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Revs and Psychos: Role, Impact and Interaction of Sport Chaplains and Sport Psychologists

Within English Premiership Soccer

Richard Gamble
University of Gloucestershire, Gloucester, United Kingdom

Denise M Hill
University of Gloucestershire, Gloucester, United Kingdom

Andrew Parker
University of Gloucestershire, Gloucester, United Kingdom

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Author note:
Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Denise Hill, Faculty of Applied Sciences, University of Gloucestershire, Gloucester, GL2 9HW, United Kingdom. Tel: 00-44-(0)1242-715157. E-mail: dhill@glos.ac.uk

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Abstract

Despite an increased focus on spirituality and athlete well-being in sport (Watson, 2011), there is limited research regarding those who provide support to the athlete in these areas. The aim of this study was to explore the practice of sport psychologists and sport chaplains within professional soccer, and identify potential for working partnerships. By interviewing three psychologists and four chaplains who are employed currently within English Premiership soccer, it was revealed that significant overlap in their roles existed. The psychologists and chaplains identified barriers that restricted support offered to players, which may be addressed by working cooperatively in the future.
The English Premiership soccer league represents currently the most successful sport business outside of the United States (Nesti, 2010), and as a consequence, its clubs have developed a winning culture in which the need for success often outweighs the needs of individual players (Railo & Matson, 2001). Indeed, the culture within Premiership soccer clubs is often transient and machoistic (Woods, 2011), with high levels of insecurity and low levels of trust (Nesti, 2010). Players normally hold a performance focus, make many personal sacrifices, are continually exposed to myopic decision making (Thelwell, 2009), and often live their pressured lives in the public eye (Boyers, 2006). Therefore, sport psychologists working within this context are required to confront a range of challenges and often perform various roles that include: educator of mental skills, mediator between coach and players, intermediary for team cohesion, and counselor (Beswick, 2001). Such services are also offered frequently against the backdrop of general apathy, suspicion or even prejudice towards sport psychology from managers and players alike (Nesti, 2010; Wilson, Gilbert, Gilbert, & Sailor, 2009).

There is a wealth of evidence to suggest that mental skills training can have a positive influence on soccer performance (e.g., Reeves, Nicholls, & McKenna, 2011; Thelwell, Greenlees, & Weston, 2006). However, few studies have explored the manner in which sport psychologists should provide such training to have the most impact on players. Of those that exist, Gilbourne has offered the most extensive insight into effective psychological service delivery within elite soccer by reflecting on his 30 years experiences of working as a coach and sport psychologist within this setting (see Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006). Gilbourne suggests that effective sport psychologist’s embrace the performance agenda and therefore employ the necessary psychological skills training to improve players’ performance. However, as professional soccer is often an abrasive, irrational, emotional and unpredictable setting, he
concludes that the impact of the sport psychologist is determined by their capacity to care. Thus, the emphasis appears to be on the sport psychologist employing a humanistic and holistic approach in which the focus is on resolving lifestyle or personal issues, and offering compassion and empathy towards the player. Indeed, recent evidence has supported the claim that within such an uncompromising setting, a holistic approach is more likely to have a positive impact on player performance and well-being (Nesti, 2007, 2012).

By adopting a humanistic and holistic approach to their work, the sport psychologist must attempt to address the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs of players (Ravizza, 2002; Walker, 2010). However, critically, it has been noted that few sport psychology consultants consider the spiritual needs and religious beliefs of their athletes (Parry, Nesti, & Watson, 2011; Watson & Nesti, 2005), despite the widespread acknowledgement of their influence on performance and well-being (Czech & Bullet, 2007; Czech, Wrisberg, Fisher, Thompson, & Hayes, 2004; Hopsicker, 2009; Watson & Czech, 2005; Watson, 2011). This omission is particularly problematic if working within English Premiership soccer clubs whereby the influx of overseas personnel has led to a significant number of players expressing a faith (Nesti, 2011).

By failing to address spiritual needs, it is unlikely that the practitioner will develop an effective athlete-consultant relationship (Watson & Czech, 2005) and contribute to the development of player well-being and performance (Nesti, 2012).

