An REBT-Mindfulness approach to working within the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP)

Data Availability Statement

Non-digital data supporting this study are curated at XXXX Soccer Club.

Abstract

Consultancy with children is rarely reported in sport psychology literature. In light of this, the current case study seeks to outline an age-appropriate approach to support provision for a 10-year-old soccer athlete at an elite soccer academy. The Trainee Sport and Exercise Psychologist utilised a combined Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) and mindfulness-based approach to practice in understanding the athlete's challenges and implemented Psychological Skills Training (PST). Effectiveness of the intervention was evaluated through a modified family-systems approach and player feedback was elicited using an adapted Consultant Effectiveness Form (CEF). Reflection on the intervention details how open-mindedness to service delivery can facilitate the understanding of PST in the early years of sport performance, and could pave the way for future reception and application at later levels.

Keywords: children; academy soccer; performance; mindfulness; enjoyment

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Context

The first author was engaged on a contractual basis at an Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP) Category 1 Soccer Club in the United Kingdom (U.K.) as a Trainee Sport and Exercise Psychologist. She was a British Psychological Society (BPS) Stage 2 Doctoral Trainee with over seven years' experience in applied work where she had focused her attention on elite youth sport over the three most recent years. To add perspective to the work undertaken, the EPPP was introduced in 2012 as a result of a consultation between the Premier League and its clubs, representatives of the Soccer League, the Soccer Association (FA) and other key stakeholders (Premier League, 2020). It is a long-term strategy with the aim of developing more and better home-grown (English) players as it promotes the empowerment of each individual player through a player-led approach across three phases: Foundation (U9 to U11), Youth Development (U12 to U16) and Professional Development (U17 to U23) (Premier League, 2020). In already having a sound evidence base, the first author believed that in working with such a young client group, there was a lot to learn in organically interacting with the children, and felt that this approach would be more appropriate during her time at the club. Additionally, as the first author sees herself as a "hands-on" practitioner, she agrees somewhat with the reasoning of Cotterill (2016) who stated that "pracademic" (practice and academic) positioning presents challenges in understanding "the real-world practitioner context." Consequently, as there are only a few studies concerning Psychological Skills Training (PST) with children (Foster et al., 2016), a detailed account of the first author's adaptive approach to working with this demographic follows. With this, there were no

preconceived notions as to how consultancy would proceed, as the focus was to provide a beneficial service to the player and club by extension.

Philosophy of Practice

The first author sees Psychology as a 'soft science' (Keegan, 2016) and therefore adopts a 'construalist' approach to her practice due to the unique nature of each athlete. In doing this, a typical consultancy involves openness and empathy with a client's story through the exploration of experiences and unique client-theory development to assist them in gaining a better understanding of their world. By this, it is hoped that clients are able to identify and successfully navigate challenges through deliberate thought organisation and analysis. Additionally, in line with the sentiments of Andersen (2000), the first author believes that, "the question is not whether an intervention works or doesn't work. The question is, which interventions, delivered to which athletes, under which circumstances, and in which relational contexts appear to help athletes become more competent… at what they do." (pp. xiv). As such, when working in this setting, she established a "working alliance" focused on authenticity, care and trust (Andersen, 2009) with clients within their immediate environment (e.g., during evenings at soccer training) as she firmly believes that anyone (regardless of age) can achieve optimal performance relative to their ability and aspiration in sport. Equally, in taking mindset into account, she believes in understanding the thought processes of her clients in order to show them how these can affect their behaviour and impact performance, and has therefore sought to present this case utilising general (as opposed to specific; see Turner, 2022, for a full discussion), Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT; Ellis, 1957) to explore the story of one, select young athlete. This story, which was a primary source of information about his adaptive and maladaptive thinking processes (Ellis, 1994) with respect to his performance

development, further influenced the use of PST to promote belief change about this stage within the EPPP Foundation Phase.

Model of Practice

In Sport Psychology, cognitive behavioural approaches heavily influence service provision and often build the foundation for PST in performance enhancement and maintenance. In this respect, Andersen (2009) acknowledges that the latter can be influenced by the CBT-grounded tools that many sport psychology consultants (SPCs) often utilise in listening for adaptive and maladaptive patterns of thinking (cognitions), along with exploring the contingencies for reinforcement and punishment (evaluations of the sport environment), which may then lead to the maintenance of helpful behaviours. Equally, as REBT (Ellis, 1957) is commonly recognised as the original CBT and provides a valuable approach to addressing the causes of emotion and behaviour (Turner, 2016), the first author deemed it to be the most appropriate model for the case presented. REBT posits that it is not events alone, but the beliefs one holds about events that underpin emotional and behavioural reactivity, and further distinguishes between irrational and rational beliefs. Additionally, it is suggested that in response to adverse events, people can react with either healthy or unhealthy emotional and behavioural responses (Turner, 2016), whereby irrational beliefs underpin unhealthy, negative emotions (UNEs) and maladaptive behaviours that can undermine mental wellbeing. As such, one of the chief foci of REBT is to weaken irrational beliefs, strengthen rational beliefs (Turner, 2022).

