

Louise Rodgers Holte

“Why I asked for help”

Narratives from Professional Football Players

Master Thesis in Sport Science
Department of Sport & Social Sciences
Norwegian School of Sport Sciences, 2022

Abstract

Using thematic analysis on narratives from professional male football players this study aimed to gain a more nuanced understanding of what triggers them to ask for help from a sport psychology consultant. Although there is an increased awareness over the past years on mental health and well-being in elite sports, the stereotype male football player is lauded an outward manifestation of hypermasculinity and unfortunately there is still a stigmatisation on mental health issues and help-seeking in this environment. The data from the interviews was thematically categorised into main categories and subcategories; (1) I asked for help because; a) the timing was right, b) I realised it was a mental issue, c) I wanted to see how it could help me. (2) The effects after asking for help; a) on the pitch (i) I am more task orientated, (ii) I am less stressed and play with more confidence, b) off the pitch (i) I am calmer, (ii) I have better work-life balance. (3) The reaction to asking for help has; a) been positive, b) been of the curious sort. (4) I believe the stigma regarding help-seeking is a) because it is associated with mental problems, b) due to the hypermasculine environment. c) experiencing a positive shift. When connecting the dots in relation to the research question a) previous hardship, b) self-regulatory skills, and c) having a confidant was of relevance. Hopefully this study can help further break down the underlying stigma of help-seeking in hypermasculine environments.

Acknowledgement

Never say never. 25 years ago, as a young student I proclaimed I would never do a master's degree. Working for over 20 years I have moved through the roles of teacher, strength and condition coach to a sports psychology consultant, while simultaneously studying and working my way into the world of elite male football. In 2020 I felt the need to continue to develop as a professional, so I embarked on this master's degree.

I would like to thank my husband, Geir, for being so supportive, not only over the past two years but through the two decades we have shared together. In the moments where I have struggled and doubted if doing a degree, while juggling three other jobs and most importantly being a good mum, is possible you have been my rock. Your faith in me has given me faith in myself. Thank you Geir, I love you. To my kids, Kristian and Leon, you are my all.

To Mum and Dad, my trailblazers, you have been my role models in how you always show a genuine interest in the people you meet in your lives. The ability to care for and carry people in all phases of life has had such a great impact on how I wish to live my life in interaction with others. For all the love, prayer and support, I thank you. To my big sister Lynne, and her wee clan, thank you for always cheering me on, I love you all.

To my supervisors, Anne Marte Pensgaard and Tom Henning Øvrebø, I could not have done this without your support and guidance. Having the opportunity to work with such great professionals has been inspiring. Thank you for your feedback and engagement throughout the project, for steering me in the right directions and for calming me when much needed.

I would also like to thank the five participants. I would have loved to mention you by name, but you know who you are. Thank you for taking time to contribute, for your openness, for letting me in on your experiences, understandings and reflections. This project has come to life because of you.

Louise Rodgers Holte,
Norwegian School of Sport Science, 2022

Table of contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgement	3
Introduction	6
<i>The present study, research question and purpose</i>	7
<i>Theoretical framework</i>	9
Well-being and mental health.....	9
Mental skills training	12
The Sport Psychology Consultant	13
Self-regulation.....	15
Methodology	18
<i>Qualitative methodology</i>	18
Narrative analysis.....	19
Qualitative interview.....	21
Developing the interview guide	22
<i>Sample</i>	24
<i>Work procedure</i>	25
<i>Analysis</i>	27
<i>Scientific quality</i>	30
<i>Ethical considerations</i>	31
Analysis & Discussion	35
<i>I asked for help because</i>	37
... the timing was right.....	38
... I realised it was a mental issue	38
... I wanted to see how it could help me	39
<i>The effects after asking for help</i>	40
... on the pitch.....	41
... off the pitch.....	45
<i>The reactions to asking for help have</i>	48
... been positive.....	49
... been of the curious sort.....	50
<i>I believe the stigma regarding help-seeking is</i>	51
... because it is associated with mental problems	52
... due to the hypermasculine environment.....	53
... experiencing a positive shift	54
<i>Connecting the dots</i>	56
Previous hardships	58
Self-regulatory skills.....	62
No man is an island - the confidant	66

<i>Methodological limitations and future research</i>	68
Conclusion	70
References	72
Appendices	80
<i>Appendix 1. Form of consent</i>	80
<i>Appendix 2. Interview guide</i>	83
<i>Appendix 3. NSD Approval</i>	84
<i>Appendix 4. REK Assessment</i>	86

Introduction

I have always been a people's person. I believe I have inherited that from my Mum and Dad who have always shown great interest in people they have met along life's journey. I call them my trailblazers. I fondly remember as a child sitting at the top of the staircase ears dropping in on the conversations they had with visitors, and how they would counsel them or offer advice to those who needed such. I have always had an interest in sports, especially football. As a child every Saturday dinner was served in the TV-room while my dad, big sister and I were cheering for Liverpool. I even played football for 10 years but was pretty crap at it. Anyway, little did I know 35-40 years ago that these two childhood interests would path the direction of my profession into male elite football and this present study.

Being both a strength & conditioning coach and a sport psychology consultant in male elite football, I have over the years become well-known with the dynamics and demands of this performance culture. Even though awareness on wellbeing and mental health in elite sports has increased over the past years (Purcell, Gwyther & Rice, 2019, p. 46), the male football player stereotype is lauded an outward manifestation of hypermasculinity (Gaston et al, 2018, p. 302), and unfortunately there is still a stigmatisation around mental health issues in this culture, often regarded as a weakness and not synchronised with the image of the macho football player. The competitive element needed for success in elite sports can conflict with issues of mental health illness (DeLenardo & Terrion, 2014, p. 43). There still resides a notion that help-seeking athletes may be regarded as weak, even though improvements are being made within elite sport, education and research can encourage men to speak about their mental health and wellbeing (Souter et al., 2018, p. 1).

The context of elite sport presents more than 600 distinct stressors besides the technical execution, tactical understanding and physical capacities and demands (Foskett & Langstaff, 2018, p. 765). The psychological demands require a well-developed mental capacity which could be defined as *“sufficient understanding and memory to comprehend in a general way the situation in which one finds oneself and the nature, purpose, and consequence of any act or transaction into which one proposes to enter”*

(Merriam-Webster.com Medical Dictionary, accessed 23rd of April 2021). Improving one's mental capacity can be crucial for performance and development as an athlete (Siekańska et al, 2021, p. 1). The highest performance levels of international football have over the past decades become increasingly complex technically, tactically and physically, enhancing the need and deliberate use of advanced psychological skills (Konter et al., 2019, p. 179). Research on this group of athletes indicates those with most success constantly require and employ mental skills to improve and develop their performance (p. 179) and possessing the ability to effectually use self-regulatory skills, makes it possible for athletes to achieve their full performance potential also under unfavourable conditions (Beckmann & Elbe, 2015, p. 3).

The abovementioned factors, issues and matters create the backdrop and purpose of the research question “Why I asked for help” that will be presented in the next section.

The present study, research question and purpose

In my work as a sport psychology consultant, I use a holistic approach when working with my athletes. Friesen and Orlick interpret holistic coaching as managing the psychological effects the athlete's performance from non-sport domains, developing the core individual beyond their athletic persona, and recognising the dynamic relationship between an athlete's thoughts, feelings, physiology, and behaviour (2010, p. 227). With a holistic view, encompassing a positive psychological perspective of mental health and well-being sets a guideline for the angle of this thesis.

In most conversations with my athletes, we focus on performance related topics, but they also share in on challenges and experiences they face outside the sports arena as a result of their profession, e.g., pressure from media, supporters or significant others, how the dynamics of a transfer window may affect them, adjustments to a new culture, environment and language, and for some it may be loneliness or missing loved ones at home. This has made me highly aware of the challenges of ensuring the athlete's well-being and coping both on and off the arena.

A central aim of this research is to gain a more nuanced understanding of what triggers athletes to ask for help, and whether using a sport psychology consultant is beneficial to

their well-being and coping in a highly demanding performance culture. An underlying curiosity is to what degree athletes pan-contextualise already acquired mental skills from sports to the everyday-life challenges. By getting hold of their stories as to why they asked for help, I hope to provide insight into how they manoeuvre in the demanding road to success in elite football on and off the pitch. The analysis of the narratives, results and discussion can hopefully help to further reduce stigma of help-seeking in hypermasculine environments.

One of the main reasons athletes work with a sport psychologist, sport psychology consultant or mental coach is to receive help and guidance to optimise their mental skills and tools to ensure the best possible performance on the training field and during competitions (Wrisberg et al, 2009, p. 471). Relaxation, goal setting, self-talk, visualisation, focusing, and re-focusing, emotional control, automaticity, attentional control, and activation, are interventions collectively called mental skills (Howland, 2006, p.49; Woodman et al, 2010, p. 185). Research shows that there has been considerable development in mental skills training in applied sport psychology practice in the field of performance and attention (Sadeghi et al., 2010, p. 81). The education and title of the professions sport psychologist, sport psychology consultant or mental coach differs but the common denominator is that it is a professional who assists, in this thesis, an athlete in their pursuit of higher levels of performance (Fortin-Guichard et al., 2018, p. 11). The term sport psychology consultant will hereafter be used.

If you conduct a search on “help-seeking elite athletes” in the database Google Scholar, you will get approximately 3170 hits¹ (8th of January 2022). The majority of research on the help-seeking elite athlete population focuses on the occurrence of common mental disorders, such as the prevalence of e.g., anxiety and depression symptoms, and symptoms of distress and addictive disorders (e.g., Gulliver et al., 2012; DeLenardo & Terrion, 2014; Wood, Harrison, & Kucharska, 2017; Foskett & Longstaff, 2018; Tahtinen et al., 2019). In 2021 several highly profiled Norwegian football players have shared their stories in national media e.g., Verdens Gang, Dagbladet, Tv2Sporten, on how various stressors have had a negative impact on their performances and/or well-being, and how receiving help from a sport psychology consultant has helped them deal

¹ https://scholar.google.com/scholar?start=10&q=help-seeking+elite+athletes&hl=no&as_sdt=0,5

with the issues of importance (Giæver, 2021; Herrebrøden, 2021; Sandholt, 2021; Arntzen, 2021; Svegaarden, 2021; Brant, Corneliussen, Salater & Gullachsen, 2021). The common denominator in these news headlines is that the athletes have received help, after struggling over a given period, resulting in what they express as both personal and professional growth.

In the following the theoretical framework and central concepts in the study are presented. By applying a narrative approach and thematic analysis to the provided in-depth data achieved through semi-structured interviews, the results will then be presented and further discussed. Methodological limitations and implications on further research will be addressed before presenting the conclusion.

Theoretical framework

Applying the qualitative method of narrative inquiry to the topic of interest sets guidelines to be open to the stories told by the participants during the interviews. Being a descriptive case study, the attempt is not to build or test theoretical models but present a detailed picture of the phenomena to reach a greater understanding of other similar cases (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 295). The different, and difference in the athletes' stories will determine the theoretical perspectives. Well-being and mental health, mental skills training, the sport psychology consultant and self-regulation are central concepts in the telling's from the athletes and will be presented in the following.

Well-being and mental health

Well-being has been regarded from either a hedonic or eudaimonic perspective (Lundqvist, 2011, p. 110-111). The hedonic perspective is based on the idea that pleasure and happiness are the essential goals of human life. Happiness is increased by; striving for pleasurable moments; working towards gratifying goals in line with one's values; and approaching stimuli that increases positive affect. This, resulting in increased well-being. On the other hand, the eudaimonic perspective considers well-being to be separated from happiness and pleasure. Goals and values that increase positive affect are not necessarily helpful to the one's growth and development. Instead

of defining well-being as primarily finding happiness, the eudaimonic perspective is related to challenges and activities people engage in to develop and reach an individual potential that is in line with important values and engagements rooted in the self (p. 110). A hedonic perspective applies the description of subjective well-being and a eudaimonic perspective uses the descriptions of social and psychological well-being (p. 111). In Lundquist's review on well-being in competitive sports she differentiates between global well-being and well-being on the contextual sport level (p. 121-122). Global well-being is viewed as contextual-free subjective evaluations of one's life. The findings also show that few studies on well-being within a competitive sport context have explored athletes' satisfaction with their sport situation in depth. By including questions on the aspect of pan-contextualisation of the athletes' mental skills in the interviews, this study may provide insight into whether global well-being may act as a buffer for sport-related well-being or vice versa; whether sport well-being may impact athletes' levels of global well-being.

Contemporary research on well-being and mental health has to some extent experienced a shift in focus from a negative conceptualisation framed in mental illness, to characterisations that also include positive aspects that encompass the level of functioning of individuals. Key points from the narrative systematic review on the mental health of elite athletes, conducted by Rice et. al (2016), are that the evidence base on well-being and mental health amongst elite athletes is limited by a paucity of high-quality, systematic studies including interventional trials (p. 1333). In line with this work Kuettel and Larsens' scoping review on risk and protective factors for mental health in elite athletes, indicates that researchers have mainly studied the occurrence of athletes' mental *ill*-health and correlated factors compromising mental health (2020, p. 231).

In 2002 Keyes posed the question to whether the absence of mental illness is reflective of genuine mental health (p. 217). In a following publication he stresses that there is no standard in how to diagnose, study or measure the presence of mental health and that science fails by portraying mental health as the absence of psychopathology (2005, p. 539). In 2014 The World Health Organisation (WHO) defined mental health as a state of well-being in which each individual realises their own potential, can cope with the

normal stresses of life, work fruitfully and productively and are able to make a contribution to their community (p. 2). This definition embraces a more holistic view and encompasses a positive psychological perspective of mental health with well-being as a central concept. WHO therefore consider mental health a continuum ranging from facets of negative mental health, such as the presence of mental health disorders, to facets of positive mental health such as high levels of psychological wellbeing (van Rens & Heritage, 2021, p. 1). Reservations expressed by philosophers and scientists towards presented definitions on mental health is the excessive emphasis on positive functions and emotions, and the overlap between the concept of well-being and health (Palumbo & Galderisi, 2020, p. 7).

Based on their overview of research on mental health of elite athletes from 1998 to 2018, and their experience working with high performance athletes, Kuettel and Larsens' definition of mental health in relation to elite athletes will be used in this thesis:

Mental health is a dynamic state of well-being in which athletes can realise their potential, see a purpose and meaning in sport and life, experience trusting personal relationships, cope with common life stressors and the specific stressors in elite sport, and are able to act autonomously according to their values (2020, p. 253).

The shift from a negative conceptualisation framed mental illness definition to a more holistic view, encompassing a positive psychological perspective of mental health and well-being sets a guideline for the angle of this thesis. The aim of this thesis is to achieve a greater understanding through the narratives of the athletes themselves, as to what triggered them to ask for help. A deep dive into their experiences and stories may lead to greater insight into the choice of working with a sport psychology consultant, and what pan contextual ripple effects such a cooperation may have on well-being and coping strategies on and off the sports arena. Hopefully this study can be beneficial for other athletes and coaches in the demanding performance culture of elite sports.

Mental skills training

Interventions such as relaxation, goal setting, self-talk, visualisation, focusing, and re-focusing, are collectively called mental skills, and are instrumental in helping athletes achieve good performances (Howland, 2006, p.49). According to Frey et al. (2003) mental skills training is when the athlete practices with e.g., a coach or sport psychology consultant, where mental skills are introduced to the athlete, or in any type of coursework where the athlete is taught mental skills training (p.116).

Historically the effect and role of mental preparation and training on performance has received considerable attention by both coaches and athletes (Heishman & Bunker, 1989, p 14). Being aware of these benefits on performance and how to apply them in training and competition is an essential starting point for an athlete. In the same study Heishman and Bunker also confirmed the effectiveness of sport psychology consultants in that their work with athletes was correlated to a higher use of mental skills and more success during competition (1989, p. 21).

Taking into consideration McCann's (1995) postulation that high-level athletes spend up to 99% of their sport-related time in training (McCardle et al., 2019, p. 113; Oliver et al., 2010 p. 433; Woodman et al., 2010, p. 184; Frey et al., 2003, p. 115), it is of importance that mental skills training is emphasised during practice. Greater use of mental skills in training has shown to be significantly related to a higher experience of success during training as well as competition. Athletes implementing such skills during training may improve their abilities to use the mental skills, and the effectiveness of the skills may in turn lead to greater success while performing (Frey et al. 2003, p. 124).

The importance of an athlete's adherence to mental skill training was emphasised by Bull (1991). His results revealed the importance of self-motivation in predicting adherence to mental training. In follow up interviews with athletes the need for individualised training programs, and the issue of sufficient time were of importance in the adherence process (p. 121). In summary an athlete's devotion and ability to prioritise time in addition to access to an individual training program and for mental skill training is of the essence for it to be beneficial for performance enhancement.

Collins and Richards (2021) emphasize that mental skills are not merely the “what” of mental skills training but include issues related to the why, how and who, indicating the ideas of decision-making and professional judgement that emphasise effective service provision (p. 61). Psychological factors play a central role in performance, including mental skills applied on the “day of performance”, mental skills to amplify training benefits, and mental skills to safeguard the well-being of the athlete as an individual (p. 61-62).

It should be mentioned that the effects of mental training are also criticised. Gardner (2009) debates issues related to the lack of efficacy of long assumed and traditional "gold-standard" mediations for the enhancement of athletic performance, comparing the field's empirical roots to sister disciplines in psychology (p.139). Additionally, claiming a lack of empirical studies on degree of change, moderators of change, and mediators and mechanisms of change, suggesting that new research should provide a research agenda in the field of sports psychology that expands the professional credibility and improve the overall scientific development (p. 139).

The Sport Psychology Consultant

Four decades ago, the role of a sport psychology consultant was relatively new to sports and the role definition and function was unclear (LaRose, 1988, p. 142). LaRose (1988) addressed the role of the clinical certified or licensed sports psychologist who helps athletes by providing various forms of psychotherapy, but on the other hand also may attempt helping athletes develop the necessary psychological skills for enjoyment and optimal participation in sport (p. 143), also fulfilling an educational role. By distinguishing between the clinical role and the educational role, practitioners who do not wish for a clinical practice can serve as consultants and provide teaching and helping services to athletes (p. 144). An athlete with an educational expectation of the sports psychology consultant would expect himself/herself to be an active participant with the consultant when analysing the given issue, challenge or problem and deciding on succeeding action. LaRose summarises by underlining that the sports psychology consultant should assist and train athletes providing them with an atmosphere that

justifies the fundamental goals of sport: optimal performance and personal growth (p.145).