Accordingly, Watson and Nesti (2005) have argued that if an athlete holds religious convictions, then the sport psychologist will need to understand those beliefs in order to support their athlete fully. However, it is also acknowledged that the psychologist may not be best placed to address these specific needs fully. Indeed as Maynard (Brady & Maynard, 2010) suggested, the sport psychologist will be “flying close to the wind (p. 60)” if they assume sole responsibility for the well-being agenda of the athlete. Thus, it seems necessary therefore, that on matters of faith, the sport psychologist should work alongside the sport chaplain.
Sport chaplaincy is considered to provide holistic pastoral and spiritual care towards the well-being of people in sport, and as a consequence, the core responsibility is to ensure athlete welfare (Hastings & Dellemonache, 2007). The number of sport chaplains working within English professional soccer has grown in recent years, culminating with the creation of a Pastoral Director in 2009, who oversees and develops the cohort of over 70 sport chaplains that exist within the professional soccer clubs. The culture of soccer has evolved from its days of Corinthian fair play to an environment of competition whereby superiority is aspired to (Parry, Robinson, Watson, & Nesti, 2007), and achievement is judged in terms of material success (Hoffman, 2010). Consequently, although some in the Christian community have questioned whether chaplains should remain involved in the sporting world (Campolo, 1988), the assertion adopted by the Christian church is that sport is a God-given point of contact (McGrath, 1992). Although the majority of sport chaplains within the United States are evangelistic with a focus around mission (Krattenmaker, 2010), they sit in sharp contrast to those based in the United Kingdom who seek to provide pastoral support and who commit explicitly to a non-proselytizing ethos.

Nesti (2011) noted that with so many English Premiership soccer players having strong religious beliefs, there is a necessity for each club to provide appropriate support. However, professional soccer players are significantly different to the normal church-goer and ‘man in the street’ because of the pressurized, public, performance focused and excessively paid environment they exist within (Boyers, 2006; Claridge, 1997; Roderick 2007). Consequently, this culture has molded the sport chaplain’s responsibilities to have an emphasis on caring (Hastings & Dellemonache, 2007), friendship, support and encouragement, but distinguishes itself from a general caring role, by providing spiritual care (Boyers, 2006). The aim is to enable the player to cope with the range of extreme pressures that exists within professional soccer (Amos, 2006), provide life skills training for younger players (Boyers, 2006), listen at moments...
of significance (Baker, 2006a), support players through bereavement (Boyers, 2006), respond to crisis (Stewart, 2009) and facilitate pre-match prayers (Weir, 2011).

There is a reluctance to examine theological issues within sport, which Watson (2011) suggests is caused by a disproportionate emphasis on the body above the mind. The majority of research that does exist in this area, has focused on the impact of prayer on sporting success (e.g., Czech & Bullet, 2007; Dale, 2000; Hopsicker, 2009; Kreider, 2004; Watson & Czech, 2005), and so there remains an absence of empirical literature regarding the practice of chaplaincy in sport. This at times has led to a misunderstanding of the role by both the provider and receiver (Nesti, 2010; Waller, Dzikus, & Hardin, 2008). To date, the only insight offered with regards to the work and impact of sport chaplaincy within professional soccer has emerged from the biographical reports of chaplains (e.g., Boyers, 2006; Heskins & Baker, 2006; Wood, 2011) and players (e.g., Primus, 2000). Accordingly, and to the authors’ knowledge, the effect of the spiritual support provided by sport chaplains to professional soccer players has yet to be explored empirically. Furthermore, their interaction with other support providers, particularly the sport psychologist has yet to be examined.

The roles of the sport psychologist and sport chaplain are distinctive in that the former are required to focus on enhancing player performance, and are therefore judged predominantly by performance outcomes (see Andersen, Miles, Mahoney, & Robinson, 2002). Whilst conversely, the sport chaplains use their spiritual expertise to enable player contentment, and respond specifically to issues of faith religious belief (Boyers, 2006; Watson & Czech, 2005).

Nevertheless, Nesti (2007) speculates that as the sport psychologist and sport chaplain have much in common, and as their skills are complimentary, they may benefit from working cooperatively. Both aim to provide the player with holistic and pastoral support to enhance well-being, with the chaplain having specific expertise to attend to the spiritual needs of the player.

As both roles have yet to be accepted fully as professions within elite soccer, there also remains a need amongst both sets of practitioners to demonstrate their occupational worth. There is
evidence from research completed within the health industry that the psychologist and chaplain have become increasingly accepted, professionalized and accountable within this context by working cooperatively to improve healthcare (see Flannelly, Weaver, Smith, & Handzo, 2003; Monod, Martin, Spencer, Rochat, & Bula, 2010). Therefore, the theoretical argument that the sport psychologist and sport chaplain should work together within professional soccer appears to have foundation. However, research has yet to examine the potential for this collaboration. Accordingly, the sport psychologist and sport chaplain appear to offer an important service within English Premiership soccer, but further exploration of their role and impact is required, particularly with regards to their contribution to the support of player’s with faith. Furthermore, there remains the need to investigate the level of co-operation that exists between the two disciplines, and consider the potential for collaboration within the professional soccer context. This study aims to address this gap in the literature by using a qualitative approach to offer unique insight into the role and impact of the sport psychologist and sport chaplain within English Premiership soccer. It also aims to explore the current working partnerships that exist between the sport psychologist and sport chaplain within Premiership soccer clubs, and consider critically the potential of this collaboration.

