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Developing Team Resilience: A Season-long Study of Psychosocial Enablers and Strategies  
in a High-Level Sports Team

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## 1 Abstract

2 *Objectives:* Previous research exploring team resilience has advanced our definitional,  
3 conceptual and theoretical understanding of this construct in elite sport. Although more is  
4 known about the psychosocial processes that underpin the resilient characteristics of sports  
5 teams, less is known about the contextual enablers that stimulate these mechanisms and the  
6 associated pathways to team resilience. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore the  
7 psychosocial enablers and strategies that promote the development of team resilience within a  
8 high-level sport team.

9 *Design and method:* Through prolonged fieldwork, a season-long ethnography (11 months)  
10 was conducted. The sample consisted of a leading English national league-winning semi-  
11 professional rugby union team ( $n = 27$  participants). Multiple data collection methods were  
12 employed (i.e., observation, interviewing, field notes, reflexive diary) as part of a holistic  
13 ethnographic approach. An iterative process of content data analysis was employed to  
14 identify key themes.

15 *Results:* Findings revealed five categories comprising multiple practical strategies, actions,  
16 and enablers for team resilience development: Inspiring, motivating, and challenging team  
17 members to achieve performance excellence; developing a team regulatory system based on  
18 ownership and responsibility; cultivating a team identity and togetherness based on a selfless  
19 culture; exposing the team to challenging training and unexpected/difficult situations; and  
20 promoting enjoyment and keeping a positive outlook during stressors. Cultural expressions  
21 and folk terms were identified to illuminate the context of the ethnography.

22 *Conclusions:* This study advanced team resilience research in sport by identifying key  
23 psychosocial strategies throughout a season as part of building team resilience. The findings  
24 provide practitioners with a platform for creating team resilience interventions in sport.

25 *Keywords:* culture, development, ethnography, excellence, group, performance

1 Developing Team Resilience: A Season-long Study of Psychosocial Enablers and Strategies  
2 in a High-Level Sports Team

3 The scientific study of teams and group dynamics is an intriguing topic for sport  
4 psychology researchers and practitioners. In a review of dynamic group environments in  
5 sport and exercise, Eys, Bruner, and Martin (2019) presented two reasons why the study of  
6 group dynamics is important. First, the pervasiveness of groups (i.e., the extensiveness of  
7 team and group sport), and second, the central role of relationships within groups (i.e., the  
8 need to belong) and its potential positive (e.g., friendship) and negative influence (e.g., fear  
9 of rejection) on cognitions and emotions. The advancement of knowledge of team  
10 psychology in competitive sport is also essential in better understanding the processes that  
11 underpin collective functioning that precedes optimal team performance in a dynamic,  
12 competitive environment (Beauchamp & Eys, 2014). Kleinert et al. (2012) discussed a  
13 number of well documented scientific constructs associated with positive team outcomes  
14 including cohesion (Carron, Widmeyer, & Brawley, 1985), team roles (Eys, Beauchamp, &  
15 Bray, 2006), and team efficacy and potency (Gully, Incalcaterra, Joshi, & Beubien, 2002).  
16 However, Kleinert et al. (2012) and others (see e.g., Martin, Bruner, Eys, & Spink, 2014)  
17 have also argued that several challenges remain in this area such as the general  
18 underrepresentation of team-level psychology, the need for a greater variety of team  
19 psychology perspectives (cf. Eccles & Tran, 2012), and more investigations which reflect  
20 'real-world' practice needs. One particular need concerns a team's ability to overcome  
21 adversity and avoid its potentially harmful effects (e.g., poor morale, low prosocial  
22 behaviour, chronic performance slumps).

23 Since the relational fabric of teams is fundamental to group functioning,  
24 understanding how to support teams to withstand shared experiences of adversity and  
25 maintain effective collective functioning offers practical appeal for researchers and

1 practitioners. This topic has been recently addressed through the study of team resilience  
2 (see, for a review, Morgan, Fletcher, & Sarkar, 2017). Emanating from other psychology  
3 disciplines such as organizational behaviour (cf. Blatt, 2009, West, Patera, & Carsten, 2009)  
4 and occupational health psychology (cf. Bennett, Aden, Broome, Mitchell, & Rigdon, 2010),  
5 team resilience has emerged as an “intriguing new subject” (Eys et al., 2019, para. 3) and a  
6 new scientific construct in sport psychology research (Strauss & Ntoumanis, 2015). In other  
7 areas of psychology, researchers have proposed that team resilience can be developed  
8 through structured training programmes and interventions via various strategies and actions  
9 (Alliger, Cerasoli, Tannenbaum, & Vessey, 2015; Amarel, Fernandes, & Varajão, 2015). It is,  
10 therefore, somewhat surprising, that seeking a better understanding of team resilience and  
11 recognizing its importance in sport has been overlooked until relatively recently (Decroos et  
12 al., 2017; Galli, 2016; Morgan, Fletcher, & Sarkar, 2013, 2015, 2017; Yukelson & Weinberg,  
13 2016).

14         In the first known study of team resilience in sport, Morgan et al. (2013) reported  
15 findings that defined and characterized team resilience in elite sport teams. Team resilience  
16 was defined as “a dynamic, psychosocial process which protects a group of individuals from  
17 the potential negative effect of the stressors they collectively encounter. It comprises of  
18 processes whereby team members use their individual and combined resources to positively  
19 adapt when experiencing adversity” (Morgan et al., 2013, p. 552). Four resilient  
20 characteristics of elite sport teams emerged from the study: group structure (i.e., conventions  
21 that shape group norms and values), mastery approaches (i.e., shared attitudes and behaviours  
22 that promote an emphasis on team improvement), social capital (i.e., the existence of high  
23 quality interactions and caring relationships within the team), and collective efficacy (i.e., the  
24 team’s shared beliefs in its ability to perform a task).

25         To better understand the psychosocial processes underpinning team resilience,

1 Morgan et al. (2015) subsequently conducted the second known study of team resilience in  
2 elite sport using narrative analyses of the autobiographies of eight members of the 2003  
3 England rugby union World Cup winning team. Five psychosocial processes were revealed:  
4 transformational leadership (i.e., leaders of teams employing inspirational, personal, and  
5 emotional approaches with team members during stressors); shared team leadership (i.e.,  
6 distributing team leadership to enhance wider accountability during stressors); team learning  
7 (i.e., acquiring and acting on new knowledge following setbacks); social identity (i.e.,  
8 building a strong, distinctive team identity to bolster team members during stressors); and,  
9 positive emotions (i.e., promoting humour and banter during difficult situations). Overall,  
10 Morgan et al. (2015) described team resilience as a dynamic process that fluctuates over time  
11 in accordance with the stressors that the team is encountering and the stage of the team's  
12 development.

13         The growth in team resilience research in elite sport over the last five years or so has  
14 generated clearer definitional and conceptual clarity. However, understanding how team  
15 resilience can be practically developed remains a captivating topic for researchers and those  
16 working with teams. Indeed, at the individual level, researchers have discussed how  
17 psychological resilience can be developed in sport performers (see Fletcher & Sarkar, 2016a)  
18 with the aim of providing practitioners with sound information (e.g., evidence-based  
19 strategies) about developing resilience that is immediately applicable to their work (see, e.g.,  
20 Fletcher & Sarkar's, 2016b, mental fortitude training program). While existing sport  
21 psychology research certainly points to potential ways of enhancing team resilience (e.g.,  
22 profiling a team's resilient characteristics), the identification of evidence-based practical  
23 strategies to improve team resilience requires specific investigation. In their discussion of  
24 future research directions, Morgan et al. (2015) proposed that "creative qualitative  
25 approaches such as ethnography offer intriguing possibilities to study 'first-hand' the

1 underlying team resilience mechanisms . . . and how they are developed (p. 76)”. Such an  
2 approach could provide a valuable ‘vantage point’ from which to capture the strategies and  
3 actions used to improve team resilience in a team sport context. Furthermore, longitudinal  
4 research conducted over the cycle of a team’s existence would advance our knowledge of its  
5 temporal, unfolding nature (Morgan et al., 2017).