In 1987 Orlick and Partington conducted a study on athletes who represented Canada during the Olympics in 1984, addressing the use of sport psychology consultants to maximize their performance as part of their preparation to the Olympic Games (p. 4). Even though the expressed opinions on whether the sport psychology consultant was helpful varied, still 98 % felt a need for better accessibility of suitable sport psychological services (p. 9). A second aim of the study was to map the athletes' views of desirable and undesirable sport consultant qualities creating profiles of best and worst consultant. For the purpose of this study the profile of best consultants is of interest. The athletes characterized the services of sport psychology consultants who were identified as "great" and "made a difference" by e.g., providing concrete suggestions, tailored training programs, frequent contact and follow-up during the competitive season, and having personal concerns for the athletes (p. 6). These findings are comparable to Sharp and Hodges (2011) findings where three characteristics of sport psychology consultants' effectiveness were identified: creating a positive change through a connection with the athlete, building a professional consulting relationship with the athlete, and finally providing a consulting relationship meeting the athletes' needs (p. 360). The aspects of the athlete as an active partaker and the consultants understanding for client boundaries of confidentiality also emerged in the given study (p. 360). Central in both studies mentioned above is the athlete's needs whether it be mental skills training or well-being.

The abovementioned research has helped identify professional characteristics of the sport psychology consultant as well as training knowledge and development. Recent research also focuses on the professional identity of the consultant and the manner of how they understand their role, specific characteristics, group membership and the cognitive structures to help them manoeuvre within the environmental demands of their profession (Quartioli et al., 2021, p. 2). Identification, raising awareness and understanding the professional identities is central in Wadsworth et al.'s (2021) systematic review on 73 studies of applied sport psychology practitioners' reflective processes, resulting in nine themes; process and purpose of reflective practice; ethical practice; supporting person and performer; practitioner individuation; relationships with

clients; cultural awareness; competence-related angst; support of practitioner development; and evaluating practitioner effectiveness (p. 1). The findings demonstrate that at different stages of development practitioners vary in topics of interest, engagement and reflection. This form of research can be applied as a frame of reference in helping consultants continue to develop through reflective practice, both technically, practically and critically. Understanding one's own experiences in relation to the experiences of other consultants can give insight to the meaning behind own practice, creating a positioning of the different experiences and practices within the field as a whole (p.1).

Self-regulation

Following is a brief introduction of self-regulation theory. This theory is of interest as a framework because it essentially captures the degree of ability an individual must possess to manoeuvre through the pan-contextual challenges of life as an elite athlete. The participants in this study all arrived at a point in their careers where they reflected over that asking for help would be beneficial to them and took action by getting in touch with a sport psychology consultant, therefore the self-regulation theory may appear to be appropriate to the given research topic.

Baumeister and Vohs (2007) describe self-regulation as the self's capacity to adjust or alter its behaviours. Good self-control is beneficial and contributes to several desirable consequences, including work or school success, task performance, popularity, good interpersonal relationships, and regulation and mental health (p. 1). By increased flexibility of one's behaviour the individual may adjust actions to a broader range of social and situational demands, in other words; in a pan-contextual manner. It enables the athlete to control their feeling, thoughts and actions. Self-regulation lets the athlete adjust and adapt to the physical and social environment and is regarded to be a central process in psychological functioning (Schmeichel & Baumeister, 2004, p. 85).

Self-regulation theory is a social cognitive theory describing self-regulation as an arrangement of conscious conduct of one's self by administering thought, behaviour and feelings to reach goals. In *Social Cognitive Theory of Self-Regulation* (1991) Bandura states that human behaviour is significantly regulated and motivated by

constant exercise of self-influence and that the system of self-regulation is the very centre of causal processes (p. 248). He incorporates three subfunctions of self-regulation; the monitoring of behaviour, its determinants, and the effects; judging the behaviour in relation to environmental circumstances and personal standards; and affective self-reaction (p. 248). Baumeister and Vohs (2007) add to Bandura's subfunctions stating that self-regulation has four ingredients; standards of desirable behaviour in the given context, monitoring of thoughts and situations is essential to be able to track and regulate one's behaviour, willpower reflected by the internal strength to control urges, this is also called self-regulatory strength and motivation to meet the standard or achieve the set goal (p. 3).

Zimmerman (1995) describes self-regulated individuals as metacognitively, motivationally and behaviourally proactive participants in their own learning process (p. 217). This implies that a self-regulated athlete will know how to achieve their performance improved goals, are motivated, and take action to attain their goal (Toering et al., 2009, p. 1509). Self-regulation, the related notion of willpower and relation to motivation was examined by Baumeister and Vohs (2007). They emphasise that self-regulation is often used to both override and alter responses, but to achieve success of engaging in self-regulation the motivation to self-regulate is of the essence (p. 2). Cognitive and motivational issues have been the focus much of self-regulation research (Cleary & Zimmerman, 2001, p. 188). Deriving self-regulation models on how and why certain processes influence an athlete's motivation, ability to self-manage thoughts, feelings and behaviour, and ability to correct mistakes have guided a variety of studies on self-regulatory processes e.g., goalsetting and feedback; self-evaluation and self-reward; problem identification and environmental management; imagery and focusing strategies (p. 188).

The extent to which individuals proactively participate in own learning processes, is a significant type of behaviour that appears to be of importance for elite, or upcoming elite, players (Jordet, 2019, p. 84). By interviewing professional football players, we may gain insight into whether asking for help has benefited their self-regulatory skills and performance enhancement and insight into how they manoeuvre in the demanding road to success in elite football on and off the pitch. Through the analysis of the

narratives, the results and discussion can hopefully help to further break down the underlying stigma of help-seeking in hypermasculine environments.

Methodology

Qualitative methodology

Methodology can be described on a general level as a systematic process to achieve a specific goal (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 83). Halvorsen (2008) provides a narrower definition as the craftsmanship of scientific functioning, or more precisely the doctrine of the tools one uses to gather information (p. 21). The main divide runs between quantitative orientated and qualitative orientated research. The latter being applied in this study. Qualitative methodology is characterised by text or verbal statements as form of expression (Halvorsen, 2008, p. 128). Halvorsen further describes that purpose of using this method is to obtain rich data about people and situations that can increase the possibility to understand behaviour and situations as they are perceived by those who are being studied (2008, p. 128).

Qualitative research in sport aims to clarify, describe, evaluate and develop theory of social relationships, motivation, behaviour, meaning and values, in diverse activity and sport contexts, contributing to the theoretical understanding of a diverse and complex sociocultural world of sporting, and insight to the understanding and experiences of athletes (Smith & Caddick, 2012, p. 60; Brinkman & Thagaard, 2012, p. 17). This study is a narrative thematic analysis of professional football players. Using semi-structured interviews and a narrative orientated inquiry is useful when studying complex and emotional topics, descriptions from the athletes lived experience in their own language and expressions may reveal strategies beneficial for others (Kvale & Brinkman, 2015, p.47-48).

Interpretive approaches such as hermeneutics, phenomenology and symbolic interactionism are linked to qualitative methods (Thagaard, 2018, p. 19). Development of data in qualitative research is often characterised by hermeneutical and phenomenological thinking. In the latter approach the researcher is interested in the participants thoughts, experiences and associated meaning. Meaning as a concept refers to both human activities and the interpretation of these activities (Gilje & Grimen, 1993, p. 142). Through this approach the lived experience of the participant is highlighted. What is perceived is interpreted by the researcher in a hermeneutical approach, i.e.,

interpreters to understand. The hermeneutic circle describes the ongoing circulation between preconception, understanding and interpretation, while the hermeneutic spiral describes the dynamic alternating between whole and part that leads to an improved understanding for each turn on the spiral (Kleven & Hjordemaal, 2018, p. 188). A phenomenological-hermeneutical method may be used since the desire is to gain insight into why elite athletes ask for help. It is an inductive process, a “bottom up” approach, going from specific to general through descriptions and explanations of the phenomena (Sparkes & Smith, 2014 p. 25). With this said, whether a qualitative approach is inductive or deductive may vary along a continuum. Commencing inductively in evaluating what emerges from the data, revealing patterns or dimensions of interest, an assessment can create a shift to verify or elucidate deductively the data collection and analysis (Patton, 2002, p 274).

Narrative analysis

Leaning on the relevance for narrative analysis in sport and exercise psychology presented by Smith and Sparkes (2009), who emphasis four reasons for application, is central to this study. First, “*stories and an analysis of them can ‘breathe’ meaning into lived experience*” (p. 279). The human existence involves of a sphere of meaning, and individuals attribute their experiences with meaning. A way to explore such experience and meaning is through athletes’ narratives. This coincides with Jowett’s (2008) comment on the use of narrative analysis in sport psychology that by focusing on the narratives from the participants can provide comprehensive subjective data and uncover personal differences by trying to interpret the meaning of the narratives and the importance for individual functioning (p. 27-28).

The second reason presented by Smith and Sparkes (2009) is that “*stories and an analysis of them may ‘breathe’ the personal and social fabric of our lives*”. The told stories are never just a personal production. They originate from “*the fabric of society and culture*” (p. 280), which in this context is the high-performance culture of elite sports. In this case the narrative analysis is of value to explore both the individual and the social sides of the storytelling. Third reason being that “*stories and analysis of them may ‘breathe’ real bodies and the messiness and complexity of being human*” (p. 280).

As a researcher, knowing the complexity of elite sport, the presented narratives from athletes can give insight into how they find meaning and create patterns of reason through their experiences in the untidiness that can occur in such a profession. The final reason is intimately related to the previous three, “*stories and an analysis of them may ‘breathe’ multiple resources for taking care of people and living differently*” (p. 280). The more stories we have access to, the greater flexibility and potential opportunities we possess to care for people, including ourselves. This caring aspect is essential for the athletes and me, both personally and professionally.

According to Smith and Sparks the narrative analysis strives to interpret the ways that individuals perceive reality, the sensemaking of their worlds, the how’s and why’s of their social actions, whilst taking into account the effects and affects of stories in, on and for individuals (2009, p. 281). Applying a narrative analysis in this study will hopefully facilitate the research question, enlightening both the affects and effects of asking for help.

Within sport and exercise psychology narrative inquiry, as one form of qualitative research, has experienced growing interest (Smith & Sparks, 2009, p. 297). Hiles, Cermák and Vladimir (2017) regard qualitative methodology as a contributor to explore what humans bring into any situation, and regard narrative inquiry as a prominent provider to this method (p. 159). In the re-telling of a story the *identity positioning* is a striking feature, and how the sense of self is complex and dynamic, internally driven, and fluctuates within boundaries. The use of *abductive thinking* by the narrative mind is the ease with which individuals use circumspection in the sense-making of their everyday experiences, using their tacit knowing when constructing narratives to describe their experiences, creating the core of what is characterised as an individual’s *narrative intelligence* (p. 159-160).

Stories must be told since they are fundamental to the cultural and social processes that structure and organise human behaviour and experience. Narrative inquiry functions as a “portal” to human thinking, experience and sense-making. It offers a methodology for the study of human experiences. It is implicated in all the aspects of interaction, communication and cultural practice (Hiles, Cermák & Vladimir, 2017, p. 157-158). Through telling their stories people reveal their feelings, entertain, make points, to fit in

with the existing expectations, fulfil social demands, and to challenge the status quo (p. 158).

Qualitative interview

One of the most applied methods in qualitative research is the interview. An interview is literarily *inter view* (from the French *entrevue*) an exchange of views between two people in a conversation on a topic of interest for them both (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 22). It has two main forms; the unstructured interview and the semi-structured interview, both are captured under the term “qualitative interview” (Bryman, 2016, p. 466). Thagaard (2018) also includes the relatively structured interview (p. 90). With this structure the researcher successively follows the main questions. Sparkes and Smith (2014) describe the interview as a social activity, or a craft, where two or more people, participate in talk, mutually assembling knowledge about both themselves and also the social world in which they interact over time, through a range of senses, in a specific context (p. 83). It is an interpretive practice where both participants cooperate in creating meaning to the interviewee’s experiences. Having this direct connection with the participants helps to, together, develop an understanding of their perspectives, intentions and actions (Thagaard, 2018, p. 89).

The researcher must make sure that he or she has engaged in the viewpoint of the participant. In the quest for detailed and rich answers both the researcher and the participant may develop a clearer understanding of the phenomenon. Holloway (1997) quoted in Sparkes and Smith (2014) describes the interview as “*a conversation with a purpose*” (p. 83). This description is in line with the narrative oriented inquiry that emphasises that narrative interviews are not seen as interrogations, but as a mutual exchange of views (Hiles, Cermák & Vladimir, 2017, p. 162, 163).

A researcher will possess a horizon of understanding, influencing the researcher's experiences. The footprint of this horizon structures experiences and expectations, and what is of interest to the researcher (Føllesdal & Walløe, 2002, p. 55). Through a specific paradigm a researcher will carry out an inquiry that embodies expectations regarding the world as we see it, supporting values of importance, and by holding the

values and assumptions dear, the conducted inquiry will be held concurring to the precepts of that paradigm (Sparks & Smith, 2014, p. 9). Being almost two decades in the field of sport, as well as being in a work-relationship with the participants, I must be conscious of the extent to which my experiences and understanding affect the matter of interest in this master thesis. If the matter of interest was to examine the effect of mental training on mental health a quantitative method would have been appropriate to confirm a hypothesis about the phenomena. But the purpose of this study is to achieve a deeper understanding of what makes, or triggers, the professional football players to ask for help. Descriptive case studies do not attempt to build or test theoretical models but present a detailed picture of the phenomena to reach a greater understanding of other similar cases (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 295).

Developing the interview guide

The narrative inquiry emphasises that narrative is not only a distinct form of qualitative data or a certain approach to data analysis, but it is a methodological approach that involves appreciation on the subtle paradigm assumptions involved, with the method of data collection called narrative interview (Hiles, Cermák & Vladimir, 2017, p. 162).

Semi-structured interviews encourage a narrative mode of expression (p. 162). The build-up of semi-structured interviews commences by formulating questions based on the *general research area* and why this is of interest, then to *specific research questions* based on the foundation of the *interview topics*. With the topics outlined the researcher can then formulate the *interview questions*. After *reviewing and revising* the interview questions ensuring that the questions are relevant to the interview topic a *pilot guide* can be a beneficial test to *identify novel issues*. A conclusive *revise of the interview questions* rounds off the *finalised guide* (Bryman, 2016, based on figure 20.1, p 470). Through the preparations of the interview guide the researcher can ensure that the questions and issues that are to be researched are addressed. The questions asked must benefit the researcher's quest on insight to the participant's perspectives of their social world (Bryman, 2016, p. 469). The phrasing and order of the questions should be flexible. The researcher must be aware that alternative paths of interest may arise. It is

the worldview of the participant that is of importance therefore the researcher should not begin the process with too many presumptions (p. 470).

The degree of flexibility from the interview guide, gives the researcher freedom and possibilities to ask follow-up questions based on the participants replies. Bryman supports “rambling” or going off on digressions or refractions, letting the researcher have insight into what is important and relevant for the participant (2016, p. 466). The development of important issues during an interview may demand an adjustment to the original emphases in the research, cf. hermeneutic spiral.

In the semi-structured interview, the benefits of flexibility are fundamental. With this said, some order on the topic areas may lead to a better flow during the interview. The questions must not be leading but on the contrary open-ended, and in a language that is comprehensible and relevant. It is important get to know the world of the participant by getting to know relevant gestures, words or expressions, and why the person expresses himself or herself in the manner that they do. Therefore, the use of the narrative oriented inquiry fits the psychological, social and cultural contexts and functions of stories (Hiles, Cermák & Vladimír, 2017, p. 162). Without going into further detail there are different types of interview questions; introductory, follow-up, probing, specifying, direct, and projective questions. Commencing inductively in the interview guide as to why the participants ask for help, a deductive sounding of questioning from a holistic point of view on the interest of pan-contextual effects is utilised (Patton, 2002, p 274). In order to get the interview in the appropriate direction the researcher can also use structural questions, while interpretive questions can be applied for confirmation that one has understood the participant correctly (Brinkmann & Tanggaard, 2012, p. 32).

Two pilot interviews were conducted to practice the role as an interviewer and aid to form the final interview guide (Halvorsen, 2008, p. 147) (appendix 2). Initially I had a positive experience after the first interview was conducted, even though I noticed that the order of the questions led to repetitive information. But my positive feeling shifted dramatically during the transcription when I realised towards the final questions that I had shifted in my role, from being an interviewer to acting as a sport psychology consultant by offering advice for similar future challenges or situations. An important

lesson learned. Before the second interview I adjusted the order of the questions and was highly aware of keeping to the role of an interviewer.

The present study's interview guide (appendix 2) is divided into different segments according to the topics of interest (Grønmo, 2016, p 171). The first segment focuses on the participants journey in football so far. The purpose of asking a question of less importance to the research question is with the intent to get the flow of the conversation going and to ensure that the participant is comfortable and relaxed (p. 171). Follow-up questions in this segment regarded rewarding and challenging moments in their careers. The middle segment introduced the topic on mental skills and the use and effects of a collaboration with a sport psychology consultant. The last segment focuses on their thoughts and experiences to the stigma on receiving help in the hypermasculine environment of football (appendix 2).

Sample

Qualitative research interviews, requires a sample of informants. That is, a selection of people who can tell us about the phenomenon or the theme we want to investigate (Halvorsen 2008, p 137). In this project, a strategic selection of informants is useful, a method often used in qualitative research. This type of sample is not by chance but based on systematic assessments of which elements, based on theoretical and analytical purposes, are most relevant and most interesting (Grønmo, 2016, p. 103). As a researcher in this context, representation is not the main purpose, but to attain greatest possible qualitative content in the information. Strategic sampling requires the researcher to establish the criteria necessary for participants to be included (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p 246).

Norwegian football players based on the following criteria were selected:

- (a) They have publicly expressed that they receive help from a sport psychology consultant.
- (b) They are male, due to the stigma in hypermasculine culture on mental health and help-seeking (DeLenardo & Terrion, 2014).

(c) Play in leagues higher rated than the Norwegian top league, due to eventual challenge living abroad. UEFA's Club Coefficients².

The athletes' ranged in age from 21 to 26 when the interviews were conducted, amounting to an average age of 23,4 years. They will be referred to as Player 1-5 in the section on results and discussion, no further description will be presented to ensure their anonymity.

Work procedure

Due to my line of profession, I had access to participants who fit the abovementioned criteria. I have been in a work relationship with one of the participants for close to 4 years and the other four between 1,5 – 2,5 years. The ethical challenges of using acquaintances, will be discussed further in the section regarding ethics. When the research question and methodological approach was determined I approached five of my players by e-mail on the 31st of August 2020, describing the purpose of the study and asked whether they would be interested in participating as informants. Within a short period of time all five expressed that they would be happy to participate. They were then sent a statement of consent form to sign with supplementary information about the study that also emphasized that they could pull out of the study at any given moment (appendix 1).