**Method**

**Methodology**

The impact and interaction of sport psychologists and sports chaplains working within professional soccer has evaded academic scrutiny. Accordingly, the present study marks unchartered territory. A broadly phenomenological approach was adopted to address the research aims of this study, for it enabled a detailed exploration of the behaviors, experiences and perceptions of individuals working as either a sport psychologist or sport chaplain within the English Premiership soccer league. By adopting a phenomenological methodology, the study generated a rich description of the participant interpretations of their experiences, whilst also exploring the meaning they attached to those experiences (Bryman, 2008). As a fuller
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1 appreciation of the phenomenon under investigation can be gained through phenomenological
2 research (Langridge, 2007), the study generates a unique insight into the role, impact and
3 interaction of sport psychology and sport chaplaincy within English professional soccer.

4 Participants

5 Using purposive sampling, seven participants were selected for the study (Miles &
6 Huberman, 1994). The participant selection criteria included current employment as either a
7 sport psychologist or sport chaplain by a professional soccer club within the English
8 Premiership. In addition, the participants were only recruited from Premiership clubs which
9 employed both a sport psychologist and sport chaplain. Three of the participants were sport
10 psychologists, four were sport chaplains, and all were male (aged 35-55) as no female participant
11 could be identified within this context in either discipline at the time of writing.

12 The three sport psychologists had worked for clubs within the English Premiership soccer
13 league for at least seven years each. One of the sport psychologists held Chartered status, and
14 the other two were accredited by the British Association of Sport and Exercise Science (or
15 overseas equivalent). Each of the sport psychologists were employed by the Premiership clubs
16 on a paid, part-time basis that included regular, if brief contact with players. Thus, players were
17 able to access the sport psychologist during the days which they were employed, and the
18 psychologist offered regular workshops on psychological support / training to the team as a
19 whole.

20 Each of the four sport chaplains had extensive experience of practicing within professional
21 soccer (i.e., 15, 10, 7 and 5 years respectively), and on average had worked for ten different
22 managers. One of the sports chaplains had also worked for an international soccer team. Two of
23 the sport chaplains came from the Anglican tradition, one was a Methodist and the other
24 emanated from the more charismatic ‘House Church’ movement. As is the norm within the
25 United Kingdom, the four sport chaplains worked voluntarily for their Premiership clubs on
26 either a one or two day a week secondment from their home churches. They were all active
members of Sports Chaplaincy UK, (a charity which supports, trains and appoints chaplains),  
and so received continual training or support.  

**Procedure**  

Participants were contacted initially by email to be invited to a meeting in which they  
were introduced to the nature and purpose of the study. All of the participants who were  
contacted agreed to take part in the study, and the interviews were completed by the lead author  
at a location that was convenient for both interviewer and interviewee. Two of the psychologists  
were interviewed away from the immediate soccer environment in their private offices, and due  
to logistical difficulties and time constraints, the third sport psychologist was interviewed via  
telephone. All sport chaplains were interviewed in person at the soccer ground in which they  
worked. The interviews were undertaken during the off-season due to the time pressures placed  
on the participants during the competitive soccer season.  

**Data Collection**  

As required of phenomenological research, the data were collected via individual semi-  
structured interviews that were extensive and which explored participant experiences of the  
phenomenon from their perspective (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). The questioning style during the  
interviews was open-ended and where necessary, further probing took place to clarify participant  
responses (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Willig, 2008). The interviews explored the  
participants’ experiences of entering their respective professions, their role and the perceived  
impact of their work with clients who compete within the Premiership soccer league. In  
addition, the sport psychologists were asked to explore their current working relationship with  
the sport chaplains, and vice versa.  

At the time of writing the lead author was a sport chaplain operating within professional  
soccer, and as such there was potential for bias during data collection (Willig & Stainton-Rogers,  
2008). In response, he maintained reflexivity throughout the research process (see Smith, 2008)  
to ensure the participants were able to offer their views fully during the lengthy semi-structured
interview. Moreover, as the lead author was at ease within the soccer environment and understood the terminology associated with the work of the participants, he was able to establish empathy and trust, which in turn enhanced the trustworthiness of the data. The interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and were recorded digitally and transcribed *verbatim*.

**Data Analysis**

The phenomenological data were analyzed in four stages by the lead author in accordance with Giorgi and Giorgi (2008). Firstly, the transcripts were read in full to gain an overview of the data. Secondly, each transcript was individually coded and indexed whereby a capturing of the different aspects of participant experience took place. Thirdly, these experiences were clustered and inductively rationalized into a number of over-arching topics. The final stage of the analysis involved the formal deductive organization of these topics into three generic themes: the role and perceived impact of the sport psychologists; the role and perceived impact of the sport chaplains; and the levels of interaction (or potential of interaction) between the work of the two.

