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Revs and Psychos: Role, Impact and Interaction of Sport Chaplains and Sport Psychologists  
Within English Premiership Soccer

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Key words: Co-operation; spiritual care; pastoral care; well-being.

1 **Abstract**

2 Despite an increased focus on spirituality and athlete well-being in sport (Watson, 2011), there is

3 limited research regarding those who provide support to the athlete in these areas. The aim of

4 this study was to explore the practice of sport psychologists and sport chaplains within

5 professional soccer, and identify potential for working partnerships. By interviewing three

6 psychologists and four chaplains who are employed currently within English Premiership soccer,

7 it was revealed that significant overlap in their roles existed. The psychologists and chaplains

8 identified barriers that restricted support offered to players, which may be addressed by working

9 cooperatively in the future.

10

## REVS AND PSYCHOS

### 1     Revs and Psychos: Role, Impact and Interaction of Sport Chaplains and Sport Psychologists 2                                     Within English Premiership Soccer

#### 3                                     **Introduction**

4     The English Premiership soccer league represents currently the most successful sport  
5 business outside of the United States (Nesti, 2010), and as a consequence, its clubs have  
6 developed a winning culture in which the need for success often outweighs the needs of  
7 individual players (Railo & Matson, 2001). Indeed, the culture within Premiership soccer clubs  
8 is often transient and machoistic (Woods, 2011), with high levels of insecurity and low levels of  
9 trust (Nesti, 2010). Players normally hold a performance focus, make many personal sacrifices,  
10 are continually exposed to myopic decision making (Thelwell, 2009), and often live their  
11 pressured lives in the public eye (Boyers, 2006). Therefore, sport psychologists working within  
12 this context are required to confront a range of challenges and often perform various roles that  
13 include: educator of mental skills, mediator between coach and players, intermediary for team  
14 cohesion, and counselor (Beswick, 2001). Such services are also offered frequently against the  
15 backdrop of general apathy, suspicion or even prejudice towards sport psychology from  
16 managers and players alike (Nesti, 2010; Wilson, Gilbert, Gilbert, & Sailor, 2009).

17     There is a wealth of evidence to suggest that mental skills training can have a positive  
18 influence on soccer performance (e.g., Reeves, Nicholls, & McKenna, 2011; Thelwell,  
19 Greenlees, & Weston, 2006). However, few studies have explored the manner in which sport  
20 psychologists should provide such training to have the most impact on players. Of those that  
21 exist, Gilbourne has offered the most extensive insight into effective psychological service  
22 delivery within elite soccer by reflecting on his 30 years experiences of working as a coach and  
23 sport psychologist within this setting (see Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006). Gilbourne suggests  
24 that effective sport psychologist's embrace the performance agenda and therefore employ the  
25 necessary psychological skills training to improve players' performance. However, as  
26 professional soccer is often an abrasive, irrational, emotional and unpredictable setting, he

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1 concludes that the impact of the sport psychologist is determined by their capacity to care. Thus,  
2 the emphasis appears to be on the sport psychologist employing a humanistic and holistic  
3 approach in which the focus is on resolving lifestyle or personal issues, and offering compassion  
4 and empathy towards the player. Indeed, recent evidence has supported the claim that within  
5 such an uncompromising setting, a holistic approach is more likely to have a positive impact on  
6 player performance and well-being (Nesti, 2007, 2012).

7 By adopting a humanistic and holistic approach to their work, the sport psychologist must  
8 attempt to address the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs of players (Ravizza, 2002;  
9 Walker, 2010). However, critically, it has been noted that few sport psychology consultants  
10 consider the spiritual needs and religious beliefs of their athletes (Parry, Nesti, & Watson, 2011;  
11 Watson & Nesti, 2005), despite the widespread acknowledgement of their influence on  
12 performance and well-being (Czech & Bullet, 2007; Czech, Wrisberg, Fisher, Thompson, &  
13 Hayes, 2004; Hopsicker, 2009; Watson & Czech, 2005; Watson, 2011). This omission is  
14 particularly problematic if working within English Premiership soccer clubs whereby the influx  
15 of overseas personnel has led to a significant number of players expressing a faith (Nesti, 2011).  
16 By failing to address spiritual needs, it is unlikely that the practitioner will develop an effective  
17 athlete-consultant relationship (Watson & Czech, 2005) and contribute to the development of  
18 player well-being and performance (Nesti, 2012).