Because of travel restrictions due to the present pandemic, the interviews were done online, leaving it up to the participant to choose the setting themselves. An obligation lies on the researcher to create a relationship of trust and confidentiality between the two parties. The setting can amplify this relationship by choosing a familiar setting, where he feels safe to share his point of view, experiences and to be himself (Thagaard, 2018, p. 99). All five participants chose the setting of their homes, while I chose the settings of my home and office depending on where there would be no interruptions (Grønmo 2016, p. 170).

² <https://www.uefa.com/nationalassociations/uefarankings/country/seasons/#/yr/2022>

Carrying out the interviews online created few challenges as this is how we usually work together. The interviews were done using Zoom Video Communications and NIH's routines for use of Zoom were followed³. The audio recorded on an Apple iPad Air, model number MD785KN/A. The iPad was not connected a network in order to secure personal data. The participants had given consent to the interview being recorded, and informed when the recording was started and turned off (Grønmo, 2016, p. 171). By using such a tool, the researcher's resources are unrestricted, meaning that I could participate in the conversation to a greater extent, only taking notes on body language or facial expressions of importance that would not be detected on the audio recording (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 47).

The interview recordings lasted from 25 to 52 minutes amounting to an average time of 37,4 minutes and a total time of 187 minutes. The interviews were carried out between the 24th of September and 19th of October of 2021. Being of acquaintance with the participants, less time was needed in setting the mood for the interview and creating the personal bond between researcher and participant. Having sound knowledge of the topic, mastering the professional language and being familiar with the participant's life story are regarded as a researcher's qualification criteria, balancing the degree of symmetry in the relationship between participant and researcher (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 195-196).

The digital audio recordings were transcribed into audio text to prepare the material for analysis. The transcriptions added up to 83 pages and in total 32 163 words. The transcriptions were arranged in the middle of the page, with a wide margin down the left side of the page for comments on body language and facial expressions and a margin down the right side of the page for comments on theoretical outlines. The transcriptions were not tidied up, but identifiers were removed and when approaching the analysis, the raw transcript was read several times in addition to listening to the recordings (Hiles, Cermák & Vladimír, 2017, p. 164). The middle margin was then copied into the qualitative analysis software MAXQDA Plus 2020. This created a working transcript

³ <https://www.nih.no/globalassets/dokumenter/afb/kvalitetssystem-for-forskning/rutine-for-bruk-av-zoom-til-gjennomforing-av-intervjuer-i-forskningsprosjekter-ved-nih-.pdf>

and facilitated the subsequent steps of data analysis. With a large amount of data, the software helped code and gather the text into central topics of choice, with the purpose of producing a raw transcript for the data analysis.

Analysis

According to Smith (2016) the family of narrative analytical methods are differentiated by two standpoints toward stories: the storyanalyst and storyteller (p. 261) The former of interest to this study. “*A storyanalyst places narratives under analysis and communicates results via a realist tale to produce an analytical account of narratives*” (p. 261) to generate an analytical description of narratives. The conducted research is on narratives, where the narratives are the objective of study and placed under examination using a certain type of narrative analysis and creating an abstract tale about stories (p. 261). When operating in the role as a storyanalyst a common type of narrative analysis to use within sport is a narrative thematic analysis focusing on the *what’s* of the stories from the participants (p. 263). By focusing on patterns to identify central themes and relationships between them distinguishes the narrative thematic analysis (p. 263).

In this study Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six phases of thematic analysis were applied. The first phase of the analysis consisted of transcribing the interviews, then reviewing and comparing them to the audio recordings several times. This was done so that I as a researcher could submerge into the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). Before I started this process, I already had some themes in mind, but being aware of this horizon of understanding I forced myself to read the data without being fixated on my pre-existing ideas. All five transcriptions were discussed with my supervisors, discussing different topics that had surfaced and the eventual implementations of these to the project (Halvorsen, 2008, p. 87). This was highly beneficial to how I proceeded in my work with the data.

In the next phase the transcripts were encoded inductively using the computer program MAXQDA Plus 2020. Coupling segments of data (citations) to codes made it easier to organise related data into categories (p. 89). These categories created the starting point for the third phase, the development of relevant themes. It is important to mention that

phases of the thematic analysis are regarded as iterative and cyclical as opposed to fixed and linear (Smith, 2016, p. 263). Moving to-and-fro between the phases of the analysis is also coherent with the hermeneutic spiral where the dynamic alternating between whole and part that leads to an improved understanding for each turn on the spiral (Kleven & Hjordemaal, 2018, p. 188). Bearing in mind the topic of the study the themes and underlying codes were thoroughly reviewed to ensure that my analyses was adequate and that I had not misunderstood the participants responses before I started to form the themes.

The fourth phase generated a thematic map based on the themes' relationship to each other. I found this phase challenging due to trial and error in testing different combinations of codes and deciding which codes should and could be eliminated (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 91). At one point all the coding was deleted, and I commenced from scratch. Eliminating all the codes manifested that the previous phases had been conducted free of my horizon of understanding. In the fifth phase the themes were defined and refined, capturing the essence of each theme (p. 92). Personally, in this phase, a constant reminder of what the essence of the research question was essential to not lose track of the aim of the study. With a full set of worked-out themes the final phase was the production of the report that you are reading now (p.93).

As aforementioned in the section on qualitative methodology (p. 15-16) an inductive approach was chosen, going from specific to general through descriptions and explanations of the phenomena (Sparkes & Smith, 2014 p. 25). This inductive approach is characterised here by the fact that the analysis is data driven (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p 80). That is, the codes, categories and themes were prepared based on the dataset itself and not on a theoretical framework. To be regarded as a theme it must capture something of importance regarding the data in relative to the research question, whilst representing a level of patterned response or connotation within the data set (p. 82). It is up to the researcher's judgement to determine what a theme is, not the space it has taken up in the data. Flexibility is of the essence, since rigid rules will fall short (p. 82).

Another choice to be made was whether to interpret and analyse the themes on a semantic or latent level (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). Braun and Clarke explain the difference of these two levels by drawing a parallel to an uneven blob of jelly, a

semantic approach describes the surface of the blob its form and meaning, while a latent approach will go deeper and try to identify what creates the certain shape and meaning (p. 84). When analysing I was both semantic and latent. First, on a semantic level where the explicit meaning of different statements was interpreted to create a form of contextualization of the data. In cases where codes were too general and did not provide clear enough insight into the issue, the codes were analysed on a more latent and deeper level to obtain the underlying meaning or message of the respondent. Not what the participants explicitly said, but what they indirectly communicated through their reflections. This was necessary to address the participants reflections and underlying philosophy and ideology (p. 84). The combination for a semantic and latent analysis gave me the opportunity to highlight both what was said and at the same time read between the lines when something explicit was expressed relevant to the topic of this research. The participants stories were therefore examined and analysed by how they were put together focusing on the cultural and linguistic resources they drew upon, and how they convince me as a listener of their authenticity. The analysis in these types of studies opens up ways of telling about experience, not solely the content to which language refers (Hiles, Cermák & Vladimir, 2017, p. 162). In the midst of this approach lies the relationship between the story that is being told (*fabula*), the re-telling of the story (*sjuzet*), and unsurprisingly the person telling the story (*identity position*) (p.161). The latter is a striking feature in personal narratives when any story is re-told. It is primarily concerned with how the individual perceives, relates, and reveals their experience of self. “*This sense of self is internally driven, dynamic, complex, and fluctuating within certain boundaries, reflecting a remarkable narrative competence*” (p. 159).

The methodology to narrative analysis focuses on the personal level. The subtleties of the re-telling of story are important to understand how the individual creates meaning. The story creates an outline of the events and how they have occurred, but it is the re-telling that encodes the manner in how the individual relates and positions themselves in relation to the events being told. An issue to take into consideration is ensuring reflexivity in the entire inquiry process. Reflexivity demands transparency, highlighting the actuality of the researcher’s role in the inquiry, as partaker in the situation, context and phenomenon under study (p. 164).

Scientific quality

Reliability, validity and generalisability are of the essence when evaluating the quality of a study. Where reliability examines the trustworthiness, validity is related to the authenticity, while generalisability occurs when the understanding that develops during a study can be transferred to other situations (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 355-356). Based on Thagaard (2018), the acquired steps in this study to ensure the scientific quality will be explained.

Reliability is a critical assessment of a study's trustworthiness, and whether the research has been executed in a reliable manner (Thagaard, 2018, p. 181). Throughout the whole project I have striven to be transparent in my choices and decisions. I have accounted for the chosen method, collection of data, analytical approach, and challenges and changes that occurred parallel to my understanding of the data (Grønmo, 2016, p. 241). Being a qualitative study, the credibility of the findings will also always depend on who conducts the interviews, and the answers in an interview may change relying on who the interviewer is. My existing work relationship with the participants must be taken into consideration when examining the findings. Explaining and clarifying my choices as a researcher provides transparency and provides the opportunity for others to assess the phases of the research process.

The validity of the paper depends on the validity of the results, and in what way the researcher interprets the developed data. The question may be asked as to whether the interpretations are valid in relation to the reality studied. Did the study examine what it was supposed to (Thagaard, 2018, p. 189)? Honesty regarding how my professional positioning may influence how I read the data and interpreted the results, strengthens the study's validity. During the analysis and interpretation of the results it has been of the essence that my supervisors have helped and challenged me, as well as enriched me with their understanding, as well as encouraging me to read the data with a broadened perspective. Maintaining this critical attitude to my horizon of understanding during the entire research process also strengthens the validity. In addition to the ethical challenges of knowing the participants, as both a strength and a weakness. A strength in the existing bond of trust and openness between us, but also how the current work-relationship we have can enhance the existing asymmetrical power-relationship. This is further discussed in the section on ethical challenges below. The applied theories and

interpretations of previous studies contributes to reinforce the validity of the present study. (Thagaard, 2018, p. 191-192).

Generalisability, or representability regards whether the interpretations made in the project can be transferred to other contexts and to others in the population that have been studied (Thagaard, 2018, p. 182). Representability is present if the narratives from this research are of relevance to other players who are in similar situations, or for athletes who may recognize themselves in the participants' descriptions and the researcher's analysis.

Generalizability in research is present when the findings of the study can be applied to other settings and cases or to a whole population, which is when the findings are threatened beyond the focus of the work in hand (Sparks & Smith, 2014, p. 183).

The sample of participants was a small selection of male elite football players, with the average age 23,4 years. In an analysis on demographic characteristics of players in 31 top division European clubs from 2009 to 2019 the average age was 26,07 years, and in 2019 the most numerous age class was players aged 24 (CIES Football Observatory Monthly Report n°49 - November 2019) ⁴.

The presented results portray their thoughts and reflections may highlight findings or topics relevant to others of the benefits of help-seeking in football or other hypermasculine performance cultures. Hopefully this research will benefit athletes and coaches at all levels, and maybe other individuals working in performance cultures. In most professions where results are the crux, an individual's mental health and well-being is essential to perform at work in addition to functioning outside off hours. Hopefully, the research will be useful in non-sporting contexts as well.

Ethical considerations

The ethical issues in interview research arises especially due to the complex conditions associated with exploring people's privacy and further posting the information in the

⁴ <https://www.football-observatory.com/IMG/sites/mr/mr49/en/>

public domain (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 97). Throughout this project ethical considerations have been prioritised during the different phases, from gathering the participants, developing the interview guide, when conducting the interviews and analysis, and in completing the results.

The participants had been informed in writing about the study's content and purpose and use of method. When consent from the participant had been received, and he had an understanding that the interview can be an unpredictable process, the question of how much information is to be shared before the interview arose. Thagaard (2018) emphasises the researcher's challenge regarding the participant's privacy and must take into consideration just how personal questions can be asked. The ethical question is how we manage our responsibilities so that we safeguard the interviewee's autonomy (p. 114).

Using a small selection of international football players, for the in-depth interviews, highlights the ethical issue of anonymisation and safeguarding their integrity. The topic of asking for help is central to the study and can be experienced as sensitive information. Therefore, it must be treated with caution (Fangen, 2018, Nov 5th). Protecting their identity and disguising locations can be challenging when the participants are highly profiled athletes. In this study all names, clubs and countries were anonymised when transcribing the audio recordings. It should additionally be mentioned that this dominant presumption, that privacy of research subjects always should be protected, is challenged by participants in research who insist in "*owning their own stories*" (Patton, 2002, p. 278). In this study all five participants expressed that they cared very little whether they were made anonymous or not. One participant expressed that he would like his name to be used, conveying that he believed that the topic of the thesis could be beneficial to others, and that he would gladly participate as front figure.

I acknowledged to the participants that people close to them e.g., family members, current and previous teammates and coaches, and others highly interested in football, might recognize them. The ongoing work-relationship as athlete and sport psychology consultant, which can be traced through various media, was also discussed since the study will confirm this. Nevertheless, the athletes consented to follow through. The participants have been sent the citations used from their interview, so that they have had

a chance to correct any misunderstandings from the interview setting. The participants have also been informed that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

Description of the study and an application for approval was sent to NSD (Norwegian Centre for Research Data) who also required approval from REK (Regionale komiteer for medisinsk og helsefaglig forskningsetikk). NSD approved the request for the ethical clearance in accordance with the Personal Data Act and the Health Register Act, whilst REK replied the application was not relevant for assessment (appendix 3 & 4).

Though I was gobsmacked by the immediate willingness of the athletes to participate and share their valuable experiences, several ethical challenges must be taken into consideration especially regarding the existing asymmetrical power-relationship due to our work-relationship as athlete and sport psychology consultant. Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) emphasize that there already exists a clear asymmetric power-relationship in the research interview, being a specific professional conversation between the researcher and the person being interviewed (p. 51). In addition to being a one-way dialog, with the researcher asking questions the participant is to answer, it is also an instrumental dialog, a means to get hold of descriptions and stories to interpret and report in accordance with research of interest (p. 52). Kvale and Brinkmann stress that researcher has “*monopoly on interpreting*” the participant’s statements, the “privilege” as “the great interpreter” in interpreting and reporting what the participant really meant (p. 52). A critique to this “privilege” is that as an interviewer I may assume a unidirectional approach during the interviews, the participants may also have countermeasures. In other words, the description of the interview as dialogue may be regarded as inappropriate (Anyan, 2013, p. 2).

Through pages 102-109 Thagaard (2018) summarizes several challenges a researcher may face when using qualitative interview as a method. Three of them are highly relevant to this project. One that may occur during the interview is if there is a deficient correlation between what the participant conveys verbally and his body language, as interpreted by collected data. Another may be what the researcher represents too the participant. Since all the participants are of my acquaintance, it is important to acknowledge that I represent an occupation that may lead that person to have

expectations of receiving help during the interview. Randall and Phoenix (2009) describe the interview not only as an event but also as a relationship restricted to the context and time of when and where it is conducted. It is a relationship between two individuals who inexorably wants the other to see them in a certain manner, to respect them, like them, even praise or pity them and so forth (p. 133).

Kvale (2006) emphasises that having a close relationship to the participant can open for a more precarious manipulation than distanced relationships such as experimental subjects and experimenter. He also highlights the closeness of near personal research interviews to therapeutic interviews, and that the mixing of roles as a therapist and research interviewer is an ethical issue that needs to be addressed (p. 482). This critique concerns the neglect in considerable amounts of interview literature on the manipulative potentials and not the use of personal or asymmetrical relations. Regarding the research interview as a power-free or conflict-free zone, supported by conceptions of empathic dialog, neglects the existing domination in interviews (p. 483). Therefore, as the researcher I must have in mind that my presence can affect whoever was interviewed to the extent that the participant answered what he thinks I would like to hear, especially in this case being their sport psychology consultant. This reprehensive double role has been taken into consideration and highlighted throughout the project, from my approach to the participants through to the section on methodological limitations. With that said, my profession and holistic interest in elite athletes brought this study to life, by wanting to take a deeper dive into the topics of this research.

Analysis & Discussion

Braun and Clarke (2021) recommend using the heading *analysis* instead of *results* to highlight the researcher’s subjective role and interpretive work (p. 131). I have chosen to present the results and discussion concurrently because I feel it creates a clearer understanding of the implications of the findings from the thematic analysis, and what they indicate. Combining these sections indicates more of a model of qualitative reporting where the analytic narrative encompasses connections with, and amplifies the analytic points relative to, other literature (p.131).

The presentation is based on the thematical categories that were finalised during the 5th phase of the analysis (table 1). In this phase the themes were defined and refined by using the “voice” of the participants in the categories and subcategories to capture the essence of each theme whilst maintaining the feeling of their storytelling. The main categories will be discussed further in light of relevant theory and research before each subcategory and associated quotations are presented.

Table 1

Main thematic categories and subcategories

Main categories	Subcategories
I asked for help because	the timing was right
	I realised it was a mental issue
	I wanted to see how it could help me
The effects after asking for help	on the pitch
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- I am more task oriented- I am less stressed and play with more confidence
	off the pitch
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- I am calmer- I have better work-life balance

The reactions to asking for help have	been positive been of the curious sort
I believe the stigma regarding help-seeking is	because it is associated with mental problems due to the hypermasculine environment experiencing a positive shift
Connecting the dots between	previous hardship self-regulatory skills no man is an island – the confidant

Commencing with the results to the core question as to why the athletes asked for help, the pan-contextual effects of receiving help follows. The experienced reactions to seeking help will then be presented received before moving to their thoughts and reflections regarding the existing stigma on asking for help. In the final part of the discussion the dots between the central concepts in this study: the athlete, mental skills, well-being on and off the pitch, and the sport psychology consultant will be connected.

Being a narrative analysis, the “voice” of the participants is of the essence, therefore when presenting and discussing the subcategories lengthily data extracts will be included to better grasp their train of thought and reflections. The thought behind Braun and Clarks (2021) recommendation of a 50-50 balance of data excerpts and analytic narrative derives from the notion that to not under-develop the analytic narrative there should not be too much data, or too much narrative at the expensive of real data (p. 131). From the following section down to the section on methodological limitations the percentage is distributed 50,97% narrative (6779 words) to 49,03% data (6521 words). The extracts provide a structure to the analytic narrative, either as illustrations when making a point, or discussing a detail of an extract, in a thematic analysis they are not opposing cruxes on a dichotomy but create a continuum. (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 135). The extracts towards the end of the analysis and discussion are extensive, but by shortening them the complexity of, and insight into, the participants depictions of their

world would be reduced. Maintaining longer extracts may also be beneficial reading for others in similar situations.

In extracts where part of the text is omitted [...] is used, while commenting on facial expression, laughter or body language is described in brackets.

I asked for help because ...

Lynch et al. defines the process of seeking help as a deliberate action starting with an awareness of recognising a problem and defining it, in psychology and counseling it is defined as a coping mechanism triggered by the task demands exceeding the individual's resources or coping ability (2018, p. 3). After asking for assistance information is revealed to others in trade for help (p. 3). For the participants in this study help-seeking displays as a manner of self-regulation. The five participants conveyed different reasons for the initial contact with the sport psychology consultant. Three different motives derived from the interviews; the timing relative to where they were in their careers, mental challenges and wanting to see how it could enhance their performance, all in line with self-regulation.