However, for the current case study, the first author adopted a general approach to REBT, rather than a specific approach to REBT. Indeed, there are actually two REBTs that sit under the REBT umbrella; specific REBT and general REBT (Turner, 2022). In general REBT, we can utilise many strategies to help athletes address all

aspects of the GABCDE framework as proposed by David et al. (2010) including the use of PST techniques as laid out by Anderson (2009) which is often seen as the cornerstone of delivery. The GABCDE framework proposes that irrational beliefs (B) manifest in response to situations or events (A) that block or impede personal goals (G), and trigger emotions and behaviours (C) (Jordana et al., 2020). As such, despite common misconceptions of REBT, one need not solely focus upon deep belief change. That is, REBT adopts a GABCDE framework, through which specific REBT addresses B (irrational beliefs) as the main purpose of the work, whilst general REBT can address all aspects of the framework, not just B. Thus, using general REBT one can apply a broad range of CBT derived techniques aligned with PST, and even mindfulness (e.g., Young et al., 2022). In the current case study, this general REBT approach was necessary in order to address the broader issues that were affecting the athlete.

The use of general REBT is not uncommon in practice, and indeed, one of the first applied REBT studies in sport (Bernard, 1985), evidenced how the basic principles and practice of REBT proved to be suitable for laying the foundation for a mental training programme for athletes. This programme was both psychoeducational and psychotherapeutic, and equipped athletes with cognitive, emotive and behavioural skills. It also assisted some athletes in overcoming sporting stressors by facilitating them with having more positive goal orientations and feelings of happiness (Bernard, 1985). Equally, it has also been shown that the combination of REBT and PST is rewarding in applied practice as the effects of the psychological skills can increase after experiencing a positive shift towards a rational philosophy (Wood & Woodcock, 2018).

For the current case study, the psychological skill applied with general REBT was ‘mindfulness’ (Kabat-Zann, 1990), in part because there was a need to utilise both a somatic and a cognitive approach to improve sport performance within this context, and

in part because the athlete's issues warranted more than just deep belief change as would be common in specific REBT. Traditionally known as a non-judgmental, non-reactive awareness of one's present moment experience (Kabat-Zann, 1990), the utilisation of mindfulness in applied sport psychology practice can facilitate athletes becoming aware of personal thoughts and feelings while enhancing concentration on performance skills and strategies instead of performance outcomes (Pineau, Glass & Kaufman, 2014). Interestingly, according to Young et al. (2022), some scholars, including Albert Ellis, have noted similarities between the teaching of mindfulness and REBT and have suggested that they may have integrative potential (e.g., Ellis, 2005, 2006; Whitfield, 2006). This has been evidenced in other psychology disciplines. For example, a study conducted by Chennille and St. John Walsh (2016) among school-aged children utilised the combination of mindfulness and REBT strategies for attending to the physical, mental and psychosocial aspects of a school-based, health education programme. They utilised "mindful rational living" (p. 72), a term used to describe therapeutic techniques with the principles of REBT and highlighted the similarities between the two approaches due to their foci on self-acceptance and non-judgement of self and others. Additionally, since it is believed that REBT and the contemporary applications of mindfulness have followed relatively similar trajectories since their introduction into Western psychotherapy (Ellis, 1957, 1962; Kabat-Zann, 1982), combining these approaches has been described as "one of the most exciting and potentially productive avenues for future exploration" (Teasdale, Segal & Williams, 2003, p. 160). In this regard, within recent decades in sport and performance psychology, researchers have come to consider that both REBT and mindfulness may have potential to enhance psychological performance within high performance settings (Young et al., 2022). This potential, from an REBT standpoint is seen to benefit high

performing individuals when they hold rational over irrational beliefs, while mindfulness cultivates a mindset of non-judgemental awareness of the present moment which is seen as equally beneficial (Young et al., 2022). The rationale for combining mindfulness with REBT stems from a humanistic drive to serve the athlete's needs, through theoretically consistent eclecticism. That is, methods of change can be adopted from a variety of sources, so long as these sources are theoretically germane (Turner, 2022). As Neenan and Dryden (2010), "REBT is a form of theoretically consistent eclecticism, meaning that it advocates the broad use of techniques, from wherever, but to achieve goals in keeping with REBT theory" (p. 17).

The idea that mindfulness practice may enhance mental performance and improve goal-directed outcomes has already been investigated in sport (*see* Bühlmayer et al., 2017) and as REBT and mindfulness-based approaches have evolved similarly within high performance settings (Young et al., 2022), the current case study will demonstrate how both can be applied in working with a young aspiring soccer athlete. In this respect, it was the view of the first author that mindfulness as the psychological technique would be able to equip the athlete with the ability to focus on the present while playing (A) with reduced worry or frustration about mistakes – past and present (C) or beliefs about future performances (B) or hopes of becoming a professional player (G).

