

INVESTIGATING BURNOUT IN GAELIC FOOTBALL

Introduction

The occurrence of burnout in talented young players within Gaelic football has recently been identified as an issue that needs to be addressed (SINI, 2003). Currently there is limited research on burnout in Gaelic football, and indeed on sport in general. It is proposed that funding a PhD studentship could provide an avenue to in-depth research on burnout in Gaelic football that would document the prevalence of burnout and identify intervention strategies to both prevent future burnout and assist burnt-out players in dealing with their situation. Through this research the GAA, coaches and players would be in a better position to undertake evidence-based practice in tackling this issue.

What is burnout?

A current definition of burnout in sport suggests that there are three delineating characteristics associated with the burnout syndrome (Raedeke, 1997). These are:

- 1) Emotional and physical exhaustion associated with the intense demands of training and competition.
- 2) A reduced sense of accomplishment – the player no longer feels that they are achieving their sport goals.
- 3) Sport devaluation- the player stops caring about their sport and their own performance (may be exhibited as lack of motivation)

What causes burnout?

Limited research has investigated the factors that contribute to burnout and as yet a consensus does not exist. Although the symptoms of burnout incorporate both physical and psychological elements, the research to date suggests that excessive physical training is not a cause of burnout (Gould, Tuffey, Udry & Loehr, 1996). This finding would suggest that burnout is a conceptually different syndrome from over training. Instead social psychological concerns (e.g., perceived pressure to perform from parents/coaches/community, lack of enjoyment, not feeling in control of one's participation, uni-dimensional sense of identity) appear to be more influential in leading to burnout in sport.

Proposed project

A PhD project using a social psychological framework to investigate the incidence and causes of burnout in Gaelic football could have three aims:

- 1) Determine the actual incidence of burnout in Gaelic football and demographic factors (e.g., age, playing level) associated with burnout
- 2) Investigate the influence of social psychological factors in leading to burnout
- 3) Identify and evaluate the effectiveness of evidence-based intervention strategies for preventing burnout.

This project presents the GAA with an opportunity to fund progressive research, which would have important implications for the practice of coaches and players. This project would also provide sufficient research training to fulfil the requirements of an academic PhD.

Funding

I am still awaiting a response from the Research Office with regard to the exact financial implication for a 3 year full-time PhD studentship.

An approximate calculation is £18K per year for three years (£10K student stipend, £2.5K fees + university overheads).

References

Gould, D., Tuffey, S., Udry, E., Loehr, J. (1996). Burnout in competitive junior tennis players II: Qualitative analysis. *The Sport Psychologist*, **10**, 341-366.

Raedeke, T. D. (1997). Is athlete burnout more than just stress: A sport commitment model. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, **19**, 396-417.

SINI (2003). Seminar addresses player burnout. www.sini.co.uk/news/index2
Accessed 19 August 2003.

Additional Information

Potential Support Areas and Expertise Currently within the University include:

- Sports Sociology
- Physiotherapy
- Psychology
- Biomechanics
- Sports Medicine Clinic
- Podiatry
- Sports Institute Northern Ireland

Potential Staff Team Driving the Project

Dr Ailsa Anderson, Sports Psychology

Dr David Hassan, Sports Sociology

Dr Marie Murphy, Exercise Physiology

Dr Gareth Davidson, Exercise Physiology

Dr Eric Wallace, Sports Bio mechanist

Dr Eugene Young, Director of High Performance Ulster Council GAA

