Four sport psychology professionals (three CC-AASPs, and one professional on the UK practitioner register) from across three generations of our profession share their insights on the watershed moments in their professional lives.

Could you share one experience [glimmer] that started your interest in sport psychology?

**CHARLIE BROWN**
I was a clinical psychologist in full-time private practice specializing in brief, solution-focused, systemic interventions. I also enjoyed doing triathlons. I overheard a spouse at one race commenting, “I’ll be happy when my husband is finished training for these things; it’s like I haven’t seen him in weeks…” Her comment prompted my embarking on a research project to study the impact of triathlon training on relationships. I was motivated both by a genuine interest in the topic and the prospect of deducting my travel to triathlons as a business expense. I gathered data from 165 triathletes and 127 of their spouses on the impact of training on relationships. At that time, there was very little research in this area, and most of it focused only on the athlete. I presented the findings at an APA Convention and had a number of people come up after the presentation and encourage me to consider specializing in sport psychology.

**JACK LESYK**
I was a rather traditional clinical psychologist in private practice when I took up running and then marathon running. My own interest and experiences in training and competing sparked my interest in the psychology of sport. I devoured the few books that were available at that time. This experience was before the founding of AASP and APA Division 47 so I began an intense program of self-study. I was determined to become a sport psychologist.
for Peak Performance. As a foundation of the book, I had extended, in-depth conversations with a number of top performers and performance consultants in North America. That alone was an incredible privilege. Synthesizing the knowledge and insights that was shared during those interviews helped crystalize and clarify my thinking and consultation practices.

JACK LESYK
In the early days it was Terry Orlick’s, Pursuit of Excellence (1980), Jon Silva and Bob Weinberg’s, Psychological Foundations of Sport (1984), Richard Suinn’s Psychology in Sports: Methods and Applications (1980), and Kay Porter and Judy Foster’s, The Mental Athlete (1986). Although the pages are yellowing, these treasured books remain on my bookshelf today.

STEVE MELLALIEU
I was very fortunate to have Professor Graham Jones as one of my lecturers at University - someone who was highly regarded in the field, not only terms of his applied consultancy with Olympic teams and athletes, but also his extensive knowledge and publication background in stress and performance in sport. One of Graham’s former graduate students, Dr. Austin Swain, who was working with the English Rugby Union team at that time, also lectured me. Austin and Graham would regularly share their experiences of working in the mental side of sport in their lectures and seminars. As a failing rugby union player whose sporting career was beginning to fizzle out, the topic resonated with me and inspired me to learn more about working in the profession.

ALISON RHODIUS
Without knowing it at the time, my own tennis performances in high school were the glimmer. I was the best in my school, but still had trouble closing out local school rivalry matches that I knew I could and should win. I also realized that there was a mental component to sport during constant viewing of Wimbledon from the age of about 3! I used to analyze how the players looked and sounded in between points. I had no idea what sport psychology was when leaving high school, so I embarked on a psychology undergrad degree first (I studied Scottish professional soccer players for my project), and toward the end of that degree, found that there was a field called “Sport Psychology.” Phew!

What is one publication that influenced your work?

CHARLIE BROWN
I’ve got to give you two and a half: Weinberg and Gould’s Foundations of Sport and Exercise Psychology helped provide a solid foundational core. Bob Nideffer’s Attentional Model of Performance has been a foundation of my applied work; and, his article, Trading an I for an Eye, particularly influenced me. That’s 1½; the other work is the book that Kate Hays and I co-authored, You’re On! Consulting
Fiennes. I found it inspirational, awe-inspiring, and it had fabulous insights into a mentally strong mind under great stress, plus it really makes you glad to be warm when reading it.

**What has been one “Eureka!” moment in your consulting career?**

**CHARLIE BROWN**
A few years back, I was returning from an AASP convention where there had been heated discussion over a number of themes that have consistently been points of contention in the organization. When I consult, I am acutely aware that each organization in which I work is a unique culture. It dawned on me that the majority of issues that we have within the organization are attributed to the different cultures in which our members live and work. While we have made strides as an organization to be more culturally sensitive to issues of race, gender, class, and sexual preference, I think we have been blind to biases we have related to the broad cultures of the settings in which we work. The cultures of academia, institutional settings, therapy, and free market performance consulting are incredibly different. I believe this cultural insensitivity is the major source of conflict and difficulties within the field.

**JACK LESYK**
Early in my career, I was invited to conduct a half-day mental skills training workshop for equestrian performers. At that time, my work with this sport was very limited. I contacted two of the top equestrian trainers and competitors in my area and asked if I could interview them. They were happy to oblige. I spent about two hours with them, asking about every aspect of their sport, including a “stream of consciousness” account of what it’s like to compete in a show jumping event. Using what I gleaned from this interview, I was able to plan and carry out a half-day workshop for about twenty riders, including the two whom I had interviewed. The workshop was very well received and I felt validated that I knew how to begin working with a sport that I didn’t know much about. This method has served me well over the years.

**STEVE MELLALIEU**
They say you learn the most from your biggest mistakes. Early in my career I was offered the opportunity to work with a professional athlete in a sport that I had not consulted in before. Unfortunately, the approach I adopted, which had been successful with previous clients, was ineffective and lead to an extremely unsuccessful consultation. This experience drove me to analyze the nature of my failure, and began for me what has been a key focus in my subsequent practice to date. That is to continually seek to understand, respect, and foster the quality of the therapeutic alliance with my clients.

“They say you learn the most from your biggest mistakes.”
— Steve Mellalieu

**ALISON RHODIUS**
During my work at the Olympic Games in 2004, I realized I couldn’t (and didn’t need to) try to help everyone all the time. I was working with athletes from more than one nation and thought I had to do more than usual (it was my first Games). I quickly realized that I needed to keep doing what I had already established with the clients I worked the most intensively with in the months before Athens. It helped take the pressure (my own) off me, reminded me not to strive for perfection, and kept me focused on doing great work with them in the moment.
What is one piece of advice you’d give to young professionals starting in the field?

CHARLIE BROWN
Develop your Contextual Intelligence - what you know is not as important as what people do with what you know.

JACK LESYK
Although many young professionals want to work with Olympians and professional athletes, this just isn’t realistic. There are only a small number of athletes in these categories, and they are likely to be working with senior members of our profession. I suggest working with high school age athletes. There are so many of them, they need our services, and there is a 100% turnover every four years. Many parents are willing to spend large amounts of money on such services, especially when it can be part of a program that leads to a four-year athletic scholarship. Best of all, you can do a lot of good in working with this population in teaching life skills, guiding positive values, and helping them develop a healthy identity as an athlete and as a person.

STEVE MELLALIEU
When shaping your service delivery philosophy regarding how you seek to practice with clients, it is essential that you first get to know and understand yourself in terms of your own competencies and boundaries, both as a practitioner and as a human being. Remember that everyone is unique and has their own style. By all means, use others as inspirations, but don’t imitate, don’t try to be someone or something that you are not! Work on your self-awareness and be comfortable in your own skin before you seek to help raise the self-awareness of others!

ALISON RHODIUS
This is a great question and one I get asked often. At JFKU our focus is on application in the field, so we ask our students to consider the following five questions. It all boils down to knowing yourself (as best you can when leaving grad school). (1) Why are you unique?; (2) What (or who) is your niche?; (3) Why should someone hire you?; (4) Why you?; and, (5) Why now?

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