The Case

The first author was hired for the role at a soccer academy on a part-time basis to provide support within her remit as a Trainee Sport and Exercise Psychologist, undertaken in line with the British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct (BPS; 2018). Additionally, as the club and academy operate within a multi-disciplinary framework, any information with respect to players would be communicated to all

199 relevant parties (i.e. coaches, physiotherapists, sport scientists and analysts), which took
200 place during weekly meetings among members of staff. This was the club's policy in
201 facilitating player development as outlined by the EPPP.
202 Consequently, the first author worked with players across all Foundation Phase
203 age groups upon the recommendation of coaches and by using her professional
204 judgement and decision-making (PJDM; Martindale & Collins, 2005) when working
205 with players individually. In doing so, a multitude of factors were considered in
206 intervention planning and delivery as decision-making within that context was heavily
207 focused on the goal of the respective intervention (Martindale & Collins, 2005). As
208 such, on selected evenings, all players' demeanours (e.g., laughing, sulking etc.) were
209 observed as some players mentioned having feelings of "frustration". This was also seen
210 in their body language and heard in the overt self-talk that players engaged in when not
211 "playing well". Equally, permission was sought from coaches to engage with players as
212 she saw fit, and this was always encouraged and facilitated in line with the club's multi-
213 disciplinary framework of support as previously mentioned.
214 Ten-year-old Jesse (pseudonym) was signed to the club from a grassroots
215 programme because coaches were impressed by his skill. However, while on trial,
216 concerns about his attitude were mentioned by coaches as a few episodes of crying and
217 other behaviours (e.g., kicking grass, throwing hands in air) were also displayed.
218 Nevertheless, he was signed and performances though good, were coupled with the
219 usual display of distinctive behaviour, when not performing up to his standard. As a
220 result of this, Jesse was referred to the first author by the Phase coach who had no
221 expectations for provision but felt that he could be supported by the skill-set of the first
222 author. Immediately, the stance taken by Gould (1982) was adopted in acknowledging
223 that the young athlete is not a miniature adult and committed to not assuming that

research on adults would automatically transfer to his case. Additionally, she saw it as an opportunity to understand performance at his age as the voice of the child in amateur sport has been repeatedly marginalised despite the scale of intensity and practice in the sport (Pitchford et al., 2004). Further to this, a study undertaken by Armstrong (2022) showed that the mental skills utilised by Foundation Phase (FP) players are categorised into three main areas: (a) having a focused and positive mindset, (b) remaining positive and (c) maintaining emotional and mental stability. This study also found that the mental qualities of feeling in control, focusing on the present task, viewing difficult situations as challenging and exciting and having positive attitudes and cognitions about performance, for players at this age, were vital (Armstrong, 2022). Take these factors into account, justification for the combination of approaches that was utilised in the current case will presented.

Intake Assessment

During intake, the first author utilised the GABCDE framework (David et al., 2010) framework (see Table 1) to guide conversation in an age-appropriate way to build rapport and to facilitate Jesse expressing himself freely. This was seen to be an extremely important part of the intervention, because it is believed that in the sport of soccer, the voices of children are not heard, even though an understanding of the game from their perspective is noteworthy (Pitchford et al., 2004). With this, in line with the tenets of constualism, the first author sought to gather meaning from Jesse's dialogue along with taking the coaches' description of the matter into account. Throughout intake, it was noted that Jesse put a lot of thought into his game and had very high expectations of himself and where he hoped to be in the future. This emphasis on excellence within the professional academy setting is not uncommon, as Botterill (2005) has previously highlighted that these environments can inspire the irrational need for

achievement which can lead to dysfunction and maladaptive emotional and behavioural responses (Turner et al., 2014). When not playing well, he described himself as becoming “frustrated” and admitted to not enjoying the game as much as he should; he also wanted to become a professional player and stated that this was often his sole focus as he played with that objective in mind. When asked about his “thoughts and feelings”, Jesse went on to identify some negative thoughts, but also shared about how he wants to feel about his future performances and the new feelings that he would like to have. The first author thought that because of Jesse’s age, REBT and its ‘ABCs’ along with their connection to the alphabet, would be ideal for fostering relatedness during the intervention. The alphabet is known by most children, and it was her intention to simplify the process to allow Jesse to become aware of the events that have an impact on his thoughts and behaviour.

There is not much known about utilising REBT within the EPPP Foundation Phase and in seeking to adapt the method to this performance group, the first author thought it fitting to digitise the drawing of Jesse’s primary and secondary irrational beliefs after discussion (Table 1). It was discovered that Jesse had beliefs about his goal of wanting to become a professional player and though this may seem perfectly rational; the success of players reaching the elite level from the Foundation Phase has been quantified at a meagre 0.5% (Wilson, 2015). Taking this into account along with his age and performance level, the first author saw it fit to assist Jesse with weakening his primary irrational belief of needing to become professional and strengthening a more coherent and rational belief (Ellis, 1957), to enable a greater capacity to deal with career adversities (Turner & Barker, 2014). In line with REBT’s ABCs, Jesse was shown through adaptive language and demonstration how his beliefs (B) about his performances (A) underpin his emotions of frustration and anger (C) (Dryden, 2009).

