

Let's close the gap between research and practice to discover new land together!

Øyvind Sandbakk, Ph.D., Associate Editor IJSPP

Centre for Elite Sports Research, Department of Neuromedicine and Movement Science, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway

The increased focus on evidence-based practice in sports has allowed exercise physiologists and researchers to play a more important role for athlete development and performance. This development has strengthened *IJSPP's* role, as we place a substantial focus on the practical applications of our research. At the same time, *IJSPP* has become one of the leading journals in sport science, and with the new Impact Factor of 3.384 we are placed at position 10 in the field of sports medicine. Our applied research, focusing on sport physiology and performance, is now well cited and the journal is visible and widely acknowledged in the field. Accordingly, there is a close and interdependent connection between the practical and scientific impact of our research that we should further strengthen in the future development of *IJSPP*.

As a scientific journal, we can only make a real impact on sports if we publish high-quality research that complements the fast decision-making required of practitioners. We need acceptance for the relatively slow process required to develop new knowledge, which subsequently provides evidence to the daily service systems. In order to succeed with this approach, we need to answer the relevant questions and provide high-quality communication of our findings, thereby optimizing the knowledge-translation between research and practice. To quote Editor Emeritus Carl Foster in a previous editorial: "*we may not have improved the ability of coaches to guide their athletes as much as we would like to think.*" In the future, our research should have a more direct impact on the behavior and practices of athletes and coaches.

The essence of research is to ask the right questions that lead us to discover new and relevant knowledge in our field. However, we should not only generate and test theory-driven hypotheses. We must additionally pay close attention to the questions asked by coaches and athletes (just as medical scientists must attend to the questions asked by medical practitioners and patients). The development of world-class results often include processes that are ahead of what has yet been scientifically proved, and many of the innovations intuitively developed by the best coaches and athletes have retrospectively been studied and thereafter defined as "new knowledge". Thus, when we cannot answer the coaches' most central questions, we should consider if these are gaps that could be developed into relevant scientific studies. On the other hand, researchers sometimes ask (and answer) questions that lead to new paradigms in sport. This is exemplified by the development of the klapskate in speed skating that led to tremendous performance improvements 10 years later when athletes dared to use them in competitions. Accordingly, we need to assure that coaches, athletes and researchers pay close attention to each other's questions, and that we work together to discover new land.

As researchers, we need integrity in the sports community and to communicate the relevance of our research so they understand that we provide complementary knowledge. Since we rarely reach coaches directly through our publications, we need to be very creative in our communication. Underlying this is the need for a common respect between the athletes, their coaches and researchers, and the ability to understand each other's different "tribal languages". In my opinion, we should take all steps, from defining the research question to the implemented effect on behavior, into account when planning our studies. This approach requires meeting places where this planning naturally happen and where knowledge-translation can occur. Today, some of the best sport science environments are located close to the sports arena, and experience shows that we need researchers embedded in the sports environments who understand athletes' and coaches' perspectives. However, the sport communities themselves should

also include support-staff with research competence and responsibility for implementing scientific knowledge into the organization. To facilitate respect and understanding between researchers and coaches/athletes, we should be aware that the lunch area of the sporting venue might be the most important room for good conversations to grow in a friendly environment. The strengths of putting critical people together is shown in various areas, and I truly believe that allowing highly competent researchers to meet world-class coaches and athletes on a daily basis would make magic happen!

At the same time, we researchers look at practitioner's problems with a complementary perspective and should perform independent research that ask questions and communicate results that challenge current practice. We should not take over the coach's role, but provide complementary services to the sports. As complex problems often need interdisciplinary competence, some researchers should obviously work closely with practice, while others should use their specific competence solely within the research team. The latter category will still have a crucial role in developing new applied sports knowledge, if a well-developed system allows "translation" through others. Awareness of the different roles and a common respect for the different points of departure should be key factors in this process, and will help us to avoid stepping into pitfalls on this journey.

Finally, the result of hard work and learning from failure will always be the basis for success in sports. However, guiding this work through evidence-based approaches should play a more important role in the future. While the improved physiological understanding of sport performance published in future editions of *IJSPP* will be an important contributor, our impact on sports will only succeed if new knowledge leads to improved coaching and positive changes in athletes' behavior and practices.

If we succeed with this strategy, we will verify the practical impact of applied research in sports and, at the same time, positively influence our future (scientific) Impact Factor. So, let's close the gap between research and practice to discover new land together.