**Results and Discussion**

The results will be presented and discussed in three sections: the role and perceived impact of the sport psychologists within their respective English Premiership soccer clubs; the role and perceived impact of the sport chaplains within the same setting; and the perceived potential for the sport psychologists and sport chaplains working cooperatively within English Premiership soccer clubs.

**Sport Psychology: Perceived role and Impact**

The study revealed that although the three sport psychologists adopted differing approaches to their practice, their role at respective English Premiership soccer clubs were similar.

**Sport psychology in practice**. The approach of the sport psychologists varied; with two applying a humanistic philosophy, whilst the other used neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) alongside the humanistic approach. Thus, as encouraged by Gilbourne and Richardson (2006),
the respondents within this study had adopted a holistic framework in an attempt to manage effectively a range of sport and personal issues.

Despite gaining relevant qualifications through formal educational routes (i.e., Chartered members of the British Psychological Society and Accredited members of the British Association of Sport and Exercise Science), the three sport psychologists offered clear cynicism towards their training experiences, and other practitioners who did not share their approach to practice. For example, when one of the sport psychologists reflected on his training, he suggested that:

I was really disappointed, slightly disenfranchised with the course. Frankly, the tools, techniques, processes, and approaches taught to me during my training were really amateurish…We work with people in an emotional state. At what point is there training that goes to the level I need to cover what I do…taking laboratory-based psychology experiments to understand this person in front of me...at the very best it’s a sticking plaster.

Thus, as recognized by Silva, Metzler, and Lerner (2007) there continues to be a need for sport psychology training routes to have a greater emphasis on the delivery of the service that includes the development of inter-personal and counseling skills. Of concern therefore, the gulf between academic research / training, and the practical delivery of applied sport psychology (see Tenenbaum, 2001), still appears to be present within the professional soccer context.

Another sport psychologist explained his concern with the use of Neuro-linguistic programming within professional soccer:

I just despair about it …Have they [NLP practitioners] got their heads up their backsides...certain psychological approaches simply do not and would not work the real world of professional football [soccer]. Particularly, when such approaches are framed as a solution to all ills.

The main concern expressed by this respondent was that NLP lacked universal acceptance as a psychological approach, and so would not address the concerns and suspicious held towards
sport psychology by players and managers. This supports the work of Pain and Harwood (2004) which identified that a negative perceptions of psychology was the main barrier to entry for sport psychologists. Therefore, the discipline needs to be demystified further, and evidence for its impact on sporting performance needs to be disseminated more widely.

Interestingly, despite their reticence towards formal training, all three psychologists leveled criticism at ‘mental skills’ practitioners who worked within elite soccer, yet did not possess recognized psychological qualifications:

Typically these practitioners don't have a huge depth of understanding of sport psychology but are charismatic. They are often older kind of guys who may have been around the game a while ...but it [psychological support] runs dry in the end, because it's all superficial.

The participant who employed an NLP approach to his work, became particularly animated when recalling a situation where a ‘mental skills practitioner’ had advised him not to become involved in player welfare, “What kind of sport psychologist are you...when suddenly, you get to the meat...to the real, the delicate things, the emotional issues and you go...‘That’s beyond me, I’d best not deal with that!” Accordingly, the more onerous recent changes to the training routes for sport psychologists within the Unites States and United Kingdom are perceived by respondents of this study as necessary protection for the athletes and the discipline (see Wylleman, Harwood, Elbe, Reints, & de Caluwé, 2009; Eubank, Niven, & Cain, 2009).

Whilst there was no uniformity in the approach amongst the three sport psychologists interviewed, this was not the case when it came to the perceived purpose of their role. Indeed, for all concerned, they stated that their key focus was player performance.

**Sport psychology and player performance.** The three sport psychologists suggested that they, and the majority of other mental skills practitioners working within English Premiership soccer, were exclusively performance-oriented. Thus, only occasionally did they consider other ‘holistic’ elements of player development such as well-being and pastoral care, because their focus was to provide tangible performance improvements:
As a sport psychologist we know that our prime function is, in some shape or form, to help performance...the focus is definitely on football [soccer]; that's where it starts...that’s where it ends. How could you play better? Then, they [the player] will, depending on their level of trust in me open up on other ‘life’ things.

The respective club managers of the sport psychologists had also made it clear to them that they should operate solely on performance, and care should be taken not to step outside of this designated role and expertise. As a result, the psychologists suggested that they focused on helping players with confidence, concentration and attention. Despite this, when pressed for examples of where they felt that they had made a specific impact on player performance, few instances were cited:

Ummm...well there was a really strong ... attacker, I forget his name...I'd read he said his target was 21 or 22 goals that season, and he'd gone a bit of a lean period. I said, 'Look, I think you're putting pressure on yourself'...He’s struggled since, since we’ve stopped working together.