<< TABLE 1 HERE >>

In facilitating an active-directive approach, he was shown his 'GABC(DE)F' intervention plan (see Table 1) on paper to elicit feedback and correction if necessary (Dryden & Neenan, 2015). As the athlete demonstrated his understanding of the "ABCs" by highlighting personal examples during our subsequent discussion, the first author sought to move onto further supporting Jesse with disputing (D) and weakening his secondary beliefs through mindfulness (Kabat-Zann, 1994) education as a means of facilitating emotional regulation. This is because, it has been suggested that mindfulness and CBT, of which REBT is foundational, shares the same principles as metacognitive techniques in that they both "consist of intentional and automatic efforts that individuals devote to controlling their cognitive activities…" (Mellinger, 2010, p. 234). Equally, within the field of counselling psychotherapy, Whitfield (2006) suggested that mindfulness training could help individuals to become more aware of their beliefs at (B) and see the differences in emotional outcomes at (C), which is dependent on their rationality (Young et al., 2022). With this knowledge, the first author hoped that Jesse would recognise that his "musts" at this stage of his performance development were not necessary, and hoped that he would become less frustrated with his performances (A) and improve his confidence while minimizing his worry (E). In this respect, Jesse also expressed that he wanted more frequent feelings of happiness and enjoyment (F). The first author believed that this was important given Jesse's age as she believed that enjoyment in playing his sport was a realistic and helpful emotional aim.

The majority of work with children and mindfulness has been conducted in educational settings with a focus of increasing their capacity to pay attention (e.g., Napoli & Holley, 2005), thus allowing Jesse the opportunity to experience focusing his attention on the only moment within his control; the present. To support this, Cottraux

(2007) defined mindfulness as a mental state resulting from voluntarily focusing one's attention on one's present experience in its sensorial, mental, cognitive and emotional aspects in a non-judgemental way. Thus, 'enjoyment', would occur when he performs "in the moment" without getting upset at his mistakes and accepts that soccer at his age is "just a game." In this regard, it should also be noted that programmes implementing mindfulness with children have shown success in reducing anxiety and disruptive behaviour with improved concentration and control (Feindler, Marriott & Iwaka, 1984; Fluellen, 1996; Ryan, 2000) which when compared to Jesse's case can be highlighted as the performance objectives of the proposed intervention.

The Intervention

When organising REBT interventions, Jordana et al. (2020) has stated that there are different aspects of this that should be considered, there are: (a) content of the sessions; (b) session length; (c) data collection length; (d) participants' organisation; (c) procedure and; (f) effectiveness measures. Considering these, the fundamental goal of REBT is to weaken irrational beliefs and strengthen rational beliefs in order to reduce dysfunctional emotions like unhealthy anxiety and unhealthy anger and increase functional emotions like healthy anxiety and healthy anger (Ellis & Dryden, 1997). Equally, the client is also encouraged to understand that in the face of perceived failure, it is their irrational beliefs (B) that are causing their dysfunctional emotional and behavioural responses (C), and not the event alone (A) (Turner et al., 2015). As such, the client is encouraged to dispute (D) their irrational beliefs and replace them with rational alternatives (E) since the major purpose of disputation in REBT is to help the client to understand that their irrational beliefs are false, illogical and unhelpful (Dryden, 2009). Furthermore, disputation comprises of three main arguments: (1) empirical – is B true or false? (2) logical – is B logical? (3) pragmatic – is B helpful?

Once irrational beliefs have been successfully disputed, rational alternatives are exposed to the same disputation process but are rendered to be true, logical and helpful (Dryden & Branch, 2008; Dryden, 2009).

In REBT, when deciding on the length of the intervention, brief interventions refers to 11 sessions or less, and the use of REBT has been evidenced as an example of best practice for short interventions (Jordana et al., 2020). Indeed, some research has utilised 20-minute duration sessions (Turner & Barker, 2013), and more recently, Bowman and Turner (2022) evidenced the use of single-session REBT with golfers. Contemporary guidelines on using REBT in sport indicates that work can be undertaken in as little as five minutes if the work is focussed and goal directed (Turner, 2022). Additionally, it has been previously shown that that irrational beliefs and cognitive anxiety in sport can be significantly reduced using just three 20-minute face-to-face sessions (see Turner & Barker, 2014) and Jordana et al. (2020) have highlighted the need for practitioners to adopt an educational approach when embarking on the utilisation of REBT in applied practice (Dryden, 2019; Wood, 2017). Equally, Turner et al. (2013) demonstrated this by utilising a 60-minute REBT education workshop in an elite soccer academy setting, and found that this amount of time was helpful in getting players to modify their thoughts and behaviours. The authors stated that enjoyment and engagement with the work delivered was important to them as they believed that athletes (ages 14-18 years) were unlikely to benefit from a workshop that was neither fun nor interesting. Their intervention was also undertaken in an interactive way, inside the changing room, which also contributed to positive perceptions of the workshop, along with a willingness of athletes to recommend it to others (Turner et al., 2014). These details are important to note because even though the research on the use of REBT in sport currently reflects the appropriate testing of core theory and practice, it

