

2010 NSCAA Convention Clinic Outline Book

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Sport Psychology in the Premiership: Real Lives, Real People and Real Lessons

This presentation will discuss the roles associated with delivering sport psychology support within Premier league football clubs. Drawing on consultancy work carried out over three to four days each week with players and staff from a number of teams including, Bolton Wanderers, Newcastle United and Hull City, the focus will be on 2 important types of tasks that a sport psychologist can carry out in this environment.

The first of these relates to one to one and group based work with players in first team and Academy settings. Dr Nesti will explain how this was carried out during over 9 seasons involvement as a consultant based inside these 3 clubs.

However, to be able to operate successfully at an individual level, especially with players, the sport psychologist must attend to the broader context within which such work takes place. In other words, their role should include the type of functions often carried out by organisational psychologists, or sometimes by human resource managers in non sport organisations. This less “glamorous” but absolutely essential set of tasks includes activities like writing job descriptions, setting up staff and player appraisal systems, organising CPD opportunities, running staff away days, managing the interface between sports science staff and coaches, and mentoring new and less experienced staff. These and other process type tasks help to create a culture of excellence and authentic professionalism. It is only in this type of culture that longer term growth, achievement and progress are possible.

Specific themes will be alluded to throughout the talk. For example mention will be made of the psychological necessity of maintaining a longer term view, especially in such a volatile and short term focused environment as a Premiership football club, the importance of confidentiality in psychological work if anything useful is to be achieved, and the importance of the trust that the staff and manger has in the sport psychologist.

Finally, this presentation will emphasise how vital it is that the manager, other senior staff, chief executive and club owners have a realistic and good level of understanding around the role that a sport psychologist can play in assisting the club to enhance its performance on and off the field. The sports psychologist can help this knowledge to develop in a number of formal and more informal ways. They may also be well placed to extend their role to improving awareness about the benefits that can accrue as a result of closer links between other sports scientists and coaches, and the advantages of a multi or interdisciplinary approach to helping players to improve.