6 In summary, research investigating team resilience in elite sport has begun to  
7 describe what resilient teams ‘look like’ (i.e., their characteristics) and how they function  
8 (i.e., their processes). However, less is known about the psychosocial enablers and cues that  
9 stimulate such mechanisms and the associated pathways to team resilience (Morgan et al.,  
10 2017; Wagstaff, Sarkar, Davidson, & Fletcher, 2017). Advancing knowledge of this area is a  
11 pivotal phase in developing an evidence-based understanding of impactful interventions in  
12 team sport contexts. The purpose of this study was, therefore, to explore the enablers and  
13 strategies that promote the development of team resilience within a high-level sport team. To  
14 effectively address this aim, we believe that an immersive, longitudinal, and prolonged  
15 approach to inquiry is needed. Such methods should enhance sensitivity to the contextual and  
16 subtle psychosocial dynamics that likely characterise team resilience development.

## 17 **Method**

### 18 **Research Design and Ethnographic Inquiry**

19 This study adopted an interpretive approach guided by a relativist ontology and a  
20 subjectivist, constructivist epistemology. Specifically, we believe that there are multiple  
21 interpretations and subjectivist aspects of group environments that influences psychosocial  
22 processes and knowledge creation (cf. Burke, 2016; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Since  
23 team resilience is described as a dynamic, psychosocial process (Morgan et al., 2013, 2015),  
24 an investigation of its underlying mechanisms requires a methodological approach that  
25 facilitates in-depth study of a psychosocial setting. Ethnography was selected as a particularly

1 appropriate method to address the range of collective actions and enablers employed in a  
2 'natural' setting over an extended period (cf. Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Moreover, the  
3 variety of data collection methods associated with ethnography (e.g., prolonged fieldwork,  
4 observation, informal interviews) can illuminate the complexity of psychosocial processes in  
5 teams (cf. Rock, 2001).

## 6 **Sample**

7 Purposive sampling was primarily employed to select a case appropriate for a study of  
8 team resilience in competitive sport. Initially, a number of teams were considered as cases for  
9 the study based on the following criteria: evidence of encountering team adversity and  
10 positively adapting to stressors over time in competitive sport. While the sampling was  
11 primarily based on a purposive approach, there was also a practical and convenient element  
12 due to the aforementioned nature of ethnography. Rugby union was selected as an appropriate  
13 sport for the present study and was used to extend team resilience research in this sport  
14 (Morgan et al., 2015). Specifically, rugby union is a dynamic collision sport requiring high  
15 levels of interaction and coordination that presents numerous structural and tactical pressure  
16 situations. Based on reviews of potential cases (e.g., researching their performance history,  
17 reputation), four clubs were 'shortlisted'. Several coaches and managers were consulted  
18 about each team's suitability for a study of team resilience. Eventually, the sample case  
19 selected for this study was a leading semi-professional rugby union team ranked in the top 50  
20 clubs in England with a national reputation for success and for developing players and  
21 coaches who have progressed to a professional and elite level. To assist further with the  
22 judgement about the appropriateness of the sample, the views of one former Head Coach of  
23 the team and athletes who possessed detailed knowledge of the club were sought. In the  
24 previous seven years prior to this study, the team retained a strong national reputation for  
25 performance while experiencing performance slumps, relegation, a severe disciplinary

1 incident, frequent changes to coaching personnel, and a particularly difficult period involving  
2 a Head Coach dispute.

3       **Team.** The team competed in the English Rugby Football Union National League.  
4 During the season under investigation, the team won their league and they were promoted to  
5 the third tier of English rugby. Despite this success, the team suffered setbacks including  
6 defeats to lower ranked opposition, fluctuating morale, injuries to key players, and disruption  
7 of momentum due to adverse weather conditions. The team (including coaches) consisted of  
8 27 participants who ranged in age between 20 and 57 years ( $M = 27.6$ ,  $SD = 9.0$ ). Playing  
9 experience in the team ranged between 1 and 9 years ( $M = 2.4$ ,  $SD = 2.5$ ). Two players were  
10 former professionals and four had national representative honours at under 19 and under 21  
11 age groups. All players were British except one who was Australian.

## 12 **Procedure**

13       Institutional ethical approval was granted prior to the study. Before the investigation,  
14 two informal meetings were held with the Head Coach to explain the purpose of the research.  
15 The first author had previously met some players and coaches, which helped to build  
16 relationships. The Head Coach introduced the first author to the squad at the start of a  
17 preseason training session. Participants were given hard copy information sheets about the  
18 research and all team members provided informed consent to take part in the study.

## 19 **Data Collection**

20       The first author was knowledgeable of rugby union and an experienced team  
21 resilience researcher. This knowledge was used to formulate foreshadowed problems  
22 (Delamont, 2007) or “guiding hypotheses” (Gobo, 2008, p. 88) that are commonly employed  
23 in ethnography (Gobo, 2008). This provided an initial broad focus for the study. For example,  
24 referring to guiding areas of the team resilience literature (cf. Morgan et al., 2015), a broad  
25 framework was formulated to identify potential enablers and strategies that enhance a team’s

1 resilience while remaining open-minded and flexible about new ideas that could emerge  
2 during the ethnography. The following data collection methods were employed during the 11-  
3 month study: observation; field notes/reflective diary; and, interviews. While these are  
4 described separately here for ease of the reader, data collection was conducted as part of a  
5 holistic ethnographic approach (Mannay & Morgan, 2015).

6       **Observation.** Observations were conducted three days per week between 2 and 8  
7 hours each day. This occurred in team situations including training, pre-match routines, team  
8 selection meetings, travelling to competitions, and during matches. Initially, observations  
9 provided context for the team's operation, language, and patterns of behaviour (cf. Fetterman,  
10 2010). Later, observations narrowed towards specific team resilience incidents (e.g.,  
11 setbacks). Throughout, a "habitual presence" (Krane & Baird, 2005, p. 94) was maintained,  
12 not only to collect data but also to display commitment to the team. For example, during poor  
13 weather, the first author attended training to show the same commitment as expected by team  
14 members.