19 Accordingly, Watson and Nesti (2005) have argued that if an athlete holds religious  
20 convictions, then the sport psychologist will need to understand those beliefs in order to support  
21 their athlete fully. However, it is also acknowledged that the psychologist may not be best placed  
22 to address these specific needs fully. Indeed as Maynard (Brady & Maynard, 2010) suggested,  
23 the sport psychologist will be “flying close to the wind (p. 60)” if they assume sole responsibility  
24 for the well-being agenda of the athlete. Thus, it seems necessary therefore, that on matters of  
25 faith, the sport psychologist should work alongside the sport chaplain.

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1 Sport chaplaincy is considered to provide holistic pastoral and spiritual care towards the  
2 well-being of people in sport, and as a consequence, the core responsibility is to ensure athlete  
3 welfare (Hastings & Dellemonache, 2007). The number of sport chaplains working within  
4 English professional soccer has grown in recent years, culminating with the creation of a  
5 Pastoral Director in 2009, who oversees and develops the cohort of over 70 sport chaplains that  
6 exist within the professional soccer clubs. The culture of soccer has evolved from its days of  
7 Corinthian fair play to an environment of competition whereby superiority is aspired to (Parry,  
8 Robinson, Watson, & Nesti, 2007), and achievement is judged in terms of material success  
9 (Hoffman, 2010). Consequently, although some in the Christian community have questioned  
10 whether chaplains should remain involved in the sporting world (Campolo, 1988), the assertion  
11 adopted by the Christian church is that sport is a God-given point of contact (McGrath, 1992).  
12 Although the majority of sport chaplains within the United States are evangelistic with a focus  
13 around mission (Krattenmaker, 2010), they sit in sharp contrast to those based in the United  
14 Kingdom who seek to provide pastoral support and who commit explicitly to a non-proselytizing  
15 ethos.

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

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1 of significance (Baker, 2006a), support players through bereavement (Boyers, 2006), respond to  
2 crisis (Stewart, 2009) and facilitate pre-match prayers (Weir, 2011).

3 There is a reluctance to examine theological issues within sport, which Watson (2011)  
4 suggests is caused by a disproportionate emphasis on the body above the mind. The majority of  
5 research that does exist in this area, has focused on the impact of prayer on sporting success  
6 (e.g., Czech & Bullet, 2007; Dale, 2000; Hopsicker, 2009; Kreider, 2004; Watson & Czech,  
7 2005), and so there remains an absence of empirical literature regarding the practice of  
8 chaplaincy in sport. This at times has led to a misunderstanding of the role by both the provider  
9 and receiver (Nesti, 2010; Waller, Dzikus, & Hardin, 2008). To date, the only insight offered  
10 with regards to the work and impact of sport chaplaincy within professional soccer has emerged  
11 from the biographical reports of chaplains (e.g., Boyers, 2006; Heskins & Baker, 2006; Wood,  
12 2011) and players (e.g., Primus, 2000). Accordingly, and to the authors' knowledge, the effect  
13 of the spiritual support provided by sport chaplains to professional soccer players has yet to be  
14 explored empirically. Furthermore, their interaction with other support providers, particularly  
15 the sport psychologist has yet to be examined.

16 The roles of the sport psychologist and sport chaplain are distinctive in that the former are  
17 required to focus on enhancing player performance, and are therefore judged predominantly by  
18 performance outcomes (see Andersen, Miles, Mahoney, & Robinson, 2002). Whilst conversely,  
19 the sport chaplains use their spiritual expertise to enable player contentment, and respond  
20 specifically to issues of faith religious belief (Boyers, 2006; Watson & Czech, 2005).  
21 Nevertheless, Nesti (2007) speculates that as the sport psychologist and sport chaplain have  
22 much in common, and as their skills are complimentary, they may benefit from working  
23 cooperatively. Both aim to provide the player with holistic and pastoral support to enhance well-  
24 being, with the chaplain having specific expertise to attend to the spiritual needs of the player.  
25 As both roles have yet to be accepted fully as professions within elite soccer, there also remains  
26 a need amongst both sets of practitioners to demonstrate their occupational worth. There is

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1 evidence from research completed within the health industry that the psychologist and chaplain  
2 have become increasingly accepted, professionalized and accountable within this context by  
3 working cooperatively to improve healthcare (see Flannelly, Weaver, Smith, & Handzo, 2003;  
4 Monod, Martin, Spencer, Rochat, & Bula, 2010). Therefore, the theoretical argument that the  
5 sport psychologist and sport chaplain should work together within professional soccer appears to  
6 have foundation. However, research has yet to examine the potential for this collaboration.

