

Final Project Write-Up

Corrie White

Department of Sport and Performance Psychology, University of Western States

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Dr. Russ Flaten

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Introduction

Jeff is a 19-year-old Rugby player recently moved to the National Team. Jeff is seeking help because he has trouble matching up with the team. Jeff, a lifelong rugby player, chose to move to Nationals after receiving the invitation. He feels this step up in play is the natural progression of his rugby career. However, now that he is playing at a higher level, the talent gap has closed significantly, and Jeff is struggling to keep up physically and mentally and find his rhythm. His challenges, as defined during the intake, are not being able to see his speed or explosion and feeling slow. Jeff states his goal is to be a starting midfielder, but he feels he is not getting enough reps to prove himself. When asked how he played in the past, Jeff said his movements were quick and he was locked in, so he could assess what was occurring on the field and how to react. He states he now cannot find that level of mental or physical speed, and this is why he is seeking the help of a consultant.

Needs Analysis

1. **Focus:** Jeff is playing at a higher level than ever before on the national team. This transition may be responsible for his problem adjusting. Speed is faster on the field, and he may be distracted by other players, thoughts of wondering if he is good enough, and the constant awareness that he isn't playing at the level he used to. These variables are all distractions that are impacting his ability to focus on the task at hand.
 - a. Refocusing techniques.
 - b. Self-talk strategies.
 - c. Attention-control exercises.

2. Learning: As Jeff moves up into the higher level, he finds himself surrounded by peers whose skill level suddenly matches or exceeds his own. Coming from a smaller talent pool, Jeff was naturally the best. Rugby came to him easily. Now, he is struggling to assess what plays to make, where to position himself, and what moves need to be made. Jeff has not had instruction on how to learn or set goals, as his natural talent carried him to his current position. Now, he needs some strategies for learning. Specifically the needs are

- a. Goal-setting: (Jeff used to simply act and succeed. Now, he needs process-oriented goals to bridge the gap between where he is and where he wants to be). This need overlaps with learning but also requires mindset training. His stated goal is “to crack the starting lineup.” To meet his goal Jeff needs education on SMART goals, achievement vs. performance goals, and tracking tools.
 - b. Cue recognition.
 - c. Game film analysis strategies.
- 3. Stress:** The pressures Jeff is facing, while self imposed, are significant. Identifying stressors and determining how they are impacting his daily routine, as well as plan to manage the stressors is an important identified need. Doing so will help with any anxiety that may be clouding his vision or ability to think quickly.
- a. Stress management techniques.
 - b. Cognitive reframing.
 - c. Athletic identity works to maintain confidence.

By addressing these **three key areas**, this intervention is expected to yield the most immediate and substantial improvements in Jeff’s individual performance. The following

strategies and implementation plans will ensure both short-term progress and long-term sustainability in these core domains of athletic skills (mental and physical) required for athletic success.

Consultant Philosophy

For the interview with Jeff, it was explained to him that the consultants were Person Centered in their philosophy. In order to facilitate an intervention plan that aligns with person centered or Rogerian philosophy, some research was necessary. Person centered therapy is based on the belief that individuals are naturally motivated toward growth and self-actualization, with the client guiding the direction of therapy. The therapist creates a supportive, non-directive environment that encourages open self-exploration, using reflection and clarification to promote greater self-awareness and psychological healing. (Yoe & Kabyr, 2023) With this in mind, the intervention was formatted around using Jeff's own experiences, memories, and innate potential to allow him to reconnect with his speed, focus, and feeling of being locked in.

Jeff will be led to access his memories and strategies that have worked for him in the past. The consultant will act as a guide. Mentioned above in the Needs Analysis is basic psychoeducation that Jeff needs. Here is where the intervention will deviate from the "Client-Centered" approach. With his permission, the consultant will teach Jeff about SMART Goals, how thoughts are processed, what it means to deliberately train and prepare, as well as mental skills strategies such as Cues, Pre Performance Routines, Breathing strategies, and other technical skills. This inclusion of these technical skills and directional teaching moves the client centered approach to Eclectic Approach. However, many questions will be asked prior to teaching Jeff mental skills, including asking questions that encourage him to probe into his past, such as "When was a time that you felt...?" "What did you do that was effective or helpful?"

“Would you change anything about that response?” allow Jeff to lead the conversation proceeding mental skills training.

Focus One: Focus

Objective: To improve Jeff’s attentional control and help him stay locked in during practices and games.

