

# Resilience Theory Model Applied in High Performance Athletes



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## Abstract

Sports performance and the work environment are presented as an environment focused on performance and task-oriented behavior. Faced with a stressful situation, in an attempt to ensure physical and psychological well-being, the literature shows that resilience that can positively influence the behavior of individuals. Considering the literature on sports resilience, two theoretical models stand out: The Conceptual Resilience Model and The Grounded Theory of Psychological Resilience and Optimal Sports Performance. The aim of this paper is to analyze the central points of each theory, as well the relationship between resilience and high-performance athletes. As an analysis, we discuss personal, social factors and the relationship between resilience and coping strategies. It is considered that the grounded theory of psychological resilience and ideal sports performance seems to better explain the resilience process in high performance athletes.

**Keywords:** Resilience; Sports; Sport psychology; Environment; Homeostasis.

## Introduction

The performance sports and work environment are presented as an environment focused on achievement and task-oriented behavior [1]. This environment can become stressful when occasional goals and pressures fail and can affect the physical and psychological well-being of those used. Faced with a stressful situation, in an attempt to ensure physical and psychological well-being, a literature shows resilience as able to positively influence the behavior of individuals [2,3]. Studies started in the area of psychology, demonstrating a desire to display resilience from affected applications after the individual experiences stressful or adverse situations [4,5].

About the Positive Psychology, Richardson, Neiger, Jensen & Kumpfer [6] inspire the sports research's to development the most important theories in resilience. To Richardson [7], the human resilience is that developed after the breakdown of homeostasis caused by a stressor. The individual strategies of mental reorganization are considered by Richardson et al. [6] as elementary factors for the reconfiguration of the human being to his natural emotional state. To the resilience re-integration, the author suggests are essential qualities like intense self-belief and focus, and capacity successfully handle both failure and success. In this way, Richardson [7] suggests that resilience research

ers move past the mere identification of resilient qualities, and toward a study of how such qualities are acquired.

## The Resilience Theory Models in Sports Context

Galli & Vealey [8] was the first authors to propose Conceptual Model of Sports Resilience. To improve the resilience model for athletes, the authors explored their perceptions of their resilience experiences in sports. Galli & Vealey [8] came from three questions: How does the resilience process "work" in sport? What factors influence athletes' response to adversity? and What role does the experience of adversity play in helping athletes be resilient?

To Galli & Vealey [8] the resilience process is related to the time of exposure to adversity and the wide influence of this situation on the athletes' lives. These authors identified the factors: injuries, burnout and career transition, as elements capable of influencing athletes' response to adversity. In this study, Galli & Vealey [8] realized that despite the many unpleasant feelings and difficult circumstances that athletes experienced, all athletes interviewed noted that they had benefits from coping with their adversities. This is shown in the Conceptual Model of Sports Resilience as a consequence of athletes' agitation and personal resources [8].

Deepening in the resilience studies Fletcher & Sarkar [9] present a new concept for sports resilience. The Grounded Theory of Psychological Resilience and Optimal Sports Performance proposes the development of resilience from the interactive influence of psychological characteristics within the context of stressful situations [9]. For the authors, resilience is represented as a comprehensive concept involving stressors, cognitive assessment and meta-cognitions, as well as psychological factors and facilitating responses. In the Grounded Theory of Psychological Resilience and Optimal Sports Performance positive assessment of stressors as a challenge and metacognition is the central component of this model which is composed of five major psychological factors: positive personality, motivation, confidence, focus, perceived social support that are represented along with their influence on challenge and goal assessment-cognitions.

Considering that both theoretical models have influenced the studies of resilience applied to athletes [10,11], the aim of this paper is to analyze the central points of each theory, as well the relationship between resilience and high-performance athletes.

### Personal Components

It is a common thread between the Resilience Concept Model [8] and the Grounded Theory of Psychological Resilience and Optimal Sports Performance [9] that personal resources influence the way athletes cope with their adversities. These features are represented by Gally & Vealey [8] as the underlying athletes' efforts to manage unpleasant emotions and mental struggles associated with adversity. Resources mentioned included being positive, determination, competitiveness, commitment, maturity and persistence. Fletcher and Sarkar complement that high-performance athletes possess numerous positive personality traits, such as openness to new experiences, awareness, innovative, outgoing, emotionally stable, optimistic, and proactive, which influence the mechanisms of challenge assessment and metacognition. In general, athletes who think about how to make a difference in their pursuit of sporting success tend to be more resilient and better withstand challenging sporting situations.