During the interviews, the sport psychologists reflected on the tendency for performance-related discussions with their players to develop into the provision of pastoral care. Thus, despite the fact that some practitioners and applied researchers continue to advocate performance enhancement as the sole concern of applied sport psychologists (see Andersen et al., 2002), the respondents in this study had adopted the more widely accepted holistic framework of consultancy. That is, whilst performance enhancement was their primary concern, they had also improved the quality of the sport experience, enhanced general well-being and encourage personal development (Anderson, 1999).

**Sport psychology and pastoral care.** Despite their primary aim and workplace focus being framed around player performance, it became apparent during the interviews that the sport psychologists had frequently become involved in providing pastoral care. The respondents operated largely through formal one-to-one meetings with players which were arranged as part
of their role within their respective clubs. It was during these meetings that players discussed pastoral issues either initially, or more often, once a level of trust had been established. It was interesting to note that although respondents were insistent that their primary role was to improve player performance, they acknowledged that on reflection, they had provided more support for non-performance rather than performance issues. Furthermore, they recognized that their pastoral role had influenced positively their players more so than any other aspect of their work. The main pastoral issues addressed by the sport psychologists were related largely to relationship problems and issues surrounding bereavement:

I've got a football client at the moment who is going through a very, very difficult relationship with his wife and his kids. The tools I'm using are not sport psychology…I would say it was crisis management. And [I] would be operating…outside the scope of sport psychology but much more in a player care capacity.

As such, the three sport psychologists recognized that their focus and role did relate to performance enhancement, but that in essence their activities and impact were centered on pastoral care, “Well I suppose at the higher [elite] level, [the] issues we are talking about have nothing to do with [performance], because they were already doing these things brilliantly”.

Importantly, the three sport psychologists felt that all pastoral issues fell firmly within their expertise, as they perceived that they were in a position to offer superior support to that provided by sport chaplains:

Well, if there's been some long-term trauma within the family or family circumstances then I think there’s a big difference between the pastoral listening ear and actually a psychologist being able to take that forward a bit further, and actually build that confidence in that person, or restore their confidence.

Although the delivery of pastoral care is perceived to have benefited the cases explored within this study, it is worth noting that Moore (2003) identified that practicing within areas of competence is an ethical and professional requirement of a sport psychologist. Thus, the
question arises as to whether the professional training route adequately equips sport psychologists with the necessary interpersonal, counseling, and therapeutic skills to offer appropriate pastoral care to the athlete. Conversely, and as suggested by Nesti (2010), the question also arises as to whether the sport chaplain is better placed to address the pastoral needs of the professional soccer player.

In the case of athletes with faith, all three sport psychologists were of the opinion that if the player had issues, concerns or questions regarding their religion beliefs, which were affecting their performance, then they should be referred elsewhere given that this aspect of a player’s life was considered to be outside of their expertise. Moreover, those interviewed perceived that their role as a sport psychologist, and the manner in which they worked with the athlete, remained unaffected by a player’s religious beliefs. As explained by one of the sport psychologists, “I know that he [the player] is a very staunch Christian. But I haven’t explored the dynamics of that and what it means to him and how that affects his life, impacts his thoughts or anything”.

However it could be argued that by failing to consider fully the spiritual needs of players, the sport psychologists may not have adequately addressed the holistic needs of the athlete and optimized well-being. This may particularly be the case when accounting for the importance of faith within the elite soccer population (Nesti, 2011, 2012).

Although all the sport psychologists espoused a close working relationship with the managers who had appointed them, it was clear that conflicts of interest arose as a result of their provision of pastoral care to players. For example, one sport psychologists explained that, “When I was talking and helping one player [about his injury], he would not let me talk to the physician. So, I was helping him get medical care outside of the club. Pretty darn awkward”. It is also worth noting that all three sport psychologists identified that the managers of their respective clubs sometimes felt “threatened” when receiving from them advice about a player’s welfare. This was likely to be a consequence of the general level of occupational and personal insecurity prevalent in the professional soccer environment (see Parker, 2006).
It was perceived by the sport psychologists that their impact on athlete welfare was restricted because players often avoided meeting with them, even after being instructed to do so by management. For all the psychologists interviewed, the importance of player approval was a prominent theme, with the acknowledgement that some players and managers were disinterested, and in some instances, opposed to working with a sport psychologist because of the stigma attached to seeking this type of support. The respondents therefore suggested that to have an impact, they relied on a snowball effect in that once one player claimed that the sport psychologist had helped him, then others followed, “By helping one player that just unlocked the door really in terms of people then making use of me… it”. Therefore, as Pain and Harwood (2004) found in their study, there remains a need to address player perceptions of sport psychologists within soccer, as they continue to act as barriers to their work.