Intervention Strategies:

- Use focus cue words (e.g., “see it,” “go,” “be here”) for use during play (Keegan, 2016).
- Implement a pre-performance routine including breath work, intention setting, and visualization.
- Teach attention shifting techniques to help Jeff manage distractions and stay process-focused.
- Introduce the [“Signal Lights on the Highway of Performance”](#) tool to teach Jeff how to monitor and redirect his mental state.

Educational & Mindset Needs: Jeff needs to have a working understanding of what a thought is, in order to control his thoughts and improve his focus. Siegel (2012) defines a thought as “An emergent property of energy and information flow in the mind” (p.52). For education purposes and simplicity's sake, a thought will be defined as an electrical impulse that comes from the flow of energy and information in the mind. This definition will allow Jeff to become aware of his thoughts, and lead into the intervention components of “tracking his thoughts.”

Additionally, breath awareness and a basic understanding of physiology are important for Jeff to get the most out of his pre-performance routine. An explanation of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system will explain the why behind longer exhalations and allow Jeff to

understand the role of the Vagus Nerve in slowing down blood and oxygen so as to control his body.

Monitoring & Assessment:

- A thought Journal will be used by Jeff to track his thoughts. He can implement this before and after practice, taking only a few moments to write down what he is thinking before practice starts.
- Monitor Thought Awareness: The consultant will check in every week with Jeff on his thought awareness as this is foundational to a successful intervention.

Focus Two: Learning

Objective: To equip Jeff with tools for intentional learning, performance evaluation, and growth at the national level.

Intervention Strategies:

- Provide instruction on SMART goal setting; set one short-term practice goal and one performance goal weekly.
- Introduce film review methods with guided self-reflection questions: “What did I do well?”, “What can I adjust?”, “Where was I uncertain?”
- Teach Jeff how to chunk plays and break down decisions using cue recognition drills.
- Guide Jeff in building deliberate practice routines, differentiating between repetition and targeted growth.

Educational & Mindset Needs:

Jeff is going to need a fair amount of basic education in the area of learning as it has been identified he never had to “learn” in the past, given his natural ability in Rugby. Jeff needs to understand Dweck's (2006) mindset framework to recognize when he's approaching challenges

with a fixed mindset ("I'm not good enough for this level") versus a growth mindset ("This is challenging, but I can improve with effort"). This foundation will help him reframe difficulties as opportunities.

Goal-Setting Theory: Jeff requires education on the differences between outcome goals (making the starting lineup) and process goals (improving specific skills). Understanding SMART goal principles (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) will help him create meaningful benchmarks rather than focusing solely on results (Duran, 1981).

Cue Recognition: Jeff needs instruction on perceptual-cognitive skills training, including how experts identify and respond to relevant cues in their environment. Education on attention allocation and pattern recognition will help him "read the game" more effectively at this higher level of play. (This may be a higher level than Jeff is ready for, which remains to be determined.

Self-Regulated Learning: Teaching Jeff how to monitor, evaluate, and adjust his own learning processes will foster independence and adaptability. This includes self-reflection techniques and understanding learning preferences. This process begins with Jeff reflecting on how he has learned in the past in other areas of his life and if he knows what his learning style might be.

Monitoring & Assessment:

- **Weekly Goal Review:** Track Jeff's ability to set and achieve appropriate SMART goals, noting improvements in the specificity and process-orientation of his goals over time.
- **Learning Reflection Log:** Jeff will maintain a structured learning journal that captures:
 - What he learned each week
 - How he applied new knowledge in practice
 - Questions/uncertainties that remain

- His comfort level with new skills (rated 1-10)
- **Video Analysis Progress:** Assess Jeff's improvement in game analysis by noting his observations when reviewing footage. Track whether his focus shifts from outcome-oriented observations to process-oriented insights.
- **Mindset Measurement:** Use a modified version of Dweck's mindset scale at the beginning, midpoint, and end of the intervention to quantify shifts in Jeff's learning orientation.

Focus Three: Stress

Objective: To reduce Jeff's internal stress and performance anxiety by building emotional awareness and self-regulation strategies.

Intervention Strategies:

- Conduct a stress mapping exercise to identify peak pressure points throughout his week and training cycle.
- Teach diaphragmatic breathing and progressive muscle relaxation to regulate arousal levels.
- Use cognitive restructuring worksheets to challenge irrational beliefs and rebuild confidence.
- Explore Jeff's athletic identity using discussion tools such as the [Athletic Identity Worksheet](#)

Educational & Mindset Needs:

Stress Response Physiology: Jeff needs to understand the body's physiological response to stress (fight-or-flight) and how this affects performance. Education on the autonomic nervous

system will help him recognize when his body is responding to perceived threats and how this impacts his mental processing speed and decision-making (Hanin, 2000).

