is also present to ask questions that range from the trivial to the intensively private, it is no wonder some athletes find it stressful and avoid them as much as possible.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Stress Questionnaires

Items of CASFQ (Coach-Athlete Stressors in Football Questionnaire) and MSFQ (Media Stressors in Football Questionnaire) used in paper 3 and 5.

CASFQ	MSFQ
	Media stress: Outcome coverage
1. The team selection is fair and does not create a bad atmosphere	1. Our Team gets much media coverage/attention
2. The coach and team agree on the strategy for the team	2. Media focus on our results
3. The coach treats all of us the same way and with fairness	3. Media give a correct coverage/framing of the Teams achievements
4. We in the team respect our coach	4. We get a media coverage which reflects our results
5. Coach is good at communicating with us players	**Media stress: Negative content**
6. Players and team management/ leaders communicate well	5. I take what media writes about my Team and myself personally
7. We are good at discussing different views during training	6. Media creates a pressure for winning which I find stressful (before games)

Appendix B: CV

Current position

The Norwegian School of Sport Sciences
PhD-student in Sport Psychology (2007-2011)

Higher Education

2002-2005   *Norwegian School of Sport Sciences*   M.Sc. Sport Science
Sport Psychology
"Competitive stress in elite wrestling: The effect of task involvement on coping"

1993-1995   *University of Oslo*   Cand. Philol.
Scandinavian languages and literature
"En kvantitativ språksosiologisk oppgave om holdningene til de vikværske dialektene /
A quantitative sociolinguistic thesis on attitudes towards the Vikværske dialects"

BA   *University of Oslo*
English (1989-1990), History of Religions (1990-91, 1995), and Pedagogy (1995-1996)

BA   *University of Bergen*
Scandinavian languages and literature (1991-1992), and Media Science (1999-2000)

Working Experience

2007-2011   *Norwegian School of Sport Sciences*   PhD Student
Teaching experience at all levels, especially "Motivational processes in sport and
physical activity"
2005-2007   *Norwegian School of Sport Sciences*   Research fellow
1998-2007   *Norwegian College of Elite Sport, Bærum*   Lecturer
1995-1998   *Bleiker vocational school, Asker*   Lecturer

Contributions to Edited Peer-Reviewed Research Books:

Roberts, G. C., & **Kristiansen, E**. (in press). Goal setting to enhance motivation in
sport. In G. C. Roberts & D. C. Treasure (Eds.), *Advances in motivation in sport and
exercise (Vol. 3)*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

2010   Roberts, G. C., & **Kristiansen, E**. Motivation and goal setting. In S. Hanrahan & M.
Anderson (Eds.), *Handbook of Applied Sport Psychology* (pp. 490-499). New York:
Routledge

Refereed Academic Journal Papers related to sport:

Kristiansen, E., Murphy, D., & Roberts, G. C**.** (submitted). Coping with stress in
American soccer.

Kristiansen, E., Hanstad, D. V., & Roberts, G. C**.** (in review). Coping with the media at the Vancouver Winter Olympics: "We all make a living out of this". *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology.*

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Kristiansen, E., Robert, G. C., & Sisjord, M. K. (in press) Coping with media stress: The experiences of professional goalkeepers. *International Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*.

2010   **Kristiansen, E.,** & Roberts, G. C. Young elite athletes and social support: Coping with competitive and organizational stress in "Olympic" competition. *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine and Science in Sports.*

2009   **Kristiansen, E.** (2009). Coping with stressors in youth sport events. Contribution published in the first volume of the Virtual Olympic Congress 2009 proceedings (pp. 656-657).

2009   Sisjord, M. K., & **Kristiansen, E.** Female elite wrestler's muscles: Physical strength and a social burden. *International Review of Sociology in Sport, 44*, 231-246.

2008   **Kristiansen, E.,** Roberts, G. C., & Abrahamsen, F. E. Achievement involvement and stress coping in elite wrestling. *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine and Science in Sport, 18 (4),* 526-538.