The participants in this study fall in line with self-regulated individuals and performers who are active participants in their own learning metacognitively, motivationally and behaviourally (Zimmerman, 1986, in Zimmerman, 1990, p. 4). Although there are several theoretical frameworks explaining self-regulation, the three derived motives for asking for help; the timing was right in relation to where they were in their careers now performing at a higher level, mental challenges and wanting to see how it could enhance their performance, fall within three shared ideas of research within self-regulated individuals. Self-regulation is a useful action to “*initiate, adjust, interrupt, terminate, or otherwise alter actions to promote attainment of personal goals, plans, or standards*” (Heatherton & Baumeister, 1996, p. 91). In this sense the individual guides his goal-orientated activities over time and across altering situations (Karoly, 1993, p. 25). Being in line with the implied standards and experience congruence, the players should have self-awareness and adequate knowledge to plan, motivate themselves, create objectives, self-monitor and intermittently adapt their behaviours, thoughts and feelings (Collins & Durand-Bush, 2014, p. 212).

... the timing was right

Player 1 and Player 4, with a knowledge of mental training and its benefits, had both moved abroad to higher-level clubs, and decided to dedicate time and resources to work with a sport psychology consultant.

“It wasn’t as if I was struggling when I went to X (new club), but I felt that it would be challenging to again be out of my comfort zone and listening to your podcast I decided to talk with you. Because I thought, why not give it a shot, I am sure there is a lot of sense to it. So, I just felt like “Okay, now I’m going to play abroad, okay, now is the time to try it.” Eh, so I felt that it was the only right thing to do when I moved to X.” (Player 1)

Player 4 was sold to a club abroad and regarded the move as a steppingstone to a higher level in the future.

“For me it’s about wanting to move on. So, details, what can you do to take that next step? So, I’ve wanted it for a long time, a mental coach. But as I said before, it was such a natural and good time to do it, it was like I’d been thinking about it for a while and then “Now, now I have to do it.” (Player 4)

... I realised it was a mental issue

Player 2 had been struggling on the pitch for a while “*It really started with a lousy match in X, where I got a message from a mate saying straight out to me that he was sick and tired of seeing me throw away my potential like this.*” When asked how he reacted to such a message from a friend.

“Well, first of all, I was really happy there’s someone who cares out there, in that way. Uh, and the other thing is that I was so down on it that I just thought “I am at rock bottom” sort of, so I’ll just have to use all the measures I can. Then I thought “Okay, maybe it’s a mental thing, I have to, I have to make a phone call then.” (Player 2)

After being abroad for a while Player 3 had been struggling with the demands of his environment. So far it had not affected his performances on the pitch, but the stress was taking its toll on his quality of sleep and confidence. “*In a way it was like “Holy shit, this is going to affect my performance, and affect what people think of me.” So, I only got worse and worse really. There were nights when I didn’t sleep at all.*” When asked

the reason of why he contacted a sport psychology consultant he refers to a tough period as a young player abroad.

“Uh, when I was lying in a lavender bath in X (abroad) and couldn’t sleep for the third night in a row, and needing sleeping tablets to sleep, then I realized something had to be done. [...] Coming to a city and level where it is expected that you are to win every match. I was a youngster, playing in a position that was new to me, then I got one uh, well the first year went well because I didn’t play, but the following year when I started to play and there were huge demands, and I myself expected to play, I was stressed about keeping my place on the team. It was a tough period. Sleeping little, stressed out about the games, being very critical myself; I sort of started to doubt how good I really was, and eh - had to get hold of a mental coach.” (Player 3)

... I wanted to see how it could help me

Players 4 and 5 wanted to see how beneficial using a sport psychology consultant could be for their development and performance.

“I wanted a mental coach to get, to get new input and to learn something new, and then to develop further. What can I do to – yes, it’s about the details again. But the main reason is development. What can I do to develop more, was my main reason.” (Player 4)

“Uh, first of all I really wanted to see how it could help me. And I think you can, well you can’t know how many percentages you can benefit from it, but whether it’s one percent or ten percent, then at least the percentages are in the right favour. And as detailed as footballers are, or work, all the percentages you can have in your favour are very positive or helpful.” (Player 5)

Developing self-regulation competencies involves focus, effort and awareness of one’s own thinking process (Jordalen et al., 2020, p. 377). Asking for help does not undermine the basic conceptions of self-regulation. On the contrary, interaction with significant others, such as parents, a coach or sport psychology consultant, may nurture the independent regulation and is referred to as co-regulation (Collins & Durand-Bush, 2014, p. 213). Self-regulatory literature indicates that before an individual can be self-regulated, he or she must be “other-regulated”, meaning that self-regulatory skills are obtained by feedback and instructions presented by others, such as coaches (Jonker et

al., 2010, p. 901). This coincides with the reasons to ask for help described by this study's participants; the importance of timing due to playing at a higher level, environmental challenges taking its toll on mental fatigue and performance enhancement.

Research conducted by Skogseth on male and female students between the age 19-24 explored the help-seeking process to identify factors influencing them to ask for help. Individual factors that were identified were the assessment of their own problems, their view on help seeking and insight into their own situation (2019, p. 3). Skogseth's findings match the findings in this study of the individual assessments as to ask for help. Even if this study was conducted on both genders, it is proven that men are less tending than women to seek help for mental issues, and that women and that men express significant differences in coping behaviour and help-seeking (Liddon et al., 2018, p. 2). Barriers for men and help seeking will be discussed further under the subcategory on stigma regarding seeking help.

The effects after asking for help

When asked about the effects on the pitch after interacting with a sport psychology consultant in the interviews the participants express a greater focus and effort on developing self-regulation competencies. To determine when it is a necessity to adjust or modify responses to meet the required standards of performance an enhanced awareness of their own cognitive processes is of importance. By co-regulating with a sport psychology consultant or other significant others can help the players to prepare for challenges ahead of performances, by letting mistakes go while performing, and ascribing errors to sources that they can control (Jordalen et al., 2020, p. 378).

In the following the participants descriptions on how they have become more task orientated on the pitch will be presented. Their descriptions are in line with Ertmer and Newby's (1996) model on the metacognitive aspects of expert learners. Possessing metacognitive knowledge regarding task requirements and personal resources, and metacognitive control (self-regulation) incorporating a plan, self-monitoring, evaluating and reflection (from figure 4, p. 15). In Toering et al., 2009, study of self-regulation and performance level of elite and non-elite youth football players the findings showed that

a higher level of performance was associated with higher scores on reflection and effort (p. 1509). They further elaborate,

Following the execution of a plan, individuals who self-regulate well evaluate the process employed and the outcome achieved. During cycles of planning, self-monitoring, and evaluation, these individuals constantly reflect upon the entire process in a continuous effort to translate thought into action and gain strategy knowledge from their actions (p. 1510).

Ahead of introducing actions to enhance performance, athletes who are good at self-regulating plan how they wish to improve by comparing the task demands to own personal resources, recognising matches between these two. While task performing, they self-monitor, mentally checking their actions in relation to their plans.

... on the pitch

With the initial contact between football players and sport psychology consultant being described above the perceived ripple effects of the received help on the pitch are of interest. Applying mental skills to their game was not new to the players. All five had a knowledge of, and benefited from a selection of mental skills previously, such as goal setting, self-talk, and visualisation. Since the collaboration with a sport psychology consultant three main themes on perceived effects on the pitch arose from the analysis; being more task orientated, less stressed and playing with more confidence.

... I am more task orientated

All five players express that they are more task orientated than before during both training sessions and matches. Player 1 expresses how *“Having focus on tasks everyday has made me so much better at just playing the game on the pitch. Play the game, like you say, not the occasion.”* Player 2 refers to the importance of his routines before the match, and when they are dealt with *“Then it's about the focus you have. And that is the same task focus that you and I have been practicing on and talking about before the game starts.”* Likewise with player 5 who calls ahead of matches,

“But I have become a bit more like “How can I...” and that is because we often talk about how the match might be, right? And that’s why it’s a bit like «How can I solve the situations that arise?» [...] And then it has become, or we have a tone where you ask me what the match might be like, and I sort of know what

the game will be like and already then you manage to create a small picture of how to ... punish the defenders or move depending on how they move. [...] And then I try, since it's on my mind, to practice taking these inputs out on the field." (Player 5)

Since collaborating with a sport psychology consultant the third player has used a diary to write down what he wants to focus on during practice and matches,

"And I really like to write down the evening before what I am to do during the game, what sort of situations I might get into, uh what I want to improve, and what might happen if one makes different mistakes during the match. And I feel at greater ease. So, I write it down before going to bed, and read it when I wake up in the morning, then I am ready for the match." (Player 3)

When asked about the effects on the pitch Player 4 emphasise the importance of being development and tasked orientated during practice, cf. McCann (1995),

"But I have had most focus on the everyday training, that I have. If you think about before, before I had a mental coach it was, yeah – it was more like I went to practice – and it was about becoming the best, boring to listen to but (laughing), it was like going to training and giving it 100%, whereas now there are goals for each session. Uh, "What do I want to be good at today?" Setting those goals and evaluating them after training on whether you achieved the goals, and what you did well and what you could do better. So, the everyday training is perhaps what has had the biggest - changed the most. [...] It is what I have learnt the most by having a mental coach. The everyday life. Because where I felt before, as I said earlier, before you went to training to do well of course, but there was no plan, there was no – what to be good at. It was more – yeah 100% and it will be good (laughing). But now there is a plan on what to do. And then it is, well at least what I have felt, the development is greater over time." (Player 4)

... I am less stressed and play with more confidence

All five players expressed that they experience a higher perceived calmness, composure and confidence when playing since collaborating with a sport psychology consultant. Player 1 describes the feelings of calmness and composure while playing, "*Uh, I'm much more composed on the pitch, uh it is easier for me feel, before a match, that I am calmer. And during the match I am calmer too*" (Player 1). Player 3 explains how he

makes use of mental techniques to calm himself in stressed situations to regain his composure,

“I use relaxation techniques, if I am a little stressed before games I tend to listen to some music and use breathing techniques to calm myself down. [...] I would say it has affected my game tremendously. I feel like I have a lot more composure when I go out on the pitch. I have no stress regarding uh ... “Now I have to deliver”, and I think my approach is a big reason why.” (Player 3)

Player 4 also being calmer and more confident due to his task orientation during training session. Focusing on his development over time gives him a greater feeling of composure.

“And I’m calmer. More confident. When you then work with task related goals in training every day, and you see and feel that you succeed with that, then you put that into the match, and succeed with it there as well, then you become much more confident, and become calmer and last but not least more composed. So that, has been a big difference.” (Player 4)

When asked about the ripple effects on the pitch both Player 2 and Player 5 express that it has really helped their confidence when playing, being able to play in the present moment and not being restrained by the fear of failure or consequences of mistakes.

“It’s like when you kind of go from not daring, that you're afraid of the consequences, you're afraid of failing. Then you hold back a lot. [...] You keep thinking about the negatives "If I shoot from here, I'm going to miss." Uh, and things like that. It affects you a lot when you kind of manage to turn all that around. That you, you, you carry on with courage. [...] You don't care who you meet, whether it's one of the best backs in the league or whether it's one of the best clubs in the league. You just don't give a shit about consequences then, and you push on with your game. At least when you have the talent to do it. That you're so good that you can really do it, you have it up here, in here (pointing at his head). [...] Kind of use your instincts, dare, and have guts, and just dare to use your skills. Whoever it is, whether it's a team playing in the Champions League or whether its players playing in La Liga or whatever it is.” (Player 2)

“Well, it sort of looks like I have a little more faith in myself. And that I don’t give a fuck really. Not that I'm not supposed to listen to people or that I'm the king of the world. But there's more that, but it's more that yes uh you're trying things that you might not always try.” (Player 5)

Improving their sport-specific confidence contributes to further refinement of self-regulation competencies facilitating (Jordalen et al., 2020, p. 377). The participants expressed less stress, more composure and confidence while on the pitch. In Ertmer and Newby's (1996) article on the expert learner being strategic, self-regulated and reflective, gaining confidence by implementing metacognitive knowledge and skills, it is of importance that the expert learner receives informative and corrective feedback regarding their use (p. 21), hence the expressed systematic conversations the participants have with the sport psychology consultant. This is in line with the practical implications presented by Ansell and Spencer (2020) on coach feedback and athlete self-regulation that players should be taught and encouraged to critically assess and think about their own performance. They should be willing to look to coaches, teammates or parents as sources of feedback to advance on their performance improvement, and coaches should try to be candid with the provided feedback (p. 1).

By developing self-regulation in their sporting environment, they recognise and make use of presented opportunities from which they may learn and develop. By planning, reflecting and evaluating their performances, both in training and matches, the participants describe a greater sense of control and confidence simultaneously as reduced stress by taking control over the controllable through task orientation. Otte et al. (2020) describe practice as a search for functional performance solutions and that enhanced feedback is instructional constraints to aid and guide an athlete's self-regulation in practice (p 1). All the players comment on their development and higher level of performances. Since systematically working on self-regulation guided by a sport psychology consultant, two of the participants have transferred to higher rated leagues, two qualified for group play in the European Conference League and one is in position for qualifying for next seasons European Conference League.

Performance pressure emphasises the players efforts on enhanced performance. In their answers regarding performance benefits on the pitch, their experiences of playing with more confidence and reduced stress aid them to regard the daily performance pressures as challenges, stimulating a commitment to their self-regulation and explaining the enhanced task orientation. Research has shown that self-regulation is an important facet underlying player performance and well-being (Balk & Englert, 2020, p. 273), which leads us over to the next question asked during the interviews.

... off the pitch

As a professional and in this case a researcher, the holistic point of view was of interest. The participants were asked whether they have noticed any effects off the pitch after asking for help. In the recovery process self-regulation skills are equally important. The definition of recovery self-regulation is the identification of current state, desired future state and commencing actions to reduce the discrepancy between the states during the recovery phase, such as between training sessions or competitions (Balk & Englert, 2020, p. 273).

Balk and Englert (2020) map the phases of self-regulation recovery. Through self-monitoring the players can successfully regulate their post-performance states. Followed by regulation of emotion and cognition, which is accomplished when the when physical and mental resources are replenished, detachment and mental rest is important to cease cognitive effort, enabling the players to restore diminished resources (p 273). Conclusively, required self-control is needed to start appropriate, and at times effortful, recovery activities. Developing their recovery self-regulatory skills they can benefit both physically and mentally, from training and competition, facilitating positive effects on performance, wellbeing and long-term health.

... I am calmer

All five describe how they have become calmer off the pitch. Player 1 explains how he now is more relaxed, being able to not think about football all the time and shifting with greater ease between the roles he has during a day, while Player 2 talks about how his temper off the pitch has changed.

“Uh, but I would say that it has helped me just as much off the pitch as on. I've learned to chill more (both laugh), yeah, not to think about football 24 hours a day. [...] It can be easy to take the all the thoughts from the football pitch home with you, and I still do it a bit, but I've become a lot better at chilling, just putting them away and just change my role when I get home, eh then I don't think that much about football, and I can relax.” (Player 1)

“Hm, what should I say, I'm much less aggressive off the pitch now. Uhm, I used to easily get mad at different things before, but now I'm pretty calm and I don't get frustrated about things like I did before. And you sort of have a lot more confidence, not arrogance, but confidence.” (Player 2)

Player 3's family have noticed a change in him being calmer in his everyday-life, and more composed when he is with others, he refers to game-days especially, "*when they stress before a football match, I am incredibly calm.*" Player 4 also talks about a calmer version of himself.

"To be totally honest, I feel as if I am a calmer person. Before I could be a bit wilder and have lots of energy and be all over the place. Well, I still have a little bit of that, but I do feel like I'm calmer. [...] So, I think, I believe it has something to do with that. I believe it helps to have more serenity, and uh more confidence." (Player 4)

"*I believe it has reduced the stress on my shoulders,*" Player 5 continues by explaining how knowing that he has someone to talk to eases what previously caused him to stress more off the pitch.

... I have a better work-life balance

Delecta (2011) defines work-life balance as a person's ability to meet family and work commitments, in addition to other activities and non-work responsibilities (p. 186). In addition to the relations between family functions and work, Delecta also states that work-life balance involves other roles the individual must fill in other areas of life, and that lacking balance between these can cause mishaps in several domains (2011, p. 187). For the participants of this study pan-contextualisation of enhanced mental capacities works as a safe-guard in their every-day lives, aiding them to be calmer, more relaxed or less stressed and experience greater work-life balance.

Three of the players expressed a greater work-life balance when asked about experienced ripple effects off the pitch. The lengthy extracts from the data are included to present the participants' sonorous perspectives and reflections on challenges that elite footballers face.

"Well, I just feel since there is a lot going on all the time in the life of a footballer, balance is important. Travelling, matches and time to be with your family, friends and girlfriend, it can be a little difficult to find that balance. The one where you're in the dressing room as a football player, and when you get home, you are a boyfriend, a good boyfriend or a good son. [...] Feeling calmer gives me a better balance in life. When I am at training I think football, and

when I get home, I don't think that much about football, and it has helped me.”
(Player 1)

“But I really think the biggest impact it's had has been on the other 23 hours of the day which also are extremely important for performing well for the 90 minutes every weekend, and that you feel better about yourself, you don't stress as much, you understand that not everything can always be optimal, you can have a night where you sleep a little less without it being bad. [...] So, I use it just as much in life off the pitch. Like, the meditation that I use has affected my sleep, I have felt the effects of calmness if I for example am in discussions of some sort. And I also feel it helps me appreciate and enjoy the little things in life.” (Player 3)

“Also, another thing that I want to do is that I want to use my energy, well kind of use my energy on the right things and try to put other things aside. [...] And I think that's important for footballers. Because people often think that playing football is so easy and you get, you get a lot of money and that “Fuck, you live the best life!” And yes, you do, but there's a big "but" behind this too. There're so many other things as well with expectations from the club, from friends and family. You have fans, people recognizing you on the street, at least when you play for a large club like I do now. [...] So, I think I would have struggled without a mental coach, not that I would have cried every day or anything, but my everyday life is easier when I have a better balance on when to focus on what. [...] I've had a lot less stuff on my mind. Because I know that if there's anything, I'll send a message to my mental coach and write to her that there are a few things that need to be sorted out and if it's possible to talk a little. That way I don't have to take it out on my parents and overthinking everything myself.”
(Player 5)

Research on male elite athletes and work-life balance is scarce, while numerous studies focus on elite coaches, female athletes juggling an athletic profession and family life, and athletes developing a dual career. Pink et al.'s study on Australian club culture states that a good work-life balance ensures better well-being for the athlete and being happy outside of football improves athletic performances (2015, p. 102-103). The intense pressure elite athletes face in competitions and increased concern for individuals' well-being and health, whilst developing their careers simultaneously as maintaining the balance between life on and off the pitch, has increased the focus on life skills education in elite sport (Agnew et al, 2019, p. 42).