does not truthfully reflect the ways in which applied practitioners are required to carry out their work in performance settings (Bowman & Turner, 2022), and since there are no previous publications of an REBT intervention being undertaken within an EPPP Foundation Phase setting, it is hoped that this report will provide a just account of its nature. Moreover, Jordana et al. (2020) also reiterated the importance of communications style and the working alliance of the practitioner with the athlete and saw this as critical to the effectiveness of psychoeducation interventions (e.g. Bernard & Dryden, 2019; Wood, Mack, & Turner, 2020). Since, the first author undertook her work with athletes primarily between 9-12 years old, age being the mitigating factor in this case, a brief intervention was seen to be the most fitting as the benefits of this type of intervention was seen in the short-term.

In this regard, the current intervention was delivered over a five-week period at the side of the soccer pitch, with one 10-minute session weekly; session five was set aside for evaluation and feedback. This means that the total intervention time for Jesse was 40 minutes. This was due to the time constraints of the Academy environment and the hopes of providing Jesse with brief, impactful sessions using a skill that he would remember and employ. Likewise, in seeking to be effective and keeping Jesse on task and thereby providing more productive sessions (Visek, Harris & Blom, 2006b), the first author also managed time efficiently by ensuring that her services were not detracting from his primary purpose of playing soccer and with such, there was a minimum one-week break between sessions. This was also done to support the club's multi-disciplinary philosophy and effectively manage his limited attention span (Visek, Harris & Blom, 2009) which was exhibited in his constant looking away to practice during sessions.

Sessions were short and direct in adhering to best practice when undertaking

work with children (Tremayne, 1995) as the first author did not want Jesse to miss out on his valuable training. This aspect of time management is also important to consider as some practitioners may only get one session with an athlete to help them, due to numerous mitigating factors, and REBT has always been flexible in this regard (Bowman & Tuner, 2022). To add to this, previous authors have suggested that the therapeutic benefits of REBT can be derived in as short as one-to-face session (Dryden, 2016) and the argument for brief REBT as opposed to long-term REBT have been proven to be worthy when performance issues are presented in non-clinical settings (Turner & Moore 2016). Thus, before commencing the process, the amount of and time allocated to sessions was agreed with Jesse, because it was already known that he was eager to play soccer and the first author did not want the support provided to be seen as a hindrance to that. Additionally, as it is known that the brief approach holds clear value to practitioners in sport as there is a need for time-efficient approaches (Turner et al., 2020), the first author hopes that by adopting, developing and testing her approach at this level, this case can be used to further develop applied practice as encouraged by Bowman and Turner (2022) within the Foundation Phase environment.

Session 1. During the first session with Jesse, 'mindfulness' was conceptualised by showing him a cartoon drawing of a person who had a "mind full" vs. his companion who was "mindful". This was used as a visual aid to show him what it looked like when someone's focus was elsewhere as opposed to focusing on what is directly ahead. We then discussed his long-term goal of becoming a professional player and looked at the length of time that it may take for him to reach to that level. In asking him about whether this was supported by empirical evidence (given his current registration within the Foundation Phase), whether it was logical (given his age) or helpful (to have such fixation on a long-term goal), he agreed that it was neither of them. In that short

399 moment, he acknowledged that it might not be ideal for him to think so far ahead.
400 Immediately after, we began to discuss some of the things that may be useful for him to
401 focus on in the current training session and ended with a video clip about being 'present
402 in the moment'. After viewing, we discussed the relevance of the video and he stated
403 that he does not play 'in the moment'. We then revisited his belief, "I want to, and
404 therefore, I have to play well" and replaced it with a more rational one of, "If I want to
405 perform well, I will have to play in the moment". We further concluded with his
406 commitment to not overthink his performances and to not focus on his long-term goal of
407 professional sport. It should be noted that the first author accepted the suggestion of
408 Vernon (2004) in providing Jesse with a concrete example (e.g., photo) of mindfulness
409 as a theoretical concept whilst simplifying her language so it was clear, concise and
410 direct (Evans & Slater, 2014) while undertaking this session.
411 **Session 2.** The second session included the first author issuing Jesse a
412 'Mindfulness Challenge' (Appendix A) where he was instructed to play without being
413 critical of himself, e.g., when he makes a bad play. Consequently, if he made a mistake
414 and found himself overthinking, he was instructed to not "worry". He was also
415 instructed to continue playing and focus on his "next move" (Ekvall, 2019), which
416 would give him the best opportunity to prepare for another moment of the game. The
417 coach was also informed of this challenge and was encouraged to provide feedback to
418 the first author on Jesse's behaviour in comparison to that stated to that initially stated.
419 After completing the challenge, at the end of the training session, Jesse's feedback was
420 also elicited, and he stated that he enjoyed the current training session a little more than
421 the last. We then revisited his irrational belief, "I want to, and so I must get positive
422 feedback from coaches whenever I play", since he always believed that his perceived
423 success in training or a game was contingent on this. We then replaced this irrational