15       **Field notes and reflexive diary.** Field notes consisted of oral and written records of  
16 incidents, events, documents, and unusual occurrences. Field notes were composed on a  
17 regular basis immediately after observations. They included electronic diary entries, oral  
18 records using a digital voice recorder, and handwritten notes. Raw notes were transferred to a  
19 formal written field log and imported into NVivo 10 software for organizational purposes.  
20 Concurrently, a separate reflexive journal was kept to maintain an analytical distance and to  
21 review theoretical ideas (Delamont, 2007). Specifically, a reflexive journal was used to  
22 record personal thoughts, reactions, and questions about encounters and interactions with  
23 participants. Audio recordings were completed immediately after episodes and interactions  
24 and later written up in an electronic diary. The process of completing this diary helped to  
25 stimulate self-awareness, criticality, and flexible thinking during data collection

1 (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

2         **Interviews.** Ethnographic interviewing explores the meanings that participants  
3 ascribe to events in their social setting, expressed in their own language (Roulston, 2010).  
4 Unstructured, semi-structured, and spontaneous ‘ethnographic conversations’ were employed  
5 (Silk, 2005). Unstructured and informal interviews were conducted during routine moments  
6 using broad questions (e.g., how did the team feel about the defeat?). These techniques built  
7 rapport and provided insight about particular episodes (Berg & Lune, 2016). Everyday ‘folk’  
8 terms were identified to capture the cultural meanings and expressions of team resilience  
9 development. Finally, ten formal semi-structured interviews were conducted with team  
10 members considered influential for the team’s resilience (e.g., Head Coach, senior players),  
11 which ranged between 55 to 88 minutes. Formal interviews explored specific enablers, cues,  
12 and strategies that promoted the team’s resilience based on observations and reflections  
13 during setbacks. To capture the temporal nature of the team’s resilience, interviews were  
14 conducted between months seven and ten of the investigation following the first half of the  
15 season. The nature of the interviews were shaped by an ethnographic approach where  
16 sufficient rapport was developed for an open exchange of views to explore participants’  
17 meanings and experiences of their team’s resilience development (cf. Heyl, 2001). Initial  
18 interview questions were of a general nature (e.g., “Can you tell me about what progress you  
19 feel the team has made this season?”) before moving onto more specific focus on the team’s  
20 resilience development (e.g., “A few weeks ago, I remember Simon and David saying that the  
21 team felt quite different [positive/a buzz] this year that’s made a difference during setbacks.  
22 What enabled this? How was this supported?”, “Following the period where there was a  
23 performance slump, can you tell me what action was taken? (why?)”, “Could you tell me  
24 specifically how this was developed? (e.g., how, who, what steps)?”. Interviews were  
25 conducted at the club before, during, or after training.

## 1 **Data Analysis**

2           Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) argued that ethnographic data analysis is not a  
3 distinct stage of research; rather, it commences prior to fieldwork and continues informally  
4 and formally throughout the research process. Data analysis consisted of an iterative process  
5 of idea-formation and theme-building (Fetterman, 2010). To illustrate, during data collection,  
6 field notes and the reflexive diary were studied to form initial thoughts and patterns. *In vivo*  
7 codes directly from participants' discourse were also used (e.g., "buzz about the place").  
8 Memo-making and annotations helped structure these thoughts and initial analytic focus by  
9 elaborating codes. These codes were compared over time (e.g., using comparisons of  
10 observations, field notes, reflexive diary) and across situations (e.g., setbacks). All written  
11 and oral records were transcribed and imported into NVivo 10 software to assist with data  
12 management. Repeated readings and reflections of recurrent patterns of data were completed  
13 with a specific focus on 'development', 'strategies', 'actions', and 'enablers' that facilitated  
14 team resilience during stressors. Data were content analyzed through coding and  
15 interpretation of these patterns (Fetterman, 2010). Key themes were eventually generated  
16 through an iterative process of memoing, open coding, triangulation of evidence, inductive  
17 reasoning and drawing on theoretical and conceptual ideas (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, &  
18 Lofland, 2006). The first author also held regular dialogue with the co-authors who acted as  
19 critical friends throughout the investigation to 'challenge' observations and ideas by playing  
20 'devil's advocate'. This process encouraged reflexivity and recognition of multiple  
21 perspectives and interpretations (cf. Smith & McGannon, 2018).

## 22 **Methodological Integrity**

23           In terms of reviewing and judging the quality of qualitative research and  
24 demonstrating that the claims made from the analysis are warranted, concerns exist regarding  
25 scholars that "frequently utilize inflexible sets of procedures and provide contradictory

1 feedback when evaluating acceptability” (Levitt, Motulsky, Wertz, Morrow, & Ponterotto,  
2 2017, p. 2). Within the qualitative research literature in sport psychology, these issues are  
3 further compounded by the varying use of related terms, such as rigor, validity,  
4 trustworthiness, and credibility (Smith & McGannon, 2018; Sparkes, 1998). To address the  
5 aforementioned concerns, the *American Psychological Association Task Force on Resources*  
6 *for the Publication of Qualitative Research* proposed the concept of *methodological integrity*  
7 and recommended its evaluation in qualitative research via two composite processes: (a)  
8 fidelity to the subject matter, and (b) utility in achieving research goals. To this end, we draw  
9 on Burke’s (2016) recommendations to evaluate qualitative research and associated ‘markers’  
10 of quality. First, the present study demonstrates *credibility* through the significant amount of  
11 time that the lead author spent with the team. Second, rigor was achieved through the *width*  
12 and *comprehensiveness* of evidence. For example, comparisons of information from different  
13 sources (e.g., observations, interviews) and temporal phases were made throughout the  
14 investigation. Third, the reader is invited to evaluate the *impact* of the first author’s  
15 experiences of conducting a season-long study of team resilience. Prolonged immersion,  
16 rapport, and displays of commitment facilitated deeper exchanges with the team. Jachyra,  
17 Atkinson, and Washiya (2015) argued that the ethnographer’s degree of rapport with  
18 participants “. . . markedly affects the content, breadth, and quality of the data collected” (p.  
19 248). Indicators of rapport included being provided with team kit to wear by the players,  
20 social conversations throughout the season, being welcomed into intimate team discussions  
21 and huddles, and being regarded as a ‘friend’ by one senior player. It is hoped that this study  
22 elucidates the benefits of such approaches for future team resilience research.

## 23 **Results**

24 The results derived from the longitudinal ethnographic fieldwork carried out in this  
25 investigation present the psychosocial enablers and strategies that promoted the development

1 of team resilience within a high level sports team. Team participants' own voices are used to  
2 portray events, and pseudonyms are used to ensure confidentiality. Table 1 provides a  
3 summary of cues and strategies to promote the development of team resilience and, to  
4 illuminate the context of the ethnography, the table includes cultural expressions, folk terms,  
5 and illustrations of the interactions between team resilience and stressors.

### 6 **Inspiring, Motivating, and Challenging Team Members to Achieve Performance** 7 **Excellence**

8         During the season, team resilience was developed by team members feeling inspired  
9 and motivated. Team members were excited about the prospect of success and the journey  
10 ahead as a group. Many team members were often heard saying, "there was a buzz about the  
11 place" that energized them and intensified their effort. A fundamental aspect of this related to  
12 team members experiencing a significant change in direction from the new coaching team.  
13 When one of the coaches (Will) was asked about how the setbacks of past seasons had been  
14 negotiated, he said, "The old regime fu\*\*ed it up!". Will was frustrated at the team's past  
15 disappointments and warned, "it's much quicker to fu\*\* it up than to build it up again". Early  
16 in the season, it was noted how Will spoke with much passion. Another assistant coach (Ed)  
17 reasoned that by "getting rid of the old regime", it signalled a desire for higher expectations.

18         One team member (Daniel) also explained how the team's resilience was improved as  
19 a consequence of the coaching team's complementary strengths and their ability to motivate  
20 the group throughout the season and during difficult periods as shown in the following quote:

21         They all [the 3 coaches] bring their own unique approaches to managing setbacks.  
22         Sometimes you need an arm round you, even though we're grown men, you still need  
23         support sometimes – we have Danny (Head Coach) for that. Ed gives you the  
24         feedback on how to improve, and then there's Will who is just going to draw out the  
25         passion in you and if he doesn't see passion, then you aren't going to play.