7 Accordingly, the sport psychologist and sport chaplain appear to offer an important service  
8 within English Premiership soccer, but further exploration of their role and impact is required,  
9 particularly with regards to their contribution to the support of player's with faith. Furthermore,  
10 there remains the need to investigate the level of co-operation that exists between the two  
11 disciplines, and consider the potential for collaboration within the professional soccer context.  
12 This study aims to address this gap in the literature by using a qualitative approach to offer  
13 unique insight into the role and impact of the sport psychologist and sport chaplain within  
14 English Premiership soccer. It also aims to explore the current working partnerships that exist  
15 between the sport psychologist and sport chaplain within Premiership soccer clubs, and consider  
16 critically the potential of this collaboration.

### Method

#### Methodology

19 The impact and interaction of sport psychologists and sports chaplains working within  
20 professional soccer has evaded academic scrutiny. Accordingly, the present study marks  
21 uncharted territory. A broadly phenomenological approach was adopted to address the  
22 research aims of this study, for it enabled a detailed exploration of the behaviors, experiences  
23 and perceptions of individuals working as either a sport psychologist or sport chaplain within the  
24 English Premiership soccer league. By adopting a phenomenological methodology, the study  
25 generated a rich description of the participant interpretations of their experiences, whilst also  
26 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 (Langdrige, 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

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1 members of Sports Chaplaincy UK, (a charity which supports, trains and appoints chaplains),  
2 and so received continual training or support.

### 3 **Procedure**

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

### 13 **Data Collection**

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

23 At the time of writing the lead author was a sport chaplain operating within professional  
24 soccer, and as such there was potential for bias during data collection (Willig & Stainton-Rogers,  
25 2008). In response, he maintained reflexivity throughout the research process (see Smith, 2008)  
26 to ensure the participants were able to offer their views fully during the lengthy semi-structured

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1 interview. Moreover, as the lead author was at ease within the soccer environment and  
2 understood the terminology associated with the work of the participants, he was able to establish  
3 empathy and trust, which in turn enhanced the trustworthiness of the data. The interviews lasted  
4 between 60 and 90 minutes and were recorded digitally and transcribed *verbatim*.

### 5 **Data Analysis**

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

### 15 **Results and Discussion**

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

#### 21 **Sport Psychology: Perceived role and Impact**

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

24 **Sport psychology in practice.** The approach of the sport psychologists varied; with two  
25 applying a humanistic philosophy, whilst the other used neuro-linguistic programming (NLP)  
26 alongside the humanistic approach. Thus, as encouraged by Gilbourne and Richardson (2006),

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1 the respondents within this study had adopted a holistic framework in an attempt to manage  
2 effectively a range of sport and personal issues.

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

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

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

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

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

25 The main concern expressed by this respondent was that NLP lacked universal acceptance as a  
26 psychological approach, and so would not address the concerns and suspicions held towards

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1 sport psychology by players and managers. This supports the work of Pain and Harwood (2004)  
2 which identified that a negative perceptions of psychology was the main barrier to entry for sport  
3 psychologists. Therefore, the discipline needs to be demystified further, and evidence for its  
4 impact on sporting performance needs to be disseminated more widely.

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

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

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

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

22 **Sport psychology and player performance.** The three sport psychologists suggested that  
23 they, and the majority of other mental skills practitioners working within English Premiership  
24 soccer, were exclusively performance-oriented. Thus, only occasionally did they consider other  
25 ‘holistic’ elements of player development such as well-being and pastoral care, because their  
26 focus was to provide tangible performance improvements:

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1 As a sport psychologist we know that our prime function is, in some shape or form, to help  
2 performance...the focus is definitely on football [soccer]; that's where it starts...that's where  
3 it ends. How could you play better? Then, they [the player] will, depending on their level of  
4 trust in me open up on other 'life' things.

