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GERMAN OLYMPIANS' EXPERIENCES OF COMPETING AT THE 2004 ATHENS GAMES

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Sebastian Brueckner

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I am grateful for the German Olympic athletes who took the time to speak with me so openly about their Olympic experiences. The opportunity to listen to their stories and learn from their experiences was invaluable.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study was to provide a detailed description of German Olympians' experience of competing at the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens. In-depth, open-ended phenomenological interviews were conducted with twelve German athletes who competed in Athens. The athletes represented various sports but in order to keep their identity confidential their names were not disclosed. The interviews, originally in German, were transcribed and served as the primary source for data analysis. In a cross-cultural setting where some of the interviews were translated into English, a method informed by hermeneutic analysis was used to derive a thematic structure of the research participants' experiences. Four grounds emerged from the analysis of the athletes' experience: 1) Time, 2) The Preparation, 3) The Olympics, and 4) The Overall Result. Time provided a context for all other aspects of the athletes' experience of competing in Athens. The athletes first had to prepare for the competition (The Preparation, which included the sub themes of Training and Making the Team), and then subsequently competed in The Olympics. The ground of The Olympics reflected the athletes' experiences of dealing with Distractions, The Olympic Village, and the fact that The Whole World is Watching. Finally, the athletes obtained a certain result (The Overall Result), which in many ways influenced how they perceived their overall Olympic experience. Three figural themes stood out in the context of the four grounds: 1) The Competitor / Self, 2) Others, and 3) The Competition / Event. Athletes talked about the sub themes of Body,

Emotions / Feelings, Staying Focused, and Identity / Personality when discussing the theme The Competitor / Self. Support and The Team were the two sub themes that emerged for the figural theme of Others. When discussing the theme of The Competition / Event, participants talked about The Sport, The Setting / Site, and Opponents. Overall, the findings suggested that while there were considerable individual differences in participants' experiences most of these athletes lacked systematic mental preparation for the 2004 Athens Olympics and also experienced various forms of organizational stress.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

> When we watch world class performers on T.V., we see their outer performance. But we are left wondering about their inner performance. What goes through their minds at critical moments? How do they stay motivated? How do they focus? How did they get so good? (Orlick & Partington, 1986, Chapter 1, ¶ 2).

In their pioneering work with Canadian Olympians Orlick and Partington (1986, 1988) provided some valuable insights into some of their country's best athletes' journeys to the top of their respective sports. They also offered some success elements and performance blocks experienced by many of the 200 plus athletes who participated in their project. Orlick and Partington (1986) provided qualitative data they obtained from athletes such as the following comment by one of their participants. When asked to be interviewed, Paul Martini, the 1984 world champion in pairs skating, said:

> Until this interview, no one has come and said 'Let me pick your brain.' . . . I don't think we use our best knowledge, in terms of putting something back . . . asking for some feedback: What can be learned from someone who has just taken an emotional roller coaster, from Barb's fall at the Olympics to the high of winning the Worlds three weeks later, and who has gone through the system for 15 years. (Orlick & Partington, 1986, Chapter 1, ¶ 7).

While Orlick and Partington (1986, 1988) were the first to systematically examine elite athletes' journeys to performance excellence using an interview methodology, other researchers soon followed their example. In the United States, Gould and colleagues (Eklund, Gould, & Jackson, 1993; Gould, Eklund, & Jackson, 1992a, 1992b) provided a very detailed description of performance excellence based on interviews with all 20 members of the 1988 U.S. wrestling team that competed at the Seoul Olympics. In a more comprehensive subsequent project sponsored by the United States Olympic Committee (USOC), Gould and colleagues (Gould, Greenleaf, Chung, & Guinan, 2002a; Gould, Greenleaf, Guinan, & Chung, 2002b; Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, Medbery, & Peterson, 1999; Greenleaf, Gould, & Dieffenbach, 2001) conducted numerous in-depth interviews and administered surveys in an attempt to identify possible explanations for observed performance differences at the Olympics. More specifically, these investigators were interested in why "some teams and coaches thrived in the Olympic environment, whereas other teams struggled and failed to live up to pre-Olympic performance expectations" (Gould et al., 1999, p. 372).

To achieve this goal, Gould's research team conducted interviews with both individuals and focus groups of athletes who had competed at the 1996 Atlanta Olympic games, as well as with the coaches of their respective teams. The USOC's interest in "understanding why, during Olympic competition, some teams meet or exceed performance expectations, whereas others fail to

accomplish performance goals" (Gould et al., 1999, p. 376), was the impetus for these researchers' attempts to find "positive and negative factors that influenced Olympic athlete and coach performances in the Atlanta and Nagano Olympics" (Greenleaf et al., 2001, p. 155).

In another study, Vernacchia, McGuire, Reardon, and Templin (2000) interviewed U.S. Olympic track and field athletes in an attempt to identify important psychological characteristics associated with successful performance in a variety of events. Thus, there currently exists a rather substantial body of knowledge dealing with North American (Canadian and U.S.) Olympic athletes' experiences. However, to date, the Olympic experiences of athletes from other countries have not been examined from a similar perspective.

In Germany, there are a vast number of publications that have focused on topics related to Olympic competition. However, none have addressed German Olympians' experiences of competing at the Games. Instead, most literature deals with topics ranging from how Olympic success is measured (e.g., Priebe, 2002), to descriptions of Olympic rankings and quantitative analyses of German team performances (e.g., Ebeling & Spitz, 2002a; Spitz & Ebeling, 2001), to observations of quantifiable characteristics of successful performances in the various Olympic sports or events (e.g., Fehling & Draeger, 1989; Fiedler, 1989; Hammermueller, Wischnewski, & Kahlenberg, 1989; Kettmann, 1989).

Additionally, many “Weltstandsanalysen”[1] have been published that combine two of the previously mentioned areas of research: 1) quantifiable success characteristics, and 2) quantifiable performance rankings. Most of these analyses were originally compiled in the East German sport system following world championships (e.g., Rudolph, 1983) and Olympic games (e.g., Fiedler, 1983; Freyer, 1989; Pieter, 1985; Steger, Barsch, & Schuster, 1989) in the 1980’s. Such analyses continue to be popular in the re-unified German sport system (e.g., Ebeling & Spitz, 2002b; Küchler, 2001; Pfützner, Reiß, & Rost, 2002; Pfützner, Reiß, Rost, & Tünnemann, 2000). Additionally, in order to justify their respective financial support for the German Olympic teams, organizations like the German Federal Armed Forces (“Bundeswehr”) or the German Federal Border Patrol (“Bundesgrenzschutz”) have begun to publish their own evaluation of Germany’s Olympic team results (e.g., Müller, 2002; Nehren, 2001, 2002).

In summary, then, it is apparent that when looking at Olympic success, German authors describe (e.g., Priebe, 2002) and use (e.g., Friedrich, 2001) standard ways of tabulating results (e.g., the traditional medal count) or that emphasize respective rankings (e.g., placing first through third in an event, or first through sixth, or first through eighth, etc.). In addition, German performances

[1] The German term “Weltstandsanalyse” is used in the German sport system to describe the numerous publications that focus on the following: 1) world rankings of leading sport nations, 2) certain characteristics of leading sport nations’ successful teams, 3) the performance of the German team, and 4) specific performance characteristics and developmental trends focusing on topics like superior gear, best race strategy, necessary volume and intensity of physical training, and/or superior technique.

are evaluated in light of athletes' personal, geographical, or anthropometrical characteristics, such as 1) East or West German origin, 2) age, 3) previous Olympic experience, 4) National Governing Body [NGB], and 5) body height (e.g., Friedrich, 2001) and/or physiological data (e.g., Pfützner et al., 2002). Often such characteristics are associated with performance outcomes (e.g., medal winners, ranking or place finished, etc.).

While much attention has been devoted to describing the statistics of German Olympic performance (e.g., Spitz & Ebeling, 2001), to date no attempt has been made to examine the experiences of successful and unsuccessful German Olympians. This lack of experiential information alone suggests a need for systematic study. However, several additional facets of the German sport system make the present project even more important. Specifically, the German re-unification and the subsequent formation of a unified German sport system provides a context for the present investigation, as does the fact that current German Olympians have by far fewer sport psychology services available to them compared to those offered for U.S., Australian, or British Olympians (Eberspächer, Mayer, Hermann, & Kuhn, 2005, p. 9). Thus, it is unclear as to how German athletes handle the many distractions and pressures of Olympic competition in the absence of such services.

The purpose of the present study was to gain insight into the experiences of German Olympians that competed at the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens, Greece. Since little is known about German athletes' experiences, an open-

ended phenomenological interview was the qualitative method used in this study. As Dale (1996) has pointed out, this method of inquiry has much potential when examining athletes' experiences. Using a single, open-ended question and then only following the direction the participant gives to the dialogue offers the researcher an opportunity to obtain insights in a respective experience that might not be possible if a more structured interview technique was used.

Before beginning the study, the researcher participated in a bracketing interview in order to identify his own preconceived assumptions and biases about athletes' Olympic experiences. Once those biases were bracketed, the researcher conducted open-ended phenomenological interviews with 14 German Olympic athletes who had competed at the Athens 2004 Olympics. Participants were asked to respond to the following open-ended statement: describe anything positive or negative that stood out for you during your experience of preparing for and competing at the 2004 Athens Olympics. They were then given the freedom to talk about their Olympic experience in any way they so chose. During data analysis an attempt was made to stay as close as possible to the actual words used by the participants. However, the fact that some interviews had to be translated from German into English prior to thematization made this process particularly challenging. Wherever translated quotes from athletes were used to support various themes and sub themes, the participants' original words in German were provided along with the English translation for comparison purposes. In addition, all participants were provided an opportunity to review and

comment on the overall thematic structures of their interviews and on a sample selection of quotes that from the primary investigator's perspective supported the various categories. This step was undertaken to assure that the researcher had accurately captured athletes' experiences.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview

Several areas of research are relevant to an existential phenomenological study of German Olympic athletes. In this literature review, I will first discuss some aspects of existential phenomenology that relate to the experiences of athletes. Then, I will discuss North American studies that have examined Olympians' experiences. As most of these publications fall under the umbrella of peak performance, I will highlight some issues that are specific to the body of knowledge on that concept. Finally, I will discuss the German literature regarding the Olympics as well as some historical aspects of German sport psychology that relate to the present study.

What Existential Phenomenology Has to Offer for Sport Psychology Researchers

Reviewing the literature for a phenomenological research project invariably leads one back to the philosophical roots of existential phenomenological inquiry. Specifically, the philosophical origins of the existential phenomenological approach found in the works of Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962), Heidegger (1927/1962), Husserl (1913/1931), and Gadamer (1976) are all relevant to a phenomenological hermeneutic research project. A detailed discussion of these roots exceeds the focus of the present study, but the interested reader may find excellent overviews in Moran (2000) and Sokolowski

(2000). In addition, several other authors have provided discussions of existential phenomenological approaches in the fields of psychology (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997; Valle & Halling, 1989), nursing (Thomas & Pollio, 2002), counseling in sport settings (Nesti, 2004), and sport psychology (Dale, 1996).

Several authors have discussed the advantages of the phenomenological hermeneutic research method when studying human experiences. Pollio et al. (1997) offered an overview of the results they obtained pertaining to *the phenomenology of everyday life* in their book of the same title. More recently, Hector (2003) listed research projects at the University of Tennessee that have utilized a phenomenological methodology, including the experience of having an abortion, playing women's basketball at the NCAA Division I level, being a Jewish woman in the Southeast, and being an African-American female student at a predominantly white university. Several recent research projects addressing the experiences of athletes have also been conducted. These include Czech, Wrisberg, Fisher, Thompson, and Hayes' (2004) investigation of athletes' experience of Christian prayer in sport, Dion's (2004) study of elite female athletes' experience of flow, Dale's (1994) research on elite decathletes' experiences during their most memorable competition, Johnson's (1998) investigation of athletes' experiences of being coached, and Holt's (2003) examination of the coping experience of a professional athlete.

Existential phenomenology appears to be particularly relevant for sport researchers because one of the four existential grounds of a person's life experience is the body or, to be more precise, the lived body (Pollio et al., 1997). Ironically, relatively little is known about the nature of athletes' lived experiences. In much the same way as Thompson, Locander, and Pollio (1989) contended that consumer research needs to look at consumer's experiences, it might be argued that sport psychology research needs to examine athletes' experiences in order to better understand certain athletic phenomena.

Phenomenological research does not address the *Why* question but rather attempts to identify and describe the *What* of particular experiences. More specifically, this method provides "a deeper and clearer understanding of what it is like to experience something" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 58). An in-depth understanding of athletes' experiences could be especially helpful for anyone involved or interested in athletes' lives; be it the coach, sport administrators, friends and family, sports psychology consultants, the media, or the general public. Additionally, rich descriptions of athletes' experiences derived by means of a phenomenological research approach could add to, deepen, or even correct findings obtained in quantitative studies. As Polkinghorne (1989) has pointed out, such revised or expanded understandings could eventually even result in public policy or social changes.

North American Studies Addressing Olympic Performance

As stated earlier, Orlick and Partington (1986, 1988) were the first to publish extensive interview studies with athletes. Based on their analysis of 75 interviews with Canadian Olympic athletes and survey data provided from 165 Canadian Olympians, these researchers identified certain success elements that seemed to be identified with performance success. Besides total commitment to the sport, these elements included quality training and mental preparation for competition (Orlick & Partington, 1986). As these researchers pointed out, the commitment with which the athletes who participated in the study pursued their athletic endeavor developed over time, as they realized the potential they had to reach the top of their respective sports. According to these successful Olympians, quality practice included simulation training, imagery exercises, and clearly defined daily goals. They also mentioned that mental preparation for competition was an essential factor in Olympic success. Such preparation consisted of developing and using a well-practiced pre-performance routine, knowing which focus of attention works best at the competition site and being able to achieve it, and evaluating and learning from the experience of each competition. A final characteristic of successful performance mentioned by these athletes was knowing how to handle distractions and being able to get back on track.

Orlick and Partington (1986) also identified a number of performance blocks that Canadian athletes encountered at the Olympic games. These

included changing established patterns, late selection to the team, and numerous sport and non-sport distractions. Athletes mentioned that changing things that worked well in the past almost always affected their performance negatively. Such changes included drastically increased workloads during practices, unfamiliar or ineffective patterns of coach-athlete interaction, and technical or tactical changes. A long, tedious selection process that, for some athletes, led to last minute nominations to the team was another performance block, due to the physical and mental toll it took on those individuals. Finally, Orlick and Partington (1986, 1988) found that athletes' failure to cope with distractions was a significant performance deterrent. Those athletes who did not perform as well as expected during the Olympics said that the "hype of the whole event; the Olympic village, the ceremonies, the 'star' athletes, the crowds, the media, and the overall expectation" were all major distractions for them (Orlick & Partington, 1986, chapter 3, section "Blown away by distractions").

In a quasi-replication of Orlick and Partington's (1986, 1988) study, Gould and colleagues interviewed 20 wrestlers that had competed on the U.S. Olympic team in the Seoul 1988 Olympics (Gould et al., 1992a, 1992b). In the first of two papers summarizing their findings, the researchers (Gould et al., 1992a) focused on the wrestlers' mental preparation and pre-competitive thoughts and feelings. To provide a clearer context, they asked the athletes to respond to questions about their all-time best performance, their worst Olympic match, and their most crucial Olympic match. Their results in many ways paralleled the findings by

Orlick and Partington (1986, 1988). For these U.S. Olympians, best performances were associated with well-established pre-performance routines, thorough mental preparation, extreme levels of self-confidence, being totally focused, and optimal arousal levels. Inappropriate feelings, irrelevant thoughts, and not sticking to pre-performance routines were things that the wrestlers talked about when describing their worst Olympic performances. Consistent with the results obtained by Orlick and Partington (1988), Gould et al. (1992a) found that medal winners were relatively consistent in adhering to their systematic pre-performance routines, while non-medals winners were not.