1           Team resilience was cultivated through a team vision, collectively agreed “team  
2 protocols”, and regular reinforcement of team goals during stressors. One team member  
3 (Andy) commented that the coaches “had brought a professional environment to a semi-  
4 professional team” and that Danny frequently emphasized the need to “maintain our high  
5 standards” since “the goal is automatic promotion, it’s not to get to the play-offs, it’s about  
6 setting high standards in everything we do”. On one occasion, despite achieving a victory, the  
7 team produced a disappointing performance and Danny reinforced their expectations for  
8 higher standards commenting that, “for any other team, winning by 60 points would be fine  
9 but not for this team because we have aspirations and expectations”. The team’s resilience  
10 also developed by collectively reminding each other of their shared expectations. At one  
11 point in the season, “we (the team) recognized we had too much of a swagger and arrogance  
12 off the pitch and a drop in performance on the pitch” and “we needed to flip that around”.  
13 One team member, Mike, explained that their team’s resilience was developed by individuals  
14 making sure that they aligned their own goals with the team’s goals and, “because they are so  
15 clear and they have been contracted up front from the start, people accept that and are totally  
16 committed”. Weekly post-match emails underlined the team’s collective performance  
17 standards as highlighted in the quote below from Danny, following one poor team  
18 performance:

19           It was a win on the road in very difficult playing conditions. However, I know we all  
20 felt that the performance was below our normal high standards. I’m not so worried  
21 about the bonus point [extra point for scoring more than four goals] but we need to  
22 live up to the high standards we are setting ourselves in terms of performance, and  
23 with that as a context, it was a disappointing day.

24           Another team member (Pete) said that, when setbacks occurred, “it all comes back to  
25 that goal where we want to get promoted. So, we work through those tough times and rebuild

1 around that goal”. Danny also illustrated the importance of setting individual and collective  
2 expectations as shown in the following quote:

3 We had higher expectations this year. I’ve always gone into competitions with the  
4 expectation that you’re going to win it, regardless of what people say. But we set out  
5 high expectations at the very beginning. While our goal in the previous season was a  
6 top four finish, we said very firmly this year that it was promotion or nothing. That  
7 was a key difference and it created a bit of a buzz about the place, in terms of “Right,  
8 well the expectations are high, therefore I’ve got to match those expectations” and this  
9 can be important when things go wrong. For some of these guys, this may be their one  
10 opportunity to be promoted and they recognize that, and that’s one of the reasons why  
11 we built it up like we did. We wanted to set those expectations because people then  
12 start to believe it.

### 13 **Develop a Team-Regulatory System based on Ownership and Responsibility**

14 The team’s sustained ability to withstand stressors was enhanced by coaches and team  
15 members monitoring their performances, actions, and responses to difficult periods. The  
16 Captain, Michael, explained that his “job as captain was not a one-man job, it was a  
17 collective”. Having “so many ‘captains’ on the field” developed the team’s resilience because  
18 “the more people you can involve in the leadership of a rugby team that are consistent under  
19 pressure in their roles, the more likely the team will overcome challenges”. Ed explained that  
20 giving more responsibility through defined leadership roles helped the team to withstand  
21 pressurized situations as highlighted in the quote below:

22 To help us deal with the different types of pressurized moments in a match, we’ve  
23 created leadership roles as rugby divides itself up nicely into different areas . . . it’s  
24 about developing these leaders in key strategic roles and encouraging them to  
25 communicate with each other . . . because the sum of all those parts make up a

1           successful team – if the team feels some ownership in their roles, that can be  
2           important when the pressure is on.

3           The team’s resilience was also developed by team members exchanging honest  
4 feedback with one another. Ed commented that “we’re not getting honest feedback from the  
5 team, they are a bit spongy in their responses”. Regular briefings encouraged team members  
6 to share honest feedback following setbacks. Will explained that this helped to avoid “finger  
7 pointing” because “if a blame culture exists, the resilience levels drop right off”. Coaches  
8 also provided individual feedback to team members “. . . so while there is that kind of  
9 security around a resilient team, there is – it’s not fear – but team members recognize that,  
10 “yeah, I have got to be accountable. There is a great deal of accountability”. Accountability  
11 was also reinforced through imagery. For example, in the changing room, a sign read,  
12 “character is defined when you think no one’s looking” (quote from J. C. Watts, former  
13 American politician). The importance of encouraging honest feedback was highlighted in one  
14 team meeting and recorded in field notes:

15           The atmosphere was subdued after the defeat. There was an unusual silence rather  
16 than the normal buzz. Sensing the atmosphere, Danny asked, “do any of you want to  
17 add anything in a constructive and controlled way, do any of you want to offload?”  
18 He paused. Michael [Captain] said, “we’ve got to get on with it, let’s move on”.  
19 Daniel then commented, “As the coaches were talking, people were looking at the  
20 floor. Look at your teammates in the face, accept it, and move on.” Martin (team  
21 member) said, “it was the lack of intensity that killed us . . .” Will then intervened,  
22 “this is what we have to cut out, we need to be brutally honest with each other, we  
23 need to be accountable to each other. I know you are all mates but if anyone falls  
24 short of the standards expected, we have to be honest with each other.

25           As the season went on, Will thought that the team were not taking ownership of

1 problem-solving and decisions during stressors and he commented that “the team had to start  
2 to think for themselves”. Danny also said “. . . the more they come up with the answers when  
3 things aren’t working, the better decisions they’ll make on the field”. Will said that the  
4 coaches were “passing stronger messages to the team that it was their responsibility to step  
5 up”. Ed explained that “what’s the point of having experienced players if you don’t give them  
6 the chance of gaining experience [of managing challenging situations]?”. He continued, “if  
7 we are going to give players responsibility, then we’ve got to make sure that collectively we  
8 go back and if things don’t work, we take some of the responsibility too”. This evolving shift  
9 in responsibility was recorded in fieldnotes in the build-up to one match that followed a  
10 setback:

11         The coaches seemed more conscious of not directing everything. This was a change in  
12         approach. Following the pre-match briefing Danny said abruptly, “it’s your game now  
13         guys” - suddenly they left the changing room and left the final preparations to the  
14         team. This hadn’t happened before and took everyone by surprise. It seemed symbolic  
15         of a change in approach. There was a silence and players looked at each other. I  
16         wasn’t sure the players knew what should happen next but gradually, they began to  
17         talk to each other, they reminded each other of their responsibilities and roles. The  
18         coaches had made their point without saying so and the team had got the message.

### 19 **Cultivate a Team Identity and a Togetherness based on a Selfless Culture**

20         Throughout the season, the team’s resilience was developed through frequent verbal  
21         and behavioural expressions of their collective emotional and relational ties to each other.  
22         During stressors, team members frequently expressed the need to “put your body on the line”  
23         and to demonstrate their collective “intensity”. The strength of the team’s physical and  
24         emotional commitment to each other that was developed during stressors was illustrated by  
25         Luke (team member) in the quote below:

1           When we are in the really tough situations, it's like you are a family and I know I  
2           would do anything for my family if anything was to happen to them. That's the kind  
3           of feeling we have developed in this team. We'd do anything we can for each other;  
4           we'll put our heads in where it hurts, because that's what you'd do for your family  
5           and mates.

6           Simon (team member) also commented on how seeing others' physical commitment  
7           in pressure situations "encouraged others to do the same for the team". The use of team  
8           rituals further developed close emotional attachments. This included recognizing the need to  
9           wear "team kit", performing "the Team Song", enacting a team "squeeze" [i.e., huddle]  
10          during training and matches, and the first and second team training together as "One Club".