Acknowledging the pressures of elite football should catalyse, from the club management level and coaching perspective, a promotion and encouragement of work-life balance by taking time to pursue other interest is beneficial for performance on the field (Pink et al, 2015, p 103). Recognising the importance of a life outside of work and having other interests refreshes the time away from the club. Adjusting the football schedule to ensure appropriate time away to recover mentally, leaving work at work, should be supported due to the findings that athletes with good work-life balance are more probable to be happy individuals which in turn enhances field performance (p. 103).

As revealed in this study, the pan-contextual ability the participants have to capitalize from their mental capacities enables the players to apply them across a range of contexts, and in the various roles that the participants have during the course of a day, both on and off the pitch. Acknowledging the importance of the having the ability to enjoy the time away from the pitch and club is beneficial to them. As previously mentioned, the participants described playing in a calmer manor, being more composed and having more confidence and being less stressed. Likewise, are the expressed effects off the pitch, resulting in greater work-life balance.

The reactions to asking for help have ...

Essentially research has focus on perceptions and attitudes toward help-seeking in relation to mental illness e.g., Watson, 2005; Ackerman, 2011; Gulliver et al., 2012; Barnard, 2016, while there is little research on perceived reactions from others to help-seeking athletes. The abovementioned studies on student-athletes indicate that although high prevalence rates of mental disorders they tend not to seek professional help. Gulliver et al.'s qualitative study focused on barriers and facilitators to mental health help-seeking for young elite athletes (2012). The results suggested that stigma was the greatest barrier to help-seeking. Other barriers were deficient mental health literacy and previous negative experiences of help-seeking. The facilitators mentioned were being encouraged by others, an authenticated relationship with a provider, agreeable earlier interactions with help-providers, positive attitudes of others in particular their coach, and internet access (p. 1).

When sampling participants for this study the first criteria was that they had publicly expressed that they receive help from a sport psychology consultant. When asked about perceived reactions to asking for help none of the participants referred to any negative feedback, solely positive reactions and curiosity as to why they needed help and how it works. These findings are aligned with previous research of facilitators to help-seeking: encouragement from others and the positive attitude of others.

... been positive

All five participants explained how they have solely been met with positive responses when openly expressing that they receive help from a sport psychology consultant. Player 1, Player 3 and Player 4 describe how their families support them and acknowledge the impact it has had both on and off the pitch. Player 3 explains how *“People are very supportive about it. My family have seen what impact it's had; how calm I am in my everyday life.”* Player 4 describes how his family has a lot of faith in the collaboration *“I explain to them how satisfied I am with it and how and what it helps me with and how we talk about and everything. What the plan is. So, they've got a bigger picture of how it works.”* Player 1 talks about the encouragement he receives from his family

“Uh, like dad and mum, they almost push me to have even more conversations because now there's going to be a lot of matches, so now I need it! (Laughing) It's just nice for me that they notice it from the side lines that eh or as long as I play well, I'm going to continue with the things that work for me. And I've never played better than when I switched to X (abroad) to a higher level, and that's when I started talking to you. So of course, they think it helps me, and I know that helps me, so that's why I'm going to continue with it.” (Player 1)

Player 2 and Player 5 talk about the ripple effects they have experienced after going public about receiving help, and how others have regarded them as role models and courageous for being open about seeking help,

“I've even been called a role model in the newspaper as well, because I actually dared to tell people. And uh, the reason I chose to do it was because I, first of all, was very grateful to be able to tell others, because now I have figured out "Okay, that's what was impending me". Uh, and secondly, I kind of wanted others to understand what I didn't understand earlier, that you don't have to be so proud.

Sometimes you just have to swallow your pride and like, "Hey, I need help."
(Player 2)

Player 5 describes how significant others regard him as courageous for asking for help, connecting it to cultural differences in the football environment in Norway versus abroad *"Because it hasn't really become that common yet, at least not in Norway. People are more like "Cool that you dare" or "Cool that you have it in you."* Encouragement and positive attitudes from family and significant others prove to be central as both facilitators and reactions to help-seeking.

... been of the curious sort

All five players experienced that their openness on receiving help led to inquiries, either to as to why the players needed a sport psychology consultant or to how it works. *"They usually say "Oh, cool!" or "How does that help you?" or "What do you do?"* (Player 1), *"A lot of people ask how it works and things like that."* (Player 2).

"I think a lot of people are curious, and maybe people aren't quiet, what should I say, quite aware of what it can do for you. I think that for a lot of people it is a little new and a little strange. I do talk with many mates and people I know who are curious and ask, "Why do you have it?" or "Does it really help?" (Player 5)

But the manner of some inquisitions proves the existing deficient literacy on how such a collaboration functions and what effects it can have for the footballer. Some of the questions posed to the players also reveal bias as to being regarded as "mentally strong" and therefore surprised that the player has asked for help.

"There are people, and that is what has fascinated me the most, that have asked me "Why do you need it, you're so mentally strong?" I have had many questions like that. And uhm one can, one may look very mentally strong in very, very many settings, and in very many everyday situations. I've always really considered myself very strong mentally, but it's impossible to prepare for every possible scenario in life without being surprised and be taken a little off guard." (Player 3)

"Well, I have had a lot of questions from others, like "Do you have a mental coach?" (emphasizes a surprise) and things like that. It has been mostly like that and then I have explained why I have it. [...] It still seems as if some people are

stunned by it and think “But are you okay?” or “Is something wrong?” But when I explain the situation and why I have it, they understand why.” (Player 4)

In extension to the question of reactions to the openness in asking for help led to the question of their perspectives of stigma regarding help-seeking.

I believe the stigma regarding help-seeking is ...

For elite athletes, stigma is the primary barrier for help-seeking (Bird et al., 2018, p. 348). The idea that athletes face an additional stigma is supported by research indicating that elite athletes report more stigma than non-athletes (Kaier et al., 2015, p. 738). Even though there is a need for psychological services in sporting contexts, both for performance enhancement and mental health issues, athletes underutilize the existing services due to the perceived stigma from others (Gucciardi et al., 2017, p. 310). In a sporting context the request to get professional help is emasculated by the fear of being regarded as “mentally weak” (p. 307). Poucher et al., suggest that these discernments of stigma may be due to the prevalent notions of mental toughness in sport (2021, p. 64). Mental toughness is described as a unidimensional construct referring to the capacity to consistently produce high levels of subjective (e.g., goal improvement) or objective performance (e.g., results), regardless of everyday stressors and challenges as well as significant adversities (Gucciardi et al., 2015, p. 40).

It is of importance to find ways of reducing the existing barriers to ask for help (Poucher et al., 2021, p 64). Researchers have designed interventions to enhance athlete behaviour for help-seeking, mostly focusing on increasing their understanding of the range of aspects of mental health. As long as there is a perceived stigma regarding asking for help, the rates will probably remain low, regardless of newfound knowledge and awareness (p. 64).

When the participants were asked to share their thoughts on stigma regarding help-seeking in football their answers revolved around it being associated with mental health issues and the hypermasculine environment of the dressing room. Three of the participants also expressed that there is a positive shift to asking for help in male

football, especially in the younger generation and that clubs abroad have a professional employee who is responsible for the psychological aspects.

... because it is associated with mental problems

Player 1 refers to what he describes a “*perfect example*” of the prejudice you can experience when telling someone that you spend time on mental training. One of his teammates had been doing a lot of extra training and was experiencing physical fatigue, in a conversation with his football coach he said that he was going to spend some time on mental training. After explaining to his coach how he visualized work tasks to help him perform on the pitch, how to focus, and how to maintain mental balance “*The coach just wrapped up their talk by asking him straight out if he had problems and needed professional help.*” Player 1 continues to describe how using a sport psychology consultant is often misapprehended for a psychologist and therefore others may associate asking for help with mental problems.

“Without a doubt because people think that you have a problem if you talk with someone. It’s a bit like, if we compare it to a psychologist, you go to a psychologist to talk about things to get better. And I think it’s a bit the same with mental training, that people think that you have poor self-esteem or don’t play well. [...] The thing is that you must not associate it with the fact that you are struggling mentally just because you use mental coach.” (Player 1)

Player 2 is honest about how he previously himself was bias to asking for help, “*Yes, but I’ve always thought of it as a psychologist! And I’ve always thought, when I think of a psychologist, I’ve been thinking psychopath!* (laughs heartly) *It’s like, I don’t want to get into that category!* (laughing)”. Player 3 also recalls how he “*in the past, I may have heard of it and thought that it is only for those who really need it and are in trouble.*” Also expressing that existing stigma on help-seeking “*has simply led to the fact that there are a huge number of men who are struggling enormously with the mental aspect and have immense mental health problems.*” Player 4 refers to the condescending feeling that one may experience “*If you do it, then you’re sort of, very often, look down on. That’s, that’s sort of the feeling I have. If you contact someone for help there is something wrong with you, right?*”

The core challenge regarding stigma and help-seeking is that embedded in male elite football is the endorsed ideals of mental toughness and therefore do not foster an environment where elite athletes are comfortable discussing mental health (Poucher et al., 2021, p. 71). Continued efforts are therefore needed to fight athletes experience regarding mental health and the idea of mental toughness in sport.

... due to the hypermasculine environment

Growing up we learn the behaviours and psychological skills to be accepted in our culture and subcultures. Tibbert et al. (2015) state that we become acquaint with which behaviours and characteristics that are admirable, and which are shunned, and that internalising the hypermasculine environment of the male football culture means embracing the ideals, traditions, norms and imperatives. The ideal of mental toughness can lead to playing with pain, disregarding injury, denying vulnerability or emotion (p. 68). Exhibiting mental toughness is like the hypermasculine environment represented by catchphrases such as “*no pain no gain*” or “*rest is for the dead*” where it is of greater importance to have success is more than ensure individual wellbeing (p. 68). The existence of hypermasculine codes in the dressing room is mentioned by all the participants as one of the reasons to stigma regarding help-seeking in football.

“What you said about that why people have problems with, or hm, why people don't talk about having a mental coach, it's often because they of how they feel that the dressing room is so, as said, you've got to be a man, eh tough and hard, and not talk about being soft and talk about problems or what you need. I do experience that it is embarrassing if you talk about it in a football dressing room.” (Player 1)

Player 2's thoughts revolve around the notion of stubborn and proud football players not wanting to admit that they need or want help in fear of being regarded as weak “*The worst thing I really know is when people come and tell me I need help. Or that I must do this or that. That's the worst thing I know, so I guess there's that stubbornness there, a lot of egoism and a lot of pride in it all*”. While Player 3 struggles with the concept that men should not show emotions but are expected to only display physical strength.

“I've never really understood why men shouldn't be able to show a side of themselves that isn't just jumping into tackles and taking most biceps curls in the gym. I've never really understood that. But I think it probably has to do with the

fact that there's been a stigma around that you shouldn't have to ask for help. And I think that has simply led to the fact that there are a huge number of men who are struggling enormously with their mentality and have tremendous mental health problems.” (Player 3)

Player 4 refers to the expectations of being mentally tough and not showing any signs of weakness “*Well, it's often said, that yeah, you should be, you're supposed to be strong mentally. You're always to be, well, you can't show anything, show any signs of weakness in football.*” While Player 5's answer differentiates between the younger and older generation,

“[...] but I do think that there are a lot of people from the older generation who might think "No, I don't need that" but who actually might need it too. [...] I think you have to try to normalize it a little, that it's not dangerous, and even if you're an athlete, a footballer or an ice hockey player, who's supposed to kind of mentally though, it shouldn't be a negative thing to open up a little to someone. But the matter of fact is, that even if you do open up and receive help, you still have to be tough on the pitch.” (Player 5)

Coaches, team staff, athletes and significant others amplifying the hypermasculine subcultural slogans encouraging players to “man up” potentially generate environments of threat and risk instead of endorsing positive self-awareness and self-care (Brustad & Ritter-Taylor, 1997, p 113). Mental toughness should be synonymous with speaking up when distressed, help-seeking and paying attention to physical responses rather than what the subculture in sport claims it is such as confident, focus, determined, managing pressure, maintaining an unshakeable self-belief, and insatiable desire to succeed (Tibbert et al., 2015, p. 70). With this said, the participants do express a feeling of positive change in male elite football.

... experiencing a positive shift

Reducing stigma and evaluating the idea of mental toughness may help elite athletes to be more comfortable with self-report techniques (Poucher et al., 2021, p. 69). This again could lead to extended progress in research if athletes are willing to talk about mental health issues and participate in studies on mental health (p. 73). In their answers as regarding existing stigma to help-seeking, the participants self-reflectively portray a positive shift. Two of the participants regard the younger generation as more positive

and open-minded to asking for help, as well as two participants referring to the commonness of clubs abroad having employed professionals.

“I feel it’s more the older players, older coaches who have most trouble understanding that you can play amazingly when using a mental coach and that there doesn't have to be anything negative about it. [...] Uh, but it's gotten a lot better now, and that there's more focus on the topic which makes it easier for people to talk about it.” (Player 1)

“Um I don't think it's like that anymore. Maybe among the older generation, but it wasn't as popular then as it is now, right, and it wasn't as widespread for sure and stuff like that. [...] I also think it helps with all other matters that football players have to think about in life too. But is not like because you’re talking to someone about problems on the football pitch or ice hockey rink or about people in your life, that it has negative effects on the pitch. So, I think that Norway has some catching up to do on this aspect. Because I think that in foreign leagues it is more common that people have a mental coach, or that the club has one.” (Player 5)

“However, I feel it getting better both within football and other sporting environments. I feel that it is considered very positive, that you address things and want to improve them. [...] In X (current club) we have a mental coach who walks around the training field and talks to different people and gets involved. So, I think, I really think that top clubs around Europe consider it very, very important.” (Player 3)

In summary the participants thoughts on stigma regarding help-seeking in football revolved around asking for help as being associated with mental health, the challenges of the hypermasculine environment of the dressing room and notation of being mentally tough. Three of the participants also expressed that there is a positive shift to asking for help in male football, especially in the younger generation, and that clubs abroad have a professional employed to ensure the psychological follow-up.

Although stigma is an essential concern, the best method to approach and address its existence is uncertain (Poucher et al., 2021). Recommendations for the way forward is for sporting bodies, athletes and sport practitioners to be further educated regarding the negative role stigma can play on the mental health of athletes. Simultaneously practitioners and researchers should be made aware of the negative implications and pitfalls of the concept of mental toughness (p 74).

Engaging successful and renowned athletes in mental health campaigns has proven to be very effective from an educational perspective on mental health in athletes and can help reduce the stigma that athletes now experience (p.75), such as the Heads Up Campaign which is a collaboration between the English Football Association and Heads Together. Heads Together is spearheaded by The Royal Foundation of The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and focuses on mental health initiatives and reducing stigma on help-seeking⁵. Elite athletes are often regarded as role models, and by sharing their experiences regarding mental health issues a synergy effect might be that athletes and non-athletes may open up about their challenges.

Connecting the dots

In this final part of the discussion the dots between the central concepts in this study: the athlete, mental skills, well-being on and off the pitch, and the sport psychology consultant will be connected. Before commencing, an important reminder in a narrative approach is to understand how the participants want to portray themselves. Stories work with, for and always on people, affecting what individuals are able to regard as real, possible, worth doing or best to avoid (Frank, 2010, p. 3). The stories are understood not just depictions of their lives but as dynamic and functioning agents in the edifice of their lives.

The narrative telling-listening process in qualitative interviews must be acknowledged for its complexity. Recognizing the complex narrative of memory itself, it assesses the conceivably implicit assumption in the mind of many researchers that responses from the interviewees to the interviewers' questions are regarded as the truth in a straightforward and simple manner (Randall & Phoenix 2009, p. 125). An important memento when connecting the dots is that the interviews were events and relationships at the given moment and setting when they were conducted, where both the participant and me as a researcher and their sport psychology consultant wanted the other to be perceived in a certain way (p. 133).

⁵ <https://www.headstogether.org.uk/heads-up/>

At the beginning of each interview the participants were asked to reminisce on their journey as football players. They were questioned to share what they regarded as both the most challenging and most rewarding moment or period in their careers so far. While transcribing the interviews a notion of experienced hardship over a longer period, an average of just under a year, occurred. During the challenging periods none of the participants asked for or received any help from a sport psychology consultant or likewise but worked their way through this period on their own. Their self-regulatory skills and flexibility of behaviour, through adjusted actions to adopt to the perceived demands, enabled the participants to self-regulate their thoughts, feelings and actions, which is a central process in psychological functioning (Schmeichel & Baumeister, 2004, p. 85).

Returning to the research question becomes inevitable, why did they ask for help if they before had managed challenging period without help? A phrase or expression my parents often used while I was young kept resurfacing in my mind when I was coding the interviews while simultaneously searching for the unspoken; “No man is an island”. When researching the background of the saying it amazed me how the title and writings profoundly encompasses both the topic and holistic aspect of this study, it is therefore included as a whole. The phrase is from a sermon written by John Donne in 1624, called *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions, MEDITATION XVII*⁶.

No man is an island entire of itself; every man
is a piece of the continent, a part of the main;
if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe
is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as
well as any manner of thy friends or of thine
own were; any man's death diminishes me,
because I am involved in mankind.
And therefore never send to know for whom
the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

Interpretation of the phrase “No man is an island” suggests that no one is truly independent or self-reliant and should trust that the company and comfort of others will

⁶ <https://web.cs.dal.ca/~johnston/poetry/island.html>

help one to thrive (grammarist.com)⁷. Coding the aforementioned results under the subcategories “previous hardship” and “self-regulatory skills”, the final subcategory is named “No man is an island – the confidant”, describing the role of the sport psychology consultant portrayed by the participants. When presenting these subcategories in the following, citations from the interviews will be discussed further in light of relevant research and theory, before methodological limitations and future research will be accounted for.

