

Philosophy of Sport and Performance Psychology Consulting

Corrie White

University of Western States

SPP 6570 Capstone

Dr. Wendell Otto

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Philosophy of Service Delivery in Sport and Performance Psychology

Introduction

My philosophy of service delivery in sport and performance psychology is grounded in a fundamental belief: sustainable performance excellence emerges when an athlete's values, thoughts, behaviors, and physiological states align with their authentic identity and purpose. Performance excellence, as I define it, is characterized by deep engagement and love for one's sport, a willingness to work, grow, and make meaningful sacrifices, and the intentional integration of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in service of performance goals. This understanding of excellence as alignment resonates with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy's emphasis on psychological flexibility and values-aligned action (Hayes et al., 2012), though my intervention approach is grounded primarily in cognitive-behavioral and psychophysiological frameworks. My philosophy reflects my commitment to the scientist-practitioner model, integrating evidence-based theoretical frameworks with culturally responsive, ethically grounded practice.

My worldview has been shaped by my experiences as a lifelong endurance athlete, Colorado resident, current runner, weightlifter, and triathlete. As a parent of competitive athletes and serial entrepreneur with a deep love of the human psyche, motivation, and a background in psychology, I have witnessed firsthand how mental patterns, belief systems, and self-awareness directly impact performance outcomes and personal fulfillment. These experiences have taught me that excellence requires more than physical talent—it demands psychological skills, intentional self-regulation, and alignment between one's actions and deepest values. I approach consulting through the lens of cognitive-behavioral and psychophysiological theories,

recognizing that thoughts, emotions, physiological arousal, and behaviors form an interconnected system that shapes athletic performance and personal well-being (Beck, 1976; Cacioppo et al., 2000).

Central to my work is the understanding that athletes achieve their greatest potential not through the suppression of internal experience, but through increased awareness, psychological flexibility, and the development of skills that promote alignment between who they are and how they perform. My approach emphasizes meeting athletes where they are developmentally, culturally, and motivationally, adapting interventions to match their readiness for change while maintaining rigorous ethical standards. This philosophy has been shaped by expert frameworks in applied sport psychology (Aoyagi & Poczwadowski, 2012), multicultural competence models (Hays, 2013), and my ongoing commitment to self-reflection and professional development.

Theoretical Orientation

My primary theoretical orientation integrates Cognitive-Behavioral Theory (Beck, 1976), Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (Ellis, 1994), and Psychophysiological Theory (Cacioppo et al., 2000). This integration reflects my understanding that human behavior emerges from the dynamic interplay between cognitive processes, emotional experiences, physiological arousal states, and behavioral patterns. Beck's (1976) foundational work demonstrated that automatic thoughts and core beliefs shape emotional and behavioral responses, while Ellis (1994) identified how irrational beliefs, particularly rigid self-demands, catastrophizing, and low frustration tolerance, create barriers to optimal performance. Contemporary applications of REBT in sport contexts have demonstrated its effectiveness in helping athletes develop rational, flexible thinking patterns that improve emotional control, resilience, and performance consistency (Toth et al., 2023; Toth & Respinger, 2024).

Psychophysiological Theory

Psychophysiological theory extends this cognitive foundation by emphasizing the bidirectional relationship between mind and body. Breathwork and somatic awareness practices are particularly powerful because they provide athletes with instant access to and feedback on their current mental, physical, and emotional state. Research supports that these practices regulate autonomic arousal and improve vagal tone, which in turn facilitates cognitive access and emotional clarity (Cacioppo et al., 2000; Toth et al., 2023). By teaching athletes to attend to their physiological signals, I help them develop a reliable internal monitoring system that enhances self-awareness and supports adaptive responding under pressure. This understanding informs my use of mental skills training programs that integrate arousal regulation, emotional awareness, and intrinsic motivation to enhance both performance and athlete enjoyment (Barnicle & Burton, 2016). The AASP Ethics Code (2024) guides my evidence-based and competence-bound implementation of psychophysiological interventions, ensuring that these powerful tools are used safely and appropriately.

Supporting Theories

Supporting theories that inform my integrative model include Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which emphasizes that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are essential psychological needs driving intrinsic motivation; Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1997), which clarifies how belief in one's capabilities influences perseverance and achievement; and the Transtheoretical Model of Change (Prochaska et al., 1995), which recognizes that individuals move through distinct stages of readiness when adopting new behaviors. Additionally, I draw upon Attentional Control Theory (Nideffer, 1976) for focus and

concentration work, and Athletic Identity research (Brewer et al., 1993) to understand how athletes' self-concepts shape their experiences and responses to challenges.