In their second paper on Olympic wrestling excellence, Gould and colleagues (1992b) reported the thoughts and feelings that the 20 U.S. Olympic wrestlers said they experienced during their all-time best match, worst Olympic match, and most crucial Olympic match. Once again, the findings seemed to be consistent with those by Orlick and Partington (1986, 1988). Whenever the athletes competed at their best they experienced optimal thoughts and feelings, including total concentration, optimal intensity, confidence, being focused on adequate strategies, and being able to focus and refocus as needed. These thoughts and feelings contrasted markedly to those experienced during athletes' worst performances, such as a lack of focus and not sticking to game plans/making poor decisions. Like Orlick and Partington, Gould et al. (1992b) found that medal winners automated two mental aspects of competition –

competition plans and refocusing strategies – to a higher degree than non-medal winners.

In a subsequent paper, Eklund, Gould, and Jackson (1993) pointed out that while Olympic medal winners share certain psychological characteristics, they also exhibit important differences. However, the differences tend to be with respect to *how* individual athletes react to imposed expectations and handle stress. Moreover, athletes differ when it comes to their unique pre-performance routines, which can vary greatly from athlete to athlete in complexity and the number of specific elements comprising the routine.

In a more recent research project with Olympic athletes, Gould and colleagues (Gould et al., 2002a; Gould et al., 2002b; Gould et al., 1999; Greenleaf et al., 2001) sought to examine not only the psychological factors influencing Olympic performance, but also the physical, social, and environmental aspects. Specifically, their research sought to determine “why some talented athletes and teams rise to the occasion and exhibit peak performances at the Olympic Games, whereas athletes and teams with the same talent and preparation falter in Olympic competition” (Gould et al., 2002b, p. 230). The researchers addressed this question by conducting focus group interviews with athletes and coaches from four more successful and four less successful U.S. teams that had competed at the 1996 Atlanta games. They also obtained individual phone interviews from eight U.S. athletes who had participated in the 1996 Atlanta Summer Olympics and from seven others who had competed at the

1998 Nagano Winter Olympics. In addition, the researchers obtained survey responses from 296 Atlanta and 83 Nagano Olympians.

The results (Gould et al., 2002a; Gould et al., 2002b; Gould et al., 1999; Greenleaf et al., 2001) revealed a variety of psychological, physiological and environmental factors that had exerted an influence, either positive or negative, on these Olympic athletes' performance. Positive psychological factors for individuals included mental skills training and preparation, participants' attitude toward the Games, support services, establishing and sticking to performance routines and plans, a multifaceted preparation for as many unexpected events as possible, being able to cope with distractions, and team unity. Positive factors for teams included having effective leaders in the group and being able to establish good team chemistry by bonding during training camps or while living in residency programs.

Gould and colleagues (Gould et al., 2002a; Gould et al., 2002b; Gould et al., 1999; Greenleaf et al., 2001) reported that problems with planning and team cohesion, lack of experience, travel and coaching issues, and a lack of focus and commitment were factors negatively influencing team performance. For individual athletes who failed to meet expectations, conflicts with coaches, issues related to team selection, and departing from pre-performance routines were identified as the main negative influences on performance. Not surprisingly, physical training was found to be one of the most important non-psychological factors, along with housing issues and coaching. These factors could affect athletes' performances

either positively or negatively. For example, while proper physical training would be essential for successful Olympic performance, overtraining would be experienced as very detrimental.

In addition to confirming earlier results regarding the importance of mental preparation for Olympic success (Eklund et al., 1993; Gould et al., 1992a, 1992b; Gould et al., 1999; Greenleaf et al., 2001; Orlick & Partington, 1986, 1988), the data from the 1996 and 1998 U.S. Olympians provided Gould and colleagues (Gould et al., 2002a) with information about the extent to which certain variables influenced athletes' performance. Most significantly, these researchers found that confidence in one's own abilities, confidence in the team's abilities, and the coach's level of confidence were major performance factors, all of which are related to the concepts of individual and collective self-efficacy (Feltz, 1994; McAuley, 1992). Other factors influencing individual success included adhering to pre-performance routines and coping effectively with outside distractions (e.g., dealing with media and sponsorship obligations). Not surprisingly, group cohesion was found to play a major role in both individual and team success. Given the inordinate emphasis on achieving peak individual and team performance during the Olympic games, I now describe some of the research and theorizing on that topic.

Peak Performance Literature and the Olympics

An early definition of peak performance was provided by Privette (1981), who stated that "the perfect moment in sports when everything is altogether,

when muscle, mind, and movement flow, when you know you're at your personal best – this is peak performance… It is behavior that exceeds one's predictable level of functioning" (p. 51). This definition sums up what Privette views as the essential features of peak performance: How the individual engages in the sport experience or performance, and the fact that the person transcends what normally would be expected of him/her in a given situation. Consistent with Privette's view, Williams and Krane (2001), more recently described peak performance as "those magic moments when an athlete puts it all together – both physically and mentally" (p. 162).

Some researchers have attempted to identify the common psychological characteristics of peak performance (Cohn, 1991; Gould et al., 1992a). Athletes' descriptions of peak performance or an "episode of superior functioning" (Cohn, p.1) have included characteristics such as spontaneity, total absorption, total focusing, a loss of awareness of time and space, a feeling of empowerment, and joy. More recently, Dale (1994) provided an excellent overview of psychological characteristics associated with peak performance, which is presented in Table 1. These characteristics are similar to the ones described by Ravizza (1977) in his earlier qualitative research on athletes' peak experiences. Participants in that study described their peak experiences as unique, automatic, and effortless performance characterized by loss of fear, an ability to execute basic skills, no consciousness of performing, a feeling of being totally immersed and in control, and a narrow focus of attention.

Table 1

Psychological characteristics of peak performance. Adapted from Dale, G. A. (1994). *The experience of elite decathlon participants during their most memorable performance: Overcoming the distractions*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Expectations	
– Self-confident	– Optimistic outlook
– Enthusiastic	– No fear of failing
Arousal level	
– Mentally relaxed	– Physically relaxed
– Calm minded	– Highly energized
Focus	
– Focused on the present	– Narrow focus of attention
– Task relevant focus	
Awareness	
– Time disorientation	– Extraordinary awareness
– In cocoon/detached from environment	
Locus of Control	
– Playing possessed yet in complete control	– Effortless/automatic performance
– In control of mind and body	

Although peak performance and peak experience seem to share important characteristics, Cohn (1991) has pointed out that “peak performance describes a level of achievement . . . [while] peak experience relates to a feeling state” (Cohn, p.2). Similarly, Privette (1986) interpreted peak performance as the positive extreme of performance and peak experience as the positive extreme of feeling states. However, from an existential phenomenological perspective, distinctions between peak performance and peak experience may be superficial (e.g., Dale, 1996; Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962) because studies of peak performance (e.g., Cohn, 1991) have in reality examined athletes’ experiences of peak performance, and hence a peak experience.

One important element of the peak performance/peak experience connection might be Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) concept of flow. Gould et al. (1992b) listed the essential flow characteristics as “a merging of action and awareness, absorption in the task, loss of self or ego, feelings of control, clear noncontradictory demands for action and unambiguous feedback, and an autotelic nature” (p. 385). Privette (1981) pointed out that the characteristics associated with Csikszentmihalyi’s flow concept show remarkable resemblance to the characteristics of peak performance. However, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) categorically stated that the optimal experience of flow involving physical skills was not limited to the context of outstanding athletic feats. More specifically, he noted that “Olympians do not have an exclusive gift in finding enjoyment in pushing performance beyond existing boundaries … The joy of surpassing the

limits of the body is open to all" (p.97). Interestingly, this notion is consistent with the definition of peak performance suggested by Privette (1981).

In the applied sport psychology literature, the topic of peak performance has primarily become associated with the experience of expert performers. As mentioned earlier, one of the primary means of identifying the essence of these experiences has been to interview Olympic athletes (e.g., Gould et al., 2002a; Greenleaf et al., 2001; Orlick & Partington, 1986, 1988; Vernacchia et al., 2000). In these studies researchers have often attempted to distinguish between the characteristics of more or less skillful performers or more or less successful teams/athletes (e.g., Gould et al., 1992a; e.g., Gould et al., 1992b; Gould et al., 1999; Mahoney, Gabriel, & Perkins, 1987). In some cases peak performance has been characterized as expert performers' lifetime-best performances (e.g., Gould et al., 1999). While this characterization is not in line with Privette's (1981) definition of peak performance, there is no evidence that expert performers, such as Olympic athletes, always experience flow-like symptoms during their lifetime-best performance, or even exceed their predictable level of functioning. In fact, it could be argued that quite the opposite is true: expert performers like Olympic champions prepare themselves to perform in exactly the same way every time, even when the forum of competition is the Olympic games. Hence, in accomplishing this goal, their performance becomes "average" (to them, at least) and more predictable, and thus not consistent with Privette's definition of peak performance (i.e., behavior that exceeds one's predictable level).

Regardless of the semantic issues surrounding definitions of peak performance, research on the characteristics of successful athletes has yielded important findings regarding the importance of mental training for performance success. These findings include “mental links to excellence” (Orlick & Partington, 1988), psychological skills profiles of successful athletes (Mahoney et al., 1987; Williams & Krane, 2001), and the development of peak performance training programs (Garfield, 1984). However, some differences exist regarding the components of mental training considered essential for promoting peak performance. Garfield’s (1984) peak performance training program consists of six key components. These include analyzing an athletes’ motivation for sport, unveiling a mission by developing goal setting strategies, practicing voluntary relaxation, practicing imagery, developing athletic poise or proper concentration, and focusing on the automatization of mental skills. For Garfield, the most essential components of peak performance are positive feelings, an attentional focus on the present, and a high energy level.

Mahoney et al. (1987) attempted to identify the mental components of peak performance by surveying a national sample of elite, pre-elite, and non-elite athletes from 23 sports. Compared to their pre-elite and non-elite counterparts, elite athletes had: 1) more effective arousal levels, 2) more effective concentration before and during competition, 3) higher self-confidence, 4) more use of mental preparation including kinesthetic imagery, and 5) higher motivation.

Thus, it might be assumed that an effective mental training program for peak performance would emphasize these components.

In their overview of the psychological characteristics of peak performance, Williams and Krane (2001) examined the common mental factors reported in earlier research on Olympic athletes and other elite performers representing a wide variety of sports. Chief among those factors were: 1) self-regulation of arousal (not anxious, but energized and relaxed), 2) high self-confidence, 3) better concentration (appropriate focus), 4) feeling in control without forcing actions, 5) positive imagery and thoughts regarding the sport, and 6) determination and commitment. The previous research also revealed that elite athletes made frequent use of mental skills such as imagery, goal setting and specific competition plans, thought control strategies, arousal management techniques, effective coping strategies for overcoming distractions, and pre-performance routines. Clearly, then, the superior mental characteristics of elite athletes are not only evident in their performance but are also the product of systematic practice.

An intriguing observation with regard to the study of Olympic athletes is that while these athletes might be considered experts in their field, many seem to have difficulty performing at their best during the Olympic games (Gould et al., 1999; Greenleaf et al., 2001). Causes of such difficulties could include the various and unique aspects of Olympic competition, such as an increased level of competitiveness due to more countries participating (Spitz & Ebeling, 2001),

and an increased importance and pressure due to the world's focus on the Games and growing media coverage (Greenleaf et al., 2001). Woodman and Hardy (2001) have also identified several sources of organizational stress experienced by elite athletes preparing for major international competitions. In their study they interviewed 15 elite athletes and found that perceived organizational stress could be due to environmental issues (e.g., late team selection, financial concerns), personal issues (e.g., goals and expectations, injuries), leadership issues (e.g., coach-athlete interactions), and team issues (e.g., lack of role clarity, poor communication, inappropriate support network). Given the importance of the coach's influence on an athletes' performance, it might be expected that changes in coaching style would be a particular threat to peak performance during Olympic competition. Having to rely on a national coach who has a different coaching style than the coach an athlete works with on a daily basis would likely affect the athlete's performance at a major international competition. Overall, Woodman and Hardy's (2001) research suggests that at least some of the psychological challenges to peak performance during the Olympic games are due to factors that are not present under normal competitive circumstances.

German Sport Studies and the Olympics

In their analysis of the 2000 Olympic games in Sydney, Spitz and Ebeling (2001) provided statistics illustrating the increase in number of participating countries and athletes over the previous 20 years. These authors also pointed

out that many of the German athletes who had excelled at the world championships during the two years prior to the 2000 Olympics were not as successful in Sydney. Spitz and Ebeling offered possible reasons as to why this was the case. Specifically, they suggested that less successful athletes had 1) unrealistic expectations regarding their performance as well as the level of support they would receive, 2) too much individual freedom with regard to planning training and competition schedules, 3) a lack of focus on preparing on the Olympics as the most important competition, and 4) failed to prepare mentally for the distracting Olympic environment. Nevertheless, Spitz and Ebeling concluded that while some aspects of the German sport system could be improved, the system still provided all the necessary structures for athletes to be successful at a high level in international competition. While the authors provided an extensive list of certain measures that should be addressed with regard to improving support for youth athletes and the national governing bodies' structures, they did not propose any increase in sport psychology services for German Olympic athletes. This omission is especially surprising in light of the fact that the authors listed the failure to mentally prepare adequately for the many distractions encountered in the Olympic environment as one of the main reasons why athletes failed to meet expectations at the Olympics.

Although Spitz and Ebeling (2001) did not recommend that more sport psychology services be made available for Olympic athletes this possibility was subsequently discussed by sport administrators (Eberspächer, Immenroth, &

Mayer, 2002) and a specific program was initiated for the 2004 Olympics in Athens (Eberspächer et al., 2005). Eberspächer, Mayer, Hermann, and Kuhn pointed out that this was the first time the German Sport Organization established a specific fund to support mental training programs for its Olympic athletes. Historically, however, it should be pointed out that in the former East German sport system, research and application of applied sport psychology techniques were an important component of international athletic preparation (Roberts & Kimiecik, 1989). As Schellenberger (1991) noted, East Germany employed a systematic approach to sport psychology interventions for the first time prior to the 1968 Mexico summer Olympics. While few details exist as to the exact nature of the interventions, it appears that the primary role of sport psychologists was to work with coaches rather than with athletes (Roberts & Kimiecik, 1989)

Interestingly, it took almost 15 years for the unified German sport system to obtain funding for sport psychology services for Olympic athletes preparing for the Games. In a recent book, Neumann (2005) provided an evaluation of the different projects supported by this special funding for sport psychology services. Unfortunately, the basis of the evaluation was the opinions of the 14 different sport psychologists that worked with athletes and teams. Similarly, in their analysis of the German sport psychology services for the 2004 Athens Games Eberspächer et al. (2005) offered little in the way of athletes' perceptions, but stated only that they seemed to be mostly positive. Quantitative data reported by

these researchers indicated that German athletes receiving sport psychology services competed in 132 of the 301 events held in Athens, won more medals than athletes who didn't receive sport psychology services, and improved their performance over previous levels even if they didn't win a medal. The results of a survey with national coaches also indicated that they supported the concept of having a sport psychologist involved and planned to continue to do so.

In summary, while there seems to be a trend toward the increased use of sport psychology services by German athletes preparing for the Olympics, findings by Emrich, Fröhlich, Güllich, and Pitsch (2004) suggest otherwise. They have presented survey data regarding the kind of services German athletes preparing for Olympic competition at the various training centers used. Of the 724 athletes, only 29.7% knew that sport psychology services were available and only 21.4% used them. Moreover, athletes used sport psychology services less than all other services provided. Of those athletes who did not know about the sport psychology services, approximately 10% used such services elsewhere, but more than 40% thought they were not necessary. Thus, the available research on the role of sport psychology services in the preparation of German Olympic athletes pales in comparison to the results of North American studies with Olympic athletes and the peak performance literature.