Cognitive Appraisal: Teaching Jeff about the relationship between thoughts, emotions, and performance will help him understand how his interpretation of events (rather than the events themselves) creates stress. This foundation is necessary before implementing cognitive restructuring techniques (Turner et al., 2020).

Athletic Identity Concepts: Jeff needs education on the concept of athletic identity, particularly how overly exclusive athletic identity can create vulnerability during periods of transition or performance challenges. Understanding this will help him develop a more balanced self-concept (Sparkes, 1998).

Stress Recovery Balance: Jeff should learn about the importance of balancing stress and recovery in high-performance environments, including how inadequate recovery can compromise adaptation and performance (Kellmann, 2010).

Monitoring & Assessment:

Subjective Stress Ratings: Implement a daily stress rating system (1-10 scale) for Jeff to track perceived stress levels across various contexts (practice, games, team meetings, etc.). This provides quantifiable data to monitor trends and improvements.

Physical Stress Indicators: Track physical manifestations of stress that Jeff has identified (potentially brain fog, feeling slow, or sleep disruption, appetite changes) using a simple checklist to monitor improvements.

Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS): Administer the AIMS (Brewer et al., 1993) at the beginning and end of the intervention to assess any shifts in the exclusivity and strength of Jeff's athletic identity.

Relaxation Technique Efficacy: Track Jeff's self-reported efficacy of breathing and progressive muscle relaxation techniques using post-practice and post-competition evaluations ("How helpful was the technique?" rated 1-10).

Performance Anxiety Inventory: Use a modified version of the Competitive State Anxiety Inventory-2 (CSAI-2) to measure cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and self-confidence at regular intervals throughout the intervention.

Recovery-Stress Questionnaire (RESTQ-Sport): Implement this validated tool to monitor Jeff's stress-recovery balance, providing insights into both sport-specific and general life stressors and recovery activities.

Summary:

Stress is a highly common consideration with nearly all athletes. Given that Jeff is new on the team, doesn't feel as if he is keeping up, and is questioning his current skill level, as well as wondering why he cannot access his former speed & explosion, Jeff is experiencing a high level of stressors. By educating Jeff on stress physiology, cognitive appraisal processes, athletic identity, and stress-recovery balance, he will develop a foundational understanding of how stress impacts his performance and wellbeing. Through structured techniques including diaphragmatic breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and cognitive restructuring, Jeff will gain practical tools to manage pressure situations effectively.

The multi-faceted assessment approach combines subjective ratings, physical indicators, standardized measures (AIMS, CSAI-2, RESTQ-Sport), and technique efficacy evaluations to track Jeff's progress. This intervention recognizes that Jeff's perceived slowness and difficulty "finding his rhythm" may be manifestations of stress responses rather than actual physical limitations. By addressing these underlying stress factors, Jeff can potentially experience the

mental clarity and quickness he previously enjoyed, while developing a more balanced athletic identity that supports his transition to national-level competition. This stress management works well with the focus and learning interventions to create a holistic approach to enhancing Jeff's performance and wellbeing.

Intervention Implementation Plan

Need One: Focus

Phase 1: Assessment and Education (Weeks 1-2)

Objective: Increase Jeff's awareness of his thoughts and when he has them.

Action Steps:

- Introduce Jeff to the idea that thoughts are not facts, but experiences that arise and pass (Siegel, 2012). Go over the working definition of a thought “an electrical impulse that comes from the flow of energy and information in the mind” so as to take any judgment off of the thought.
- Begin thought monitoring using an easy simple journal after each practice.
- No need to change the thoughts yet—just observe and record.

Monitoring & Assessment:

Jeff will bring the journal to each session and reflect on his thoughts throughout the week. A discussion of his thought awareness and whether it is increasing will be held in week 2.

Phase 2: Skill Development and Practical Application (Weeks 3-5)

Objective: Begin teaching Jeff how to control and change his thoughts, now that he is aware of them.

Action Steps:

- Teach psychological Cuing with the basics of “ball, field, go, stop” (Keegan, 2016)
- Jeff records if/ how the attentional focus cues work for him on the field once practice is over.
- Teach a refocus practice, so that when he notices a distracting thought, he does not become stressed or slowed down. Use Mindfulness throughout the thought education process, so Jeff is not afraid of his thoughts or worried about their impact, but rather accepts them and can use them to his advantage (MAC model, Gardner & Moore, 2004).
- Simple Breathwork Cues- in for 4, hold for 4, out for 4, should for 4 to help Jeff refocus once he is aware of his thoughts running around or lack of focus. [Video to Share for Homework](#)

Monitoring & Assessment:

- Jeff brings in his journal and shares each week if the attentional cues were helpful, if he was able to use them at all (or if he forgot). Have a discussion of when they proved to be beneficial.
- Discuss if and when the breathwork was helpful.
- Practice Breathwork in session to ensure Jeff knows how to do it properly.