**Sport Chaplaincy: Perceived role and Impact**

Despite the differing theological stances from which the respondent sport chaplains emanated, there appeared to be no discernible difference in their day-to-day professional behaviors within their respective Premiership soccer clubs. That is, their core activities were to offer spiritual and pastoral care to players.

**Sport chaplaincy and spiritual care.** In keeping with the assertions of Boyers (2006), all four sport chaplains perceived that their primary role was to provide spiritual care to their clients, “I would see the chaplain as providing care and guidance from a spiritual perspective for players who choose to have it…dealing with things…central to the person's identity…such as spiritual crisis”. Yet chaplains did not consider that such care was solely for players, or for those who demonstrated a faith. Instead, it was extended to all staff at their clubs irrespective of religious beliefs (or lack of beliefs). Despite coming from different expressions of the Christian faith, such role clarity amongst the chaplains is evidence of a uniformity in practice, and suggests that those responsible for managing and presiding over sport chaplaincy within
professional football (i.e., Sports Chaplaincy UK), have instilled a set of core values amongst practitioners.

The sport chaplains noted that the majority of their players considered faith to be an important issue, and were significantly more open to embracing spirituality as part of their life when compared to individuals within the community. One of the chaplains explained why he believed this to be the case:

We found that there is a disproportionate passion for faith inside his club when compared to the rest of society, and put that down to...we have a lot of people from across the world coming in [to the club], so their passion for faith is much stronger than you find in the cultural norm of England...And in this case...our captain was a...larger than life character...a Christian...and he was part of [others] becoming a Christian...the knock on effects were huge.

The chaplains identified that they provided spiritual care for all faiths, and were not restricted to those beliefs that were similar to their own. Examples were cited of providing care for Muslim, Jewish and Rastafarian players, and for one sport chaplain this even involved conversations regarding the wider aspects of spiritual life including séances and mediums, “I’ve found that people see you as a person of faith...They don't define you in terms of Christian, Methodist...anything at all...So if they share spirituality, then they'll talk to you about anything”. There were a variety of ways in which the sport chaplains facilitated such spiritual care. Examples ranged from responding to the everyday spiritual needs of the people around the club environment (e.g., purchasing bibles, providing bible studies, daily devotionals, and seeking out places of worship), to more formal situations such as presiding over child baptisms and memorial services. However, the most significant aspect of spiritual care provided by all four sport chaplains was that of prayer.

For three of the four respondent chaplains, prayer took place before games, which at times included the presence of the manager, opposition players and those with non-Christian beliefs.
The chaplains suggested that the players normally prayed about family issues, friends or world events, rather than the match outcome. Where prayers did relate to the forthcoming game they were focused on preventing injury and playing to the best of one’s abilities; although one chaplain did admit there was a ‘fine line’ between praying for a good performance and a victory.

Pre-match prayers were described as being part of the match day experience that had become an embedded aspect of club culture:

They [the players] started pre-match prayer…the team led that, and they were getting up to 15 players…even XXXX [International soccer player] used to come to it. It was the most remarkable thing. They used to go into the kit room…the Kit Man had this sign on the door saying, ‘Welcome to…the Chapel. If you want to pray, come in. If you don't, **** off [expletive]’. I thought that summed up football [soccer] brilliantly.

These findings add to the growing body of literature that indicates a positive relationship between prayer and sporting performance (e.g., Czech & Bullet, 2007; Dale, 2000; Hopsicker, 2009; Kreider, 2004; Watson & Czech, 2005), with three of the four sport chaplains perceiving that pre-match prayer had the potential to impact player performance. One chaplain highlighted an instance where a player with no particular faith experienced a marked improvement in his game after adopting the ritual of pre-match prayers:

It was about six months down the line I said to him, 'You've had a good season. What's changed?'...He said 'coming along to prayer…I go out now with a sense of peace when I go to play, so that whatever happens…I'm at peace in how I play… and that has enabled me to perform better'.

As suggested by Watson and Czech (2005), it appeared that prayer had allowed the player to realize there were more important things in life than soccer, and as a result he had become more relaxed and in control of his emotions during games.

**Sport chaplaincy and pastoral care.** It was revealed that offering pastoral care was the second key activity that the sport chaplains provided within their role. In distinguishing pastoral
from spiritual care, the sport chaplains noted that the former comprised of offering general support to the players, whereas the latter was specifically faith-based. Thus, it involved the chaplains listening to the needs of their clients, from an independent viewpoint, that was unaffected by club politics. This allowed players to vent their frustrations in a confidential setting.

Respondents offered pastoral care through one-to-one meetings that often arose as a result of informal conversations. Subsequent meetings then took place away from the training ground in private corporate rooms at the stadium, in hotels, or at players’ homes in order to protect client anonymity. As noted above, these meetings tended to focus on specific personal issues such as bereavement, with the chaplains then being asked to deliver formal ceremonies such as, “scattering ashes” or taking a memorial service: “I remember this lad whose grandfather had died many years ago…he still wasn’t coping…got very angry…it was because his granddad…had actually brought him up. So I address that kind of thing a lot in my work”.