Self Compassion

Self-compassion theory is particularly central to my approach. Research demonstrates that athletes who respond to mistakes with self-compassion recover more effectively and sustain motivation over time (Mosewich, 2020; Neff, 2023). Recent work has shown that self-compassion enhances emotional resilience to failure through its impact on vagal reactivity, linking psychological and physiological mechanisms (Zhang et al., 2023). Self-compassion allows athletes to maintain psychological flexibility-the ability to remain present and choose values-aligned action even when internal discomfort appears (Hayes et al., 2012). Without this capacity for self-kindness, athletes struggle to maintain the alignment necessary for sustained excellence.

Fundamental Change

My fundamental belief about change is that awareness enables new outcomes (Lorenzo-Luaces et al., 2015). When athletes develop insight into their thought patterns, emotional triggers, physiological states, and behavioral tendencies, they gain the capacity to respond differently. However, change is stage-based, progressing from initial awareness through preparation and into sustained action (Prochaska et al., 1995). Athletes progress most effectively when interventions match their developmental readiness and respect their evolving identity as performers and people.

Ethical Foundation

My ethical foundation rests upon the principles articulated in the AASP Ethical Principles and Standards (2024), the ACA Code of Ethics (2014), and the APA Ethics Code (2017). These

frameworks emphasize competence, integrity, professional boundaries, informed consent, and an unwavering commitment to client welfare. I approach every consultation relationship with transparency about my qualifications, scope of practice, and the evidence base supporting my interventions (Poczwadowski et al., 2004). Ongoing supervision and consultation remain essential to my practice, ensuring that I continuously refine my skills and maintain accountability in my work (Keegan, 2016).

Cultural Awareness

Cultural self-awareness is foundational to ethical practice. Using Hays' (2013) ADDRESSING model, I regularly evaluate how my social identities, including being White, heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied, and from an upper-middle-class background, shape my perceptions, assumptions, and interactions with athletes. Understanding my social location helps me recognize invisible systems of advantage (McIntosh, 1989) and work to reduce bias while improving attunement to athletes whose experiences differ from my own. This is an ongoing process of self-reflection that requires humility, curiosity, and willingness to be uncomfortable (Poczwadowski et al., 2004).

Personal Ethical Stance

My ethical stance is deeply informed by multicultural and sociopolitical perspectives. I recognize that individual and team consulting occurs within historical, racial, and structural contexts that profoundly shape athlete experiences (Lee, 2019). Feminist theory, particularly the principle that "the personal is political" (Hanisch, 1970), guides my understanding of how power, gender, and sociocultural forces impact athletes' lives, opportunities, and sense of self (hooks, 2000; Brown, 2018). This lens helps me recognize how systemic factors influence the challenges athletes face and the resources available to them.

When implementing psychophysiological interventions such as breathwork and somatic awareness practices, I adhere strictly to AASP's requirement for evidence-based, trauma-informed, and culturally sensitive application (2024). I prioritize athlete comfort and autonomy, continually checking in about how techniques feel and adapting based on their feedback—a practice grounded in basic counseling competencies (ACA, 2014). Clear informed consent, transparency about my training and qualifications, and commitment to working within my scope of competence are non-negotiable aspects of my practice.

Approach to Intervention

My approach to intervention follows expert practice models that emphasize systematic, theory-driven, evidence-based application (Aoyagi & Poczwardowski, 2012). Whether working with individuals or teams, I begin with comprehensive assessment, move through awareness-building and skill development, and emphasize application in performance contexts.

Working with Individuals

Individual work begins with a thorough intake and needs assessment (Keegan, 2016) that explores the athlete's presenting concerns, learning style, strengths, performance history, and stage of change using the Transtheoretical Model (Prochaska et al., 1995). Performance profiling (Williams & Krane, 2021) helps athletes identify discrepancies between their current and ideal psychological states, creating investment in the change process. Understanding where an athlete falls on the readiness continuum allows me to pace interventions appropriately and meet pre-contemplative athletes with curiosity rather than action plans, and supporting those in preparation or action stages with concrete skill-building.