Self-confidence is also highlighted in both models [8,9]. Gally & Vealey [8] state that the learning process is the main component that supports the development of the athlete's mental strength and confidence. However, the authors do not elaborate this concept. Only in the work of Fletcher & Sarkar [9] is it possible to perceive a greater attention to the relationship between the self-confidence and resilience components. In the theory developed by the authors, it has been suggested that facilitating responses, such as greater effort and commitment to decision making, help in the performance of world-class athletes, especially when confidence is high. Fletcher & Sarkar [9] showed that building athlete confidence includes multifaceted preparation, experience, self-awareness, visualization, training, and teammates. Thus, the elaboration of the belief that the athlete is capable of winning is an essential component of the resilience process, so that if the athlete does not believe he will win, he will naturally not win.

Motivation has proved to be a necessary component for the athlete to withstand stressful sports situations. Although relevant, Gally

& Vealey [8] have little explored this topic. In the Conceptual Model of Resilience, the authors pointed out that passion for sports are components that are associated with the most resilient athletes. In addition, they add that as the athlete's experiences throughout his career helped them gain motivation to help others, support others, as individuals had done for them. However, the authors did not indicate what kind of strategies would be associated with the individual strengthening of this athlete that would lead him to positive results after helping the other. In Grounded Theory of Psychological Resilience and Optimal Sports Performance [9], the authors state that high performance athletes had multiple reasons to compete at the highest level. They agree with the relevance of passion for sport and state that resilient athletes seem able to internalize and integrate more self-determined forms of extrinsic motivation and appear to be an important psychological factor influencing the assessment of challenges and meta-cognitions. Fletcher & Sarkar [9] show that resilient athletes seem able to internalize and integrate more self-determined forms of extrinsic motivation and appear to be an important psychological factor influencing the assessment of challenges and meta-cognitions.

### Social Support

Sociocultural influences also seem to influence the resilience process of athletes. Another point of agreement between theories is that support provided by others has been discussed as a key factor in athletes' response to adversity. These include important sources of social support, family, coach, training colleagues. Although little addressed in the theories, future studies need to investigate the role of the school physical education teacher as one of the supporters of this resilience development process.

Social support, as highlighted by one of the athletes assessed by Fletcher and Sarkar (9) may be an additional factor to the athlete's lack of confidence, so that estimated esteem support (ie, others that reinforce the sense of competence of one person) of teammates may have dampened the potential detrimental effect of lower levels of self-confidence and subsequently benefited their sports performance.

### The Relationship Between Coping and Resilience

The weakest point of Gally and Vealey's Conceptual Resilience Model is its construction based on coping processes and strategies. García-Secades et al. [12] agree that recovery and coping should be conceived as conceptually distinct from resilience. Thus, studies have shown that there are conceptual differences between resilience and coping. Fletcher & Sarkar [2] and García-Secades et al. [12] showed that resilience influences how an event is evaluated, while coping refers to the strategies employed after the evaluation of a stressful encounter. Conceptually, coping strategies is a multidimensional self-regulatory construct that represents the behavioral and cognitive mechanisms used to manage the ongoing internal and external demands of a stressful episode [13]. Another fundamental distinction between resilience and coping is related to the consequences associated with aspects of the stress process [2], resilience is characterized by its influence on a person's assessment before emotional and coping responses and by its positive and protective impact, while coping is characterized by its

response to a stressful encounter and its variable effectiveness in resolving outstanding issues.

Considering the Grounded Theory of Psychological Resilience and Optimal Sports Performance [9], to illustrate the differences between resilient behavior and coping strategies, athletes who are daily exposed to pressure from the high-performance sports environment would be considered resilient if they rated stressors as an opportunity for development, engagement, and improvement of athlete performance. On the other hand, it would be an example of coping, if the athlete in this same context did not react positively to the pressure for performance, seeking, for example, the social support of other training colleagues to support these demands.

## Conclusion

Considering the limitations presented in the Gally & Vealey [8] Conceptual Resilience Model to date, the Grounded Theory of Psychological Resilience and Optimal Sports Performance [9] seems to better explain the resilience process in high performance athletes. One of the highlights is Fletcher & Sarkar [9] identified that the nature of the stressors experienced by athletes seems to be influenced by the specific context in which they were competing. Positive assessment of stressors as a challenge and metacognition is the central component of this theory.

Future studies need to deepen the athletes' social and cultural experiences, and to understand if beliefs and spirituality are also components of resilience. It is still unclear how the process of building the individual, their religious, family and school influences may or may not be associated with resilience, from the beginning of his career to the moment when the athlete reaches the peak of his performance.

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