2008   Sisjord, M. K., & **Kristiansen, E.** Serious athletes or media clowns? Female and male wrestler's perceptions of media constructions. *Sociology in Sport Journal, 25 (3),* 350-368.

Refereed Academic Journal Papers related to dialects (Norwegian publications):

1999   **Kristiansen, E**: Haldningar til vikværsk. In Kleiva, Donali, Nesset, & Øygarden (Eds), *Austlandsmål i endring. Dialekter, nynorsk og språkhaldningar på indre Austlandet* (pp. 140-148). Oslo: Samlaget.

1996   **Kristiansen E**: En kvantitativ språkholdningsundersøkelse i Drammen *Norskrift,* 8-29.

1995/2009   **Kristiansen, E**: Drammensernes holdninger til eget talemål *Språklig Samling,* 13-1.

Published conference proceedings

2007   Sisjord, M. K., & **Kristiansen, E**: Wrestling, Physicality and gender. In H. Itkonen, A.K. Salmikangas, & E. McEvoy (Eds.), *The changing role of public, civic and private sectors in sport culture* (pp. 71-74). University of Jyväskylä, Finland.

2007   **Kristiansen, E.,** & Roberts, G. C.: Religion as a coping strategy among elite wrestlers. In H. Itkonen, A.K. Salmikangas, & E. McEvoy (Eds.), *The changing role of public, civic and private sectors in sport culture* (pp. 224-227). University of Jyväskylä, Finland.

2007	**Kristiansen, E.,** Roberts, G. C., & Abrahamsen, F. E.: Coping with competitive stress in elite wrestling. The experiences of men and women wrestlers. In p. Heikinaro-Johansson, R. Telama., & E. McEvoy (Eds), *The role of physical education and sport in promoting physical activity and health* (pp. 252-257). University of Jyväskylä, Finland.

Oral presentations at international Conferences:

2010	*AASP, Providence, USA* Kristiansen E., & Roberts, G. C.: "Motivation and goalkeeping: Coping with negative media reporting"
2010	*BMS (Biomechanics and medicine in Swimming), Oslo, Norway* Kristiansen, E., Stensrud, T., & Stadelmann, K.: "Bronchial hyper responsiveness, physiological and psychological recovery among adolescent swimmers: A preliminary investigation".
2009	*ECSS, Oslo, Norway* Kristiansen, E., & Roberts, G. C.: "Motivation and goalkeeping: Coping with media reporting of saves and failures".
2008	*AASP, St. Louis USA* Kristiansen, E., Roberts, G. C., Abrahamsen, F. E.: "Young elite athletes coping with "Olympic" demands" (poster).
2008	*AASP, St. Louis USA* Abrahamsen, F. E., Roberts, G. C., & Kristiansen, E.: "Climate change between training and competition – increasing stress in an international tournament".
2007	*FEPSAC, Greece* Kristiansen, E., Sisjord, M. K., & Roberts, G. C: "Wrestling, with gender stereotyping in media constructions: A study on how Norwegian elite wrestlers cope with media attention".
2006	*AAASP, Miami USA* Kristiansen, E., Roberts, G. C., & Abrahamsen, F. E: "The role of task involvement in coping with competitive stress".
2006	*AIESEP World Congress, Finland* Kristiansen, E., Roberts, G. C., & Abrahamsen, F.E: "Coping with competitive stress in elite wrestling".
2006	*3rd EASS Conference, Finland* Kristiansen, E., & Roberts, G. C.: "Religion as a coping strategy among elite wrestlers".
2006	*3rd EASS Conference, Finland* Sisjord, M. K., & Kristiansen, E: "Wrestling, physicality and gender".

Manuscript submitted for publication:

Kristiansen, E., Abrahamsen, F. E., & Stensrud, T. Elite swimmers and breathing: A stress issue?

Kristiansen, E., Tomten, S., Hanstad, D. V., & Roberts, G. C. Coaching elite female athletes.