

# 28th ECSS Anniversary Congress, Paris/France, 4-7 July 2023

## Attempting to Thrive During the Olympic Qualification Window: A Narrative Analysis

Brown, D.J., Wagstaff, C.R.D.

University of Portsmouth

**Background.** The desire to succeed at the highest levels of sport has resulted in vast investment and, with it, greater scrutiny and accountability for performance. Consequently, this 'need' to succeed has fostered a 'win-at-all-costs' mentality and led to some environments that prioritize results and performance at the expense of athlete welfare. Although the existence of such 'performance-narratives' may be prominent in elite sport, there is growing recognition that such narratives need not be at the cost of welfare, and that more should be done to create and maintain environments that promote both high performance and athlete well-being.

**Purpose.** Our purpose for the present study was to better understand track cyclists' experiences of attempting to thrive (i.e., experience high levels of performance and well-being concurrently) during the Tokyo Olympic qualification window. In so doing, we hoped to shed light on the prevailing narratives underpinning their accounts, and to reflect the dynamism and complexity in experience inherent with competing for high-performance sporting organizations.

**Methods.** Underpinned by ontological relativism and epistemological constructionism, a longitudinal design was employed with interviews conducted with eleven international track cyclists on three occasions over a six-month period. At the time of the first interview, the cyclists had competed in 126 major sporting events (e.g., World Championships, Olympic Games) and won 36 medals at these events. We adopted a storyanalyst stance and used thematic narrative analysis to understand the narrative themes that underpinned the cyclists' stories as they attempted to thrive during the Olympic qualification window.

**Results and Discussion.** Our results comprise four realist tales that reflect narratives of family dynamics, labor of love, discovery, and redemption that we believe were embodied in the cyclists' experiences during this time. These tales are the first representation of athletes' attempts to thrive during a critical part of their Olympic journey and offer a unique insight into how these experiences evolved over time. Moreover, they highlight the complexity, variety, and dynamism in athlete experience, and provide direction to allow us to proactively support people (e.g., by developing adaptability and acceptance, and ensuring a sense of safety) and systems (e.g., to raise organizational awareness of how and when friction may occur) to thrive sustainably at the highest level of sport.

**Funding.** This research was supported by a grant from the International Olympic Committee's Olympic Studies Centre.

**Topic:** Mentoring/Coaching

**Presentation** Poster

European Database of Sport Science (EDSS)

Supported by SporTools GmbH



34931