

What's the secret to building resilience in elite sports?

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A study has shed new light on how resilience develops in elite athletes, providing invaluable insights for enhancing both performance and mental health in competitive sports.

Summer 2024 promises to be an epic season for sports—from the Euros and Wimbledon to the Olympics and Paralympics—millions of people are tuning in to watch their sporting stars compete.

With the world watching, elite athletes will experience both mental and physical pressures and challenges, including injuries, performance slumps, and other stressors that negatively affect their well-being.

Resilience is an important factor in combating this, so what can sports psychologists and coaches do to help?

The new research, [published](#) in *Discover Psychology*, has introduced the first comprehensive framework outlining the process of resilience development in athletes over time.

The "A-R-C Development Model" establishes that sporting resilience is a learned, developable, and non-gendered trait, which involves three critical components; A) identifiable antecedents, R) resilience responses, and C) consequences.

Lead author, Dr. Sahen Gupta from the University of Portsmouth's School of Sport, Health and Exercise Science, said, "While elite sport is an incredibly rewarding space to be in, it also creates high-stress environments that are difficult to navigate without causing harm to the athlete's well-being and [mental health](#)."

"Resilience doesn't just happen overnight, so what this study has done is help bridge the gap between understanding how elite athletes develop resilience over time, and how to put it into practice."

Following a [systematic review](#) of 92 studies on resilience in sport, the research team conducted in-depth life-story interviews with 10 [elite athletes](#) from diverse cultural backgrounds (five men and five women).

All participants placed great emphasis on how they had "developed" and "learned" sporting resilience. It can be cultivated through specific strategies and interventions, and practitioners are being encouraged to use individualized approaches rather than a one-size-fits-all method to effectively develop resilience in athletes.

Participant Elaine (an elite female rugby player) said, "You don't get resilience overnight. It's a long-term process of gaining it, and it's a multifaceted approach of how you gain it and I think everybody is different. Different individuals will be motivated or spurred on by different things. It's very dependent on time, place and who it is."

Effective development of sporting resilience also requires considering both personal and [environmental factors](#), with the role of sport psychologists being crucial in creating a positive psychological environment and promoting emotional regulation.

"While it seems counterintuitive, that role can mean supporting athletes with their decision to take some time away from the sport," explained Dr. Gupta.

"Take for instance tennis star Naomi Osaka. She withdrew from the French Open in 2021 for mental health, and it sparked a huge discussion on the importance of well-being in elite sport."

The paper says the ideal environment is one that balances enough controllable difficulties or challenges to build resilience skills through the ARC method. Sport psychologists play an important role in allowing individuals to understand what strategies give them the best results.

Co-author Dr. Paul J. McCarthy from Glasgow Caledonian University, said, "The one-size-fits-all approach is often used in elite sport, especially in [team sports](#) where athletes are given a blanket training

program to work from.

"Our findings support existing evidence that a more catered approach to develop [resilience](#) is the most effective one. The A-R-C Model enables practitioners to chart out an athlete's progress and gives research a frame to investigate further."

More information: Sahen Gupta et al, "You don't get resilience overnight": a grounded theory framework of the A-R-C sporting resilience development, *Discover Psychology* (2024). [DOI: 10.1007/s44202-024-00169-8](#)

Provided by University of Portsmouth

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