Phase 3: Integration and Long-Term Development (Weeks 6-8 and Beyond)

Objective: Equip Jeff with reliable, personalized tools to regulate his focus under pressure and during competition.

Action Steps:

- Create a pre-performance routine that includes breathwork, cue words, and intention setting. [Worksheet for creating pre-performance routines](#)
- Use imagery practice to mentally rehearse staying locked in during high-pressure plays.
- Continue using Jeff's focus journal to track growth and setbacks.

Monitoring & Assessment:

- Jeff continues to bring a journal, reflecting on moments each week: What helped? What and when was I distracted? Were there times he felt “faster” mentally?
- Consultant provides ongoing feedback and helps Jeff update his routine, again practicing together so that it can become automatic over time.

Need One (Focus) Conclusion:

By starting with simple thought awareness and gradually building toward attentional control techniques, Jeff learns to notice distractions without judgment and redirect focus with intention—laying the foundation for confident, focused performance.

Need Two: Learning***Phase 1: Assessment and Education (Weeks 1-2)***

Objective: Identify Jeff's learning needs and introduce structure to support performance growth.

Action Steps:

- Reflect on past learning experiences. How does Jeff think he learns? Can he identify any current challenges specific to the National Rugby team; ie; playbook, not understanding drills?

- Introduce Dweck's (2006) growth mindset framework to encourage adaptive learning responses.
- Teach the basics of SMART goal setting (Doran, 1981) and process vs. outcome goals (Weinberg, 2010).
- Walk together thru setting one SMART goal and one process vs. outcome goal (ideally a process goal) (Williams & Krane, 2014).

Monitoring & Assessment:

- Jeff includes in his journal progress on SMART goal and process goal; reflects on their implementation, progress, and reality. He also journals if he has awareness of a mindset specific thoughts.
- Walk through the goal setting process together so if Jeff has questions, he can ask them in session.
- Report back weekly on implementation of SMART goal & process goals. Adjust if necessary

Phase 2: Skill Development and Practical Application (Weeks 3-5)

Objective: Review processes learned (SMART goals and process goals). Jeff can identify his mindset (growth vs. Fixed). Jeff can begin to independently Apply structured goal setting and self-reflection to his mindset to work towards fixed.

Action Steps:

- Teach cue recognition strategies to support on the field decision-making (Horn & Smith, 2021).
- Introduce structured film review protocol: "What did I see? What was my cue? What can I adjust?"

- In film analysis, listen for fixed vs. growth mindset talk and make Jeff aware of when he is using the two different types. Help him reframe a fixed statement to a growth statement. Have him practice applying a growth mindset statement to a mistake on the field.
- Ask Jeff to make himself aware of his mindset throughout the week.

Monitoring & Assessment:

- Weekly self-assessment of goals set and re-examining goals from the SMART perspective. Adjust goals as Jeff feels necessary
- In session discussion on what learning methods are effective, and if he needs to ask for help gaining further understanding from coaches or assistants.
- Discuss moments where he found himself aware of fixed or growth mindset thoughts.

Phase 3: Integration and Long-Term Development (Weeks 6-8 and Beyond)

Objective: Encourage autonomy in Jeff's learning reflection and mindset process.

Action Steps:

- Jeff tracks weekly goals, plays/drills/expectations he does not understand, and video reflections in a personal performance journal. Continue to monitor for fixed/growth mindset thoughts.
- Discuss the establishment of self check-ins for Jeff and "what's next" planning as the season progresses.

Monitoring & Assessment:

- Progress log reviewed every two weeks and evaluated with a consultant.

- Continual reflection on awareness and further distillation of thought awareness and control- using journal and introducing meditation as a tool for off the field thought awareness.

Need Two (Learning) Conclusion:

With this intervention focused on identifying learning needs and style, Jeff transitions from relying on instinct and automatic response to being an informed learning equipped with intentional learning strategies. He will know how to advocate for himself and ask questions on the field when he needs further explanation. The phased approach first establishes a foundation by introducing growth mindset concepts and SMART goal-setting frameworks, then builds practical application through film analysis and cue recognition, and finally fosters independent self-regulation through ongoing reflection and adjustment.