Summary

In this chapter North American studies of Olympic performance, the peak performance literature, and selected German studies regarding Olympic competition and the sport psychology services available for and used by German Olympians were discussed. North American studies of the mental characteristics of successful and less successful Olympic athletes as well as the research on peak performance in sport clearly indicate that certain psychological skills and mental preparation play an important role in elite athletic performance. Compared to North America less is known about the role and effectiveness of sport psychology services available to German Olympic athletes. Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to determine German athletes' experience of Olympic preparation and competition in order to, among other things, ascertain more information about the nature of athletes' mental preparation and use of sport psychology services.

Chapter III

METHOD

Introduction

This chapter consists of two parts. In part one, general methodological and epistemological issues dealing with the existential phenomenological, hermeneutic approach to qualitative interviewing are discussed. These include a detailed description of the step-by-step process of existential phenomenological research suggested by Thomas and Pollio (2002). In part two a discussion of the process of data collection and analysis used in the present study is provided.

General Methodological and Epistemological Issues

Kerry and Armour (2000) argue that researchers who choose to employ a phenomenological approach must provide sound conceptual rationale for using this specific method of inquiry. Citing an earlier quote by S. J. Smith (1992), these authors stress that the phenomenological method "is as much a way of speaking about a particular orientation, commitment, and presence of mind as it is about specific procedures" (Kerry & Armour, 2000, p. 8). Thus, in the following sections a discussion of the various steps in the phenomenological research process along with the philosophical underpinnings is presented.

Step 1 – Choosing a Topic

As highlighted in Figure 1, existential phenomenological research consists of a sequence of interrelated steps. As described by Thomas and Pollio (2002), the

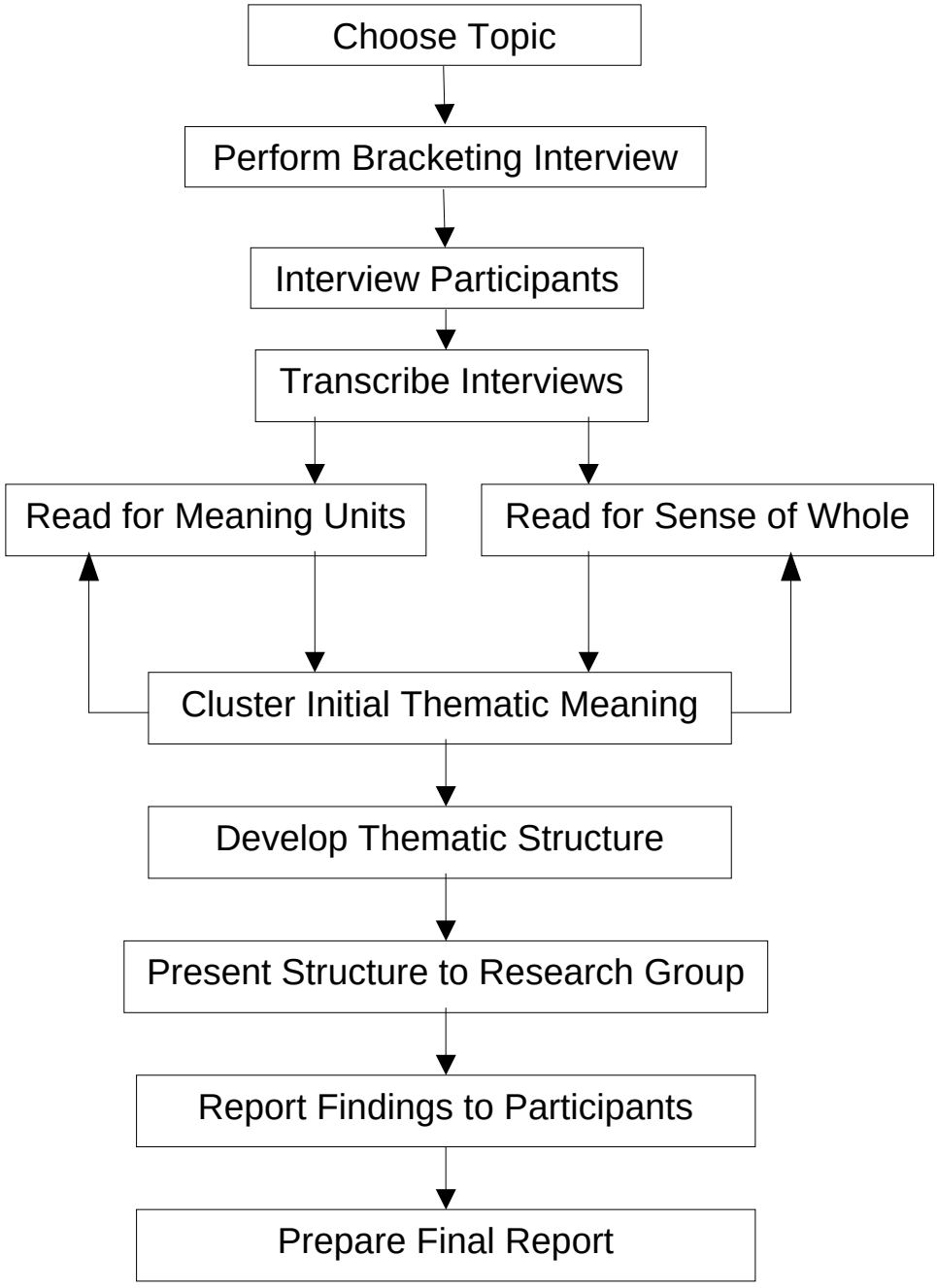


Figure 1. Summary of the step-by-step process of an existential phenomenological research project. Adapted from Pollio, H. R., Henley, T., & Thompson, C. B. (1997). *The phenomenology of everyday life.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

first step is the researcher's decision regarding the topic of investigation. In doing this, the researcher must also focus on him or her self as well. However, the topic should be picked first and then the researcher should decide on the most appropriate method for examining the topic. For a researcher who is interested in a particular human experience, a phenomenological hermeneutic approach offers a potentially fruitful research method.

When choosing to explore a particular human experience like competing at the Olympic games, it is essential to consider certain philosophical aspects that are central to this decision-making process. Based on the existing literature (Kerry & Armour, 2000; Thomas & Pollio, 2002), the present existential phenomenological research project combined aspects of Husserlian, Heideggerian, and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. An attempt was made to find out how German Olympians in Athens 2004 experienced "their lives from their own, unique, first-person perspective" (Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p. 4). The goal of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962) is mostly to derive at descriptions of human "being-in-the world" as it is experienced before it is classified by science or rational thought (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). In order to achieve this, Merleau-Ponty tried to combine aspects of Husserl's "eidetic" or "descriptive" approach to phenomenology (Husserl, 1913/1931) with the "interpretive" phenomenology that Heidegger (1927/1962) had proposed (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Specifically, Merleau-Ponty tried to combine Husserl's idea of descriptions of everyday, direct and immediate experiences in the

Lebenswelt (or life-world) by returning to “the things themselves” or their very essences (Thomas & Pollio, 2002; Valle, King, & Halling, 1989), along with the concepts of the historicality of understanding and the hermeneutic circle, introduced to phenomenology by Heidegger (Kerry & Armour, 2000).

While Husserl sought to derive systematic descriptions of universal essences, Heidegger acknowledged that peoples’ histories lead to unique perceptions of experiences. Hence, he proposed that the notion of the hermeneutic concept, described by Gadamer (1976), be a central part of the process of making meaning of peoples’ lived experiences. That is, the meanings do not emerge simply from the text as universal essences, but rather from the process of the hermeneutic circle, where even the cultural context in which participants and the researcher live might play a role (Thomas & Pollio, 2002).

Although Kerry and Armour (2000) pointed out that Husserl’s (1913/1931) concept of bracketing contradicts Heidegger’s (1927/1962) notion of the hermeneutic circle, it is necessary that both concepts be applied in a study like the present one. According to these authors, Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) offered a philosophy of meaning in real life that made use of rich descriptions of phenomena (Husserl) before an existential ground (Heidegger) that cannot be bracketed. Additionally, Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy is especially relevant to a study investigating the experience of German Olympic athletes competing at the 2004 Athens Games; as Merleau-Ponty is primarily interested in human

experiences in real life on its own term, not just in Being as such from a more theoretical perspective, as was the case with Heidegger (Thomas & Pollio, 2002).

According to Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962), phenomenology emphasizes the importance of returning to the world as one experiences it and the central role played by the co-constitutionality of the person and the world. Both Merleau-Ponty and Husserl (1913/1931) contend that people are always interconnected with the world by their intentionality: What a person is aware of reveals what is meaningful to her or him. For Merleau-Ponty, a person's perception "provides a direct experience of events, object, and phenomena of the world" (Thomas & Pollio, p. 14) and makes it possible for the researcher to "describe an individual's first-person world on the basis of what he or she does as well as in terms of what he or she perceives or talks about" (p. 16).

Kerry and Armour (2000) note that "for Merleau-Ponty, a person's being-in-the-world is given a perspective only through his or her body" (p. 7). Since the Olympic athlete's body plays a central role throughout his or her athletic career as well as when preparing for and participating in Olympic competition, the phenomenological research method would seem to be an appropriate choice for examining the experiences of Olympic athletes. In addition, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy encompassing holism, culture, and especially embodiment (Thomas & Pollio, 2002) provides an appropriate framework for examining athletes'

experiences, which are presumably shaped as they come to understand the world by and through their body.

These philosophical considerations were the basis for choosing an existential phenomenological research method for the present study. The method offered a way of examining German Olympians' experiences of competing at the 2004 Athens Games and providing information about the athletes' lived experiences.

Step 2 – The Bracketing Interview

Once a topic has been chosen and the phenomenological method has been determined to be the most appropriate approach for addressing it, the focus shifts to the participant. In order to sharpen this focus, a bracketing interview is conducted. During this interview the primary investigator is interviewed by another researcher familiar with the phenomenological research process. The purpose of the bracketing interview is to explore possible personal biases of the primary investigator. As described by Dale (1996), the process of bracketing allows the researcher to respond to the question that he or she will be asking the participants in the study. The researcher's responses to the question (or statement) are transcribed verbatim and then analyzed in order to determine any preconceived assumptions the researcher might hold about the topic or experience. Once the interview is completed, a thematic structure is developed with the assistance of a phenomenological research group. As a result, the primary investigator becomes cognizant of any existing presuppositions he/she

might have prior to initiating contact with the participants and beginning the interview process.

Contemporary researchers (Dale, 1996; Thomas & Pollio, 2002) acknowledge that total bracketing of the “natural attitude” (Husserl, 1913/1931) is not possible. Thus, the goal of the bracketing interview is not complete transcendental phenomenological reduction as initially proposed by Husserl (Kerry & Armour, 2000). Rather bracketing should be considered as an ongoing process during the research project where the researcher continually reflects upon, brackets, and intuits his/her biases. Hector (2003) points out that a bracketing interview is only a first step in an attempt to achieve a suspension of the natural attitude. Besides being aware of his or her own presuppositions and biases regarding the topic, the researcher brackets those biases by using the participant’s words, rather than his/her own, when interviewing participants and summarizing their experience.

In summary, then, the goal of the bracketing interview is for the primary investigator to identify his or her presuppositions from the very outset of the research project (Dale, 1996). By making biases visible, the researcher is positioned to be a good listener during the interview process and is less likely to mix his or her own beliefs with the experience of the participant (Thomas & Pollio, 2002).

Step 3 – Interviewing Participants

The third step in the phenomenological research process is the actual phenomenological interviews (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Here, the focus is on the participants and their first-person description of the specific lived experience in question (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989). Dale (1996) and Thomas and Pollio (2002) have described specific procedures that provide useful guidance for conducting phenomenological interviews. After obtaining informed consent and providing participants with a detailed explanation of the study, the researcher poses a single open-ended question or statement for the participants to ponder and respond to. The question/statement is worded in such a way that it allows participants the freedom to respond in the way they feel best describes their experience (Thomas & Pollio, 2002).

Following this initial open-ended question, the interview follows the direction given it by the participant. The dialogue between the interviewer and participant is more circular than linear in nature (Dale, 1996). Thus, it resembles a conversation more than a question and answer session (Thompson, et al., 1989). To achieve this conversational dialogue, the researcher asks probing follow-up questions to clarify statements or to obtain a more detailed description of certain experiences. Whenever possible, the interviewer uses the participant's own vocabulary when asking these questions. As noted earlier, this is another way the researcher can assure the bracketing of his/her biases (Hector, 2003). The researcher might also summarize what the participant has said as a way of

obtaining clarification (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). The interview concludes once the participant agrees that he or she has described his or her experience is as much detail as possible and that there is nothing else that "stood out" to him or her about the experience. The researcher then summarizes once more what he/she has heard the participant say regarding his or her experience in order to obtain final confirmation.

Step 4 – Data Analysis

After conducting and audiotaping the interview, the researcher uses analysis procedures, such as those described by Dale (1996), Thomas and Pollio (2002), and Polkinghorne (1989) to thematize the data. As Polkinghorne pointed out, "the aim of phenomenological inquiry is to reveal and unravel the structures, logic, and interrelationships that obtain in the phenomenon under inspection" (p. 50). Dale (1996) has suggested that the researcher maintain a methodological log throughout the duration of the study, making notes on his/her thought processes, reasoning, and specific actions undertaken throughout the research project. The steps of data analysis include transcribing and the hermeneutic circle.

Step 4.1 – Transcribing

The audiotaped interviews are transcribed verbatim, paying close attention to pauses, laughter or other noticeable phenomena during the interview (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Whenever possible, the researcher should transcribe the audiotaped interviews him or her self. This allows the researcher to engage the

data, containing participants' descriptions of their experiences.

Transcribing the interviews him or her self also enables the researcher to begin the process of data analysis by trying to interpret parts of the text in relation to other parts.

Step 4.2 – The Hermeneutic Circle

In general, the concept of the hermeneutic circle helps to overcome "the seemingly linear character of reading by having an interpreter understand earlier portions of the text in relation to latter portions and, conversely, understand latter portions in the context of preceding ones" (Pollio et al., 1997, p. 49). The hermeneutic circle is implemented in three ways during the interpretation of phenomenological interviews. First, the primary researcher brings his/her own interpretation of an interview to an interpretative research group, where the interview is read aloud. While the primary researcher sits and takes notes, two other members of the group take turns reading the questions and statements by the interviewer and the participant, respectively. Frequent pauses are made "to discuss potential meanings and possible interrelationships among meanings" (Pollio et al., 1997, p. 50). Once the primary researcher obtains confirmation and clarification of the themes from the group, he or she proceeds to analyze the remaining interviews mostly by him or her self, reading each one multiple times in full-length and making notes of the themes that stand out in the text. From time to time, the primary researcher returns to the interpretative research group to present preliminary descriptions of the individual interviews, obtain

confirmation/clarification, and develop a provisional overall thematic structure. While the focus shifts back and forth from the perspective of the individual researcher to that of the group, the group setting facilitates identification of alternative themes and offers confirmation of themes. In addition this setting creates a dynamic that allows additional themes to emerge. The research group also provides feedback as to whether the presented thematic structures are supported by the interview data and represent clear descriptions of the participants' experiences (Pollio et al., 1997).

Secondly, the hermeneutic circle functions in an "idiographic" way, where the group or the primary researcher continuously relates parts of a single interview to the whole text. This methodological procedure is used to insure that all parts of the text "are always understood in terms of their relationship to the larger whole" (Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p. 35). Thematic descriptions of passages of a participant's interview lead to the formation of an overall thematic structure of that individual's unique experience. This thematic structure serves as a case-study-like description of each interview.