belief with a more rational one of, “I want to play well and receive positive feedback from coaches, but it is okay if I don’t”. One could argue that the challenge along with another rational belief, provided him with a different focus, but the first author believed that any other focus apart from that of playing well to become professional and needing coaches feedback to validate that, was helpful. Nonetheless, coaches also provided their feedback at the end of training on a slight change in his behaviour in relation to the effectiveness of the challenge. It was stated to the first author at the time, that he was smiling more.

Session 3. In the following session, to reinforce mindfulness and the two new rational beliefs, coaches provided feedback to Jesse about the improvement in his behaviour. As he valued their opinion, the first author believed that this information would be useful in sustaining this type of positive behaviour. Jesse was then left to play on his own free will and was told to feedback to the first author what his training experience was like after receiving positive feedback from coaches. After the training session, as there was not much time, he was asked to do so at the start of the next session. However, it must be noted that at this point, while being observed in the training session, there was an overall change in Jesse’s behaviour as in the past, he was usually seen to be fretting and visibly upset while performing.

Session 4. In the fourth session, we picked up on the high note of the last session and Jesse was then offered autonomy in “Choosing to be Mindful” (Appendix B). After providing feedback on his positive experiences of reinforcement, he was then asked by the first author if mindfulness was something that he thought was beneficial to his performances and was offered the opportunity to decide if he would continue to use it in training and games. We then explored his final irrational belief of, “I want to, and so I must become a professional player”, which was agreed to be a goal too distal to be

deemed empirical, logical and pragmatic. This was replaced with a more rational belief of, “I want to become a professional player, but that will take time”. He further supported this by offering a past performance of typically giving up (stopping mid-play) when displeased with his performance and making a verbal commitment going forward to “letting that [mistake] go” and continuing to play. As a lot of our discussions during this time were focused on “learning from mistakes”, acknowledging that soccer is “just a game” and enjoyment, it was deemed by the first author that he had understood the purpose of the work undertaken and was released to join the session with other players.

Due to the overall improvement in Jesse’s behaviour, after five sessions, support was paused and the fifth was reserved for verbal evaluation through adaptation of the language of the Consultant Effective Questionnaire (CEF; Partington & Orlick, 1987). This measure was utilised to elicit feedback from Jesse with respect to the service provided and his performance. It should be noted at this time that the first author was working with a number of players across the Foundation Phase and thus had to set limits on support provision in order to manage her time effectively. Further details on this process are outlined below.

Evaluation

Documenting effectiveness is a standard practice in Sport Psychology (Anderson et al., 2002; Poczwardowski et al., 1998) and thus, the final session included an evaluation of the intervention by utilising a family-systems approach (Blom et al., 2013) and an adapted version of the Consultant Effectiveness Form (CEF; Partington & Orlick, 1987) for Jesse’s understanding. Traditionally, though a family-systems approach involves a player-centered and coach and parent-supported framework, for the purposes of this consultancy, coaches were the main point of contact for parents. Discussion on work undertaken by the first author was reserved until each player’s

474 academy review. This was established prior to consultancy as the first author had the
475 opportunity to address some of the common concerns of coaches (Blom et al., 2013) in
476 the preceding months and this agreement was made among all parties. As it is widely
477 known that establishing a solid coach-practitioner relationship is vital to being effective
478 (Barker, McCarthy & Harwood, 2001), the rapport built with coaches proved to be the
479 first author's greatest asset as it allowed for the establishment of respect, trust and
480 satisfaction (Harwood, 2008) in relation to Jesse's consultancy outcomes (Table 1).
481 Additionally, coaches' involvement in mental training is somewhat essential to the
482 effectiveness of consultancy due to their influence on achievement (e.g., Harwood &
483 Swain, 2001; Krane et al., 1997) and this was seen through their positive reinforcement
484 at specified intervals during the process.
485 The first author was aware that youth athletes should typically participate in
486 sport for fun (Blom et al., 2013) thus making it one of the main outcomes for the
487 intervention along with Jesse's enjoyment of the consultancy process as an active
488 partner (Orton, 1997). This was done by incorporating game-like experiences as a
489 means of teaching him the importance of mindfulness so that he was able to reap the
490 benefits of its tactical transference to performance (Visek et al., 2009). At this time, it
491 must also be highlighted that transparency was crucial to the work that was undertaken
492 and was displayed through active communication of the first author with Jesse and the
493 coaches; Jesse was also made aware of their facilitation. In this respect, Jesse rated the
494 intervention and interaction with the first author positively throughout consultancy and
495 stated at the end that he was less frustrated and more content with his performances. He
496 also indicated that he had decided to stop worrying about his mistakes and had chosen
497 to learn from them. Subsequently, when asked about the way in which the work was
498 undertaken, coaches were also satisfied with the length of time and relevance to the

499 sport (Visek et al., 2009).