11          Team resilience was also developed by promoting a "selfless culture" as shown in the  
12          following quote by Will:

13          During difficult situations, we reinforce the importance of our emotional attachment.  
14          I've always said to the players that when you come to the club, you've got to develop  
15          an emotional attachment to the place, and certainly an attachment to the players and  
16          the coaching staff and that you want to win for them as much as for yourself. I think  
17          that selfless team members are the best ones to have; even if they are not as talented,  
18          they're going to be honest in what they do. We want to be able to look over the  
19          shoulder and know that the person behind is there for you. And that's a skill. We  
20          won't pick players that don't have that approach because it's a spanner in the works,  
21          it's a weak link in our chain, and we can't have weak links.

22          During the season, the promotion of a selfless team culture to enhance the team's  
23          resilience was evident through references to "The Team" during difficult situations such as  
24          individual disappointments. Team members often reminded each other that "no individual is  
25          bigger than the team". Indeed, team resilience was developed by individuals sacrificing their

1 own frustrations and expressing support for the team as highlighted in the following quote by  
2 Ryan (team member):

3 I got dropped but I was fine with it because I understood that he was playing better  
4 than me, I had gone off the boil a bit . . . as a result, I got dropped, and it gave me a  
5 kick up the arse because I wanted my position back . . . but I knew why I had been  
6 dropped, I'd had a phone call and it was explained to me. All I wanted was the best  
7 for the team . . . I could see through my personal disappointment of being dropped,  
8 because I knew it was the best decision for the team and I knew what I had signed up  
9 for with the team.

10 The strong emotional team attachments, formed over several seasons, enhanced the  
11 team's resilience during performance slumps. Team members developed strong ties to each  
12 other and new members were encouraged to "buy in" to the team's philosophy. The  
13 development of the team's resilience through a welcoming approach for new team members  
14 and displaying a strong togetherness was illustrated by James (team member) below:

15 Although my previous professional clubs were great, the bond of the players that has  
16 been built up here over five years and the way new team members have come into the  
17 squad and just signed up for it straight away has made a difference. We're playing for  
18 each other, we're great friends. In clubs, you always get the "you don't want to let  
19 your teammates down" thing but we truly are. When I got my injury, I got a phone  
20 call from everyone in the squad whereas I only may have got two or three calls in  
21 other [professional] teams I have played in. But this was a genuine "hope you're OK",  
22 "great season so far", and you don't get that very often.

### 23 **Expose the Team to Challenging Training and Unexpected/Difficult Situations**

24 The development of team resilience was facilitated by creating a training environment  
25 that exposed the team to pressurized situations. In the pre-season, one team member, Gavin

1 said that “the team deliberately chose a tough warm-up campaign of six matches and it’s left  
2 us battle-hardened”. During the season, the team simulated specific challenging situations.  
3 Team members were expected to train under “the same kind of pressure as a matchday”  
4 (Luke) and “switch on”. The team was also expected to “switch on” immediately at the start  
5 of each training session to replicate the pressure of taking control from the start of each  
6 match. It was observed how team members verbally reminded each other if they were not  
7 simulating sufficient communication in such pressure situations. At the very start of one  
8 training session, Will shouted “Show some intensity! We train with the same intensity as a  
9 match . . . not one of you fu\*\*ers said anything!”. The instruction was intense but the training  
10 session suddenly ‘felt’ more like a competitive match. Team members immediately  
11 responded through increased “noise” [communication]. Team members described their  
12 environment as “challenging training” and practiced adjusting to difficult moments as the  
13 following quote by Ed illustrates:

14       When we’re facing challenges, it’s about letting the players know that these  
15       pressurized situations are going to arise . . . we remind them that the reason why we  
16       are practicing a situation is because something hasn’t gone to plan and they must learn  
17       how to get themselves out of it. We prepare the players to learn that things aren’t  
18       always going to go well, but we don’t need to be concerned because there are things  
19       we can do to turn it around. They understand why we do it in training so when it  
20       happens in a game, it’s important that they can react and remember that there’s a  
21       system in place.

22       Repetition of specific “chaotic” situations was vital since “you’ve got to be able to  
23       perform under pressure with your eyes shut so that “nothing is a surprise” (Michael). Weekly  
24       match analysis was also used to help team members ‘see’ the connections between training in  
25       “chaotic” situations and individual and collective responses to stressors during competition.

1 Match analysis was also important to “reflect on and work out what could have gone better or  
2 what really did go wrong”. Reflecting on the team’s general approach to training in  
3 pressurized situations, Mark (team member) described how being exposed to setbacks more  
4 effectively coordinated the team’s future responses:

5       It’s very much a shared mindset thing. We practise playing in pressure situations  
6       where things go against us. We do a thing called ‘what from where’ [the practise of  
7       pressurized events] and we spend a lot of time in training making sure we’re making  
8       the right decisions in the right areas of the pitch so we’re all on the same page under  
9       pressure.

10       Throughout the season, the team frequently reminded each other to “focus on the  
11       process, not the outcome” (James). In one pre-match meeting before a vital fixture, it  
12       was noted how the team emphasized the need to maintain “calm heads under pressure as they  
13       [their opponents] are a nasty team that are likely to use cheap shots [illegal foul play], but  
14       “we need all players on the pitch at all times” (Will). During a difficult part of the season, the  
15       pressure had, in turn, increased on the team to win all of their remaining games to achieve  
16       their goal of promotion. Following a defeat because of poor officiating, the team were  
17       encouraged to “reset” their team focus during one team meeting by adopting a process  
18       approach as the following quote from Danny illustrates:

19       We have a big challenge ahead but we need to just focus on one game at a time. If we  
20       win every game we play from now until May [season end] then we will be there.

21       There is no point worrying about what results other teams are getting. Let’s just worry  
22       about ours. What’s happened has happened. There’s no point in dwelling on it. Let’s  
23       look forward and worry about the things we can make a difference. There are always  
24       external factors such as the referee but next time it happens, let’s be in a position that  
25       we are so far ahead it doesn’t matter.

## 1 **Promoting Enjoyment and Keeping a Positive Outlook during Stressors**

2           The development of team resilience involved boosting positive feelings, wellbeing,  
3 and enjoyment during challenging situations. The team exhibited humour, banter, and  
4 comical rituals to promote enjoyment. Team members said that they “handed out the banter,  
5 and if you can’t take it, you’re not a big enough boy as we don’t suffer fools gladly” (Mike).  
6 Humour reminded players “not to take things too seriously” (Ryan). Jake (team member)  
7 stated that humour was “something to fall back on [following setbacks] because if we take  
8 ourselves too seriously, you take out the enjoyment factor”. Team members also expressed  
9 how players’ positive moods “rubbed off on each other” (Michael). Coaches reinforced  
10 “getting the fun back into our performances and play with a smile on our faces again” (Ed).  
11 Danny said that promoting enjoyment was essential because “even though we play at a fairly  
12 high level, you’ve still got to go out there and enjoy yourself, especially following setbacks.  
13 If it becomes a chore, then you’re not really doing it justice.”