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

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

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

23 **Sport psychology and pastoral care.** Despite their primary aim and workplace focus being  
24 framed around player performance, it became apparent during the interviews that the sport  
25 psychologists had frequently become involved in providing pastoral care. The respondents  
26 operated largely through formal one-to-one meetings with players which were arranged as part

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1 of their role within their respective clubs. It was during these meetings that players discussed  
2 pastoral issues either initially, or more often, once a level of trust had been established. It was  
3 interesting to note that although respondents were insistent that their primary role was to  
4 improve player performance, they acknowledged that on reflection, they had provided more  
5 support for non-performance rather than performance issues. Furthermore, they recognized that  
6 their pastoral role had influenced positively their players more so than any other aspect of their  
7 work. The main pastoral issues addressed by the sport psychologists were related largely to  
8 relationship problems and issues surrounding bereavement:

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

13 As such, the three sport psychologists recognized that their focus and role did relate to  
14 performance enhancement, but that in essence their activities and impact were centered on  
15 pastoral care, "Well I suppose at the higher [elite] level, [the] issues we are talking about have  
16 nothing to do with [performance], because they were already doing these things brilliantly".  
17 Importantly, the three sport psychologists felt that all pastoral issues fell firmly within their  
18 expertise, as they perceived that they were in a position to offer superior support to that provided  
19 by sport chaplains:

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

24 Although the delivery of pastoral care is perceived to have benefited the cases explored within  
25 this study, it is worth noting that Moore (2003) identified that practicing within areas of  
26 competence is an ethical and professional requirement of a sport psychologist. Thus, the

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1 question arises as to whether the professional training route adequately equips sport  
2 psychologists with the necessary interpersonal, counseling, and therapeutic skills to offer  
3 appropriate pastoral care to the athlete. Conversely, and as suggested by Nesti (2010), the  
4 question also arises as to whether the sport chaplain is better placed to address the pastoral needs  
5 of the professional soccer player.

6 In the case of athletes with faith, all three sport psychologists were of the opinion that if the  
7 player had issues, concerns or questions regarding their religion beliefs, which were affecting  
8 their performance, then they should be referred elsewhere given that this aspect of a player's life  
9 was considered to be outside of their expertise. Moreover, those interviewed perceived that their  
10 role as a sport psychologist, and the manner in which they worked with the athlete, remained  
11 unaffected by a player's religious beliefs. As explained by one of the sport psychologists, "I  
12 know that he [the player] is a very staunch Christian. But I haven't explored the dynamics of that  
13 and what it means to him and how that affects his life, impacts his thoughts or anything".  
14 However it could be argued that by failing to consider fully the spiritual needs of players, the  
15 sport psychologists may not have adequately addressed the holistic needs of the athlete and  
16 optimized well-being. This may particularly be the case when accounting for the importance of  
17 faith within the elite soccer population (Nesti, 2011, 2012).

18 Although all the sport psychologists espoused a close working relationship with the managers  
19 who had appointed them, it was clear that conflicts of interest arose as a result of their provision  
20 of pastoral care to players. For example, one sport psychologists explained that, "When I was  
21 talking and helping one player [about his injury], he would not let me talk to the physician. So, I  
22 was helping him get medical care outside of the club. Pretty darn awkward". It is also worth  
23 noting that all three sport psychologists identified that the managers of their respective clubs  
24 sometimes felt "threatened" when receiving from them advice about a player's welfare. This  
25 was likely to be a consequence of the general level of occupational and personal insecurity  
26 prevalent in the professional soccer environment (see Parker, 2006).



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1 It was perceived by the sport psychologists that their impact on athlete welfare was restricted  
2 because players often avoided meeting with them, even after being instructed to do so by  
3 management. For all the psychologists interviewed, the importance of player approval was a  
4 prominent theme, with the acknowledgement that some players and managers were disinterested,  
5 and in some instances, opposed to working with a sport psychologist because of the stigma  
6 attached to seeking this type of support. The respondents therefore suggested that to have an  
7 impact, they relied on a snowball effect in that once one player claimed that the sport  
8 psychologist had helped him, then others followed, “By helping one player that just unlocked the  
9 door really in terms of people then making use of me... it”. Therefore, as Pain and Harwood  
10 (2004) found in their study, there remains a need to address player perceptions of sport  
11 psychologists within soccer, as they continue to act as barriers to their work.