Awareness Skills

The foundation of my individual work involves developing awareness skills. Athletes learn to monitor their thoughts using CBT principles (Beck, 1976), track their physiological arousal through breath and somatic awareness (Cacioppo et al., 2000), and expand their emotional vocabulary using tools like Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions. Research supports that emotional awareness and regulation develop progressively (Ekman, 1989; Goleman, 1996), and building this foundation enables more sophisticated interventions later.

Psychophysiological Tools

Psychophysiological tools form a core component of my practice. I teach breathwork techniques to help athletes regulate autonomic arousal and enhance vagal tone, which research demonstrates can improve both emotional regulation and performance (Cacioppo et al., 2000; Toth et al., 2023). Evidence supports mental skills training programs that integrate arousal regulation with enjoyment enhancement and anxiety reduction (Barnicle & Burton, 2016), and I implement these tools in accordance with AASP ethical guidelines (2024).

Cognitive Interventions

Cognitive interventions follow what I call a "catch, challenge, change" progression aligned with Beck's (1976) cognitive therapy model. Athletes learn to identify automatic thoughts, evaluate their accuracy and utility, and develop more adaptive cognitive responses. For athletes ready for deeper cognitive work, I integrate Ellis' (1994) ABCDE model of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, helping them dispute irrational beliefs characterized by rigid self-demands, catastrophizing, and low frustration tolerance (Toth & Respinger, 2024). This process builds rational, flexible thinking patterns that support consistent performance.

Additional intervention tools include scenario-based imagery and confidence scripts (Vealey, 2001; Williams & Krane, 2021), mindfulness practices for present-moment awareness

(Kabat-Zinn, 1990), and self-compassion exercises to address perfectionism and promote resilient responses to setbacks (Mosewich, 2020; Neff, 2023). Intervention sequencing follows expert practice models (Aoyagi & Poczwardowski, 2012) and stage-based pacing aligned with both the TTM and established models of learning.

Working with Teams

Team interventions focus on building collective mental skills that enhance cohesion, communication, and performance under pressure. I teach thought stopping techniques (Williams & Krane, 2014), attentional control strategies based on Nideffer's (1976) multidimensional model of attention, cue words for refocusing, and performance readiness plans that include pre-performance routines, maintenance strategies, and mistake recovery protocols (Burton & Raedeke, 2008).

Team Goal Setting

Goal-setting with teams is a collaborative process grounded in shared values, athlete autonomy, and meaningful motivations. This approach aligns with Self-Determination Theory's emphasis on internalized, value-driven goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and Dweck's (2009) work on mastery-oriented mindsets that support persistence, resilience, and long-term growth. My instructional approach is interactive, engaging, and application-based (Keegan, 2016), recognizing that immediate field application after instruction helps athletes assimilate skills more effectively.

Skill Progression

I structure skill progression using Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), moving athletes from foundational knowledge and understanding toward application, analysis, evaluation, and ultimately the creation of self-directed regulation strategies. Younger

athletes begin with concrete, foundational awareness, while older or elite performers progress into complex skills such as independent decision-making and autonomous performance management.

Timing Across the Season

Based on Burton and Raedeke's (2008) coaching-focused model, I tailor intervention timing to match training cycles, competitive demands, and athlete readiness. Pre-season work emphasizes skill building, performance profiling, and strategic planning. In-season interventions focus on adjustments, coping skills, and fatigue-resistant strategies that can be implemented quickly without overwhelming athletes during high-demand periods. Off-season work provides space for deeper reflection, identity development, processing of the season's experiences, and setting long-term developmental goals.

Developmental Appropriateness

A core principle of my philosophy is that interventions must match athletes' cognitive, emotional, and physiological developmental stages. I sequence mental skills based on cognitive readiness, using Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) to design interventions that move athletes from basic knowledge and comprehension toward higher-order application, analysis, and self-regulation appropriate to their developmental stage.

Young Adults

Youth athletes require concrete tools, simplified routines, and support for emotion labeling and recognition. Their emotional development is still unfolding (Ekman, 1989; Goleman, 1996; Blakemore et al., 2010), and they often operate in earlier stages of the TTM (Prochaska et al., 1995), requiring scaffolded interventions that build on foundational concrete knowledge. I adapt

my language, examples, and expectations to match their developmental capacity, avoiding abstract concepts that may be inaccessible to younger performers.

Emerging Adults

Emerging adults possess greater cognitive capacity for CBT-based work, identity exploration, and complex imagery. REBT interventions become more accessible at this stage, though they must still be developmentally adapted with simplified rational versus irrational belief distinctions consistent with sport-specific REBT approaches (Toth & Respinger, 2024). Emerging adults typically demonstrate increased readiness for preparation and action stages of change, allowing for more sophisticated skill application and independent practice.