Previous hardships

In the interviews the participants were asked about the most challenging moment or period so far. All of them described a lengthily period of hardship, amounting in average to just under a year (11,2 months). Hardship falls under Jackson et al.’s definition of adversity as the state of suffering or hardship correlated with distress, difficulty, misfortune, trauma, or a tragic event (2007, p. 3). The definition incorporates both external circumstances, affect and internal cognitions, thus apprehending adversity as a relational ‘state’ concerning an individual and their environment (Howells & Fletcher, 2015, p. 37). The described periods of hardship by the participants include both external internal factors at a young age (average of 17 years old). Player 1 reflects over how he was told by his coach that he was not good enough to be given renewed contract at the club (Norway, highest level), and ended up club in the 2nd league in Norway in a remote town, moving away from his family for the first time at a young age. While Player 2 recalls two tough periods,

“And then after 6 months, 7 months I was sold to Europe for a lot of money to only be 15 years old (laughing). You get to experience the different personalities. People don’t care that you are 15-16 years old. They just try to have a go at you all the time. That was difficult. Uhm, I didn’t really thrive or enjoy my time there. It became so much harder that I thought, so I went on loan to X (level 2, Norway). That didn’t go well either, well the first 6 months went well, but then I ended up in disagreements with people. And then when the time had run out on the loan, and I was to go abroad again, I didn’t want to, and was then sold to X (level 1, Norway). And I would say that the biggest hardship of all was after I had my strain injury in the groin when I was there. It set me back 3-4 years.” (Player 2)

⁷ <https://grammarist.com/phrase/no-man-is-an-island/>

Moving abroad for the first time as an 18-year-old, Player 4 experienced being abandoned, physical punishment and loneliness. Player 5 also describes being lonely and the challenges a different coaching culture and not knowing the language.

“I'd almost say that eh when you get setbacks like that, when you kind of get to X (abroad) and you only get to play with the 2nd team, and at the end I guess I played with the under-18s. The rest of the under-21 squad went with the first team to a training camp, and then there was me and another player who stayed eh and had to train with the under-18s. Uh and then I was kind of at the bottom of what you could be. [...] If we did something wrong then, once uh (laughs lightly) then I was hit by the coach too, so there were some, there were some horrible experiences. But you obviously realized that's the way it is over here, and I've heard several other stories too. So, there's no dear mother here, and then you had to be tough in the head. [...] Well, I actually thought everything around was tougher. Uh what the coach was like and eh there was sort of no mates, or anyone to be with. Off the pitch I was mostly alone. Uh, I had one mate who I was with now and then, but it wasn't much more than that. And the coach was stone crazy, stone crazy (laughing).” (Player 4)

“They wanted to have a striker who scored goals and you didn't do that uhm and then it got tough. At the same time also that I went to school and had to learn the language, didn't understand anything the first few months! Nothing was in English! [...] I got to play the first 2-3 games. Here it was just "No talking, no excuses!" Do you understand me? It was just "You were crap in the match, so you won't fucking play!" And that's what made it difficult, because then there was no one to talk to, and no one in a way to tell me what I could do better, right, and what and how can I, I get back into the starting 11, you know?” (Player 5)

Howells and Fletcher's study on elite athletes and growth through adversity highlights that adversity has proven to be a potential for individuals to grow. The experienced growth emerges within three areas: enhanced relationships, a different view of oneself, and re-evaluating and adjusting one's life philosophy” (2015, p. 38). The participants were asked as a follow-up question whether they would recommend their younger self to embark on the exact same journey. A comment to when asked the follow-up question is that none of the participants directly answered a “yes” or “no” but reflected and reasoned through their experiences before expressing that they would do it all over again. Player 1 development a lot and had great success at the 2nd level club and was sold to club abroad after his first season there, “*I learnt form the process of rejection*

and having to adjust, growing up, moving away. [...] I just thought of it as that a new "thing" out of my comfort zone. So, I would have done it again, going down a level and just work really hard." Player 2 also regards previous hardship as a way of making him more resilient,

"When you look back now, you think time has passed really quickly! But thinking about it now, I still felt that it really lasted forever. But I would, I feel like it's made me very strong mentally. That I can take a lot, preferably things I couldn't handle before, that I can handle now." (Player 2)

Even though Player 3, Player 4 and Player 5 describe their hardships as being thrown off a cliff, heavy as hell and a tough journey, they also express gratitude for having the experience due to the growth they have obtained.

"It's kind of like getting thrown out off the cliff and you have to handle it. I went from the quietest place in Norway, where everything was very, very straightforward, to X (abroad) which is perhaps the sickest place in Europe when it comes to pressure and expectations and criticism and shit. So obviously, one was challenged very early, and was challenged very early and quickly, but right now I am very happy that I experienced that." (Player 3)

"It was heavy as hell. And especially when I'd had a visit and saw when my family was going to leave again. I remember standing at the window, I was living in a three-floor house, when I stood on the top floor and waved to my mum and the others when they went home! My heart hurt so bad. So it was, it was, it was simply really heavy-going. [...] So, of course it was tough. It was tough, but I kind of felt at the same time that I was able to, oh yes, of course I had periods where I thought a lot and there was a lot of chaos in my head and so on. But you also got a little used to that after the first year, so when I got back to pre-season in the second year, you kind of know what you're going to. But, still tough, but a good experience anyway to take with you. So, I don't regret making that choice to go to X (abroad). [...] But eh, like that in retrospect when you think about your career, I'm still glad I did. For the experience I've gained from all the bad things you had to go through, and you grow very quickly, going abroad alone. So, I quickly became a man to put it that way, even though I looked like a kid! (laughing)" (Player 4)

"It's been such a tough journey and, but it's been, but it's been a very important journey for me to develop how I've become as a football player. I've become a lot faster and tougher mentally as a footballer, and got a lot more like that, yeah lessons earlier than I would have done if I'd just played in Norway, right?"

[...] So, yes. Without a doubt. Because you're left with so many things. If I hadn't been there, imagine if the same outcome would have been now. If I take away the year in X (abroad) and had a year in X (level 1 Norway) instead. To go directly to where I am now (current club abroad) and I have no idea how the world works out here. Uh with teammates who are going to stab you in the back, now it's not like that in X (current country), but it could have been because I knew. With teammates stabbing you in the back if they can, tackling you on the pitch extra hard so you don't get ready for the game or try to make fun of you in front of the group and stuff. How to handle things like that, how to handle if the coach doesn't want to talk to you, kind of just put you out of the squad without saying anything. There's been a bit of that here too, so I've learned that's the way it is. Ehm and all those things I've been through in my journey that could have been here, which hasn't quite been here, but if I'm going to take the next step and maybe go back to X (country) for example then I think I'm left with a hell of a lot of learning from that time then.” (Player 5)

According to Fletcher (2021) the world’s best athletes are astonishing, supernormal performers; and it is doubtful that a regular and average background will be adequate to acquire and attain the remarkable levels of psychological resilience necessary to flourish in the world of elite sport (p. 219). Rather, it seems that extreme events, in the form of early life adversity, and responses, characterized by psychological growth, are essential to the resilience required to attain and sustain success at the highest level of sport.

“It's just everything the aftermath has given me, I believe that's why I'm here today, sort of. I'm certain has been a part of what I've been through. There is no doubt that it has helped me – in retrospect! To deal with any downs and adversity I've had, the downs I've had, afterwards. That's why I managed to, after the first year of X (level 1 Norway), I was so wise as to choose to stay. And fight. Nothing was going to stop me!” (Player 4)

The interrelated experiences of hardship, growth and resilience involves ongoing complex interactions of numerous personal and situational factors (Fletcher, 2021, p. 219). One of the personal factors found in this study is the participants use of self-regulatory skills before initiating contact with a sport psychology consultant.

Self-regulatory skills

Research on self-regulation and talented athletes has revealed that they outscore their mainstream peers (Jonker et al., 2010, p. 901). As mentioned initially in the theory section self-regulated individuals are metacognitively, motivationally and behaviourally proactive partakers in their own learning process (Zimmerman, 1995, p. 217), implying that a self-regulated athlete comprehends how to achieve their improved performance goal, are motivated and act accordingly (Toering et al., 2009, p. 1509). Player 1 and Player 2 described two different motivational factors,

“What I am, or the choices I'm most proud of, was that I didn't want to, or instead of, uh, I wasn't offered X (level 1, Norway), but I was determined that I wanted to move away. So, I went to X (level 2 Norway). I'm most proud of that because I had to manage myself. The fact that I took matters into my own hands and decided there and then that football was going to be my profession.” (Player 1)

“Yes, there's a lot of willpower behind doing what you want. But then there's motivation. You have family that comes from a country with war and, and you want to like, to secure a life for them, so then it's sort of either winning the lottery or I must become so good that I kind of secure them financially. And that's a motivation I use a lot.” (Player 2)

In search of a greater understanding on the why and how specific processes stimulate an athlete's ability to self-manage feelings, thoughts, and behaviour, motivation, and ability to correct mistakes, self-regulatory skills e.g.; self-evaluation and self-reward; imagery and focusing strategies; goalsetting and feedback; problem identification and environmental management have been the centre of attention in deriving models and studies on self-regulatory processes (Cleary & Zimmerman, 2001, p. 188). In the extract from Player 3 he explains how he self-evaluates and identifies problems in his performances to learn from them,

“But uh, uh I, I, I'm very critical myself, so I, I need to, I'm my biggest critic myself, so that, what others think doesn't matter that much, but I'm a guy who goes through the match, looking at what's done wrong and tries to learn as much from it as possible, and eh these periods where things haven't gone so well and you've had bad experiences I've really come strengthened out of them. So, periods of injury and things that are kind of devastating to many, I have really used very well myself.” (Player 3)

Several of Player 4's reflections on self-regulatory skills revolve around self-evaluation, problem identification, focus strategies and goalsetting. During the interview the participants were asked when they were first introduced to mental training, how and when they used it,

“It started when, really, that time when I was struggling a little the first year in X (level 1 Norway). I started reading some books about mental training and, yeah started working on it myself. Uh, just to, yeah "What can I do better?" to try to get a bigger perspective on things, and sort of like everything isn't terrible even if it feels like that. So yes, "What can you do differently? What can you do better?" and eh yeah really enjoyed it, and I think it helped a lot to work on it myself. And I believe it has been of good help to me to get out of the situation I was in. [...] I sat down and thought about what, what I could do and what yeah, simply "What am I going to do?" then I found things here and there that I could do. Bought some books and started, started with small things on my own. Wrote things down and, yes, some things about training, some things about the week and everything. Achievements and performances. How I had it off the field. It kind of became a, well you kind of got into rhythm where I worked systematically, even with the mental training.” (Player 4)

All models of self-regulated learning involve a level of learning and improvement concept of goal, a mastery focus or general goal, (Pintrich, 2000, p 479). Interventions such as goal setting, self-talk, visualisation, focusing, and re-focusing, relaxation are mental skills that are influential in helping athletes accomplish good performances (Howland, 2006, p.49). When returning to Norway after two tough years abroad Player 4 used goalsetting as self-regulatory skill,

“So, to come back to Norway, and then set a goal for the future, I quickly, together with my father, planned for the next four years. I signed, I signed for three years, but uh we sat down and had a plan and goal that in four years I would move abroad again. So that, and also that process from the time I went home to Norway and until I actually went abroad again, those four years, I would say that was maybe the best I've experienced. Because it was like, you're kind of at the bottom and then you get to work your way up. Yes, I struggled a bit the first year especially in X (level 1, Norway), but then the development came and then there was really only one way. And striking back was kind of the best feeling I've ever had. Where people doubt you and people don't believe in you then, when you can prove them wrong, it's magical.” (Player 4)

Being aware of the benefits of mental skills on performance and how to utilise them in training and competition is an important foundation for an athlete (Heishman & Bunker, 1989, p. 21). The extracts are examples of how two of the participants in given situations self-regulates by metacognitively, motivationally and behaviourally responding after a period playing out of position and lack of playing time,

“Yes. But it's a bit of a coincidence as well, because it was during half-time of the game I was playing. I played as a wing first, and at half-time I was told to play midfield. And then it just switched in my head right away. "This is my opportunity! I have to take this opportunity! I just have to take it!" Then I played very, very well in the second half then. And then I got a chance again the next game. Played well again, and this continued. And that, it gives an extremely good feeling, such a sense of mastery and then you think how much you have been through and then things finally fall into place.” (Player 4)

“If there's one training, I can remember when I was really good, it was that session with the new coach. I really nailed the way I played in front of him, and I think everyone was a little shocked. I'd been a little bit of a recluse and had high shoulders for four or five months, right? And then I just thought, now I'm going to let myself go and just go for it, and if it goes to hell, I'll just have to continue working, and if it goes well, I'm going to play, right? Then it was straight into the starting 11, and we won 4-0. Two assists and a goal and it was like, that was kind of enough then to be pretty safe in the starting 11 again. After I didn't exactly lower my standards either! Because I knew how quickly it could turn around. I had managed to get out of a bad situation and was back on the team again, a new coach, played all the time and scored goals! I had managed to turn around, the tough, tough first six months. So, something positive came out of it after all.” (Player 5)

Probing into the understanding how Player 5 resonated with himself in terms self-regulating after several months of hardship, he was asked to elaborate. The extract provides an insight into how he encompasses interventions such as: problem identification and environmental management, self-evaluation and self-reward, self-talk, goal setting, focusing strategies; all influential in helping athletes accomplish good performances (Howland, 2006, p.49).

“I was so down on it and at times that I thought about just going into the office and saying, "I want to go home now!" like, you know? Because I knew I had one year, but at the same time, there was this flame inside me that thought, "Fuck!

You got one year! Now you've been whining for six months and haven't get anything out of this! Are you really going to go home to Norway and say that – well I played two games and I got zero goals!" I wasn't going to do that, was I? So, I did what I've normally done if I haven't been playing. I worked harder in addition to the usual sessions and was just even more determined to not feel sorry for myself and things like that. I quite often want to feel sorry for myself, and I probably do sometimes too, but at the end of the day I kind of manage to turn it around, at least 9 out of 10 times, to turn it into something positive. But in X (first foreign club), I was really struggling to find something positive. As I said, times on the pitch were tough. It was tough living in such a big city alone. I lived in sort of a boarding accommodation with the rest of the guys. In a sense you didn't have the usual freedom. So, I longed for home a lot. But ehm the exact reason I managed to turn it around is hard to say, but eh, but the way that I managed to get my head back in the right place and resisted calling home every day to talk about how so bad things were every day and that I missed home and stuff. I was able to just think, "It is good here and it will work out. And if it doesn't work out, at least I've had a year of learning." (Player 5)

When analysing the narratives, data on previous hardship and applied self-regulatory skills to manoeuvre through challenging periods were connecting themes. The findings highlight the participants self-regulatory skills functioned in relation to the eudaimonic perspective of well-being which is related to circumstances and challenges people go through to develop and reach their potential that is in line with important values and engagements rooted in the self (Lundquist, 2011, p. 110). This is in line with the definition of mental health in relation to elite athletes, described as a dynamic state of well-being, where the athlete can fulfil their potential, have a purpose and meaning in life and sport, cope with stressors in everyday life and elite sport specific stressors, and act autonomously to their set values (Kuettel & Larsen, 2020, p. 253).

The results from the produced data depict self-regulated elite athletes who through hardship have developed as both athletes and individuals prior to asking for help. If already possessing this ability, why did feel the need for help? The motives deriving from the interviews were, the timing, mental challenges and wanting to see how it could enhance their performance, still an underlying explanation surfaces; having someone to talk to and confide in.

No man is an island - the confidant

Managing psychological effects, developing as a person beyond an athletic persona, understanding the dynamic relationship of one's thoughts, behaviour, feelings and physiology can be challenging for any individual. In addition an elite athlete works daily towards peak performances both in training and in competition, as well as attending to their well-being on and off the pitch. Data derived from the interviews prove it beneficial for both performance and well-being of the participants to have someone to talk to, a confidant.

A holistic approach to sport psychology consulting should aid athletes in managing these complex dynamics (Friesen & Orlick, 2010, p. 227). Often sole mental skills can be insufficient tools to deal with and personal or athletic concerns (Bond, 2002, p. 19). By discovering the multifaceted proportions of an athlete's identity, and addressing the whole person, can act as a bridge to improving their athletic performances (Friesen & Orlick, 2010, p. 228). Corlett stated that enhancement of one's performance is not all the time about mental training (1996, p. 93).

“I've really felt that talking to a mental coach really affects how well I feel otherwise, and it also ultimately affects my football career. So, I feel there's a really nice balance between talking about things, working on things before and after games, and also what affects me in life in general. You can talk about anything that's not 100% great. So, I think that's the most important thing about mental training really is that you have a sparring partner that you can talk shit with, talk a little loosely and firmly about things, and really just get, yes eh in a sense think out loud with another person.” (Player 3)

There has been a continued collaboration between the participants and the sport psychology consultant, with an average of 22,6 months. The interview guide did not include a question regarding the why's of an extended collaboration, but answers from various questions during the interview gave insight into an expressed appreciation and the experienced benefits of having a confidant showing interest in the individual as a whole,

“I get help with the things I need to talk about and the problems I come to you with. For example, if I want to be able to chill out more or become more comfortable and not get as embarrassed and stuff like that. You help me to find

ways in how to solve things. And then you challenge me too, so I can become better. I therefore feel that it is a combination, where I can talk about what I have on my heart, while at the same time getting better, and developed on things I need to work on.” (Player 1)

“It's, well you have to be very open, there's no use on holding back. That's how I feel. You have to be very open, you talk absolutely everything you are carrying, even if it feels very idiotic, but in the conversations, there is always an opening to open up about exactly those things. And it's kind of makes you feel free like a bird.” (Player 2)

“I think I would have struggled without a mental coach to be able to talk to, it's just much easier in my everyday life now, to just go through with the things I want to think about as well put away what I don't want to think about. And I think that helps with everything else that goes on in the lives of footballers as well.” (Player 5)

In the interviews the participants describe having strong support from family and other significant others but that an external conversational partner functions as a challenger, a buffer or a valve, making it easier to safe-guard family time and relationships. *“It's also nice to have someone else to talk to if there's actually something you need to talk about. If you're annoyed with something, it's nice to get things out, not just ventilate at home”* (Player 4).

“Although they (family) kind of say "Yes, but you can talk to us about everything," I feel it's, it's a slightly different conversation. It's kind of an outsider who sort of dares to say things straight out, and explain things, and be a little harsh. I feel that's very important.” (Player 3)

“I've had a lot less stuff on my mind. Because I know that if there's anything, I'll send a message to my mental coach and write to her and say that there is stuff going on here that we have talk about. Then I don't have to take it out on my parents or start overthinking myself.” (Player 5)

Reported psychosocial concerns of the athletes are e.g., consequences of failure, relationship issues and life balance (Sullivan & Nashman, 1998 p. 9). Based on these reports Friesen and Orlick state by developing the whole person, not just the athlete, these issues would recede (2010, p. 228). Working in a holistic manner is in line with Miller and Kerr's (2002) statement that excellent performance is only attained through

best possible personal development (p. 141). The produced data indicates perceived benefits of having a confidant to turn to, to share things with but also to be challenged by, in order to thrive. The participants in this study chose not to be independent or self-reliant. They chose not to be “an island” but asked for help and were open about it, regardless of exiting stigma of help-seeking in elite male football. A final dot to connect; the participants’ well-being through realising own abilities, working productively and fruitfully, coping with normal stresses of life, and contributing to one’s community falls in line with WHO’s definition of mental health (2014, p. 2).