The third function of the hermeneutic circle is in the analysis of each transcript in the context of all the other transcripts. This application is referred to as the "nomothetic" (in contrast to the "idiographic") level of hermeneutic analysis (Pollio et al., 1997). During this step the researcher attempts to develop a single general, or overall thematic structure for all of the interviews. This overall structure is based on the case-study-like descriptions of themes derived from the

idiographic hermeneutic analysis of each participant's interview. Now the hermeneutic circle constitutes a constant change of focus from single interviews to all of the interviews conducted.

As K. R. Smith (1998) has noted, continuous bracketing by the researcher facilitates the hermeneutic process. Valle, King, and Halling (1989) point out that "the ability to deepen one's understanding of the text has to do with one's willingness and ability to reflect one's own *preunderstanding* of the text" (p. 15, italics in original). Valle et al. suggest that such reflection should lead researchers/readers to ask themselves questions like: "What have I already assumed which may account for my failure to make sense of this section?" (p.16). By continuously asking and answering such questions, the researcher maintains a more heightened self-awareness when interviewing participants and also when interpreting the interviews.

Step 5 – Reporting Findings to Participants

During the last step of the phenomenological research process the focus shifts back to the participant (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Here the researcher gives participants an opportunity to review the thematic structure describing their experience and provide feedback as to how accurately and completely the structure does so. This step is important in securing the study's validity (Dale, 1996). Put another way, the researcher is asking each participant "How do my descriptive results compare with your experiences?" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 53). Any requests from the participants to add or delete something from the thematic

structure are honored and the changes are incorporated into the thematic structure.

Issues of Validity and Reliability

In laboratory and survey studies the concept of reliability generally refers to the measures taken to insure that the research findings are replicable. However, in interview studies complete replication is usually not possible, especially in dialogic research (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). As Thomas and Pollio point out: “Human description and meanings change over time as a result of changing experiences, new insights, and ever more articulated awareness that accompanies an ongoing life event” (p. 40). Therefore, attempts to obtain reliability by conducting multiple interviews would likely fail, because subsequent interviews would not yield exactly the same responses as previous interviews. As Hector (2003) points out: “When people describe past experiences in depth, something important happens. People begin to understand and ‘make meaning’ of their experiences . . . These new understandings can have profound implications for the individuals’ futures” (p. 26). Clearly, then, the idea of a test-retest method of assuring the reliability of phenomenological research is not appropriate.

There are, however, some alternative methods phenomenological researchers can use to ensure the reliability of their data. Giorgi (1975) argued that findings from a phenomenological research project are reliable “if a reader, adopting the same viewpoint as articulated by the researcher, can also see what

the researcher saw, whether or not he agrees with it" (p.93). Thus, it is the researcher's responsibility to provide the reader with as much information as possible in order to allow the reader to understand the researcher's perspective. This information should consist of a thorough bracketing statement outlining the researcher's biases and presuppositions. It should also include a detailed description of the thematic structure, along with many examples and excerpts from participants' interviews that support the themes.

Although identical word-for-word replication is not possible in dialogic studies, Thomas and Pollio (2002) point out that thematic consistency is as much a goal of phenomenological research projects as it is of quantitative studies. A phenomenological researcher expects that an overall thematic structure and understanding of participants' experiences that might emerge from another study examining the respective experience would be commensurate with the structure found in the original study. Yet, given the facts that ultimate and complete bracketing is impossible and that interpretations are context-dependent, Thomas and Pollio acknowledge "there may always be more than one legitimate interpretation for any particular set of data" (p. 40). Summing up their notions about the reliability of phenomenological studies, Thomas and Pollio point out that "in a sense, the aim of replication is to *extend*, not *repeat*, the themes and relations obtained in the original study" (p. 40, italics in original).

The issue of validity in phenomenological studies is once again conceptualized differently than it is in quantitative studies. According to

Polkinghorne (1989), the issue of validity in quantitative studies depends on whether the instruments used to measure a phenomenon do in fact do so. In phenomenological research the term validity is used in a broader, more general sense. According to Polkinghorne (1989), the issue concerns the question, “Does the general structural description provide an accurate portrait of the common features and structural connections that are manifested in the examples collected?” (p. 57). The challenge for the phenomenological researcher is to convince the reader that his or her findings are accurate. To achieve that goal the researcher must show that his/her method has been applied rigorously and appropriately, and that the results are plausible and illuminating. Pollio et al. (1997) point out that “only when both criteria are met does phenomenological description attain the rigor and insight that it aspires to attain” (p. 56). As mentioned earlier, perhaps the best way to insure the validity of phenomenological interview data is to send participants the thematic structure that emerged from the data analysis and ask them to confirm that it accurately represents their experience.

Specific Methodological and Epistemological Issues Relevant to the Present Study

In this section, the process undertaken during the present research project investigating German Olympians’ experiences of competing at the 2004 Athens Games is described. The section is subdivided into separate discussions of the two main processes of data collection and data analysis.

Data Collection

The three aspects of the process of data collection for the present study were: 1) bracketing, 2) selecting participants, and 3) interviewing. Each is discussed in the sections that follow.

Bracketing

As discussed earlier, the goal of the bracketing process is for the phenomenological researcher to identify any personal presuppositions and biases about the chosen research topic. As Colaizzi (1978) has suggested, the researcher should continually reflect on questions like “Why am I involved in this phenomenon?” and “How might my personal inclinations and predispositions as to research value influence or even bias how and what I investigate?” Additionally, the researcher should be aware of “all that is involved in his approach, such as personal gain and prestige, social recognition, moral, ethical, religious, political and economic features” (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 55, cited in Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p. 33).

While conducting the present study, I tried to keep Colaizzi’s concerns in mind. Analysis of my bracketing interview revealed first the reasons why I chose German Olympians’ experiences as the topic of investigation. For 13 years I was a competitive swimmer, although competing at the Olympic trials was as far as my performance took me. While I never made it to the Olympic stage, it has always fascinated me, even since my childhood. This fascination has led me to pursue a professional career focused on the arena of high performance sport and

the participants who comprise it. For seven years I worked as a sports writer in Germany, covering many different kinds of stories, including the Olympics, and interviewing all kinds of athletes, from Germany as well as from other countries.

When I shifted my professional focus to the study of sport psychology, I became aware of some of the fascinating research studies on Olympic athletes who had been published, including those by Orlick and Partington (1986, 1988) and by Gould and colleagues (e.g., Gould et al., 1992a, 1992b; Gould et al., 1999). These studies presented many interesting accounts of the performance and experience of the best athletes in the world, and illustrated the importance of mental preparation for successful competition at the Olympic level. Yet, given my German background, I knew that few if any sport psychology services were available to or used by Germany's elite athletes, a fact that was more recently emphasized by Eberspächer et al. (2005). Thus, I became motivated to find out whether German Olympians' experiences differed in any way from those of North American athletes, who had more access to mental training and sport psychology services.

For this research project it was necessary for me to make a clear distinction between my previous (non phenomenological) interview experiences with German Olympians and the phenomenological interviews I would be conducting with my research participants. More specifically, I had to make sure that I permitted my participants to take any direction they chose during the

phenomenological interviews. Given my awareness of the lack of sport psychology services available in Germany and my potential interest in pursuing a possible future career as a German sport psychology consultant, I had to make sure I did not lead participants to talk about the mental aspects of their Olympic competitive experience.

Bracketing also required me to state the research question in as open-ended a fashion as possible. The fact that I conducted interviews in German required some changes to the initial question, which was "Can you please tell me in as much detail as possible about your experience of competing at the 2004 Athens Olympics, anything that stood out to you?" As it is hard to translate the English verb "to compete" into German, the question was expanded to (a close translation from the German question back to English follows): "If you think back to last year, the Olympic games, can you describe for me your experience of competing in Athens? Anything that stood out to you preparing for Athens but then also in Athens itself, anything that you think helped you to perform well or hindered you in any way? [*Wenn du noch einmal überlegst, letztes Jahr Athen, die Olympischen Spiele, deine Wettkampferfahrung, im Vorfeld und dann vor Ort. Was war hilfreich deine Leistung zu bringen, beziehungsweise Sachen, die nicht so positiv waren, die dir vielleicht eher im Weg gestanden haben beim Versuch deine Leistung zu bringen?*]" I was careful not to direct participants in any way beyond those instructions, but rather give them the freedom to talk about any

experiences they perceived as negative or positive while preparing for and when competing at the Olympics.

My bracketing interview also focused on what I thought participants would say in response to the initial, open-ended interview question. Since I had never had the experience of competing at the Olympic games, I could not offer a first person account of such an experience. Based on 1) my previously described experiences as a sports writer who, among other things, had interviewed Olympic athletes, 2) my own athletic experiences that had taken me to the Olympic trials, and 3) media coverage I had seen, heard, and read about the Olympics, I answered the research question in the way I expected athletes to talk about their competitive experience at the Olympics.

A colleague who worked at the University of Tennessee as a sport psychology professor and sport psychology consultant conducted the audiotaped bracketing interview, and asked me: “Can you talk about your experiences of Olympic athletes, German Olympic athletes, that you feel are relevant for your study?” Following the interview, the tape was transcribed verbatim and the transcript was presented to a phenomenological research group for analysis.

In the bracketing interview I began by talking about the previously mentioned personal experiences I felt were relevant, including: 1) having been an athlete myself, 2) having been a sportswriter that had interviewed Olympians and written about the Olympics, 3) having read and studied scholarly articles about

Olympic competition and athletes, and 4) having read, heard, and seen newspaper articles as well as radio and T.V. broadcasts about the Olympics.

Analysis of the bracketing interview revealed that I was aware that engaging in a dialogue with Olympians from an existential phenomenological perspective provided certain challenges for me. Prior to that time, all my experiences had been “filtered” through the media, either seeing, hearing or reading about the Olympics directly through the media, or “serving” the media myself as a sportswriter. For this project my primary role needed to be that of a listener to the athletes, to assist them in telling their story, and to bracket any biases or pre-suppositions I had about Olympic competition.

One of the biases I had about Olympic competition was the belief that mental preparation is crucial for Olympic athletes to succeed at the Games. Therefore, I needed to make sure not to lead participants along those lines, probing for their feelings about their mental preparation (or lack thereof) when I was asking follow-up questions.

My experience as a sportswriter and an athlete made me realize that athletes expect sportswriters to be somewhat knowledgeable about sports they cover, in order to establish trust and rapport. However, in an existential phenomenological research project it is crucial to make sure that the athletes tell the researcher about their experience from their own perspective and not assume that the researcher already knows. Thus, I had to assume the role of an interviewer with no knowledge of what the participant might have experienced.

This role clarity was particularly crucial since I ended up interviewing six athletes whom I had previously interviewed as a sportswriter and who have also known me as an athlete. Moreover, at some point during the interviews with all the athletes, I revealed that I had been an athlete myself and that I was currently studying sport psychology in the U.S.

Two main themes emerged during the analysis of the bracketing interview. The first was the theme of preparation. I believed that preparing mentally for and being able to deal with the expectations, distractions, and emotions competitors face at the Games was as crucial for success as being physically ready. I also felt that athletes needed to time their training so that they would be physically ready to perform at their best on the one day that comes around only every four years. To achieve this timing would, in my view, require the support of teammates, national governing bodies, and sport scientists.

The second theme associated with my bracketing interview was actually a "non-theme" (i.e., something that I did not talk about). Nowhere in the interview did I talk about an actual Olympic race or competition, which is not surprising as I had never had such an experience. Thus, finding out how Olympians actually perceived their experience of competing at the Olympics was going to be a particularly illuminating event for me.

Conducting a Pilot Interview

Prior to beginning the actual interviews with the participants for this study, I conducted a pilot interview with a German volunteer who – like myself – had not

competed at the Olympics, but who shared my interest in sports in general, and who had also been a competitive athlete. This pilot interview served several purposes. First, it allowed me to test the research question and see if it promoted dialogue about athletes' Olympic experiences. I felt the dialogue that developed during the pilot interview was pretty good, although my volunteer had some difficulties elaborating on the topic. This was not surprising in light of the fact that he had never had an Olympic competitive experience and was only trying to imagine what it would be like. However, the experience provided me with some useful information for the wording of probing questions with actual participants. I concluded that the opening question would be adequate when interviewing my participants. Finally, the pilot interview provided me with an opportunity to familiarize myself with the newly purchased digital recording device I would be using to audiotape participants' interviews.

Selecting Participants

Thomas and Pollio (2002) suggest that there are two essential criteria to keep in mind when determining the eligibility of participants for an existential phenomenological study. First, a participant must have had the experience under investigation. Second, he or she has to be willing to talk about the experience (purposeful sampling). For the present study, only athletes who had been part of the German Olympic team, which had competed in Athens in 2004, were eligible. After Institutional Review Board approval, potential participants were either contacted in person or by phone by myself, or by German sport scientists I asked

to assist me. Once contacted, all participants were asked if they would be interested in talking about their experience of competing at the 2004 Athens Games.

The networking technique I adopted in identifying possible participants helped me obtain athletes from a wide variety of sports, which is considered advantageous (K.R. Smith, 1998). During the summer of 2005 I traveled to Germany and conducted interviews with 14 athletes. While there are no rules regarding the number of participants necessary in a phenomenological study, the number 14 was just above the range of six to twelve interviews Thomas and Pollio (2002) indicated as an appropriate number for phenomenological studies and sufficient for a detailed thematic structure of the experience to emerge.

Two of the 14 participants I interviewed did not yield a rich thematic description of their experience and thus were not included in the study. One participant said she had had negative experiences with her team and did not feel comfortable talking about them. The other participant said little about his experiences, but rather offered facts and information about his athletic prowess as if trying to market himself to prospective sponsors.

Of the remaining twelve participants I contacted seven personally or by phone and established initial contact with the others with the help of other German sport scientists. Once I made contact, I provided preliminary information regarding informed consent and set up a time and date for the interview. To protect the confidentiality of my participants, I have chosen not to reveal the

specific sports that they competed in. Of the twelve participants I interviewed, eight had competed in individual sports, four in a team sport; seven were male, and five were female.

Interviewing

The twelve interviews ranged in time between 45 and 90 minutes. Participants were free to choose the location for their interviews. Four interviews took place in the athletes' private apartments, four were conducted in university offices that were made available by German colleagues at their respective universities, and four occurred in rather public places (public park, restaurant, and community room). I began by explaining the purpose of the study and describing the athlete's rights as a prospective participant. Before each interview I obtained informed consent from the athletes, which assured confidentiality and included their permission to audiotape the interview (see Appendix A and B). Each interview began with the open-ended question (a close translation from the German question back to English follows) "If you think back to last year, the Olympic games, can you describe for me your experience of competing in Athens? Anything that stood out to you preparing for Athens but then also in Athens itself, anything that you think helped you to perform well or hindered you in any way? [*Wenn du noch einmal überlegst, letztes Jahr Athen, die Olympischen Spiele, deine Wettkampferfahrung, im Vorfeld und dann vor Ort, was war hilfreich deine Leistung zu bringen beziehungsweise Sachen, die nicht*

so positiv waren, die dir vielleicht eher im Weg gestanden haben beim Versuch deine Leistung zu bringen?]"

Data Analysis

Step-by-step procedures suggested by Thomas and Pollio (2002) and Pollio et al. (1997) were used to analyze the phenomenological interview data in this study. These include: 1) transcribing, 2) the hermeneutic circle, and 3) verifying thematic structures with participants.

Transcribing

Based on the digital audio recording, I transcribed each interview verbatim. Laughter and pauses during speech were included in the text in parentheses. Once transcription of each interview was completed, I listened one more time to the interview in full length while reading along in the transcript and making any necessary changes (typographical errors, minor modifications to passages difficult to understand, etc.). For group analysis purposes, two full-length transcripts were translated into English.