14           At another challenging point in the season, it was noted how team members displayed  
15 a positive outlook by relishing the prospect of one of their most difficult away fixtures as  
16 illustrated in a diary extract:

17           Entering the player area, the team was seated in two lines of chairs with their coffees  
18 and light food. There was general banter. They gave me (first author) a round of  
19 applause for making the long trip. Spirits were good. This was a big match, their  
20 biggest away challenge against a physical team and opposing fans infamous for being  
21 hostile but the mood was relaxed, focused, enjoying each others’ company and the  
22 forthcoming challenge. Danny said, “. . . we need to be strong mentally and  
23 physically . . . there will be mistakes today but it’s all about days like this. Love it.  
24 Enjoy it”. There was a brief silence and a strong sense of excitement.

25           The role of enjoyment was often highlighted by team members during their long,

1 pressurized season. Matt (team member) remarked on this before one training session:

2       People are mainly here because they enjoy it. I've noticed on a few occasions that if  
3       we aren't enjoying it, our form dips a bit. You look for the reasons why you lost and  
4       you start questioning things, heads can go down. The vibe that was making us play so  
5       well can be lost and you have to start again. We play well because we are having fun,  
6       we're happy. The second that goes, it all changes [less chance of being promoted].

7       The team's last match of the season involved a head-to-head encounter against  
8       opponents they had suffered their biggest defeat against earlier in the season. Both teams  
9       needed victory to win the league. During the week, there was an emphasis on "staying calm",  
10      "maintaining perspective", and treating it as "business as usual" (Ed). In training, Danny said,  
11      "there's no need to be anxious or thinking about it too much, let's just focus on the task". A  
12      record number of spectators attended and public expectations were high. Upon arrival at the  
13      club, team members seemed distracted by the media and the large number of fans. In the pre-  
14      match briefing, the Club Director (Andrew) said, "enjoy it, we are all proud of you, and what  
15      you have done in the last ten weeks". Ed remarked, "you have all done something different  
16      today but from this moment, just do what you usually do". The team's focus on maintaining a  
17      positive outlook despite setbacks and embracing the pressure was highlighted in the  
18      following match report after the team's success:

19      Danny believes the seeds of his side's success were sowed in the dressing room after  
20      their last loss. That day the team were beaten . . . but it forged a steely determination  
21      amongst the squad to win the rest of their fixtures. Their opponents had led the league  
22      for much of the campaign but the team's win saw them leapfrog their opponents on  
23      the final day of the season and win promotion. Danny said, "We made a collective  
24      agreement not to lose another game and that's what happened. We set our stall out  
25      very clearly that we wanted to win this league. There were a couple of wobbles along



1 research that has identified transformational and shared leadership as psychosocial processes  
2 underpinning team resilience (Morgan et al., 2015). For example, inspiring the team to  
3 reinforce high expectations of success during stressors resonates with the concept of  
4 transformational leadership. However, the findings of the present study also pointed to  
5 specific actions and cues that mobilize these processes (e.g., creating “protocols” for pressure  
6 situations). Moreover, the findings suggested the importance of the whole coaching team’s  
7 complementary expertise and roles rather than one individual leader.

8         One potential explanation for the findings of the present study is the concept of  
9 “coordinating mechanisms” (Salas, Sims, & Burke, 2005, p. 564) that are associated with  
10 successful team outcomes. Salas et al. (2005) proposed that three coordinating mechanisms  
11 influence broader aspects of teamwork: shared mental models (cf. Cannon-Bowers, Salas, &  
12 Converse, 1993), closed-loop communication (cf. Eccles, 2010), and mutual trust (cf.  
13 Webber, 2002). In the present study, team resilience enablers and strategies included  
14 regularly exposing the team to challenging training and unexpected/difficult situations, which  
15 enhanced the team’s shared mental model during stressors (i.e., a common understanding of  
16 actions). Team members often stated that they “knew what to do” during stressors “where  
17 nothing was a surprise”. Salas et al. (2005) stated that, “the importance of this coordinating  
18 mechanism [shared mental model] increases in teams that must perform in stressful  
19 conditions” (p. 567). Interestingly, exposing the team to regular unexpected, difficult,  
20 pressurized scenarios in training appeared to provide a practical aspect with regards to the  
21 development of team resilience compared with the abstract/conceptual findings of Morgan et  
22 al. (2015). For example, Morgan and colleagues explained that team learning was a key  
23 psychosocial process underlying team resilience. However, the results of the present study  
24 provide more specific enabling strategies (e.g., using pressurized scenarios) that enhance the  
25 application of collective knowledge during stressors.

1           Research in medical and organizational settings also shows that closed-loop  
2 communication and mutual trust improves team performance (e.g., through error reduction)  
3 during stressful situations (cf. El-Shafy et al., 2018). The present study's findings reported  
4 how the team held regular communications about minimizing errors and putting "systems in  
5 place" to clarify actions under pressure. Mutual trust was cultivated through enablers such as  
6 having a shared vision, encouraging honest feedback, and distributing responsibility during  
7 difficult periods. This resonates strongly with Hodge, Henry, and Smith's (2014) study that  
8 identified the role of ownership, accountability, and "dual management models" (Hodge et  
9 al., 2014, p. 64) for the 2011 Rugby World Cup champions, New Zealand. The findings also  
10 offer support for the role of shared leadership processes for team resilience (Morgan et al.,  
11 2015); however, employing ethnography in the present study also seemed to offer greater  
12 insight about how ownership and responsibility is enacted over time through specific  
13 strategies (e.g., create defined leadership roles, coaches allowing team members to take  
14 responsibility during setbacks, encouraging honest feedback, holding team briefings to  
15 discuss team functioning following setbacks).

16           The influence of numerous coordinative factors during stressors illuminated how team  
17 resilience developed differently in different situations. Specifically, during the pre-season,  
18 team protocols aligned team members' commitment to shared goals through enhanced team  
19 members' collective sensemaking (cf. DeChurch & Mesmer-Magnus, 2010). Later in the  
20 season, team resilience was developed by activating practical strategies to emphasize the  
21 importance of the team enjoying their sporting challenges. These findings suggest that  
22 harnessing a range of coordinative factors over time, and in different situations, is critical for  
23 team resilience development. This resonates with team resilience research in organizational  
24 behaviour; West et al. (2009), for example, found that team resilience only developed  
25 following prolonged multiple interactive experiences. The findings of the present study

1 suggest that team resilience is developed through ongoing multiple team-environmental  
2 interactions (cf. Egeland, Carlson, & Sroufe, 1993).

3         The second overarching message generated from the results of the present study was  
4 the salience of team culture. This refers to the values, beliefs, standards, and power  
5 distribution within a team environment (Dew, 1998). Numerous enabling actions and cues  
6 nurtured a culture that helped develop team resilience and mobilize constructive shared  
7 perceptions and responses during stressors. For example, team members' collective ambition  
8 created a "buzz about the place" and they frequently reminded each other to instil a "culture  
9 of confidence without arrogance and complacency". The results also showed that collective  
10 actions were employed to harness a "selfless culture" during setbacks. These findings provide  
11 support for Morgan et al.'s (2015) research that cultivating a team's social identity is a key  
12 underlying team resilience process. Further support was offered for the role of intense  
13 physical and affective commitment within a collision sport such as rugby union. However, in  
14 comparison to Morgan et al. (2015), the findings of this study point to the importance of team  
15 culture, possibly because ethnography provided a 'first-hand' deeper immersion into a team's  
16 functioning. The psychosocial enablers and strategies used to cultivate the team's identity and  
17 togetherness (e.g., phoning team members who were injured to provide support, putting the  
18 team first and "sacrificing" individual disappointment if not selected) illustrates the numerous  
19 'acts' of their selfless team culture (see also Table 1). A potential explanation for the role of  
20 culture for team resilience development is its influence on enabling constructive team  
21 member actions, promoting ownership, and monitoring power relations during challenging  
22 situations (cf. Cruickshank & Collins, 2012; Driskell, Salas, & Johnston, 1999).