### 12 **Sport Chaplaincy: Perceived role and Impact**

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

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

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1 professional football (i.e., Sports Chaplaincy UK), have instilled a set of core values amongst  
2 practitioners.

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

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

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

25 For three of the four respondent chaplains, prayer took place before games, which at times  
26 included the presence of the manager, opposition players and those with non-Christian beliefs.

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1 The chaplains suggested that the players normally prayed about family issues, friends or world  
2 events, rather than the match outcome. Where prayers did relate to the forthcoming game they  
3 were focused on preventing injury and playing to the best of one's abilities; although one  
4 chaplain did admit there was a 'fine line' between praying for a good performance and a victory.  
5 Pre-match prayers were described as being part of the match day experience that had become an  
6 embedded aspect of club culture:

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

12 These findings add to the growing body of literature that indicates a positive relationship  
13 between prayer and sporting performance (e.g., Czech & Bullet, 2007; Dale, 2000; Hopsicker,  
14 2009; Kreider, 2004; Watson & Czech, 2005), with three of the four sport chaplains perceiving  
15 that pre-match prayer had the potential to impact player performance. One chaplain highlighted  
16 an instance where a player with no particular faith experienced a marked improvement in his  
17 game after adopting the ritual of pre-match prayers:

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

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

25 **Sport chaplaincy and pastoral care.** It was revealed that offering pastoral care was the  
26 second key activity that the sport chaplains provided within their role. In distinguishing pastoral

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1 from spiritual care, the sport chaplains noted that the former comprised of offering general  
2 support to the players, whereas the latter was specifically faith-based. Thus, it involved the  
3 chaplains listening to the needs of their clients, from an independent viewpoint, that was  
4 unaffected by club politics. This allowed players to vent their frustrations in a confidential  
5 setting.

6 Respondents offered pastoral care through one-to-one meetings that often arose as a result of  
7 informal conversations. Subsequent meetings then took place away from the training ground in  
8 private corporate rooms at the stadium, in hotels, or at players' homes in order to protect client  
9 anonymity. As noted above, these meetings tended to focus on specific personal issues such as  
10 bereavement, with the chaplains then being asked to deliver formal ceremonies such as,  
11 "scattering ashes" or taking a memorial service: "I remember this lad whose grandfather had  
12 died many years ago...he still wasn't coping...got very angry...it was because his  
13 granddad...had actually brought him up. So I address that kind of thing a lot in my work".  
14 Interestingly, it was revealed that bereavement was the only area where managers were prepared  
15 to refer employees to the sport chaplain within the club.

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

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

23 However, it was recognized by the sport chaplains that the amount of time they were able to  
24 spend providing spiritual and pastoral care within their respective clubs was limited as a result of  
25 their other church-based activities. Such time limitations were perceived to restrict the  
26 chaplains' ability to have regular contact with players, and as a result they had chosen actively to

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1 concentrate their efforts on certain clients or issues, at the expense of others: "...[my] biggest  
2 regret...is I have never done as much with the youth [players] as I could do...because, again, it's  
3 a time issue really". In addition, as the sport chaplains were not integrated formally into the club  
4 structures, they only worked with players when requested to do so, and did not pro-actively  
5 promote their services. As such, chaplains perceived they did not have as much impact within  
6 their clubs as they would have liked.

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

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

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

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1 player support: For example, when a player experienced bereavement, the sport psychologist  
2 explained that:

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

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

17 **Sport psychology and sport chaplaincy: Potential of cooperation.** All respondents had  
18 found working within the English Premiership a difficult and unique experience with the overall  
19 culture described as being, "disorganized, transient, insecure and with a brutal sense of humor".  
20 This culture impacted on both the psychologists and the chaplains, "because in a culture that's all  
21 over the shop, that doesn't add value, doesn't treat people properly, it's very, very hard. You're  
22 isolated and you become much less effective". Both the sports psychologists and chaplains were  
23 not integrated into the formal structures of the clubs in which they worked, and were perceived  
24 generally as an outsider. One of the psychologists observed this meant that, "earning their  
25 [player] trust...becomes hard to achieve". The sense of not being formally and effectively  
26 integrated into the club was seen by all participants as frustrating, and for the most part

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1   disadvantageous. However, it is possible that through cooperation and combining their expertise  
2   and perspectives, that the sport psychologist and chaplain may be able to cope more effectively  
3   with the demands of such a challenging environment (see Andersen & Van Raalte 2005; Tod,  
4   2010). With an overlap of roles regarding pastoral support, there is evidence to suggest that by  
5   working in partnership, their efforts could be more effective and efficient. Lessons could be  
6   learnt for example from the health industry, whereby the collaboration of psychologist and  
7   chaplain has led to discernible improvements in working practice which, in turn, has led to  
8   greater accountability and an increased recognition of their worth (e.g., Monod et al., 2010; Harr,  
9   2010). With both psychology and chaplaincy still seeking professional status and integration  
10   within the English Premiership soccer clubs, a collaborative approach is therefore worthy of  
11   consideration.