Interestingly, it was revealed that bereavement was the only area where managers were prepared to refer employees to the sport chaplain within the club.

All four sport chaplains also identified that as part of their pastoral care, they offered support to players with regards to family matters that were predominantly related to relationship issues (i.e., girlfriends, wives and infidelity) and homesickness. The latter was not limited to younger players but also senior players who had moved clubs and had left their families behind:

When he came into the [Youth] Academy he was very homesick…and cried himself to sleep every night. Now he is a bit of a hero in the academy because he made it to the first team and told the story in a national newspaper about it…and how the chaplain helped him.

However, it was recognized by the sport chaplains that the amount of time they were able to spend providing spiritual and pastoral care within their respective clubs was limited as a result of their other church-based activities. Such time limitations were perceived to restrict the chaplains’ ability to have regular contact with players, and as a result they had chosen actively to
concentrate their efforts on certain clients or issues, at the expense of others: “…[my] biggest regret…is I have never done as much with the youth [players] as I could do…because, again, it's a time issue really”. In addition, as the sport chaplains were not integrated formally into the club structures, they only worked with players when requested to do so, and did not pro-actively promote their services. As such, chaplains perceived they did not have as much impact within their clubs as they would have liked.

**Sport Psychology and Sport Chaplaincy: Synergies or Schisms?**

Despite a combined fifty five years of experience within English professional soccer, and having served under thirty different managers; the sport psychologists and sport chaplains interviewed in this study identified collectively only one instance when practitioners from these two occupational areas had worked together. This was despite the fact that at each of their previous clubs, there had been opportunities for working collaboratively. In this one instance, the sport psychologist and sport chaplain were both respondents within this study. They had developed a strong working relationship, with the sport chaplain describing the sport psychologist as, “my biggest ally”. Both of these practitioners observed that as the two roles had a number of practical similarities, particularly with regards to offering pastoral care and enhancing well-being, a cooperative working relationship was both effective and efficient.

**Sport psychology and sport chaplaincy: Co-operation.** The success of the cooperative relationship which existed between the respondent chaplain and psychologist was suggested to be the results of players within the club understanding, via communication from the management team, the different functions that the two served. The need for such role clarity within effective and cohesive working partnerships is unsurprising (see Cartwright & Cooper, 2009). In this case, players were referred to the sport psychologist on matters of sport performance and to the chaplain for spirituality issues. Both parties contributed to the pastoral care of the players, but as recommended by Nesti (2011), the sport chaplain took primary responsibility for this aspect of
player support: For example, when a player experienced bereavement, the sport psychologist explained that:

Now that's [pastoral care] a big tangled thing and it needed untangling, and I felt that it was important to pass this player on [to the sport chaplain]. There were things that needed to be talked through much more...Now that doesn't mean to say I washed my hands of it.

Accordingly, it was suggested by the sport chaplain that the success of the cooperative relationship was based on a mutual understanding and respect of each other's expertise, whilst also appreciating the crossover potential of the two roles. There is ample evidence from interdisciplinary working practices within the health industry to suggest that the effectiveness of a team will diminish as a result of misunderstanding the role of the chaplain (e.g., Fitchett, Rasinski, Cadge, & Curlin, 2009; Wittenberg-Lyles, Oliver, Demiris, & Regehr, 2009). Equally, misconceptions regarding sport psychology (see Nesti, 2010; Shiang & Mitzel, 2010) only serve to interfere with the potential contribution and working relationships of the psychologist. As a consequence of appreciating fully each other's role and function, both respondents were enthusiastic about future collaborations between sport psychology and sport chaplaincy.

**Sport psychology and sport chaplaincy: Potential of cooperation.** All respondents had found working within the English Premiership a difficult and unique experience with the overall culture described as being, “disorganized, transient, insecure and with a brutal sense of humor”. This culture impacted on both the psychologists and the chaplains, “because in a culture that's all over the shop, that doesn't add value, doesn't treat people properly, it's very, very hard. You're isolated and you become much less effective”. Both the sports psychologists and chaplains were not integrated into the formal structures of the clubs in which they worked, and were perceived generally as an outsider. One of the psychologists observed this meant that, “earning their [player] trust...becomes hard to achieve”. The sense of not being formally and effectively integrated into the club was seen by all participants as frustrating, and for the most part
disadvantageous. However, it is possible that through cooperation and combining their expertise and perspectives, that the sport psychologist and chaplain may be able to cope more effectively with the demands of such a challenging environment (see Andersen & Van Raalte 2005; Tod, 2010). With an overlap of roles regarding pastoral support, there is evidence to suggest that by working in partnership, their efforts could be more effective and efficient. Lessons could be learnt for example from the health industry, whereby the collaboration of psychologist and chaplain has led to discernible improvements in working practice which, in turn, has led to greater accountability and an increased recognition of their worth (e.g., Monod et al., 2010; Harr, 2010). With both psychology and chaplaincy still seeking professional status and integration within the English Premiership soccer clubs, a collaborative approach is therefore worthy of consideration.