23         Although the findings of the present study reinforced the role of strategies that  
24 fostered a strong work ethic and "accountability" for team resilience development, the team's  
25 culture placed a high value on 'enjoyment'. Positive emotions have been associated with

1 resilience at both the individual (Gonzalez, Newton, Hannon, Smith & Detling, 2018; Tugade  
2 & Fredrickson, 2004) and the team level (Meneghel et al., 2016; Morgan et al., 2015).  
3 Interestingly, Meneghel et al. (2016) suggested that *collective* positive emotions develop  
4 team resilience through affective sharing mechanisms such as emotional contagion (see e.g.,  
5 Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1992). This offers support for the findings of Morgan et al.  
6 (2015) who suggested that the use of humour and banter throughout a team helped to absorb  
7 the potential harmful effects of stressors. In comparison to Morgan et al.'s (2015) findings, the  
8 broader theme of 'enjoyment' and 'a positive outlook' emphasized that maintaining team  
9 members' satisfaction, pleasure, and wellbeing during a season of intense competitive sport  
10 was essential to withstand stressors. Extending this explanation further, the findings may  
11 suggest that team resilience is developed through group-based appraisals and their influence  
12 on collective emotions (cf. Kuppens & Yzerbyt, 2012). Specifically, Kuppens and Yzerbyt  
13 (2012) argued that when there is a strong team identity, "people start seeing their social  
14 environment through some sort of group lens" (p. 21), and this can lead to group-based  
15 appraisals and group emotions.

## 16 **Strengths and Limitations**

17         A particular strength of this study was the use of ethnographic inquiry to explore team  
18 resilience development during a competitive sport season. Prolonged immersion illuminated  
19 how team resilience was developed in different situations through multiple team interactions.  
20 Indeed, a significant strength of the study was that the investigation involved full access to  
21 the team each week during the season where the first author was present as much as the  
22 participants themselves. This elicited a degree of "immersion and concrete detail . . .  
23 necessary to ascertain tacit knowledge . . ." (Tracy, 2010, p. 843). Another strength of the  
24 present study was the selection of ethnography to address real-world practices of teams to  
25 offer a deeper insight into the strategies, enablers, and actions for team resilience

1 development. It is hoped that the triangulation and depth of research ‘evidence’ enabled  
2 naturalistic generalizability (cf. Smith, 2018) for readers engaged in team sport settings. A  
3 further strength of this study was that team resilience development strategies were captured  
4 across multiple time points. To date, and to the best of our knowledge, no other study in  
5 psychology has investigated team resilience over such a prolonged period. Salas et al. (2005)  
6 argued that team-level investigations should assess team processes during “a variety of  
7 conditions and situations” (p. 587). A season-long study allowed appropriate time to explore  
8 team members’ interactive experiences on multiple occasions rather than a snapshot of team  
9 resilience (cf. Galli & Gonzalez, 2015; Morgan et al., 2017).

10 A limitation of the present study, perhaps, lies in the positive emphasis of team  
11 resilience development. While team resilience is a desirable construct, dysfunctional aspects  
12 of team resilience can exist (Galli, 2016). For example, the findings illuminated the discourse  
13 associated with the physical commitment required in a collision sport (e.g., “put your body on  
14 the line”). A potentially ‘darker’ portrayal of team resilience development was not reflected  
15 in this ethnography; for example, while a selfless culture is important for team resilience, it  
16 should not be at the expense of one’s health and wellbeing and seen as a ‘badge of honour’  
17 (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2016b). Furthermore, while we consider that a strength of the present  
18 study is the richness of longitudinal ‘evidence’ and naturalistic generalizability (cf. Smith,  
19 2018), we acknowledge that the findings of the study might be peculiar to a collision sport’s  
20 culture. The engagement of critical friends was a valuable part of encouraging reflexivity.  
21 However, for a longitudinal study of this nature, a wider range of critical friends (e.g.,  
22 coaches of other team sports, researchers in other group settings) might have broadened one’s  
23 interpretations of the data (cf. Smith & McGannon, 2018).

#### 24 **Future Research**

25 There are a number of avenues for future research arising from the present study.

1 First, the ethnographic approach utilized in this study could provide a foundation for pre-  
2 intervention evaluations of team resilience development (cf. Schensul, Schensul, &  
3 LeCompte, 2013). Indeed, the findings have offered support for the psychosocial team  
4 resilience processes identified by Morgan et al. (2015) together with some additional  
5 considerations (e.g., exposure to challenging training situations). The present study's  
6 concentration on identifying contextual enablers that stimulate these mechanisms and  
7 associated pathways to team resilience might act as a bridge for interventions that assess  
8 pre/post quantitative improvements. Indeed, future research should design team resilience  
9 interventions using pre-post intervention quantitative analyses. Interventions should involve  
10 enacting multiple team resilience development enablers, cues, and strategies (e.g., using  
11 Table 1 as a guide) to enhance the protective characteristics and processes found in previous  
12 studies in this area (see Morgan et al., 2015). To date, no team resilience interventions have  
13 been conducted in sport psychology and this represents an exciting opportunity for  
14 researchers (Morgan et al., 2017). To measure pre/post changes in team resilience, a valid and  
15 reliable scale is required. The CREST inventory developed by Decroos et al. (2017) might  
16 offer researchers a basis to assess changes in team resilience.

17 Second, since team resilience is defined as a dynamic, temporal process, further  
18 longitudinal research conducted over the cycle of a team's existence would enhance our  
19 understanding of how team resilience is developed and whether it is more effective at one  
20 time point in a team's history than another (Morgan et al., 2017). This points to the value of  
21 conducting team resilience research over numerous time points. Galli and Gonzalez (2015)  
22 argued that, "if the goal is to truly understand resilience as a process that unfolds across time,  
23 "one-shot" . . . studies of sport resilience will necessarily lack depth compared to studies . . .  
24 at multiple time points" (p. 252). Moreover, Mathieu, Maynard, Rapp, and Gilson (2008)  
25 recommended that researchers embrace the complexity of team investigations and proposed

1 research methods which are sensitive to time (e.g., the use of diaries, time-sampling). Team  
2 resilience researchers might also apply the notion of resilience trajectories (Bonanno &  
3 Diminich, 2013) to capture the varying effects of different forms of stressors when  
4 developing team resilience.

5         Third, future research should explore the relationship between team culture and team  
6 resilience. The role of strategies to inspire, motivate, and challenge team members to achieve  
7 performance excellence could be examined using quantitative and qualitative approaches.  
8 These strategies resonate with previous team resilience research, which identifies  
9 transformational leadership as an important team resilience process (cf. Morgan et al., 2015;  
10 Rodríguez-Sánchez & Perea, 2015). Indeed, research suggests that transformational  
11 leadership instils a proactive and resilient culture in organisations (Rodríguez-Sánchez &  
12 Perea, 2015). This also resonates with the role of coaches' use of character-building efficacy  
13 in elite rugby union teams (cf. Hodge et al., 2014). Observation studies should be conducted  
14 to assess effective coaching strategies to influence team members' behaviour during stressors.  
15 Finally, case studies might be employed to explore the relationship between team resilience,  
16 culture, and the factors that influence its development (cf. Vargo & Seville, 2011).