12       Finally, the participants indicated that the role they played within their respective clubs and  
13   the impact they had on players, was normally determined by the manager's attitude towards  
14   them. One respondent identified that the attitude of the manager fell into three categories.  
15   Firstly, some managers held a holistic view of player care, and as a consequence were positive  
16   towards the psychologist and chaplain, and actively used both disciplines within their work. The  
17   second type of managerial response, which was identified as the most dominant by respondents,  
18   was an indifference to both psychology and chaplaincy. In this instance, both professionals were  
19   able to, "go about our work unhindered, but we were not integrated". The final response, was  
20   one in which the participants were actively restricted their role. One chaplain who had worked  
21   for such a manager suggested: "that was a very difficult time for me. He [the manager] kind of  
22   very much side-lined me as far as he could. I had nothing to do". Thus, as noted by Forde  
23   (2010), antipathy towards psychology and possible chaplaincy within elite soccer is often  
24   determined by the manager valuing the physical aspects of the sport above those relating to the  
25   mind/emotions. Further collaborative and educational work with coaches and players by sport

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1 psychologists and chaplains is required therefore, to illustrate the critical contribution that  
2 psychology and faith can have on elite performance and the performer.

3 **Sport chaplaincy and sport psychology: Non-cooperation:** Throughout the interview  
4 process it became evident that the sport psychologists had a ‘broad’ understanding of the role of  
5 the sport chaplain, and vice versa. However, two of the sport psychologists did not know the  
6 sport chaplain based at the clubs they had operated in. Similarly, the sport chaplains were not  
7 able to recall readily the names of the sport psychologists at the clubs where they had worked.  
8 Indeed, all three sport psychologists noted that for the most part, the relationship between them  
9 and the resident sport chaplain had been uncooperative. One of the sport psychologists stated  
10 that he was also aware of a number of fellow practitioners who would at best tolerate the  
11 presence of a chaplain, but would more likely become obstructive towards them. Another of the  
12 sport psychologists openly expressed concern over the presence of sport chaplains and religious  
13 issues in the football setting, by arguing that sport chaplains may bring with them “some kind of  
14 proselytizing mission” and an ulterior evangelistic motive (see Hoffman, 2010; Krattenmaker,  
15 2010). As a result, two of the three sport psychologists had never referred their clients to the  
16 sport chaplain, and three of the sport chaplains had not referred a player to the sport  
17 psychologist. This was despite the acknowledgement that at times, this may have been helpful.  
18 As explained by one of the sport psychologists:

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

### 23 **Summary and Conclusion**

24 This study has provided a review of the role and perceived impact of sport psychologists and  
25 sport chaplains within a selection of English Premiership soccer clubs. Through interviews with  
26 information-rich participants, who are amongst the few practitioners to work within the English



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1 Premier League, it is clear that both the psychologist and chaplain play an important role within  
2 the challenging context of professional soccer. The sport psychologists focused on performance  
3 enhancement; the sport chaplains primarily offered spiritual care, and they all contributed to  
4 addressing the pastoral needs of players. However, the impact of both disciplines within the  
5 context of Premiership soccer does remain restricted currently due to a number of barriers,  
6 which may be overcome by working cooperatively in the future. Thus, further applied research  
7 is required to ascertain in further detail the manner in which the provision of psychology and  
8 chaplaincy can have a greater impact within elite soccer. Specifically, further research is  
9 warranted to explore the potential of a collaborative partnership between the sport psychologist  
10 and chaplain, and how they could work more effectively with significant others (i.e., coaches  
11 and managers) to provide support to their athletes.

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

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

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- 1 chaplaincy within English Premiership soccer, and establishes a foundation for future research in
- 2 this area.

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