Methodological limitations and future research

It is important to account for the strengths and weaknesses in a study. In this methodological discussion I have decided to focus on the study’s sample. The strategic sample consisted of male elite football players with the average age of 23,4 years, having publicly expressed receiving help from a sport psychology consultant, and playing in leagues higher rated than the Norwegian top league (UEFA’s Club Coefficients)⁸. As mentioned under the section on scientific quality the age-class most represented in top European football is aged 24. Even though this study’s sample is small in number it falls within a largely represented group in professional male football. That said, it is important to emphasise that what is shared during the interviews are the players own experiences and told truths, and where others involved, their “truth” may have another perspective.

The existing work-relationship between the participants and researcher can be regarded as the study’s double-edged sword. The rapid answers to participate in the study can be due to a feeling of obligation towards me, since I help them, they want to help me. This could have been clarified in the interviews by including a question on the willingness to participate. A move I could have made was to include football players I did not know in the study’s sample. Expressing their help-seeking publicly challenges safeguarding their anonymity due to the researcher being their sport psychology consultant. This would not have been the case if there was not an existing work-relationship between the interviewer and interviewee.

⁸ <https://www.uefa.com/nationalassociations/uefarankings/country/seasons/#/yr/2022>

Benefits of knowing the participants is the already relationship of trust during the interviews. This allowed for them to speak freely, sharing thoughts and reflections on topics concerning personal experiences and challenges both physically and mentally. With hindsight a clarification on the definition mental health could have been presented to the participants in advance of the interviews. This to ensure transferability of the narratives and analysis in comparison to other or future research.

Future research on help-seeking should also include, or consist of, a female selection of elite football players. To find out how the culture of elite male and female football can influence a player to ask for help one must recognize that culture itself is a complex phenomenon. A focus on cultural challenges related to help-seeking in multicultural team composition could be of interest for future research, and what impact cultural diversity has on players to ask for help. Statistics from this year's Premier League show that out of a total of 507 players across 20 teams, 332 players (65.5%) are foreign ⁹. A deeper understanding of gender differences in help-seeking, and whether cultural diversity influences the choice of asking for help may provide insight for researchers and sport practitioners on how to provide optimal mental health services and education in elite sports.

Vast amount of research on elite athletes and mental health focuses on the occurrence of symptoms of mental health problems (Kuettel & Larsen, 2020, p. 231). For future research on help-seeking athletes it is of importance how mental health is measured, and how the studies are designed and evaluated. The implementation of such research may help future researchers and practitioners reduce athletes' perceptions of the stigma encompassing mental health (Poucher et al., 2021, p 60). A deeper understanding of athlete mental health and the pan-contextual effects of seeking help may in turn help to improve applied practice guidelines, enlighten sport specific policies and interventions designed to improve athletes' mental health.

⁹ <https://www.transfermarkt.com/premier-league/transfers/wettbewerb/GB1>

Conclusion

When at work an elite football player will be surrounded by coaches who coach and assist them to develop technically, tactically and physically. In the same way most football players can benefit from the use and support of a sport psychologist or sport psychology consultant. The choice of using such a service is influenced by the players attitudes towards both the service and the provider of such service. Positive attitudes concern confidence in that consultation will bear fruits, personal openness and willingness to practice mental skills, and lower stigma tolerance, while negative attitudes are described by the opposite.

The players in this study ask for help for various reasons. All reasons related to the isolated sport context. On the pitch they have become more task orientated, less stressed and play with more confidence. This study also provides insight into the pan-contextual effects of receiving help. Off the pitch the players describe how they have become calmer and experience greater work-life balance. A holistic approach in the collaboration between player and consultant nurtured individual wellbeing. Falling in line with the WHO's definition of mental health, the players express how they are able to better cope with the stresses of life as an elite football player, realise their abilities and work productively and fruitfully to contribute to their given environments during a day.

One of the aims of this study was to further break down the underlying stigma of receiving help in hypermasculine environments. The presented analysis and results reveal that none of the participants, when being open about asking for help, had received any negative feedback, solely positive reactions and curiosity. It may seem as though the tides are turning, and that the thriving generation of football players experience less stigma regarding help-seeking.

Previous hardship, self-regulatory skills and having a confidant were the dots that needed to be connected. Through previous hardship in their careers self-regulatory skills are displayed. Even though they did not collaborate with a consultant during these times, being proactive partakers in their own learning process led them to a point where

help-seeking was motivationally, metacognitively and behaviourally desired. The epiphany of not having to be self-reliant but having a confidant to help them thrive proved to be pan-contextually beneficial for the players. Let us not forget that no man is an island.

References

- Ackerman, S. R. (2011). *Attitudes toward help-seeking and mental health among college athletes: Impact of a psycho-educational workshop*. Seton Hall University.
- Agnew, D., Jackson, K., Pill, S., & Edwards, C. (2019). Life skill development and transfer beyond sport. *Physical Culture and Sport*, 84(1), 41-54.
- Ansell, D. B., & Spencer, N. L. (2020). "Think about what you're doing and why you're doing it": Coach feedback, athlete self-regulation, and male youth hockey players. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 1-20.
- Arntzen, M. (2021, 23rd October). Solbakkens møte med mentaltreneren endret alt: - Et vendepunkt. *Verdens Gang*.
<https://www.vg.no/sport/fotball/i/47R9Ro/solbakkens-moete-medmentaltreneren-endret-alt-et-vendepunkt>
- Anyan, F. (2013). The influence of power shifts in data collection and analysis stages: a focus in qualitative research interview. *Qualitative Report*, 18, 36.
- Balk, Y. A., & Englert, C. (2020). Recovery self-regulation in sport: Theory, research, and practice. *International journal of sports science & coaching*, 15(2), 273-281.
- Bandura, A. (1991). Social Cognitive Theory of Self-Regulation. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*. 50, 248-287.
- Barnard, J. D. (2016). Student-athletes' perceptions of mental illness and attitudes toward help-seeking. *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy*, 30(3), 161-175.
- Baumeister, R. F. & Vohs, K. D. (2007). Self-regulation, ego depletion, and motivation. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*. 1, 1-14.
- Beckmann, J., & Elbe, A. M. (2015). *Sport psychological interventions in competitive sports*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Bird, M. D., Chow, G. M., Meir, G., & Freeman, J. (2018). Student-athlete and student non-athletes' stigma and attitudes toward seeking online and face-to-face counseling. *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology*, 12(3), 347-364.
- Bond, J. W. (2002). Applied sport psychology: philosophy, reflections, and experience. *International Journal of Sport Psychology*, 33(1), 19-37.
- Brant, M., Corneliusen, A., Salater, R.-A. & Gullachsen, Å. (2021, 5th October). – Det har ikke alltid vært en dans på roser. *TV2 Sport*. <https://www.tv2.no/a/14338228/>
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3:2, 77-101.
- Braun, v. & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*. Sage Publications Ltd.
- Brinkmann, S. & Tanggaard, L. (2012). *Kvalitative metoder: empiri og teoriutvikling*. (Hansen, W., Overs.) Gyldendal Akademisk.
- Brustad, R. J., & Ritter-Taylor, M. (1997). Applying social psychological perspectives to the sport psychology consulting process. *The sport psychologist*, 11(1), 107-119.
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods* (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.

- Bull, S. J. (1991). Personal and Situational Influences on Adherence to Mental Skills Training. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, 13, 121-132.
- CIES Football Observatory Monthly Report, n°49 - November 2019. The demographics of football in the European labour market. <https://www.football-observatory.com/IMG/sites/mr/mr49/en/> (Accessed 19th April 2022)
- Cleary, T. J., & Zimmerman, B. J. (2001). Self-regulation differences during athletic practice by experts, non-experts, and novices. *Journal of applied sport psychology*, 13(2), 185-206.
- Collins, J., & Durand-Bush, N. (2014). Strategies used by an elite curling coach to nurture athletes' self-regulation: A single case study. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 26(2), 211-224.
- Corlett, J. (1996). Sophistry, Socrates, and sport psychology. *The Sport Psychologist*, 10(1), 84-94.
- Delecta, P. (2011). Work life balance. *International journal of current research*, 3(4), 186-189.
- DeLenardo, S. & Terrion, J. L. (2014). Suck It Up: Opinions and Attitudes about Mental Illness Stigma and Help-seeking Behaviour of Male Varsity Football Players. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health*. Vol 33, No. 3, Dec 2014, 43-56.
- Ertmer, P. A., & Newby, T. J. (1996). The expert learner: Strategic, self-regulated, and reflective. *Instructional science*, 24(1), 1-24.
- Fangen, F. (2018). Nov. 5th. *Kvalitative metode*. De nasjonale forskningsetiske komiteene. <https://www.forskningsetikk.no/ressurser/fbib/metoder/kvalitativ-metode/>
- Fletcher, D. (2021). Stress-Related Growth and Resilience. In Arnold, R. & Fletcher, D. *Stress, Well-Being, and Performance in Sport*, 191-221. Routledge.
- Fortin-Guichard, D., Boudreault, V., Gagnon S. & Trottier, C. (2018) Experience, Effectiveness, and Perceptions Toward Sport Psychology Consultants: A Critical Review of Peer-Reviewed Articles, *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 30:1, 3-22.
- Frank, A. W. (2010). *Letting stories breathe: A socio-narratology*. University of Chicago Press.
- Frey, M., Laguna, P. L. & Ravizza, K. (2003). Collegiate Athletes' Mental Skill Use and Perceptions of Success: An Exploration of the Practice and Competition Settings. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*. 15: 115-128.
- Friesen, A. & Orlick, T. (2010). A Qualitative Analysis of Holistic Sport Psychology Consultants' Professional Philosophies. *The Sports Psychologist*, 24, 227-244.
- Føllesdal, D. & Walløe, L. (2002). *Argumentasjonsteori, språk og vitenskapsfilosofi* (7. utg). Universitetsforlaget.
- Gardner, F. L. (2009). Efficacy, mechanisms of change, and the scientific development of sport psychology. *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology*, 3(2), 139-155.
- Gaston, L., Magrath, R., & Anderson, E. (2018). From hegemonic to inclusive masculinities in English professional football: Marking a cultural shift. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 27(3), 301-312.

- Gucciardi, D. F., Hanton, S., & Fleming, S. (2017). Are mental toughness and mental health contradictory concepts in elite sport? A narrative review of theory and evidence. *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport*, 20(3), 307-311.
- Gucciardi, D. F., Hanton, S., Gordon, S., Mallett, C. J., & Temby, P. (2015). The concept of mental toughness: Tests of dimensionality, nomological network, and traitness. *Journal of personality*, 83(1), 26-44.
- Giæver, J. (2021, 28th December). «Nå ler de av meg». *Dagbladet*.
<https://www.dagbladet.no/sport/na-ler-de-av-meg/74992898>
- Gilje, N. & Grimen, H. (1993). *Samfunnsvitenskapens forutsetninger: innføring i samfunnsvitenskapelig vitenskapsfilosofi*. Universitetsforlaget.
- Glaser, B. G. & Strauss, A. L. (2017). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Routledge.
- Grønmo, S. (2016). *Samfunnsvitenskapelige metoder* (2. utg.). Fagbokforlaget.
- Gulliver, A., Griffiths, K. M., & Christensen, H. (2012). Barriers and facilitators to mental health help-seeking for young elite athletes: a qualitative study. *BMC psychiatry*, 12(1), 1-14.
- Gulliver, A., Griffiths, K. M., Christensen, H., Mackinnon, A., Calear, A. L., Parsons, A., & Stanimirovic, R. (2012). Internet-based interventions to promote mental health help-seeking in elite athletes: an exploratory randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 14(3), e1864.
- Hagger, M. S., Wood, C., Stiff, C. & Chatzisarantis, N. L. (2010) Self-regulation and self-control in exercise: the strength-energy model. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 3:1, 62-86.
- Halvorsen, K. (2008). *Å forske på samfunnet. En innføring i samfunnsvitenskapelig metode*. (5. utg.). Cappelen Akademisk Forlag.
- Heads Together, <https://www.headstogether.org.uk/heads-up/>. Accessed 10th March 2022.
- Heatherston, T. F., & Baumeister, R. F. (1996). Self-regulation failure: Past, present, and future. *Psychological Inquiry*, 7, 90–98.
- Herrebrøden, Ø. (2021, 8th June). «Supertalentet» Tobias Svendsen åpner opp om fem år med angst: - Rare tanker jeg aldri har hatt kontroll på. *Verdens Gang*.
<https://www.vg.no/sport/football/i/VqWR43/supertalentet-tobias-svendsen-21-aapner-opp-om-fem-aar-med-angst-rare-tanker-jeg-aldri-har-hatt-kontroll-paa>
- Howland, J. M. (2006). Mental Skills Training for Coaches to Help Athletes Focus Their Attention, Manage Arousal, and Improve Performance in Sport. *Journal of Education*, 187(1), 49-66.
- Hiles, D., Cermák, I. & Vladimir, C. (2017) Narrative Inquiry. In Willig, C. & Rogers, W. S., (Ed.) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology*. 2nd ed. 157-175. SAGE Publications.
- Jackson, D., Firtko, A., & Edenborough, M. (2007). Personal resilience as a strategy for surviving and thriving in the face of workplace adversity: A literature review. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 60(1), 1-9.
- Jonker, L., Elferink-Gemser, M. T., & Visscher, C. (2010). Differences in self-

- regulatory skills among talented athletes: The significance of competitive level and type of sport. *Journal of sports sciences*, 28(8), 901-908.
- Jones, G., Hanton, S., & Connaughton, D. (2007). A framework of mental toughness in the world's best performers. *The sport psychologist*, 21(2), 243-264.
- Jordalen, G., Lemyre, P. N., & Durand-Bush, N. (2020). Interplay of motivation and self-regulation throughout the development of elite athletes. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 12(3), 377-391.
- Jordet, G., Pepping, G. J., Cappuccio, M., & Press, M. (2019). Flipping sport psychology theory into practice. A context-and behavior centered approach. *Handbook of Embodied Cognition and Sport Psychology; The MIT Press: Cambridge, MA, USA*, 75.
- Jowett, S. (2009). Outgrowing the familial coach-athlete relationship. *Journal of International Sport and Exercise Psychology*. 3, 20-40.
- Kaier, E., Cromer, L. D., Johnson, M. D., Strunk, K., & Davis, J. L. (2015). Perceptions of mental illness stigma: Comparisons of athletes to nonathlete peers. *Journal of College Student Development*, 56(7), 735-739.
- Karoly, P. (1993). Mechanisms of self-regulation: A systems view. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 44, 23–52.
- Keyes, C. L. M. (2002). The Mental Health Continuum: From Languishing to Flourishing in Life. *Journal of Health and Social Behaviour*. Vol. 43, No. 2. Selecting Outcomes for the Sociology of Mental Health: Issues of Measurement and Dimensionality. 207-222.
- Keyes, C. L. M. (2005). Mental Illness and/or Mental Health? Investigating Axioms of the Complete State Model of Health. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*. Vol. 73, No. 3, 539-548.
- Kleven, T. A. & Hjordemaal, F. R. (2018). *Innføring i pedagogisk forskningsmetode. En hjelp til kritisk tolkning og vurdering* (3. utg). Fagbokforlaget.
- Konter, E., Beckmann, J., & Mallett, C. J. (2019). 14 Psychological skills for football players. *Football psychology: From theory to practice*, 179-197.
- Kuettel, A. & Larsen, C. H. (2020). Risk and protective factors from mental health in elite athletes: a scoping review. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*. 13:1, 231-265.
- Kvale, S. (2006). Dominance through interviews and dialogues. *Qualitative inquiry*, 12(3), 480-500.
- Kvale, S. (2006). Dominance through interviews and dialogues. *Qualitative inquiry*, 12(3), 480-500.
- Kvale S., & Brinkmann, S. (2015). *Det kvalitative forskningsintervju* (3. utg.) Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk Forlag.
- LaRose, B. (1988). What Can the Sport Psychology Consultant Learn From the Educational Consultant? *The Sport Psychologist*. 2. 141-153.
- Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. Springer Publishing Company.
- Liddon, L., Kingerlee, R., & Barry, J. A. (2018). Gender differences in preferences for