Finally, the participants indicated that the role they played within their respective clubs and the impact they had on players, was normally determined by the manager’s attitude towards them. One respondent identified that the attitude of the manager fell into three categories. Firstly, some managers held a holistic view of player care, and as a consequence were positive towards the psychologist and chaplain, and actively used both disciplines within their work. The second type of managerial response, which was identified as the most dominant by respondents, was an indifference to both psychology and chaplaincy. In this instance, both professionals were able to, “go about our work unhindered, but we were not integrated”. The final response, was one in which the participants were actively restricted their role. One chaplain who had worked for such a manager suggested: “that was a very difficult time for me. He [the manager] kind of very much side-lined me as far as he could. I had nothing to do”. Thus, as noted by Forde (2010), antipathy towards psychology and possible chaplaincy within elite soccer is often determined by the manager valuing the physical aspects of the sport above those relating to the mind/emotions. Further collaborative and educational work with coaches and players by sport
psychologists and chaplains is required therefore, to illustrate the critical contribution that
psychology and faith can have on elite performance and the performer.

Sport chaplaincy and sport psychology: Non-cooperation: Throughout the interview
process it became evident that the sport psychologists had a ‘broad’ understanding of the role of
the sport chaplain, and vice versa. However, two of the sport psychologists did not know the
sport chaplain based at the clubs they had operated in. Similarly, the sport chaplains were not
able to recall readily the names of the sport psychologists at the clubs where they had worked.
Indeed, all three sport psychologists noted that for the most part, the relationship between them
and the resident sport chaplain had been uncooperative. One of the sport psychologists stated
that he was also aware of a number of fellow practitioners who would at best tolerate the
presence of a chaplain, but would more likely become obstructive towards them. Another of the
sport psychologists openly expressed concern over the presence of sport chaplains and religious
issues in the football setting, by arguing that sport chaplains may bring with them “some kind of
proselytizing mission” and an ulterior evangelistic motive (see Hoffman, 2010; Krattenmaker,
2010). As a result, two of the three sport psychologists had never referred their clients to the
sport chaplain, and three of the sport chaplains had not referred a player to the sport
psychologist. This was despite the acknowledgement that at times, this may have been helpful.
As explained by one of the sport psychologists:

I suppose that [chaplaincy] could have been something quite useful for this one
player…because for me, there was this missing component…which was spiritual guidance. I
didn’t feel like he was getting that from me…I think it was a significant area for him…If I
was an expert I would have [explored faith issues]. On reflection, I could have referred him.

Summary and Conclusion

This study has provided a review of the role and perceived impact of sport psychologists and
sport chaplains within a selection of English Premiership soccer clubs. Through interviews with
information-rich participants, who are amongst the few practitioners to work within the English
Premier League, it is clear that both the psychologist and chaplain play an important role within the challenging context of professional soccer. The sport psychologists focused on performance enhancement; the sport chaplains primarily offered spiritual care, and they all contributed to addressing the pastoral needs of players. However, the impact of both disciplines within the context of Premiership soccer does remain restricted currently due to a number of barriers, which may be overcome by working cooperatively in the future. Thus, further applied research is required to ascertain in further detail the manner in which the provision of psychology and chaplaincy can have a greater impact within elite soccer. Specifically, further research is warranted to explore the potential of a collaborative partnership between the sport psychologist and chaplain, and how they could work more effectively with significant others (i.e., coaches and managers) to provide support to their athletes.

A secondary, but potentially important finding of this study was the perceived limitation of the sport psychology training routes in preparing respondents for work within professional soccer. Although these views may not represent those found within the broader sport psychology community, they indicate an increased need for training programs to develop practitioners who recognize the value of adopting a person-centered, holistic approach to client well-being (Walker, 2010), and who have the ability to work in partnership with others (such as chaplains) to provide an effective service.

There are limitations to this study, which future researchers should consider. Firstly, the first author’s relationship with the interviewees and their knowledge that he was (at the time of the research) a practicing chaplain within professional soccer, may have caused participants’ responses to be influenced. In particular, it is possible that the sport psychologist participants may have over-emphasized their pastoral responsibilities and may not have expressed fully any concerns, skepticism or animosity toward chaplaincy. Secondly, the study only offers retrospective perceptions of the participants, and their recall may have inaccuracies over time. However the study provides unique insight into the workings of sport psychology and
chaplaincy within English Premiership soccer, and establishes a foundation for future research in this area.
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