The Hermeneutic Circle

To enhance the accuracy of translation of participants' experiences, data analysis was partially conducted with the help of a German-speaking research group. To insure participants' confidentiality, all participants in the German-speaking as well as in the English-speaking interpretive research groups signed a confidentiality statement (see Appendix C) prior to gaining access to the interview transcripts. As none of the researchers in the German-speaking

interpretative group (except for me) was a native speaker in German, analysis (e.g. group discussion and thematizing) was performed in English. Two entire German transcripts and one partial German transcript were analyzed in this group setting. Two entire English translations of interview transcripts were analyzed by the English-speaking research group.

For both research groups, transcript analysis occurred as follows. Transcripts were read aloud, with one group member reading the part of the interviewer and another the part of the participant. Passages of the text were read and frequent pauses were made to discuss the themes that group members saw in the text. This process was continued until the full transcript was read and thematized.

Besides participating in this group process I also read and re-read every single interview, section by section, in its entirety, making notes of the themes that stood out in the text. Based on these notes I developed thematic structures that represented each individual's experience. Periodically, I shared these thematic structures with the interpretive research groups for confirmation and clarification.

After analyzing the interviews and creating thematic structures of each individual's experience, I created an overall thematic structure relating each interview to all the interviews. Here, themes that emerged across all interviews were identified and incorporated into an overall thematic structure. Again, the

interpretive research groups were used to comment on preliminary versions of this overall structure.

A vital part of the process of creating the thematic structure consisted of creating lists of verbatim participant statements, which were used to support each of the individual themes. All verbatim statements used as supporting evidence of a specific theme were re-checked in their original context to insure that the specific experience described in the statement reflected the meaning of the theme.

Verifying Structure With Participants

In order to verify the overall thematic structure, I sent every participant a follow-up letter (English version, see Appendix D; German version, see Appendix E) and a copy of the diagram of the overall thematic structure along with a description of the structure (in German only, see Appendix F). To accomplish that purpose, I had to translate the grounds, figural themes, and sub themes making up the overall thematic structure back into German (see Appendix F). However, this process assured that participants' original statements reflected the meaning of the respective themes in their native tongue. Participants were then asked if they felt that the thematic structure accurately reflected their respective experiences.

Additionally, participants received a list of statements they had made during the interview, which – in my view – supported the respective grounds, figural themes, and sub themes. They were asked to tell me whether this list of

quotes accurately reflected their experiences of the themes that emerged during data analysis. I told them that some of the quotes would be used in order to provide a description of the thematic structure in as detailed a fashion as possible, but that in order to maintain confidentiality all identifying information would be omitted.

Due to the busy schedules of the German athletes who participated in this study, only two provided feedback. Both of them felt that the thematic structure accurately reflected their respective experiences. One participant requested that certain parts of his quotes, which I had included in the list I had sent him, be deleted. Nine months after the interview he felt that those statements no longer accurately reflect his perspective on those respective topics. Therefore, I deleted the part that he requested be removed.

Chapter IV

RESULTS

Introduction

In this chapter, the results of this study are presented. First, the participants are described. Next, the overall thematic structure that was created based on the participants' interviews is presented. Finally, the grounds and figural themes are discussed in detail, with numerous quotes from the interviews illustrating how the respective categories related to the participants' experiences as described by them during their interviews.

Brief Description of the Research Participants

In order to protect the confidentiality of the twelve German Olympic athletes who participated in this study, only a very brief description of each will be given. In terms of gender, five were female and seven were male. Eight of the twelve participants competed in an individual sport while four competed in a team sport. Overall, the twelve Olympians represented six different sports out of the 30 sports that the German team competed in at the 2004 Athens Olympics. Four of the participants had previous experience competing at the Olympics, to which they referred during the interviews. Such information was not actively sought at the beginning of the interview, but participants brought it up whenever they felt it was important in describing their Olympic experience in Athens 2004. Furthermore, detailed descriptions of each athlete's previous achievements were available through the official team guide published by the National Olympic

Committee for Germany (2004). This guide served as a tool in identifying possible participants for the study. All other personal details and demographic information were obtained directly from the participants.

Thematic Structure

The overall thematic structure of these German Olympians' experience of competing in Athens 2004 is presented in Figure 2. It consists of four grounds and three figural themes. The diagram represents the athletes' experience by demonstrating how Time was a main ground that underlies all other grounds and figural themes. The athletes' experience of Time provides a context for the experiences relative to the three other grounds and the three figural themes. The grounds of The Preparation, The Olympics, and The Overall Result, are presented in order from left to right and over the ground of Time. Viewing from left to right, the athletes first had to prepare for the competition (The Preparation), and then subsequently competed in The Olympics. Finally, they obtained a certain result, which in many ways influenced how they perceived their overall Olympic experience.

Three figural themes stand out from the experiential grounds. These themes are: 1) The Competitor / Self, 2) Others, and 3) The Competition / Event. The four grounds and three figural themes including the respective sub themes are presented in Table 2 and Table 3.

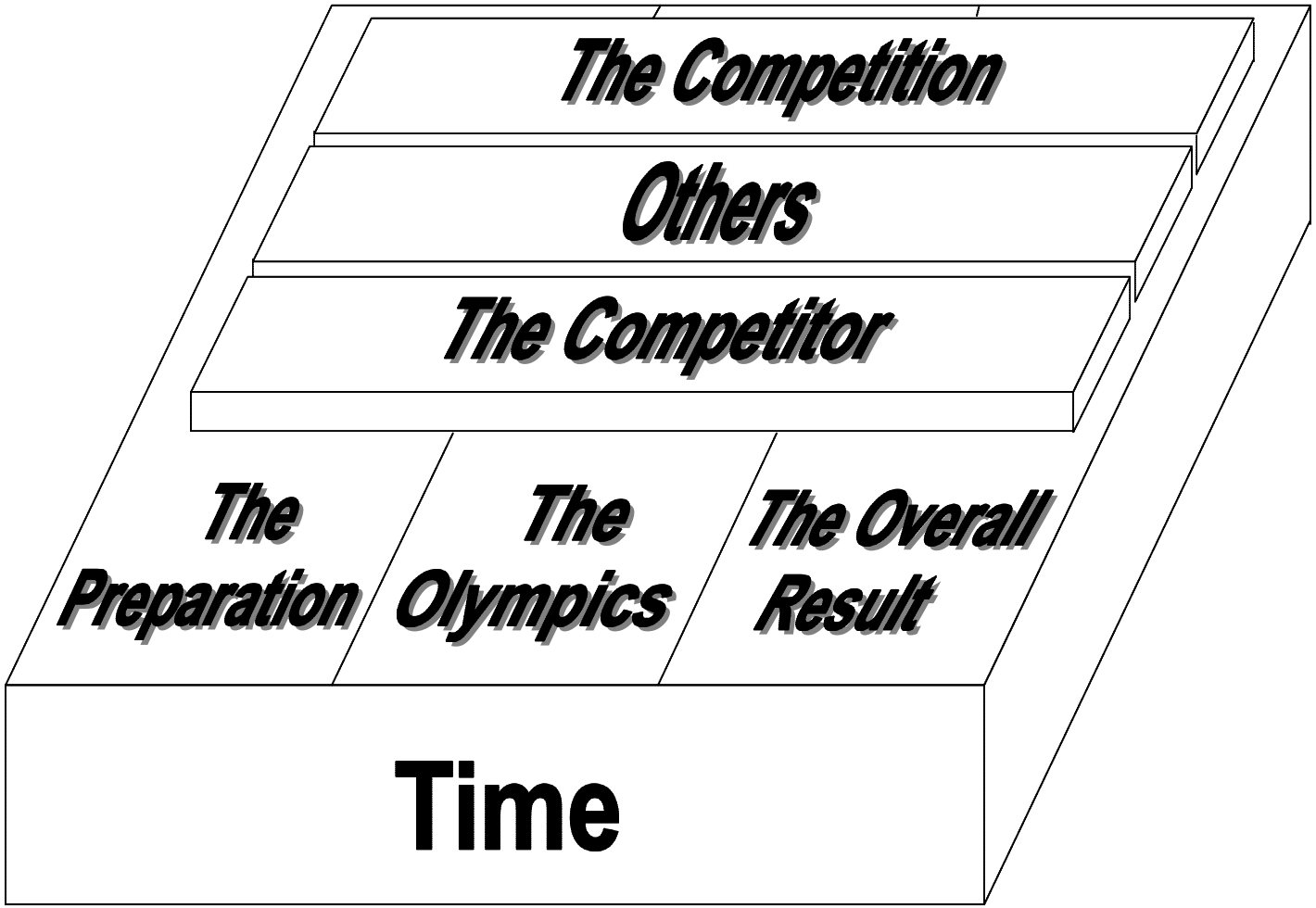


Figure 2. Diagram of the thematic structure of figural themes and grounds in the experience of athletes who participated in this study.

Table 2

List of grounds with respective sub themes

Grounds	
Ground 1.	*Time*
Ground 2.	*The Preparation*
	A. Training
	B. Making the Team
Ground 3.	*The Olympics*
	A. Distractions
	B. The Olympic Village
	C. The Whole World is Watching
Ground 4.	*The Overall Result*

Table 3

List of figural themes with respective sub themes

Figural Themes	
Theme 1.	*The Competitor / Self*
	A. Body
	B. Emotions / Feelings
	C. Staying Focused
	D. Identity / Personality
Theme 2.	*Others*
	A. Support
	B. The Team
Theme 3.	*The Competition / Event*
	A. The Sport
	B. The Setting / Site
	C. Opponents

The well-known five interlocking rings that comprise one of the symbols of the Olympic games can be interpreted as a metaphor for how the grounds, themes, and sub themes are related. The grounds, themes and sub themes are always overlapping and interlocking, and each individually cannot be considered independently of the others. They are different in the sense that the rings are of different colors. Not one of the grounds, themes or sub themes can be removed from the overall thematic structure, just as each of the five equal rings is critical to the Olympic symbol. These Gestalt-like characteristics play an important role in describing the meaning of the athletes' experiences. The thematic categories included a wide variety of experiences. What some athletes perceived as motivating, others saw as very distracting, and some experienced certain factors as positive while others viewed them as negative. Certainly, some themes were more figural for one athlete than for another athlete.

As stated above, the first ground, Time, served as a background for all other aspects of the athletes' experience of competing in Athens 2004. The three main grounds are based on the ground of Time. The first ground was The Preparation, and it relates to the time before the Olympic race or competition. The athletes described how they trained for years in order to prepare for the competition. Descriptions of the first sub theme in the ground of The Preparation, the athletes' Training, included mental preparation, physical training, high altitude training, and training conditions once athletes arrived in Athens. Another important aspect of The Preparation was Making the Team. While for some

athletes qualifying for the Olympics was not that big of a challenge, for others it was the most dominating aspect of their whole Olympic experience.

The second main ground in the overall structure was The Olympics. Three sub themes stood out in the athletes' experience at The Olympics: 1) Distractions, 2) The Olympic Village, and 3) The Whole World is Watching. The athletes provided numerous examples of the uniqueness of the Olympic environment, and how this could be distracting or motivating. They described increased media attention, public expectations, fans and spectators, issues regarding financial support, security measures, rules and regulations, transportation, and drug tests as some of these environmental factors.

The third main ground, The Overall Result, influenced how the athletes perceived their Olympic experience. How they finally placed in their respective competitions was essential for how they talked about their Athens 2004 Olympic experience. This ground had no sub themes.

There were three figural themes. The first figural theme that stood out from Time and the three main grounds was The Competitor / Self. Athletes talked about the sub themes of 1) Body, 2) Emotions / Feelings, 3) Staying Focused, and 4) Identity / Personality. In terms of Body, injuries or staying healthy were issues for athletes before and during the Olympics. They also described how they had to deal with the hot climate in Greece. The sub theme of Emotions / Feelings included a great variety of emotions: feeling sadness, joy, overwhelmed, being in control, sick, angry, disappointed or surprised. The third sub theme,

Staying Focused, consisted of athletes' accounts as to how they dealt with the many distractions encountered in the Olympic environment. Athletes also highlighted certain aspects of their Personalities and they described how they perceived their Identities as Olympic athletes.

The second figural theme of Others played a vital part for all athletes who participated in this study. There were two main sub themes for Others: Support and The Team. All of the athletes felt as though they had Support from staff members, friends and family, other Olympians, Germans and non-Germans, who competed in Athens, and from their sport governing body. The Team played a big role for the athletes as well. Athletes who competed in Athens as part of a team spoke more about The Team, which included teammates and coaches, than those who competed in individual sports. However, all athletes talked about their team members and coaches, and their respective relationships. Some athletes perceived an extreme lack of support from people they felt should have been there to support them, which in many ways affected their Olympic experience negatively.

The third and final figural theme that stood out was The Competition / Event. There were three aspects of The Competition / Event that athletes discussed: 1) The Sport, 2) The Setting / Site, and 3) Opponents. The participants in this study elaborated on specific aspects of their respective sport that affected their Olympic experience, such as special techniques and tactics used, the role of referees and performance enhancing drugs, or things like

unique course characteristics and a high level of competitiveness. Of course, whether they competed in an individual or team sport was another factor influencing their experience. Many participants also elaborated on the specific characteristics of their competition site, or of Athens in general. Among the topics discussed were the climatic conditions in Greece, the characteristics of the course chosen for their Olympic competition, or the atmosphere at the respective venues. Finally, participants talked about the very high level of competition they faced from teams or Opponents in Athens. Some were surprised by unexpected competition from teams or athletes who hadn't competed internationally prior to the Olympics. There was also frequent discussion of doping issues.

Grounds

The three grounds, The Preparation, The Olympics, and The Overall Result, are structured along a timeline continuum representing the fourth ground, Time. Against these four grounds the three themes of The Competitor / Self, Others, and The Competition / Event become figural. Participants always described their experiences of their Self, Others, and their Event in the context of Time, how they trained for the Olympics, what they experienced at the Games, and how they placed in the overall standings. A detailed description of each of those grounds is now presented.

Time

The ground that contextualizes all other ground and figural themes was Time. Time is a crucial part of all aspects of athletes' lives. Specifically, it is

relevant to an aspiring Olympian, who prepares, i.e., trains, and – in case he or she qualifies – competes at the Olympic games. The athletes reported being aware of certain developments over Time during their preparation. Participant 6 said:

> Well, of course in our team the problem was that we simply [performed] badly and that we simply didn't perform as good as we had wanted to. But that wasn't a short-term problem, that problem really developed long-term. And we just couldn't get it under control. We were strong, but our technique really wasn't optimal.[2] (1)

Time is also a central aspect of the qualifying process for many athletes, as this quote by participant 9 demonstrates.

> I mean for us, here in Germany, there are other criteria that apply in order to be nominated on the team than is the case internationally. What that means is that we have a time span that is a lot shorter to qualify, basically. While other countries might have a two-year timeframe, we usually have only one year, but within that one year, last year that was 2004, we only had from April 30 until nationals. So that makes it extremely difficult. If you have bad luck, let's say, well for example, it can happen to you that you don't have a single competition under dry conditions. And those are the kind of environmental factors that you have no control over, that are created, that make this more difficult. (2)

As the following quote from participant 2 illustrates, Time also played a crucial part in the athletes' attempts to acclimatize to the weather conditions encountered in Athens, Greece in August 2004:

> The weather was brutal. We got there, it was 40 degrees right away. That was like a slap in the face. And then we had only like 10 days to acclimatize. (3)

[2] This quote like all the following ones was translated from the original German text. Behind each quote an identifier is placed. The original quotes can be found under the respective identifier in Appendix G.

The following comment by participant 3 illustrates how he reflected on his Time leading up to the Olympics after his competition was over:

> I mean, those were six months with constant stress, constant, aehm, well, somehow hoping to make it to the Olympics, to make it on the Olympic team. And then it takes a while until you can, well, can just relax, calm down. And tell yourself that, “It’s over now, just try to enjoy these couple of days off that you have.” (4)

Finally, participant 4’s quote refers to the one factor that for many athletes makes the Olympics so special, which is the fact that they only come around every four years.