By addressing Jeff's learning needs, the intervention will allow him to transition to national-level competition where technical understanding becomes as important as natural ability. Jeff will begin to develop an awareness of when fixed mindset thinking limits his development and how to apply growth-oriented alternatives instead. The emphasis on process goals rather than outcomes provides Jeff with achievable benchmarks that build confidence and competence simultaneously.

These interventions are designed to give Jeff the power of his athletic experience. This newfound learning autonomy is a critical shift for an athlete who previously relied on talent alone. Eventually he will have the frameworks allowing him continued development at a higher level. By integrating these learning strategies with his natural abilities, Jeff can maximize his potential on the national team. Doing so will address his initial concerns about speed and performance while working towards his goal of “cracking the starting lineup.”

Need Three: Stress***Phase 1: Assessment and Education (Weeks 1-2)***

Objective: Increase awareness of stressors and educate Jeff on their physiological and psychological impacts.

Action Steps:

- Introduce Jeff to the idea that stress is a natural response to pressure and uncertainty, especially in performance environments.
- Help Jeff identify when and where he feels stress most strongly (e.g., before games, during drills, after mistakes).
- Use a basic stress reflection at the end of the day: “What made me feel tense today?” “When did I feel pressure?”, “How did I respond in those moments?”
- Guide a short discussion on how stress feels in the body (tight chest, racing thoughts, irritability, etc.), helping Jeff begin connecting physical signals with emotional stress.
- Normalize the experience of pressure at higher levels of play, reinforcing that awareness is the first step to managing it

Monitoring & Assessment:

- Jeff completes a brief weekly check-in worksheet or verbal debrief where he identifies 1–2 key stress moments and how he noticed them.
- Consultant will monitor presentation and affect for stressors Jeff may not be aware, bringing them to his attention when beneficial.
- Ask Jeff to Rate his stressors and how they are impacting him physically and mentally on a scale of 1-10 every session.

Phase 2: Skill Development and Practical Application (Weeks 3-5)

Objective: Equip Jeff with practical strategies to manage stress and redirect anxious energy.

Action Steps:

- Teach diaphragmatic breathing and progressive muscle relaxation techniques (Vealey, 2024).
- Introduce cognitive restructuring tools to reframe negative thoughts and reduce performance anxiety (Turner et al., 2020).
- Introduce athletic identity and how shifting performance has challenged his self-concept (Sparkes, 1998).

Monitoring & Assessment: Jeff completes a brief weekly check-in worksheet or verbal debrief where he identifies 1–2 key stress moments and how he noticed them.

- Consultant will monitor presentation and affect for stressors Jeff may not be aware, bringing them to his attention when beneficial.
- Ask Jeff to Rate his stressors and how they are impacting him physically and mentally on a scale of 1-10 every session.

Phase 3: Integration and Long-Term Development (Weeks 6-8 and Beyond)

Objective: : Reinforce Jeff’s emotional resilience and readiness to navigate pressure consistently

Action Steps:

- Co-create a “Reset Plan” for pre- and post-competition routines.
- Solidify Jeff’s value and identity outside of just performance using values-based reflection exercises.

- Identify activities, groups, events or clubs he may participate in when not playing or practicing.
- Revisit and celebrate growth using self-reflection.

Monitoring & Assessment:

- Final stress self-assessment and reflection: “What has changed in how I manage stress?”
- Final Stress Rating from 1-10.

Need Three Conclusion:

By becoming aware of stressors and their physiological and mental impact, Jeff will begin to identify them on and off of the field. As Jeff learns to navigate pressure with greater clarity and control he will grow in his confidence and improve his emotional regulation. By examining his current athletic identity and his off the field identity, Jeff will begin to develop a more holistic picture of who he is as a person and as an athlete, and begin to feel his value, regardless of how his playing is and how fast or slow he moves. This outcome is inline with the holistic, whole-person wellbeing approach advocated for by Vealy (2024) and is in line with desired consulting outcomes.

Summary

This comprehensive sport psychology intervention plan focuses on helping Jeff, a 19-year-old rugby player transitioning to the National Team who is struggling with feeling "slow" and unable to maintain his previous performance level. The intervention addresses three key areas: focus (improving attentional control through thought awareness and refocusing techniques), learning (developing intentional learning strategies and a growth mindset), and stress management (identifying stressors and their impact, as well as a balanced athletic identity).

Using a person-centered approach with necessary educational components, the 8-week phased intervention provides Jeff with practical tools, systematic monitoring methods, and gradual skill development aimed at helping him regain his mental quickness and confidence. By integrating these three domains, the intervention creates a holistic framework that addresses Jeff's immediate performance concerns while building sustainable mental skills that will support his long-term development as a national-level athlete.

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