- psychological treatment, coping strategies, and triggers to help-seeking. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 57(1), 42-58
- Foskett, R. L., & Longstaff, F. (2018). The mental health of elite athletes in the United Kingdom. *Journal of science and medicine in sport*, 21(8), 765-770.
- Lundqvist, C. (2011) Well-being in competitive sports—The feel-good factor? A review of conceptual considerations of well-being, *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 4:2, 109-127.
- Lynch, L., Long, M., & Moorhead, A. (2018). Young men, help-seeking, and mental health services: exploring barriers and solutions. *American journal of men's health*, 12(1), 138-149.
- McCann, S. (1995). Overtraining and burnout. In S. M. Murphy (Ed.), *Sport psychology interventions* 347–368. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- McCardle, L, Young, B. D. & Baker, J. (2019) Self-regulated learning and expertise development in sport: current status, challenges, and future opportunities. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 12:1, 112-138.
- “Mental capacity.” *Merriam-Webster.com Medical Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/medical/mental%20capacity>. Accessed 23rd April 2021.
- Miller, P. S., & Kerr, G. A. (2002). Conceptualizing excellence: Past, present, and future. *Journal of applied sport psychology*, 14(3), 140-153.
- Nicholls, A. R. & Polman, R. C. (2007) Coping in Sport: A Systematic Review. *Journal of Sports Sciences* 25 (1): 11–31.
- Nixdorf, I., Frank, R., Hautzinger, M., and Beckmann, J. (2013). Prevalence of depressive symptoms and correlating variables among German elite athletes. *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology*. 7, 313–326.
- No Man is an Island, Grammarist, <https://grammarist.com/phrase/no-man-is-an-island/> Accessed 12th March 2022
- No Man is an Island, John Donne, <https://web.cs.dal.ca/~johnston/poetry/island.html>. Accessed 12th March 2022.
- Oliver, E. J., Hardy, J. & Markland, D (2010). Identifying important practice behaviors for the development of high-level youth athletes: Exploring the perspectives of elite coaches. *Journal of Psychology of Sport and Exercise*. Vol 11 Issue 6. 433-443.
- Orlick, T. & Partington, J. (1987). The Sport Psychology Consultant: Analysis of Critical Components as Viewed by Canadian Olympic Athletes. *The Sport Psychologist*. 1. 4-17.
- Otte, F. W., Davids, K., Millar, S. K., & Klatt, S. (2020). When and how to provide feedback and instructions to athletes?—How sport psychology and pedagogy insights can improve coaching interventions to enhance self-regulation in training. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 1444.
- Palumbo, D., & Galderisi, S. (2020). Controversial issues in current definitions of mental health. *Archives of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy*, 1, 7-11.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Patton, M. Q. (2002). Two Decades of Developments in Qualitative Inquiry. A Personal, Experiential Perspective. *Qualitative Social Work, Vol 1 (3)*. 261-283. SAGE Publications.
- Pink, M., Saunders, J., & Stynes, J. (2015). Reconciling the maintenance of on-field success with off-field player development: A case study of a club culture within the Australian Football League. *Psychology of sport and exercise, 21*, 98-108.
- Pintrich, P. R. (2000). The role of goal orientation in self-regulated learning. In *Handbook of self-regulation* (pp. 451-502). Academic Press.
- Poucher, Z. A., Tamminen, K. A., Kerr, G., & Cairney, J. (2021). A commentary on mental health research in elite sport. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 33*(1), 60-82.
- Purcell, R., Gwyther, K. & Rice, S. M. (2019). Mental Health in Elite Athletes: Increased Awareness Requires an Early Intervention Framework to Respond to Athlete Needs. *Sport Med. Open, 5*, 46-54.
- Quartiroli, A., Wagstaff, C. R., Martin, D. R., & Tod, D. (2021). A systematic review of professional identity in sport psychology. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology, 1-27*.
- Randall, W. L., & Phoenix, C. (2009). The problem with truth in qualitative interviews: reflections from a narrative perspective. *Qualitative research in sport and exercise, 1*(2), 125-140.
- Rice, S. M., Purcell, R., De Silva, S., Mawren, D., McGorry P. D. & Parker, A. G. (2016). The Mental Health of Elite Athletes: A Narrative Systematic Review. *Sports Medicine 46*: 1333-1353.
- Sadeghi, H., Sofian, M., Fauzee, O., Jamalis, M., Ab-Latif, R., & Cheric, M. C. (2010). The mental skills training of university soccer players. *International Education Studies, 3*, 81–90.
- Sandholdt, R. K. (2021, 23rd June). Erland Dahl Reitan: Bruker mental trener: Tabubelagt. *Dagbladet*.
https://www.dagbladet.no/sport/bruker-mental-trener---_tabubelagt/73887962
- Schmeichel, B. J., & Baumeister, R. F. (2004). Self-regulatory strength. *Handbook of self-regulation: Research, theory, and applications*, 84-98.
- Sharp, L-A. & Hodge, K. (2011). Sport Psychology Consulting Effectiveness. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 23*:3, 360-376.
- Siekańska, M., Bondar, R. Z., di Fronso, S., Blecharz, J., & Bertollo, M. (2021). Integrating technology in psychological skills training for performance optimization in elite athletes: A systematic review. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 57*, 102008.
- Skogseth, E. C. (2019). *Terskelen for å søke hjelp-En kvalitativ studie av faktorer som påvirker hjelpesøking fra et psykologisk lavterskeltilbud*, Master's thesis, NTNU.
- Smith, B. (2016). Narrative analysis in sport and exercise: how can it be done? In Smith, B. & Sparkes, A. C. (Red). *Routledge Handbook of Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise*. (1st ed.) 260-273. Routledge.
- Smith, B. & Caddick, N. (2012). Qualitative methods in sport: a concise overview for

- guiding social scientific sport research. *Asian Pacific Journal of Social Science*. Vol 1, Issue 1. 60-73.
- Smith, B. & Sparkes, A. C. (2009). Narrative analysis and sport and exercise psychology: Understanding lives in diverse ways. *Journal of Psychology of Sport and Exercise*. 10, 279-288.
- Souter, G., Lewis, R., & Serrant, L. (2018). Men, mental health and elite sport: a narrative review. *Sports medicine-open*, 4(1), 1-8.
- Sparkes, A. C. & Smith, B. (2014). *Qualitative research methods in sport, exercise and health: From process to product*. Routledge.
- Sullivan, P. A., & Nashman, H. W. (1998). Self-perceptions of the role of USOC sport psychologists in working with Olympic athletes. *The Sport Psychologist*, 12(1), 95-103.
- Suri, H. (2011). Purposeful sampling in qualitative research synthesis, *Qualitative Research Journal*, Vol. 11, no. 2. 63-75.
- Svegaarden, K. E. (2021, 10th October). Patrick Berg – et bevis på hvor viktig det mentale er i idretten. *Verdens Gang*.
<https://www.vg.no/sport/fotball/i/JxBP3j/patrick-berg-et-bevis-paa-hvor-viktig-det-mentale-er-i-idretten>
- Tahtinen, R. E., and Kristjansdottir, H. (2018). The influence of anxiety and depression symptoms on help-seeking intentions in individual sport athletes and non-athletes: the role of gender and athlete status. *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology*. 13, 1–31.
- Thagaard, T. (2018). *Systematikk og innlevelse: En innføring i kvalitative metoder* (5. utg). Fagbokforlaget.
- Tibbert, S. J., Andersen, M. B., & Morris, T. (2015). What a difference a “Mentally Toughening” year makes: The acculturation of a rookie. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 17, 68-78.
- Toering, T. T., Elferink-Gemser, M. T., Jordet, G., & Visscher, C. (2009). Self-regulation and performance level of elite and non-elite youth soccer players. *Journal of sports sciences*, 27(14), 1509-1517.
- Transfermarkt.com <https://www.transfermarkt.com/premier-league/transfers/wettbewerb/GB1> Accessed 10th May 2022.
- UEFA Club Coefficients.
<https://www.uefa.com/nationalassociations/uefarankings/country/seasons/#/yr/2022>. Accessed 27th December 2021.
- Ursin, H., & Eriksen, H. R. (2004). The cognitive activation theory of stress. *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, 29(5), 567-592.
- van Rens, F. E., & Heritage, B. (2021). Mental health of circus artists: Psychological resilience, circus factors, and demographics predict depression, anxiety, stress, and flourishing. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 53, 101850.
- Wadsworth, N., McEwan, H., Lafferty, M., Eubank, M., & Tod, D. (2021). A systematic review exploring the reflective accounts of applied sport psychology practitioners. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 1-27.
- Watson, J. C. (2005). College student-athletes' attitudes toward help-seeking behavior

- and expectations of counseling services. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46(4), 442-449.
- Wood, S., Harrison, L. K., & Kucharska, J. (2017). Male professional footballers' experiences of mental health difficulties and help-seeking. *The Physician and Sportsmedicine*, 45(2), 120-128.
- Woodman, T., Zourbanos, N., Hardy, L., Beattie, S. & McQuillan, A (2010). Do Performance Strategies Moderate the Relationship Between Personality and Training Behaviors? An Exploratory Study, *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 22:2, 183-197,
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2014). *Mental health: A state of well-being*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organisation.
- Wrisberg, C. A., Simpson, D., Loberg, L. A., Withycombe, J. L., & Reed, A. (2009). NCAA Division-I student-athletes' receptivity to mental skills training by sport psychology consultants. *The Sport Psychologist*, 23(4), 470-486.
- Zimmerman, B. J. (1990). Self-regulated learning and academic achievement: An overview. *Educational Psychologist*, 25, 3-17.
- Zimmerman, B. J. (1995). Self-regulation involves more than metacognition: A social cognitive perspective. *Educational psychologist*, 30(4), 217-221.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Form of consent

Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet

“Why I asked for help.” Narratives from professional football players.

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er å få innsikt i hvorfor elite utøvere ønsker hjelp av mental trener (MT)/ idrettspsykologisk rådgiver (IPR). I dette skrivet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

Formål

I hypermaskuline prestasjonsmiljøer er det historisk sett et underliggende stigma å be om hjelp. I denne masteroppgaven er formålet å hente historiene til norske fotballspillere i utlandet som har offentlig, i aviser og sosiale medier, uttalt at de har oppsøkt hjelp av MT/ IPR. Gjennom semistrukturerte intervjuer vil utøverne bli stilt spørsmål om reisen som fotballspiller, årsaken til at de oppsøkte hjelp og hvordan de benytter seg av mental trenings teknikker på og utenfor banen.

Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?

Norges Idrettshøgskole (NIH) er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?

Du blir spurt om å delta fordi du fyller kriteriene:

- (a) mann, på grunn av stigma i hypermaskuline kulturer på å søke hjelp.
- (b) spiller i ligaer høyere rangert enn den norske toppligaen, på grunn av høyere krav og eventuelle utfordringer ved å bo i utlandet.
- (c) offentlig (aviser/ sosiale medier) uttalt bruk av MT/IPR.

Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?

Hvis du velger å delta i dette prosjektet innebærer det et 45-60 minutters intervju. Intervjuet vil bli gjort i dine omgivelser, eller online grunnet nåværende pandemi. Det vil bli gjort lydopptak av intervjuet.

Fordeler: Få mulighet til å reflektere over relevante tema som oppstår gjennom en fotballkarriere og mulige overføringsverdier til livet generelt.

Ulemper: Ingen spesielle, bortsett fra tiden som må settes av til å gjennomføre intervjuet.

Det er frivillig å delta

Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykket tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle dine personopplysninger vil da bli slettet. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

Ditt personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger

Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrevet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket. Dine personopplysninger blir også behandlet i Zoom, ettersom Zoom benyttes til intervjuet.

Professor Anne Marte Pennsgaard (hovedveileder) og Tom Henning Øvrebø (stipendiat/psykologspesialist og biveileder) og Louise Rodgers Holte (Masterstudent) ved NIH vil ha tilgang til opplysningene.

Navnet og kontaktopplysningene dine vil jeg erstatte med en kode som lagres på egen navneliste adskilt fra øvrige data og datamaterialet blir lagret på forskningsserver. Klubber og land blir ikke nevnt. Du vil ikke kunne gjenkjennes i publikasjon. Sitater fra intervjuet vil bli publisert etter du har lest gjennom og godkjent de utvalgte sitatene.

Hva skjer med opplysningene dine når vi avslutter forskningsprosjektet?

Opplysningene anonymiseres når prosjektet avsluttes/oppgaven er godkjent, som etter planen er 27.05.2022. Personopplysninger om opptak vil da bli slettet.

Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?

Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra NIH har NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

Dine rettigheter

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- innsyn i hvilke opplysninger vi behandler om deg, og å få utlevert en kopi av opplysningene
- å få rettet opplysninger om deg som er feil eller misvisende
- å få slettet personopplysninger om deg
- å sende klage til Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger

Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å vite mer om eller benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:

- NIH ved Anne Marte Pennsgaard, annemp@nih.no, +4723262421.
- Vårt personvernombud: Rolf Haavik, personvernombud@nih.no

Hvis du har spørsmål knyttet til NSD sin vurdering av prosjektet, kan du ta kontakt med:

- NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS på epost (personvertjenester@nsd.no) eller på telefon: 55 58 21 17.

Med vennlig hilsen

(Forsker/veileder)

Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet “Why I asked for help. Narratives from professional football players”, og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

- å delta i intervju.

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet.

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

Appendix 2. Interview guide

Interview guide – themes

1. Tell me about your journey so far in football.
 - What has been the most rewarding moment or period?
 - What has been the most challenging moment or period?
2. When was the first time you heard about mental training?
3. What made you decide to contact a sports psychology consultant?
4. To what degree would you say receiving help has influenced your game?
5. In what way, if any, have mental skills from football helped you off the pitch?
6. Why do you think there has been a stigma in football to ask for help?
7. How have people reacted to your choice of asking for help?
8. Any thoughts or comments on the topics that we have talked about that you would like to address or add to before we finish?

Appendix 3. NSD Approval

20.04.2022, 08:49

Meldeskjema for behandling av personopplysninger



Vurdering

Referansenummer

163029

Prosjektittel

“Why I asked for help.” Narratives from professional football players.

Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon

Norges idrettshøgskole / Institutt for idrett og samfunnsvitenskap

Prosjektansvarlig (vitenskapelig ansatt/veileder eller stipendiat)

Anne Marte Pensgaard, annemp@nih.no, tlf: +4723262421

Type prosjekt

Studentprosjekt, masterstudium

Kontaktinformasjon, student

Louise Rodgers Holte, louise@ttgymnas.no, tlf: 92402943

Prosjektperiode

02.08.2021 - 27.05.2022

Vurdering (1)**08.07.2021 - Vurdert**

Det er vår vurdering at behandlingen vil være i samsvar med personvernlovgivningen, så fremt den gjennomføres i tråd med det som er dokumentert i meldeskjemaet den 08.07.21 med vedlegg, samt i meldingsdialogen mellom innmelder og NSD. Behandlingen kan starte.

TYPE OPPLYSNINGER OG VARIGHET

Prosjektet vil behandle alminnelige personopplysninger og særlige kategorier av personopplysninger om helse frem til 27.05.2022.

LOVLIG GRUNNLAG

Prosjektet vil innhente samtykke fra de registrerte til behandlingen av personopplysninger. Vår vurdering er at prosjektet legger opp til et samtykke i samsvar med kravene i art. 4 nr. 11 og 7, ved at det er en frivillig, spesifikk, informert og utvetydig bekreftelse, som kan dokumenteres, og som den registrerte kan trekke tilbake.

For alminnelige personopplysninger vil lovlige grunnlag for behandlingen være den registrertes samtykke, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 a.

For særlige kategorier av personopplysninger vil lovlige grunnlag for behandlingen være den registrertes

<https://meldeskjema.nsd.no/vurdering/60b618ac-823e-4851-bc51-a5b6d2596378>

1/2

uttrykkelige samtykke, jf. personvernforordningen art. 9 nr. 2 bokstav a, jf. personopplysningsloven § 10, jf. § 9 (2).

PERSONVERNPRINSIPPER

NSD vurderer at den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger vil følge prinsippene i personvernforordningen:

- om lovlighet, rettferdighet og åpenhet (art. 5.1 a), ved at de registrerte får tilfredsstillende informasjon om og samtykker til behandlingen
- formålsbegrensning (art. 5.1 b), ved at personopplysninger samles inn for spesifikke, uttrykkelig angitte og berettigede formål, og ikke viderebehandles til nye uforenlige formål
- dataminimering (art. 5.1 c), ved at det kun behandles opplysninger som er adekvate, relevante og nødvendige for formålet med prosjektet
- lagringsbegrensning (art. 5.1 e), ved at personopplysningene ikke lagres lengre enn nødvendig for å oppfylle formålet.

DE REGISTRERTES RETTIGHETER

NSD vurderer at informasjonen om behandlingen som de registrerte vil motta oppfyller lovens krav til form og innhold, jf. art. 12.1 og art. 13.

Så lenge de registrerte kan identifiseres i datamaterialet vil de ha følgende rettigheter: innsyn (art. 15), retting (art. 16), sletting (art. 17), begrensning (art. 18) og dataportabilitet (art. 20).

Vi minner om at hvis en registrert tar kontakt om sine rettigheter, har behandlingsansvarlig institusjon plikt til å svare innen en måned.

FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER

NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene i personvernforordningen om riktighet (art. 5.1 d), integritet og konfidensialitet (art. 5.1 f) og sikkerhet (art. 32).

Zoom er databehandler i prosjektet. NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene til bruk av databehandler, jf. art 28 og 29.

For å forsikre dere om at kravene oppfylles, må prosjektansvarlig følge interne retningslinjer/rådføre dere med behandlingsansvarlig institusjon.

MELD VESENTLIGE ENDRINGER

Dersom det skjer vesentlige endringer i behandlingen av personopplysninger, kan det være nødvendig å melde dette til NSD ved å oppdatere meldeskjemaet. Før du melder inn en endring, oppfordrer vi deg til å lese om hvilken type endringer det er nødvendig å melde:

<https://www.nsd.no/personverntjenester/fylle-ut-meldeskjema-for-personopplysninger/melde-endringer-i-meldeskjema>

Du må vente på svar fra NSD før endringen gjennomføres.

OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET

NSD vil følge opp ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet.

Kontaktperson hos NSD: Line Raknes Hjellvik

Lykke til med prosjektet!

Appendix 4. REK Assessment



Region:	Saksbehandler:	Telefon:	Vår dato:	Vår referanse:
REK sør-øst A	Tove Irene Klokk	22845522	02.08.2021	309016

Anne Marte Pensgaard

Fremleggingsvurdering: Why I asked for help! Narratives from professional football players

Søknadsnummer: 309016

Forskningsansvarlig institusjon: Norges idrettshøgskole

REK vurderer prosjektet som ikke fremleggingspliktig

Søkers beskrivelse

I hypermaskuline prestasjonsmiljøer er det historisk sett et underliggende stigma å be om hjelp. I denne masteroppgaven er formålet å hente historiene til norske fotballspillere i utlandet som har offentlig, i aviser og sosiale medier, uttalt at de har oppsøkt hjelp av mental trener eller idrettspsykologiske rådgivere. Gjennom semistrukturerte intervjuer vil utøverne bli stilt spørsmål om reisen som fotballspiller, årsaken til at de oppsøkte hjelp og hvordan de benytter seg av mental trenings teknikker på og utenfor banen.

Vi viser til forespørsel om fremleggingsplikt.

REKs vurdering

Formålet med prosjektet er å hente historiene til norske fotballspillere i utlandet som offentlig har uttalt at de har søkt hjelp av mental trener eller idrettspsykologiske rådgivere. Det vil bli gjennomført semi-strukturerte intervjuer med fotballspillerne, hvor de vil bli spurt om hvorfor de søkte hjelp og hvordan de benytter seg av mentale treningsteknikker på og utenfor banen.

Konklusjon

Etter REKs vurdering faller prosjektet, slik det er beskrevet, utenfor virkeområdet til helseforskningsloven. Helseforskningsloven gjelder for medisinsk og helsefaglig forskning, i loven definert som forskning på mennesker, humant biologisk materiale og helseopplysninger, som har som formål å frambringe ny kunnskap om helse og sykdom, jf. helseforskningsloven §§ 2 og 4a. Formålet er avgjørende, ikke om forskningen utføres av helsepersonell eller på pasienter/sårbare grupper eller benytter helseopplysninger.

Prosjekter som faller utenfor helseforskningslovens virkeområde kan gjennomføres uten godkjenning av REK. Det er institusjonens ansvar å sørge for at prosjektet gjennomføres på en forsvarlig måte med hensyn til for eksempel regler for taushetsplikt og personvern.

REK sør-øst A

Besøksadresse: Gullhaugveien 1-3, 0484 Oslo

Telefon: 22 84 55 11 | E-post: rek-sorost@medisin.uio.no

Web: <https://rekportalen.no>

Vi gjør oppmerksom på at vurderingen og konklusjonen er å anse som veiledende jf. forvaltningsloven § 11. Dersom dere likevel ønsker å søke REK vil søknaden bli behandlet i komitémøte, og det vil bli fattet et enkeltvedtak etter forvaltningsloven.

Med vennlig hilsen

Jacob C. Hølen
Sekretariatsleder
REK sør-øst

Tove Irene Klokk
Seniorrådgiver
REK sør-øst

Kopi til:

Norges idrettshøgskole