> And on top of that there’s this, this pressure, that this, this race is special. And being able to give everything on this one day, in this single race, that is, aehm, I think that is a very, that’s what’s so difficult, or so tricky. Everyone can win the world championships, that is not everyone, but you can win the world championships, you can try that every year, but Olympic champion, I mean first of all only every four years, and just to qualify again, I mean that is a much more significant achievement, at least in my opinion. (5)

As these quotes reveal, Time was an underlying theme for all other three main grounds mentioned above.

The Preparation

The first main ground in the athletes’ experiences was The Preparation. Preparing for the Olympics is an all-consuming activity, which can be a very emotional experience. Time plays a crucial role as participant 12 explained:

> Well, if I start with the preparation, I mean the whole previous year. You don’t just train for one year with that goal, but more or less a full four years. (6)

For many athletes, once an Olympiad is over, preparation starts for the next Olympic games in four years. Within The Preparation there were two sub

themes: Training and Making the Team. The Training aspect of The Preparation involved training physically, mentally, and, for some sports, special training regimens like high altitude training.

Training

When preparing for the Olympics, the athletes tried to train with the goal of being able to perform at their best on “Day X”, as participant 2 said:

> In general the preparation for the Olympics actually went really well. Everything that the sport governing body had organized worked as planned with regard to, aehm, the Olympics, uhm, including the Olympic trials, we were in top shape. Up until, I’d say the immediate preparation for the competition I felt like I had built my form up for that Day X, so that I really felt like, on that day I would be able to compete as well as possible. (7)

It was crucial for the athletes to keep track of the progress that they made during their training. Participant 9 discussed being able to compare her day-to-day performance during practices under consistent conditions. Training repeatedly in the same facilities is an example of this consistency. Having consistent conditions allowed her to notice the progress that she made, or make adjustments to her training program and track down mistakes in case she wasn’t getting better.

> And that’s something very positive here, that you can make sure you have these consistent conditions. And that self-confidence that you gain from being able to notice how you improve throughout your practices… improvements you have under consistent conditions. I mean, in my facility you can, if I do a [drill], I can keep track of my [performance] over weeks, so I’m able to say “This is how I’m developing. Am I on the right track, or am I headed in the wrong direction?” And if so “Well, aehm, what did I do wrong? Can I still change that?” And uhm, well that is really a big advantage to have. (8)

For athletes competing in team as well as in individual sports, becoming physically fit was an essential goal in order to be prepared for the Olympic tournament. For participant 7, knowing that she was physically fit going into the Olympics was crucial. Yet, in order to make it through the long hours of training without her teammates, it was equally important for her to know that everyone trying to make the team had to endure the same hardships and everyone was pulling together.

> Well, what was really positive related to the Games in Athens was that, or something that you'd say was a reassuring factor, was that we prepared really well athletically. So that you really had a feeling, that the whole team, that uhm… I mean even with regard to the assigned homework, well, it was, I mean we spent quite a bit of time together, but even during those times that we were able to simply be back home, every, everyone just knew that "I'm not the only one going through this. It's worth doing this, worth it for the others, and worth it for myself!" And well, yeah, just to feel like everyone's pulling in the same direction. And, uhm, of course you were able to… I mean, of course that was reflected in the test scores, results of fitness tests, endurance, sprints, stuff like that. And, uhm… well, you simply knew that that you were really fit when going into the Olympics. (9)

Participant 3 talked about how getting injured during The Preparation hindered him in some aspects. He also explained how being able to compete against and train with some of the world's best athletes prior to the Olympics helped him improve. He improved in the mental, technical, tactical, and physical aspects of his sport.

> Well, of course. It really was a handicap, aehm, because you need more than just the general training. It's really important for us that we practice […] the techniques, so that you feel like you're able to work efficiently… uhm, well, and of course I did not have that. (10)

> And now you are, every training you are making progress, you feel like, well, you feel as if you have really trained, so that it really made a

> difference, made you better, if that's as far as endurance, strength, or technique and tactics go. And, uhm, also, because we started training with some of the world's best athletes you have the experience that you are able to [compete] with them, you just know that you can compete with anybody. And you see that they also have weaknesses. I mean, they have their strengths, but that you, aehm, well, using your strengths you can win against them, no problem. And that is reassuring and also gives you quite a bit of self-confidence. (11)

Several athletes also commented on the importance of both physical and mental recovery from training during The Preparation. Participant 10 and participant 6 said, respectively:

> Usually, to get in really good shape, I need about eight weeks. And, aehm, well I, I simply didn't have that time anymore. I didn't have the time, for a really low-intensity phase, to recover, and then get a fresh start preparing. (12)

> There are some guys that serve in the military during those four years, and although they're strong, somehow they're not really fast either. And I think that's because they do all the workouts, but mentally they are not focused on what they are doing, or don't think about what they are actually doing. And I think that's really important, that you don't just do your workout, but make sure you have quality practices, and I think that's what we were missing during that last year. And if we were to do the same thing again, that would be missing again, because if you're training 25 hours a week, it's virtually impossible to be mentally so strong to be able to have such a narrow focus all the time. Because at some point you're getting tired and then it's impossible to keep proper technique, and that's what you really need… So I'd say less is more, in that case." (13)

This preceding quote by participant 6 is a good example of what this athlete believed to be "quality practice". For him, an important characteristic of "quality practice" was being able to recover. He felt that only if he was feeling sharp and recovered can he then put the quality work, focus, concentration, effort, and proper technique in the practices that he does.

The following quote by participant 11 shows that he saw his ability to mentally prepare and motivate himself as one of his main strengths:

> And that's something, that became really apparent for me during [competition], that I was able to prepare myself and motivate myself so well for my [events], that I was able to beat athletes that were a lot younger, aehm, beat world champions or even Olympic champions. People know that about me. And that's something that based on reputation no one would have expected. That's why, I'd have to call myself, aehm, a motivational expert, because I was able to prepare myself for just the right moment, prepare mentally. (14)

Finally, preparing for the Olympic competition while in Athens was also crucial. Participant 4 explained how having the necessary training facilities at the Games and also being able to relax and find a quiet space were essential components for his preparation just prior to his race.

> I mean, what's really important for me is, especially before such an event that you have a quiet space, at least in your, well, have your room where you, where, where you can close the door, and calm down. And we had that there and, aehm, that we have to be, have training facilities, that you don't have trouble, have to get stressed out, have to drive somewhere for an hour in order to find a place to train. And that wasn't the case down there. And that's something, if that, if that's okay, then I'm, aehm, happy. Then I can really focus on preparing for a competition. (15)

Making the Team

The second sub theme within The Preparation was Making the Team. Making it onto the German Olympic team was a crucial step all athletes had to achieve in order to be able to compete at the Games. There was a "before" and "after" Making the Team, which also affected the athletes' preparation. Participant 10 said:

> So, then, that span of time, which all in all ended up being one and a half years, was over for me. Now, it started with, because I had, I'd say before I qualified, right, before I hadn't yet made the team, I didn't even waste

> one thought on the Olympics, or even the preparation. Because for me, I just felt like I had to make it there first. In January or February, I couldn't just say, "Well, what's my plan for the Olympics in August?" I wasn't, I couldn't be sure that I was gonna be there, right? For me the most important thing was how I was preparing for the trials… for the Olympic trials. That was the big and crucial step for me. And only after I made it, I started thinking "Okay, now the Olympics. How am I going to do that?" Yea. But there, there just wasn't enough time. And just like I said, that's just, you just have mastered this one big test but then the next test is right there waiting… (16)

All athletes participating in this study discussed Making the Team. The experience of qualifying for the German team was a highly individualistic experience for each of the athletes. For participant 1 it was a very emotional event. Others (participant 5 and participant 6, respectively) commented on how qualifying in their sport was not that difficult. They lacked serious competition from other German athletes for their respective spots on the team.

> Well, because, there are, there are always so many emotions that affect this, even just making the team, before the Olympics, who makes the team, who doesn't. There's joy and tears and everything at the same time... It's just, there's always so many emotions that affect this. That's... (17)

> But basically we are that good so qualifying isn't really that hard. (18)

> Here the guys that are, that made it to the top, are the only ones who are there. There's no talent pool behind it. Just look at this, for example: One guy got sick, so we can't compete [in this event]. (19)

Other athletes experienced Making the Team as a roadblock on their way to the Olympics (participant 4). One athlete (participant 10) secured a spot for Germany in the Olympic competition and then had to qualify against other German athletes for a specific place on the German team. It was a difficult task

and he felt burned out and not able to recover before his actual Olympic race. Following are the comments of participant 4 and participant 10, respectively:

> I'd have to say that I was really well prepared for the, aehm, competition. That was the big goal that I worked towards, for four years. With one or two roadblocks during the preparation due to the qualifying process, because you just can't be sure. Only if, aehm, you have made the team. (20)

> After that hard year, 2003, in 2004 it just continued with those grueling trials, which… was really hard for me to secure my spot on the team. So that it was basically already June by the time I made the team for the Olympics. And they were going to be at the end of August. So I'd have to say, well, pfff, after making the team I just hit this low. And it was really hard to pull myself out of this. So for me, based on that, the preparation for the, for the main, for the main event wasn't really good. I really tried to do everything possible, but... Well, I didn't really feel very well, didn't really [compete] very well. . . . And the main reason was probably that somehow I just felt burned out. (21)

Participant 9 explained how important it was for her that she managed to qualify early in the season for the Olympics. Participants 7 and 8, however, described how they felt that having a long selection process for their team benefited team development and team cohesion. Following are comments by participant 9, participant 7, and participant 8, respectively:

> I mean it really was, that was what my coach had planned for, he said he wanted to make sure we have the norm to qualify for the Olympics from the very beginning in order to be able to then just go ahead and keep training. (22)

> And, uhm, what was really extremely stressful was the late nomination. I mean… well, I don't know, on the one hand it really robbed us of some energy, but on the other hand the increased competition was good, and for a team sport, of course it's always… it's always hard to say when you should nominate, when it's not so good to nominate. And, well… So based on that you can't really say that this was a disadvantage, the late nomination. It was probably rather to our advantage, because we… well,

> we simply couldn't be sure till the very end if we were on the team. And that was really, were really such factors where you'd say, you were able to say even before, not only when we came to Athens, where you'd say everybody grew together as a team. That happened before we came to Athens, this process. And that's really what made the difference trying to make it through all those matches and numerous training camps and stuff like that. (23)

> And it's really funny if I tell you, uhm, if, how the nomination went. Aehm, I mean there were, up to the last training camp before the Games we were [number of players], two or three, no, exactly, three training camps before the Games we were [number of players] and before that we were [number of players]. And it wasn't too hard when the first ones were cut from the team, because they haven't grown that close. And, aehm, of course, it's always tough, for everyone. But to be cut at the very end, that's really hard. And, aehm, the funny thing is that… well, what we did this time was that the last two players to be cut had to be at the last training camp. So in case someone got injured they would be part of the daily practices rather than say "Bye then. I'm off, going on vacation, I'm sick of this!" And, aehm, they did such an excellent job, they were part of the group, and, you, if you, I mean as someone observing the team you wouldn't have been able to tell which were the two players that had been cut. Because they were so motivated to, I mean everyone just wanted to make sure we would be able to perform as good as possible. And of course right when they found out they were cut, they were down, but it was truly amazing. I mean many players said that they couldn't have done that, what those two did. I don't know, maybe that's what those two would have said as well, if they had made the team, that they would never have been able to do this. And, aehm, well, I think that just goes to show that the team worked really well together. How that happened, that's, well, somehow the spirit within the team was really high. And that's what a lot of people say that saw us play, that what stood out was that we really came across as one team. (24)

Finally, participant 12 mentioned possible consequences she might have considered had she, for a second time, not managed to Make the Team.

> Aehm, 2000 I did not make the team, that's when I, I got sick during the Olympic trials, and, aehm, last year I felt like I had to make it, because four years ago I was so disappointed. And I think, had I not made the team, I'd probably, the consequences could have… it could even have been that I'd finished my athletic career. (25)

The Olympics

The second main ground in these athletes' experiences was The Olympics. Researchers have suggested that the Olympic environment has unique characteristics that make it different from all other environments athletes encounter when competing internationally (Gould et al., 1999). Therefore, The Olympics pose unique challenges for successful performance. Participant 12 had this experience. She said about the Olympics:

> It's really worth it, qualifying for that, but… I mean, well, you just have to evaluate: What is the best way to make sure that I perform well? And with regard to that, the Olympic games are simply… not, I mean, I don't think are ideal in regard to that. Because there's too much going on. (26)

She had a hard time dealing with all the possible Distractions, the first sub theme that athletes discussed within the ground of The Olympics. However, what some athletes perceived as distracting was motivating for others. The other two sub themes are The Olympic Village and The Whole World is Watching. Experiences in these categories can also be perceived as distractions, but athletes talked about aspects other than Distractions regarding these themes as well. Thus they were considered to be separate sub themes.

Distractions

Dealing with distractions like rules and regulations or your arousal level and excitement is an important aspect of Olympic competition, and athletes try to prepare for these aspects. Yet, participant 1 acknowledged that this was hard to achieve due to the fact that one does not encountered similar conditions anywhere else.

> Well, what I want to say is that, that there simply are many things that, that you have to pay attention to, uhm, besides your actual competition. You have the whole environment, of course that's, you don't have an environment like that at any other competition. The whole, well there are so many athletes, then all the support staff, and of course you can tell that somehow everyone's tense and excited. And, well, the whole situation is just different, and you just can't prepare for it. (27)

Participant 2 expanded on this, explaining how he felt that it is especially hard to manage staying focused if one is exposed to the Olympic "adventure" for the first time.

> As an athlete the Olympics are somehow like a big adventure. You can try as hard as you want to just focus on your, aehm, competition: If you are there for the first time, there are simply so many experiences and impressions that affect you, things, also including organizational stuff, that are just very different than you might be used to from World Cup events or other highlights. (28)

One place where athletes experienced a wide variety of possible distractions was the cafeteria in the Olympic village. But as participant 7 explained, her experiences in the cafeteria were rather motivating than distracting, although the Games in Athens 2004 were her first Olympics:

> And I, of course those are really interesting, since then I have, before that, I'd never qualified so far, and then also the cafeteria, and seeing all those people there, that is really unique. And of course that is also motivating. (29)

For participant 8 it stood out that she and her teammates handled the distractions effectively. They were aware that they could not focus on their competition all the time and actively sought distractions.