Masters Athletes

Adult and masters athletes can engage in deeper cognitive restructuring using both CBT and REBT frameworks. At this stage, I increasingly emphasize self-compassion (Neff, 2023) as athletes navigate career transitions, performance declines, or shifting identities. Purpose-driven and identity-based performance work becomes particularly meaningful (Brown, 2018; Hayes et al., 2012), as adult athletes often seek alignment between their athletic pursuits and their broader life values and roles.

Throughout all developmental stages, I maintain alignment with expert frameworks emphasizing the adaptation of mental skills training and cognitive-behavioral principles to developmental readiness (Aoyagi & Poczwadowski, 2012). This ensures that my interventions are not only evidence-based but also appropriately matched to each athlete's capacity to understand, integrate, and apply them.

Diversity and Inclusion

Identity-informed, culturally responsive practice is essential to ethical and effective sport psychology consultation. I use Hays' (2013) ADDRESSING model to guide ongoing self-awareness about how my identities and social locations create power dynamics in the consulting relationship. The Cultural Formulation Interview (Lewis-Fernández et al., 2014) informs my approach to cultural tailoring, helping me understand how athletes' cultural backgrounds, values, and experiences shape their relationship with sport, performance, and help-seeking.

Sociocultural Context

I approach my work with explicit recognition of sociocultural context. Historical inequities and structural factors shape athletes' access to resources, opportunities, and support (Lee, 2019), and I maintain awareness of current events that impact marginalized communities. My understanding of privilege (McIntosh, 1989) and feminist theory's analysis of power differentials (Hanisch, 1970; hooks, 2000) keeps me attentive to how systemic forces—including racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression—manifest in sport settings and influence the athletes I serve.

Readiness For Change

When applying the Transtheoretical Model in diverse contexts, I recognize that readiness for change is culturally influenced and must never be assumed (Prochaska et al., 1995). What appears as resistance or pre-contemplation may actually reflect cultural values, systemic barriers, or appropriate skepticism about psychological services. I approach these dynamics with curiosity rather than judgment, adapting my pacing, language, and intervention delivery to honor each athlete's identity, culture, and context.

Ethical Psychophysiological Interventions

Psychophysiological interventions require particular cultural sensitivity. AASP ethics mandate trauma-informed and culturally responsive use of physiological tools (2024), recognizing that practices involving breath, body awareness, and arousal regulation can carry different meanings and evoke different responses across cultural contexts and trauma histories. I prioritize athlete agency, comfort, and consent when introducing these techniques, remaining flexible and responsive to their feedback.

Self Reflection

Self-reflection remains essential for recognizing how my identities, biases, and personal history shape my work (Poczwardowski et al., 2004). I commit to constantly examining "who I am" as a practitioner so I can recognize my assumptions, remain grounded in professional values, and deliver services that honor the full humanity and complexity of the athletes I serve. This reflection is not a one-time exercise but an ongoing practice that deepens my capacity for culturally responsive consultation.

Conclusion

My philosophy of service delivery rests on the conviction that sustainable excellence in sport and performance emerges from alignment, between values and actions, thoughts and behaviors, arousal states and performance demands, identity and purpose. This philosophy reflects the scientist-practitioner model, integrating evidence-based cognitive-behavioral, psychophysiological, and humanistic theories with culturally responsive, developmentally appropriate, and ethically grounded practice.

Through comprehensive assessment, awareness-building, systematic skill development, and application-focused intervention, I help athletes develop the psychological flexibility, cognitive

skills, physiological regulation strategies, and self-compassion needed to perform at their best while maintaining well-being. I adapt my approach to match athletes' developmental stages and cultural contexts, recognizing that effectiveness requires meeting each person where they are with interventions that respect their readiness, identity, and unique circumstances.

My commitment to ongoing self-reflection, supervision, and professional development ensures that my practice continues to evolve in alignment with emerging research, changing societal contexts, and the diverse needs of the athletes I serve. Sport and performance psychology consultation, when grounded in strong theory, ethical practice, cultural humility, and genuine care for athlete welfare, has the power to help individuals not only perform at higher levels but also develop greater self-awareness, resilience, and alignment between who they are and who they aspire to become. This work is what I am committed to doing in my career.

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