500 The first author weighed her reflexivity as an equal contributor to the evaluative
501 process and therefore focused on the Jesse's self-reporting on the work conducted along
502 with his changed behaviour. More specifically, with a construalist philosophy (Keegan,
503 2016), his experience was at the core of the process and it was shown over a short
504 period of time that he was able to shift his long-term and somewhat irrational goal of
505 becoming a professional player to a short-term and more rational one of enjoyment.
506 Though the overall approach may have shied away from traditional theoretical
507 mechanisms and bodies of evidence, including the allocation of time, it did allow Jesse
508 to reinterpret his reality in a way that resulted in a solution to his displeasure with
509 performance (Keegan, 2016).

510 **Reflection**

511 As reflection is an adopted attitude of the first author (Anderson et al., 2004),
512 she utilised Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1988) to provide a fair, transparent and
513 interpersonal account of her support provision. The guide, which comprises of six
514 phases includes:

515 (1) Description – What happened?

516 (2) Feelings – What was thought about and feelings about this?

517 (3) Evaluation – What was good and bad about the experience?

518 (4) Analysis – What sense can be made about the situation?

519 (5) Conclusion – What else could have been done?

520 (6) Action Plan – What can be done if it happens again?

521 **Description.** At an EPPP Category 1 Soccer Club, the first author was engaged
522 part-time as a Trainee Sport and Exercise Psychologist to provide support for players
523 registered within the Foundation Phase. On this occasion, coaches referred a player by

524 the name of Jesse and a constualist philosophy was adopted to implement a combined
525 REBT-mindfulness intervention after intake was undertaken. This was done through the
526 use of PJDM while taking into account the athlete's age and the importance of
527 understanding his performance issue from his perspective. Jesse had a long-term goal of
528 becoming a professional player, which caused him to think negatively about his
529 performances and resulted in episodes of observable frustration. These episodes further
530 impacted his performance and after the formulation of his 'ABCs', he began to
531 understand how his irrational beliefs about becoming a professional player was
532 impacting his performances and made a verbal commitment to learn from his mistakes
533 in the hopes of enjoying the sport. After 40 minutes of intervention time across five
534 weeks, worked was proven to be effective based on triangulation among the first author,
535 coaches and the athlete and through the latter's self-reporting. The first author also
536 considered reflexivity in examining how the consultancy aligned with the practice
537 philosophy and found that though CBT may align more with certainism, the role of the
538 athlete as an active partner (Orton, 1997) in consultancy cannot be taken for granted.
539 **Feelings.** It is known that a certainist philosophy directly contrasts that of
540 construalism with respect to theoretical application (Keegan, 2016) but as the first
541 author has made a commitment to practicing CBT for several years, the necessity of
542 flexibility in methods has been taking into consideration with the age of the athlete.
543 Indeed, it is the belief of the first author that an attempt to teach another abstract
544 construct (e.g., motivation) in this case may have led to the athlete's disinterest but due
545 to the relevance of mindfulness in educational literature (e.g., Napoli & Holley, 2005),
546 the intervention for the age of the athlete was deemed appropriate. As this was also one
547 of the first author's youngest clients being introduced to sport psychology for the first
548 time, the first author was cognizant of the need to leave a positive first impression. This

549 was seen in what was deemed to be age-appropriate time management in the event of
550 future work continuance as was possible with role requirements.
551 **Evaluation.** The good thing about the experience was that the first author
552 demonstrated the fineness of the line between certainist and construlist philosophies,
553 models and methods and equally that between CBT and Humanistic therapies. This case
554 study also demonstrated why service delivery to children does not need to be limited to
555 a specific paradigm. Specifically, the work has demonstrated how mindfulness in the
556 psychosomatic context of self-regulation can be taught to young athletes as a mental
557 skill without a focus on mediation as traditionally understood. It must also be noted that
558 the first author worked with several players at a time and time management of
559 consultancies was essential to ensure that there was equal commitment across age
560 groups, which further demonstrates the dynamic nature of the work, sport and
561 environment.
562 **Analysis.** Success of the consultancy was evidenced as the athlete and coaches
563 reported the outcome of enjoyment. Whether Jesse continues to enjoy the sport in the
564 future will entirely depend on his mindset towards his registration at the academy and
565 the reinforcement of the consultancy work by coaches. Due to the process of
566 triangulation, evaluation was done taking relevant stakeholders into account, which also
567 evidenced coaches' knowledge and understanding of Jesse's performance challenges
568 and the purpose of the intervention that was undertaken. Considering Jesse's age and
569 that of other players within the FB, it is the belief of the first author that the
570 triangulation process [or quadrangulation rather] should also include the views of
571 parents to elicit a deeper understanding of the issue. In fact, eliciting a greater
572 understanding of players' dissatisfaction with performances and how it may be
573 influenced by parents is indeed necessary. It is known that young players within the FP