> And, aehm, I mean that really is something special and there's lots of stuff to see (laughing) and that's something you can easily let distract yourself. . . . I mean… basically like "The most important thing is not to win but to take part. And, look, there! And let's have a look here!" . . . And what we did now was, that's what we talked about before the Games, or when we

> got there, that's when we talked about it, aehm, that this is something exciting and we want to enjoy all of this and be part of this, aehm, but can't lose track of our goal. . . . And that everyone has to take care of herself, and aehm, sometimes it's also good to seek some distraction. You can't think about your next game all the time. . . . So basically being aware of this, that we talked about it, was what made it all work out. . . . "Oh, can't we go and watch the team-handball team play?" Well, we did those kinds of things as well, but always were aware "We are doing this because we want to be distracted." I mean we always had a reason for it. (30)

Some athletes, like participant 11, perceived that not sticking to pre-performance routines was distracting. Others, such as participant 9, had to deal with unusual procedures immediately before their Olympic competition that they did not experience at other major international competitions. Following are the quotes from participant 11 and participant 9, respectively:

> And there I made the mistake that I, because I didn't know him, but knew that he had [competed] at the world championships, against an [athlete] that I knew, [athlete], the [nationality] guy, so I went ahead and watched the video. And tried to find out how he [competes], and tried to come up with a, a strategy overnight, aehm, what I should, if possible, avoid doing. But that definitely hindered me in some way. And that was a mistake. And what I learned from that is that, especially with regard to the Olympic games you just can't start experimenting. You just have to stick to what made you successful all those years, and work with that. And don't try to do something new, and this and that, and then this, because that, aehm, that can be distracting and simply makes you insecure. And that's exactly what happened to me. I shouldn't have watched that video before my competition. That was a mistake. (31)

> The one thing I remember is that we had to, you had to go through all these different Call Rooms. (32)

Participant 5 felt distracted by some unexpected changes that had been made to his equipment prior to his event. Finally, participant 6 thought that his coach's talk, which was intended to get him and his teammates ready for

competition, had the exact opposite result. Following are the quotes made by participant 5 and participant 6, respectively:

> And, well, what was really aggravating was, two things that happened before the race: That was, we got to the [competition site], because after we practiced we had been back to our apartment, we came to the [competition site] and realized that [someone had messed with [our equipment]. You can do [these things] in order to try and get faster. Well, anyway, we'd never done that during the last four years and then at the Olympics we go and try that. Right? And everyone said "What's going on? That's impossible. We didn't want that. The [equipment] was just fine, that's how we've always had it." And our [equipment manager said]: "Well, I had time. Uhm, so I thought we could try that here at the Olympics." Well, so that was, that was the first thing that basically distracted us in our concentration, that started all this commotion. (33)

> And then, what bothered me as well was the talk that our coach gave before our race. That was really bad. Well, in the German sport system there are three levels of financial support, one, two, and three. And we were three, because we didn't make it to the Games in 2000, well, that is not us, but those guys that were [competing] before, I wasn't part of that team, uhm, and we had, really wanted to qualify for level-one support, because that means financially you are much better off. Well, so before the Olympic final we had our team meeting to discuss the strategy "Guys, we need some more points to qualify for level-one support!" Which, right then I couldn't have cared less. We could have been on level-ten support; I mean the main thing is to [find a rhythm] during the race. Well, that was really… really bad. (34)

The Olympic Village

Within the ground of The Olympics, The Olympic Village was the second sub theme. Living in The Olympic Village, the athletes experienced many of the possible distractions that they described above. But many athletes, like participant 1 and participant 10, also commented on the excellent conditions that they encountered in The Olympic Village to help them prepare for their competition.

> Well, it's just... everything in the Olympic village is really the finest. (35)

> Well, being in the Olympic village is basically like being in paradise. Everything's free, stuff like that. And you don't have to worry about anything. Everything you'd possibly want is just available (laughs). If you made it in there, everything's fine. (36)

Many athletes also had the choice of staying in The Olympic Village or in an alternate accommodation closer to their competition site. Transportation and the possibility of staying away from distractions were factors that influenced this decision-making process. Proximity to their sporting venues and the opportunity to experience the Olympic atmosphere and support by other German and international athletes in The Olympic Village were things that athletes pondered when reflecting on their accommodations in Athens. Participant 4, participant 5, and participant 6 said, respectively:

> And, aehm, I definitely decided to stay in the Olympic village, because I knew from Sydney what the village was like, because the, of the life in the Olympic village, you can train there. And it's this gigantic atmosphere, which of course you want to enjoy in that moment. And like I said, we really had the best conditions possible, most of it was great. It's just that optimal is relative, of course, because under these circumstances that everyone has to, aehm, has to deal with. I mean, the heat, transportation, stuff like that. But in the end everyone has, has the same problems down there. And like I said, we managed to deal with them pretty well. (37)

> Such a long shuttle ride, that's what we also had at [this competition], going from the hotel to our [competition site]. And… so basically we were misinformed. If we had known that we would have stayed in a hotel, aehm, aehm… stayed in the Olympic village. If I ever make it there again, that's what I want to do. Because, aehm, you can… that's where everything happens. And, aehm, for example the team-handball team, they stayed in the Olympic village for two weeks. And they say it helped them a lot, that… During the second week I met those guys and had some small talk with them. If other athletes walk up and wish you good luck and, that's when you realize that you are part of this huge team, not just a lonely warrior out there, which was basically what happened to us… (38)

> Besides that, we also lived outside the Olympic village, some thought that was bad, but I'd have to say it really was okay, because we didn't have to make all those long trips. (39)

The Whole World is Watching

The Whole World is Watching was the third sub theme of the ground of The Olympics. Many things that the athletes discussed within this sub theme revolved around the media. They were aware of media attention and the specific expectations that go hand in hand with this media exposure. As the following quotes demonstrate, athletes' perceptions of these factors influenced their performance in both positive and negative ways. Sometimes the fact that The Whole World is Watching was motivating and sometimes it was distracting. Participant 1, for example, felt nervous even thinking about the importance of the Olympics prior to being in Athens. Participant 11 on the other hand thought it was great to know that the Olympics were the biggest event worldwide and he was part of it.

> And, of course, there is, it's THE event, and the whole world is watching and you are probably already nervous ninth months before. I mean even just thinking about, just thinking about it. (40)

> Well positive of course that, aehm, first of all… to know that is the biggest event worldwide! That's definitely, and being under that impression, aehm, of course you also have those expectations. And under that impression you go there. And then to be part of that . . . to experience that is just, gigantic! And really, nothing compares to that. (41)

Compared to other international competitions, participant 2 noticed the increased presence of cameras and spectators prior to his Olympic event as well as during the competition, as the two following quotes illustrate:

> You are definitely more in the spotlight. Already, there're cameras everywhere and spectators in the stands, and that's something that doesn't happen at every World Cup event. (42)

> That is, somehow it is really nice to draw a little more attention. I mean, especially to know that, now the race is on and there's so many people watching, again, that's really motivating and, and that gets your adrenalin going, all of that. (43)

The same was true for participant 4, as the following two quotes from his interview illustrate:

> Basically, you are standing there before the start of your competition and when the, aehm, you feel nervous, there're cameras everywhere, stuff like that, and you are so excited, because you realize "Now you're part of all this, and…" (44)

> Every single one of those 50 athletes knew "Okay, now there's, there's a billion people out there that are watching this race!" You just have this one opportunity to showcase your talent, or to win a medal, whatever. And, aehm, right in that moment, everything's possible, positive or negative. (45)

Even before The Olympics, the fact that the media as well as other people in the athletes' lives made the Olympic competition omnipresent could be experienced as motivating. Participant 9 said:

> So basically, everywhere you are, sitting in your car, here in the cafeteria, that's where they put up this poster and all that, everything is, basically starting January 1, 2004 everything was focused on the Olympics. That means, aehm, you are just caught by that current. And if you are, once you are sure you made the team, of course you can enjoy all of that even more. And before that it's this motivation, right, because you think "Yea, this and that!" And then you see all those pictures and think "Wow, I have to be part of this!" And that… makes everything else you have to deal with so much easier. (46)

For participant 5 the public pressure and expectations seemed to be a negative factor influencing his performance.

> But, I have to say, if you go to the Olympics you can, well, either you are the kind of person that is pretty easygoing like the [nationality], I mean just in general, you just said “Come on, let’s go, we’ll see later on if it all worked out”, or you have a whole country on your back that’s like “This [team], they have to win! Everything else is a disaster.” (47)

The Overall Result

The third main ground of the athletes’ experience was The Overall Result. In many ways, how the athletes placed in the competitions in which they participated influenced how they experienced The Olympics and also how they talked about them. Some athletes noticed a conflict between their own expectations and the expectations that the media and the public in Germany had regarding the German Olympic team. Participant 1 noted that the fun and reward of her experience was not recognized by the media, because she didn’t medal, as did participant 4. Both these athletes said, respectively:

> But I mean I had fun, I was feeling good all the time, and I, the training was good and I always had the feeling that I was making progress. And that’s what makes me feel good about this. I mean, I don’t have to, I’m not standing at the start thinking “Oh, now I have to win a medal here.” It’s more like I am standing at the start and thinking “Well, you’ve prepared well, you did everything possible that was under your control, now just line up, do your best, and then we’ll see what happens!” I never have the attitude “Oh, I have to come in with a good result!” No, I’m rather focused on myself. And I know that a couple of journalists started asking stupid questions after I finished, saying “Oh, how disappointing! [place]” I couldn’t understand that at all. I wasn’t a bit disappointed. But what can you say if you are asked such questions. I just think to myself “Great!” I don’t know, the German media, they just want to see top finishes, and then, when it doesn’t happen, they are disappointed. But I see it the other way. I have an opportunity to do well, but if I don’t succeed, then I’m not a loser, I mean, I don’t know. You are not a loser, just because you didn’t win a medal. (48)

> Well, of course you realize that. A medal, winning, that’s what counts… That’s the story for the media. I mean, you could definitely tell that. And you notice how, or what you realize for yourself, that your, your personal

> opinion about your race, how happy you are, you just can't project that, or it doesn't get across as you experience it. But that has to be the case. With, with the, with the media personnel. I mean for me, personally, [place], was a great result. Right then I thought "You justified everything, you were able to perform to your full potential, it was worth it, for you personally it was a, a, a great experience!" And for the media it was: "Of course, [place]. Great! Best result of your career, Mr. [athlete]! Good luck for the future!" But you just had to… of course I think you can't expect anything else, really. Because, because the people just don't realize how much, how much effort and dedication you have to put into this… All the stuff that is suddenly just lifted off your shoulders, in that moment. (49)

Winning an Olympic medal or missing out on that achievement was something that had the potential to change the athletes' whole Olympic experience. Participant 11 said:

> I mean, considering the goals that I had, I wanted a medal and… I was definitely good enough, I'd say, to [compete] for a medal. . . . But in the end it wasn't enough to win the thing. So because of that I have to look back and analyze that, I mean… first and foremost the result was not satisfying. (50)

Later on he continued:

> And looking back, now, after the fact, I have to say that the time preparing for the Games, so basically the Olympiad as such, was far more rewarding than the actual Olympic games. Well if, if I'd won a medal, it would have been a very different situation. That would have been the icing on the cake. But as it is, I have to say that I rather remember the time before the Olympics, the Olympiad, than the actual Olympic games themselves. Because there's always this bad aftertaste. (51)

Not all athletes talked about their perception of how their Overall Result compared to their own expectations with such clarity. Sometimes, athletes were ambiguous about the outcome of their competition, as the following quote by participant 2 illustrates:

> In the end it was the [place], I mean that wasn't totally disappointing for me, but somehow I had hoped I would do better. (52)

Other athletes felt ambiguous about their Overall Result and had specific reasons for that. Participant 3 described how he first felt disappointed although he had made it to Athens despite serious personal problems during The Preparation.

> Well, I mean, it really was sensational that I even made it there, that I was able to [compete]. (53)

And later he said:

> Well, like I said, I was really disappointed, for two or three days. Until I told myself “Well, okay, these were really special circumstances and you also gave it your best shot, you can’t blame yourself.” (54)

For participant 12 it took a while before she could start to reflect on her experience at the Olympics, after she had encountered major problems during her events.

> And… I don’t know. First, my inner feeling was that I wasn’t even interested, because I was just mad. But reflecting on it you start thinking “Man, you trained for that so hard and for such a long time. How much pain you had to go through, and all the things that you had others do to you?” All the trouble that I had because of that. And then it doesn’t work out. (55)

Participant 9 felt ambiguous about her Overall Result because she realized that some of her opponents were probably taking performance-enhancing drugs.

> Well and basically it was a little, aehm, annoying, finishing [place], which really was a great success for me personally. . . . But I’d say that’s something you can’t really start worrying about as an athlete; instead you have to make sure that during your competition, preparing for your competition you are just focusing on yourself. Otherwise you’d go crazy. Maybe you even start putting yourself down. I mean I have to say that I’m pretty talented, uhm, I’m really built for my sport, the one that I chose, so that’s why, aehm, I’ll never be an Olympic champion if… let’s say, aehm, under those conditions that, I mean if nothing changes and everything

> stays like it is. Not having the same standards for out-of-competition drug tests, internally, but at least I have an opportunity to be part of this. And, uhm, I guess you just have to... your, your hopes and dreams that you might have had one day, you have to adjust them based on the reality, you have to put the whole thing, well, based, based on the facts you have to put things into perspective, and, and, uhm, prioritize for yourself, put the pieces together so that they fit, so that you know: “This is what I can do, and this is what I can’t. But maybe that’s not something I have control over.“ (56)

Participant 6 explained how he felt that his team had not met expectations. Yet, he was not disappointed with his own efforts. He attributed failing to medal to previously described “unprofessional behavior” by the support staff who should have helped him perform at the Olympics, but – from his perspective – had let him down. Instead of being frustrated with the outcome of the Olympics, he was rather disappointed about what he felt was a resistance to learn from the mistakes made.

> I think that was really unprofessional. And that’s what I said a couple of times, but nothing changes… I mean it’s always the same . . . and because of all that I was so frustrated after the Olympics. And also bitched about it . . . But I simply wasn’t interested anymore in being in the same situation four years down the road, having to say “I gave it my best shot, gave it all, trained hard, but it wasn’t enough because no one noticed the mistakes we made earlier and we ended up doing the same shit all over again!” And I’m not interested in that. (57)

Participant 8 reflected on the reasons for her success, the rewarding training process, possible consequences of not meeting expectations, and how her team had managed to make changes for the better that ended up bringing them success.

> And somehow, I mean if it all hadn’t worked out, I mean it didn’t have to be [place], but the result that we wanted, I don’t know (laughing), I think I would have been about to quit. I mean I, I mean it, it was good and I would have said I had a great time, but somehow “That’s crazy.” Like: “Why, how

> are the other ones making this work?" And "What is it that they do better?" Those kinds of questions go through your head. And now it's the other way round. Yea. (58)

Contrary to her experience, participant 10, who had mentioned how he felt burned out at the Olympics because of an 18-month long qualifying process, felt that the Olympic creed *Dabeisein ist alles* [The most important thing is not to win but to take part] fit his experience pretty well.

> No, no, the bottom line is, well, I have to be happy that I was able to, that I was able to be part of it. Yea, that's, I mean that's basically how I would sum it up. All right, I didn't place as well as I had hoped for, but for me that doesn't affect my overall experience. (59)

Themes

The four grounds of Time, The Preparation, The Olympics, and The Overall Result have just been described using multiple quotes from all twelve athletes who participated in this study. Three figural themes stand out from these grounds: 1) The Competitor / Self, 2) Others, and 3) The Competition / Event.

The Competitor / Self

The Competitor / Self was the first figural theme of these athletes' experiences. Participants in the present study talked freely about their respective experiences of competing at the 2004 Athens Games. Each athlete interviewed described in much detail how he or she felt during the process of preparing for (The Preparation) and competing at The Olympics as well as about his or her Overall Result. Sub themes within this category of The Competitor / Self included: 1) Body, 2) Emotions / Feelings, 3) Staying focused, and 4) Identity / Personality. Topics that the athletes discussed included how they felt emotionally

and physically and how they managed or tried to stay focused. The participants also revealed some aspects of their identities and personalities that were relevant for them with regard to their Olympic competition.

As the quotes in the following section demonstrate, issues regarding their bodies were vital to all of the participants in this study. The athletes described their emotions and feelings and how they frequently changed, sometimes even during the competition. As described earlier in this chapter, the participants also related some accounts of how they dealt with the distractions that they encountered at The Olympics. Finally, the whole Olympic experience revolved around who the athletes were, how they perceived themselves as athletes, and which personality characteristics they had.

Body

One topic that was very important for these athletes was trying to stay healthy while preparing and competing at the Olympics. But staying healthy can be a delicate undertaking, as participant 10 described:

> I mean, you are pushing your limits, physically and mentally. (60)

He realized, as described earlier in this chapter, that he simply felt burned out both physically and mentally at the Games. For participant 12, the hard workouts that she did while training for The Olympics led to physical exhaustion and what she referred to as overtraining.