### 17 **Practical Implications**

18         The findings of this study provide sport psychologists, coaches, and those working in  
19 teams with multiple psychosocial enablers and strategies to stimulate pathways to team  
20 resilience. First, sport psychologists should spend sufficient time with 'gatekeepers' (e.g.,  
21 Head Coach) to understand a team's strengths and acquire the contextual intelligence  
22 necessary for effective interventions (cf. Brown, Gould, & Foster, 2005). Observing a team's  
23 behaviour during different stressors and noting strengths and weaknesses will provide a  
24 stronger platform for interventions.

25         Second, when developing team resilience, practitioners should implement the

1 psychosocial strategies described in this study. Inspiring team members to achieve  
2 performance excellence during a team's pre-season could be enabled by collectively agreeing  
3 team protocols. This could involve discussion about how team members should positively  
4 adapt to challenging situations (e.g., adjusting to the loss of key players, how to communicate  
5 when losing (and winning) during a match, and how to individually and collectively respond  
6 to poor officiating). During stressors, these protocols should be reinforced and further  
7 developed so that team members are encouraged to see "the bigger picture" as part of their  
8 overall psychological and performance development. Coaches should reflect on how they  
9 lead by example during setbacks, and express confidence in the team to promote some  
10 perspective in difficult moments.

11         Third, as a team develops, individuals should be given opportunities to take  
12 responsibility during challenging situations. Coaches should foster a resilient team culture  
13 based on accountability and support to each other during stressors. Leadership roles and  
14 groups will promote accountability (cf. Hodge et al., 2014) and a wider sharing of knowledge  
15 to respond effectively during adversity. To ensure that team members are "on the same page"  
16 during stressors, teams should be regularly exposed to "challenging training" and rehearse  
17 pressurized situations (cf. Fletcher & Sarkar, 2016b). The use of "what-ifs", match analysis  
18 (i.e., individual and group responses to setbacks) and debriefs to discuss the benefits of new  
19 knowledge of setbacks can enhance the development of team resilience through increased  
20 learning and coordination (Alliger et al., 2015).

21         Fourth, the findings of this study showed that cultivating a strong team identity and  
22 selfless culture was vital for team resilience development. This could be nurtured through  
23 displays of the team's physical and emotional commitment during stressors (e.g., using  
24 noticeboards, social media). Celebrating 'moments of team resilience' can boost connectivity  
25 during setbacks. Those working with teams should recognize the importance of time for a

1 resilient culture. It is possible to achieve ‘quick wins’ through the establishment of team  
2 protocols (e.g., how will we collectively act when we lose a key team member to injury or  
3 disciplinary penalty?); however, creating a sense of belonging, cultivating constructive  
4 relationships, and developing psychological safety during stressors (cf. Edmondson, 1999)  
5 will require ongoing application. Coaches should also ensure that they promote enjoyment.  
6 Coaches could plan to provide players with adequate opportunities for rest at suitable points  
7 in the season, consider timings of social occasions, and monitor body language during  
8 stressors.

9       Finally, this study involved a top-level semi-professional team. While team resilience  
10 enablers and strategies might be similar at both elite and semi-professional levels, their  
11 emphasis might be different. Moreover, the intensity of stressors is likely to vary. Therefore,  
12 team resilience interventions might be similar across competitive levels but the development  
13 and sophistication of implementing these strategies may differ. To illustrate, Hodge and  
14 Smith (2014) suggested that the limited resources of amateur teams might restrict coaches’  
15 abilities to implement a range of anti-choking strategies. A team resilience intervention at  
16 lower levels of team sport could utilize a staged approach by focusing on one or two  
17 strategies at a time. Interestingly, the present study reported how team resilience was  
18 developed by creating a ‘professional environment’ within a semi-professional setting.

### 19 **Concluding Remarks**

20       This study has explored the enablers and strategies that promote the development of  
21 team resilience within a high-level sport team. A season-long ethnography identified  
22 multiple, and often contextual psychosocial enablers that stimulate pathways to team  
23 resilience. The results were categorized into five main themes: inspire, motivate, and  
24 challenge team members to achieve performance excellence; develop a team-regulatory  
25 system based on ownership and responsibility; cultivate a team identity and togetherness

1 based on a “selfless” culture; expose the team to challenging training and unexpected/difficult  
2 situations; and promote enjoyment and a positive outlook during stressors. It is hoped that  
3 this study advances knowledge of the psychosocial enablers that promote the development of  
4 team resilience and contributes towards an evidence-based understanding of impactful  
5 interventions in team sport contexts.

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1 Table 1  
 2  
 3 *Strategies and Indicators of Team Resilience Development*  
 4

Descriptor	Development strategies and indicators	Folk terms
Inspiring, motivating, and challenging team members to achieve performance excellence	Build complementary coaching strengths and roles	“right people in the right places”
	Build commitment to, and alignment with, team goals	“professional culture”
	Define and reinforce collective “team protocols” during stressors	“setting the standards” “buzz about the place”
	Reinforce high standards, shared expectations, and team values during stressors	“confident, not arrogant”
	Profile and recruit “team players” who will adopt a team approach	“values led by those at the top” “see the bigger picture”
	Communicate with enthusiasm and express confidence in the team during setbacks	“raised expectations” “step it up”
Develop a team-regulatory system based on ownership and responsibility	Role model by leading by example during pressurised situations	
	Define leadership roles and responsibilities	“character is defined when no one is watching”
	Give team members responsibility for team functioning and communication during stressors	“on the same wavelength”
	Hold regular team briefings to openly discuss team functioning following challenging situations	“captains on the field” “chat”
	Encourage and monitor individual and collective performance and tasks	“take responsibility”
	Encourage creativity within a broad structure	“don’t be the one that puts us all at risk”
Cultivate a team identity and a togetherness based	Exchange honest feedback and avoid blame	
	Create leadership groups to transfer responsibility for solutions to stressors	
	Frequently reinforce the importance of physical commitment and “intensity”	“your body on the line”
	Promote a sense of belonging and emotional	“put your head in

on a selfless culture	attachment during difficult circumstances	where it hurts”
	Nurture quality, supportive squad relationships during setbacks	“man up”
	Frequently reinforce the importance of a “selfless team”	“do it for your mates”
		“squeeze”
		“grab a shirt”
		“family”
		“sacrifice”
	Display media reports in the changing rooms of team successes and celebrate “resilience” moments through team imagery, mantras, logos	“No egos here”
Expose the team to challenging training and unexpected/difficult situations	Develop a shared understanding of systems and coordination to withstand pressurised situations	“we know what to do”
	Replicate pressurised scenarios	“nothing is a surprise”
		“intensity!”
	Hold regular discussions about errors to encourage learning and problem-solving	“chaos”
		“accuracy under pressure”
	Practise ‘resetting’ the team’s focus following challenging situations	“noise”
		“dynamic”
		“repetition”
	Rehearse specific situations (what-ifs) and skills during pressurised conditions	“what from where”
		“systems in place”
	Take ongoing action, analysis and adjustments to continuously improve despite setbacks	“process not outcome”
		“Keeping our structure”
Promoting enjoyment and keeping a positive outlook during stressors.	Promote the importance of enjoyment and wellbeing during challenging situations	“banter”
	Use humour and encourage banter during challenging situations	“recharge the batteries”
		“let’s enjoy it”
		“keep the fun factor”
	Plan and organise social occasions during setbacks or during fatigue	“let’s play with smiles on our faces again”
		“lighter”
	Develop pre-match routines using a “business-as-usual” approach during pressurised occasions	