574 at academies across the UK are under pressure to consistently perform at a high level
575 (Richardson et al., 2004) but to date, an in-depth investigation into these factors within
576 this age group is yet to be undertaken.

577 Also, one has to reflect on the practice of REBT within the context of the case.
578 General REBT was adopted with the client, whereby beliefs (B) are not the sole focus
579 of the work, compared to specific REBT whereby beliefs (B) are the chief focus.
580 Therefore, compared to much of the REBT in sport literature, this paper offers a more
581 nuanced use of REBT. This has some downsides, and the practitioner does adopt some
582 techniques that might not be recommended in REBT. For example, in session 2 the
583 athlete is instructed to not worry if he makes mistakes. This is not in line with REBT
584 per se. In REBT we would encourage the athlete to experience functional anxiety that
585 includes thinking about the right things for their performance, rather than avoiding
586 thoughts and feelings. Also, readers might be surprised that the belief "I want to, and
587 therefore, I have to play well" is countered with "If I want to perform well, I will have
588 to play in the moment". It is important to understand that not every "must" or "have to"
589 is irrational. We can consider "If I want to perform well, I will have to play in the
590 moment" to be a conditional must, whereby the demand follows on logically from the
591 want. This belief is also a form of contingency intention (if-then) that places a
592 controllable action after a desired goal.

593 **Conclusion.** With the already published work on psychological skills in youth
594 soccer (e.g., 5Cs; Harwood & Anderson, 2015), it can be assumed that the mindfulness
595 utilised in this consultancy could be substituted with Harwood and Anderson's (2015)
596 'control' except in this case, there was no emphasis on Jesse utilising mental
597 preparation routines for future moments of the game (e.g., breaks in play). The
598 intervention of REBT's disputation and mindfulness in this work sought replace Jesse's

irrational beliefs with rational ones to assist him more with focusing on the present moment, which was crucial to his "next [performance] move" (Ekvall, 2019). This was also done considering the collaborative work that was undertaken with coaches in the best interest of the athlete and overall team performance.

Action Plan. In the continuance of the first author's work at the elite youth level, a contrualist approach will be adopted when working individually with athletes unless athletes identify specific performance-related issues. The former is necessary to generate an in-depth understanding of the client's needs and is essential to providing tailored support and especially so when seeking to teach mental skills to a young athlete. By doing this, a consultant has the opportunity to shape an athlete's understanding of sport psychology and leave a positive impression with that consultancy experience.

Future Recommendations

Though it is believed that the behaviours of significant others (coaches, parents and peers) are relevant to early sport performers (Keegan et al., 2009), young soccer players speaking on their experiences are yet to be heard (Pitchford et al., 2004) and this case study has outlined why their voices should be amplified. The academy environment is competitive and players at the lowest performance level do feel pressure to excel. Through this consultancy experience, the first author has learned first-hand some of the emotional experiences of players and by committing to understanding an individual experience, created a shift in a performance mindset with the replacement of irrational beliefs for rational one. As practitioners, it should be seen as a duty to acknowledge, accept and understand clients, however young and provide the best possible support regardless of philosophy as it has been shown that adaptation of such has the potential to yield benefits in the service delivery outlined. As such, it is

suggested that support within the EPPP Foundation Phase be revisited to better understand how players feel about performance, as there is a preconceived notion that enjoyment should be most important to players. Though true, this is not always the case. By doing this, delivery at introductory levels will become more age-appropriate thereby making the process of mental skills development and performance at the foundational level enjoyable and beneficial to athletes.

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Table 1. Jesse's ABC's including 'Intervention Plan

G (Goal)	**A** (Activation)	**B** (Beliefs)	**C** (Consequence/ Behaviours)	**D** (Disputing) ***INTERVENTION***	**E** (Effect)	**F** (Feelings)
To become a professional soccer athlete	Not playing well in training and games	*"I want to, and therefore, I have to play well"* *"I want to, and so I must get positive feedback from coaches whenever I play"* *"I want to, and so I must become a professional player"*	Frustration Anger	*"I will learn from my mistakes."* *"It's just a game."* *"I will enjoy every game that I play."* **Notes: A general focus on enjoyment without a fixation on future opportunities or long-term goals.** **MINDFULNESS**	Be more confident Not worrying about performances/outcomes	Happiness Enjoyment