> Well, what we figured out was that we just did a little too much, . . . Beginning in February I started feeling, I felt really, I'd say I was definitely overtrained. . . . As an athlete you just know when, when you… don't eat anymore or, uhm, can't sleep well and don't feel like doing anything. And that's also, at some point you start getting aggressive (laughs). And, well,

> you don't really want that, but you can't help it right then, because it just drags on. And that was such a hard time, I was so sick of it all. . . . And then you start thinking, aehm… "Well… Is that my body that just can't take anymore what I do to it? Or is that all just mental, that this is just me, seeing problems where there really aren't any?" You never really know, right? (61)

Participant 6 also talked about the high intensity of his workouts while preparing for The Olympics and how he felt that he didn't have enough Time to physically and mentally recover. Participant 5 felt the same way, and for him the fact that he trained at high altitude right before The Olympics added to the physical discomfort.

> And besides all that, I wonder if it really pays off right away if you are working that hard for a full year . . . I mean I didn't work out as much this year, but kept getting better and better. Just because the body finally had some time to recover and reenergize. (62)

> And we simply weren't sharp enough at the Olympics, because like I said, we stayed that long at high altitude, used the concept of high-altitude training, . . . maybe looking back, that's when we just realized that we simply were too exhausted at the Olympics. . . . To go ahead and simply make sure you recover, right? That you allow people room to breathe, give them some space, because a body that had an opportunity to recover, with a clear mind as well, will allow you to perform a lot better than one that trained… trained all the time and is maybe even overtrained and exhausted, compared to one who says "Okay, let's do it!" (63)

Another aspect that affected many athletes' Olympic experience was that they had to adhere to a certain diet to keep their weight under control or just to eat healthy. For both participant 10 and participant 9 this was something that they felt they needed to do in order to be competitive.

> At these levels of elite competition that plays a vital role. Because, I mean as far as exercise science goes, things like that… everyone's pretty much maxed out on that and, aehm, well, has to have the body composition. But in order to make the most out of it, aehm, you have to have your optimal weight. Well, and that basically means lowering your weight. As long as it

> works, without sacrificing strength. And, well, but that's quite a bit, I mean you can lower your weight for quite a while before you lose strength. (64)

> Well, I remember last year prior to the Olympic games I made sure I followed this really, really strict diet. I mean not diet in a sense to lose weight, but simply to, uhm, well just to make sure that I didn't eat a lot of sugar, so basically, aehm, overall eat a healthy diet. (65)

Athletes were aware of the physical challenges they faced in Athens as well. One of those challenges was to adjust to the hot climate in Greece (participant 2). For participant 11 an obstacle he failed to overcome was not being able to hold on to the positive energy that he felt in his body between when he first arrived in Athens and when he started his competition.

> And especially if you have such an extreme climate, with 30, 35 degrees even before the start of the race, then spending too much time out in the sun drains energy out of your body. (66)

> So I got there and it was, you felt right away "Oh jeez, that's, this is something very special here!" And that's when I should have been able to start my competition and everything would have been fine. But then I had too much time to acclimatize to, aehm, to realize "Well, hm, this isn't really that special after all!" (laughs) Right? And suddenly everything's just normal, and that's when your body loses some of that positive energy, that tension. (67)

Finally, participant 10, who had already felt burned out before his race started, also experienced unexpected physical symptoms during his race that he had never had before.

> And suddenly I noticed how my heart beat went out of control, and my pulse was really high, but didn't manage to put any force [in the race]. And, aehm… that's when I, of course I realized that and thought "Oh shit, it's not working, nothing works!" Well, so I basically set myself up for failure, and a lot of [athletes] passed me. (68)

Emotions / Feelings

The second sub theme within the theme of The Competitor / Self was Emotions / Feelings. All the athletes' experiences referring to their body described above were associated with a certain feeling for the participants. For example, in the last quote, participant 10 noticed his irregular heart beat and was upset as he realized that the race was not going the way he had hoped. Often, physical and mental aspects were also closely connected for athletes, as the quotes above illustrate. There were, however, other emotions and feelings aside from those connected to the athletes' Body that the participants in this study talked about. Participant 11 described how he enjoyed feeling accepted again by younger competitors, as he was being successful despite his age.

> To notice all of a sudden that, even with [age], to be young again, to be part of it, to train like all the young guys do, also to win against guys a whole lot younger than you, that's, that's just such a motivating feeling, if you realize "Oh, I'm not [age] anymore, I'm getting close to [age], but I'm still physically fit and can easily keep up with the young guys, and also get the recognition from the, the younger athletes!" (69)

For participant 6 having fun was essential to being motivated and enjoying his sport, and he did not feel that all the pressure and intense training that he was put under by his coach during the final year of The Preparation for The Olympics allowed him to have fun.

> So we start to, no one is allowed to go to college anymore, we have to train all day long, . . . And that's when you really start thinking, going to practice is like going to work, it's not fun anymore to [train], which is something very natural, but it simply doesn't make fun anymore, and it's just not fun anymore. (70)

Participant 8 talked about how with the assistance of a sport psychology consultant she came up with her personal goal for The Olympics, which did not involve the outcome of the games but rather how she wanted to feel when she stepped off the field.

> I mean what I wrote down was, aehm, that I wanted to walk off the field feeling exhausted and happy after each game. And then it wouldn't really matter, then it's okay to lose against [opponent]. If they were the better team and we, if I feel like, that's why I said happy, uhm, I gave it all I had, and then it's okay. (71)

Athletes also realized that the unique Olympic environment with all the Distractions, The Olympic Village, and the media attention evoked certain emotions in them. While participant 1 was able to enjoy the beauty of the moment and noticed that at The Olympics extreme joy and extreme disappointment go hand in hand, participant 12 felt overwhelmed and not able to handle her emotions. The following are two quotes from participant 1 and one quote from participant 12:

> The thing that I remember is that I stood there, before the start of the race, and everything was so beautiful, the stands and the start and our racecourse. And then they played music, and everyone got on the carpet and the carpet was, everything was just really beautiful, like at no other competition. And then I got in a mood "Oh, it's really beautiful here." And someone told me before the competition "Well, all of us, we are doing this just for fun. Have fun! That's really something very neat" So that's when I told myself: "Yeah, that's right! I'm here because I want to be. No one is forcing me to be here!" And then I had, I mean, everything's just, somehow it's just like a great festivity. Everything is arranged beautifully. And everyone's in a festive mood and somehow, well… I can't just detach myself from that or something. I mean that definitely influences you. (72)

> Well, of course you try to prepare for that day. And then there're so many emotions that are part of this. Because it's something very special and it can be a very joyful experience, I mean I've never seen people as happy as at the Olympics, but I've also never seen people that disappointed. (73)

> And you are really involved, emotionally, yea. And I couldn't, simply couldn't handle that at all. That's also, now… well, because of that I couldn't focus on the competition anymore. I mean, I didn't forget that I had to compete, but it was just… well, somehow it became secondary. (74)

Other athletes felt sad or upset. Participant 9 talked about how disappointing it was to be led out of the stadium after being eliminated during the competition and participant 3 discussed how he felt about his result. Participant 7 said she felt exhausted before her Olympic final and intimidated when she had to perform a drug test. Participant 1 was happy when finishing her race. Following are the quotes by participant 9, participant 3, two by participant 7, and one by participant 1, respectively:

> And, aehm, that was kind of sad (laughing). I mean if you have to, to… aehm, leave and the other athletes are still [competing]. That's something, uhm, that's not easy. (75)

> And after we were done with our event the Olympics were pretty much over. And we were really, or at least I was really upset, for two or three days. Because I didn't do as good as I hoped I would. (76)

> Well. And, uhm, I mean I would never have thought that I'd still be able to play that well. Really! Well, mentally, I was just really exhausted. (77)

> And everybody just stood there, arms crossed. And that's when I thought "Oh my god, help!" (78)

> But I remember, when I cross the finish line, at the Olympics, then... I don't know. I mean, at that moment, I'm just really happy. (79)

Finally, participant 4 described the emotions and feelings – bitterness, frustration, and disappointment – he had to deal with during his race when he realized that some of his opponents were stronger than he was that day and that he would not end up winning a medal.

> But unfortunately after that, aehm, I had to realize that I couldn't keep up anymore. That was a really bitter moment, because all of a sudden, aehm, you fall into a tiny hole, during the competition. Because that's basically the decision. You know exactly, "Now you are not part of this group anymore that will compete for the medals!" And, aehm, "All that training…" You, you were, or personally, right then, I was a little, little frustrated, because you realized… That, right then, you weren't competitive enough. The others were definitely stronger, that day. . . . There's actually a lot, it's kind of curious, during the competition, that you experience as far as, as emotions go, and which you have to, to, to deal with. (80)

Staying Focused

Staying Focused was the third sub theme within the theme of The Competitor / Self. When attempting to handle the distractions and the pressure experienced in the Olympic environment described above, the athletes used strategies and techniques like self-talk and focusing on process rather than outcome goals, but they also noticed how self-confidence and arousal levels influenced their attentional focus. Participant 1 used self-talk effectively, and participant 8 described how she had learned not to worry about the outcome of the game during the match.

> Well, but of course you just try to focus on your competition and just be cool about it, saying, well, "This is just another competition, I'll go to the start, and off we go." (81)

> I mean we really always stood in our own way, not our opponents. And that we had to change that, that was, was pretty obvious. "Let's go out and play, and at the end of the game we'll see how it went." And, if you, well, basically if you start worrying about the outcome of the game while you are still playing that, that just doesn't work. I mean during the game you have to pretty much focus on the situation at hand, what's happening right now and, well, do your job as good as possible and most of the time what you end up with will also be something good. And that's what we did pretty much all year long. (82)

Participant 2 talked about how for him feeling in good shape for the competition and thus feeling confident was all that he needed to be able to handle possible distractions. Participant 4 explained how right at the start of the race he suddenly felt relaxed and focused.

> In the end it's all about being in good shape at that point in time, and if that's the case you'll be self-confident enough and will just do your own thing, no matter what external factors or whatever might be present. I think that is, in the end, if you are in top shape that is negligible. (83)

> And then, when the gun sounds to start the race, or I guess when he says "Take your marks!", then, it's kind of curious how I experience that, then I'm, aehm, right then, well not totally relaxed, but then the only thing that I'm focused on is my race. And then the race starts, and you just try to give it… give your best. (84)

Participant 9 described how she had to vary her focus of attention in order to most effectively master every attempt of her event, while also sitting through long pauses between attempts.

> While you have to wait the most important thing is to… keep that arousal level and of course to stay focused, but not the whole time on that maximum level. That wouldn't be possible, I mean for two, three hours that's impossible. No, you have to find this balance between being relaxed right after your [attempt] and then get psyched up preparing for your next [attempt]. (85)

Participant 9 was not necessarily used to sitting through such long pauses during other competitions, but she managed to handle it effectively by transitioning between phases where she relaxed and phases where she started concentrating on her next attempt. Participant 3 and participant 10 talked about how they felt that focusing on their sport during The Preparation and finding a quiet place to relax helped them in regard to their respective Olympic competition.

> I'd say I was as fit as I have ever been before, I mean I'd never prepared that well, because I really focused on that. During that time I didn't even go to work anymore. (86)

> Well, to really calm down, I'd have to say, that's kind of hard to do. Because you don't have that much space so you can't just be by yourself, or something like that. Well, but you just have to go for a walk, stuff like that. That works as well. (87)

Finally, participant 5 discussed how for him his coach's pre-race talk started out helping him focus on the right things, but then turned into a distraction as the coach tried to tell him all the things he shouldn't do.

> The final… pep talk, basically it was, it started really well. I mean he said "Guys, there's not a whole lot I have to tell you. Go out there and [get going]!" And everyone was like: "Yes! That's, that's right, we can go out there." And we thought: "This was the best pep talk ever!" But then he started babbling for another full 15 minutes, about all the things we do wrong. So then it was over. I mean I lost all the positive tension, all that energy left my body . . . Just because: 15 minutes we had to let our mind wander, be lost in our thoughts, . . . and the way he talked was so monotonous as well. That was… that was just . . . that was really aggravating. In that moment all your positive, mental energy was gone. (88)

Identity / Personality

The fourth and final sub theme within theme of The Competitor / Self was Identity / Personality. When discussing their identity as Olympic athletes and certain personality characteristics, the participants in this study talked about several aspects of their Olympic experience. Participant 12 described how she felt that she was mentally unstable and how that affected even her physical well-being.

> And I'd have to say that I'm mentally a little… well, unstable. I mean, I always take everything to heart and think a lot about it. Uhm, but that's also when I'm competing nationally . . . and there's something at stake. Most of the time I'd usually get sick during the trials (laughs). (89)

Participant 7 and participant 1 both said that they were not the kind of people who enjoyed being in the limelight and getting a lot of media attention. Participant 4, on the other hand, got motivated from feeling the pressure of external expectations.

> Well that was… I mean I'm not the kind of person that likes that kind of stuff (laughs), that wants to read about herself in the newspaper all the time. (90)

> Well, I don't like that too much. I'm more of a quiet person, I like it if it's rather quiet. (91)

> And for me, personally, what I'd have to say is, I mean I really like it when I'm, when I'm feeling a lot of pressure . . . that's extra motivation. (92)

The role of the media and the public perception of Germany's Olympic athletes in times when the German economy was down and many people in Germany were struggling financially was what participant 2 and participant 9 discussed.

> As an elite athlete you sometimes feel, aehm, well like an outsider, living in Germany. If you tell someone that you are an elite athlete they say "What? Sport? That's all you do? That's almost asocial." So basically all they see is the negative and say "Man, that guy lives off our tax money!" And the feeling that you are left with every once in a while, which definitely isn't something positive, aehm, when trying to convince someone to go ahead and become an elite athlete... Well, it should, maybe athletics should have a higher status in our society once again. But the question is if it'll work. There are more and more people that are jealous, during those rough times. The economy is down and then... (93)

> I mean it was, or last year what was all over the media was "Well, those Olympic tourists! And they are all allowed to stay there!" And that's somehow part of the German mentality that we, aehm, are jealous rather than proud . . .Someone who is eliminated from competition who isn't happy with his own performance, doesn't enjoy staying there that much, because as elite athletes we have high enough standards for ourselves, so we wouldn't be able to enjoy that. And besides that . . . you are also there as an ambassador for your country. I mean if some German athletes

> wearing their German uniforms are down there, they represent, at least that's my take on this, our country. . . . Or, aehm, we would have, well, let's say in the German house we wouldn't have been able to advertise our, our sport and Germany as a country interested in sports, stuff like that. I mean I, aehm, I have to say that really bothered me last year. Because no one intentionally gets eliminated and says "Well, I'll be eliminated right away and then I can enjoy a great two and a half weeks of vacation paid for by the taxpayers!" (laughing) Something like that, right? Aehm, I have to say, people should grant these athletes the right to be there. (94)

Participant 2 also described how while at the Olympic games an athlete loses his or her identity if he or she does not carry an ID at all times.

> Well, that you, no, first of all that you had to carry your ID with you at all times, but, okay, that's something that you can adjust to. I mean in the Olympic village, without ID, you are a nobody. ID is everything. (95)

His role as an athlete, actively involved in The Olympics and there to entertain an audience, was something that participant 3 struggled to adjust to. He talked about how he felt disconnected from the Olympics although he was right there in Athens, because he could not watch the Olympics on German T.V. networks, which was what his experience had been like at all previous Olympics.

> Like I said: Never before did I, was it that hard for me to stay up-to-date about the Olympic games. That was too bad. But if you're there yourself as an athlete, then you have to entertain and deliver a show, instead of enjoying one. (96)

Finally, participant 6 and participant 8 stressed specific factors that they thought were essential for them to be successful in their respective sports. For participant 6, "having fun" with his sport was most important. Participant 8 talked about how as an amateur it was easy to get distracted from the teams' goals. She felt that everybody's willingness to give 100 percent for the team combined

with having a common team goal was an important change from previous experiences and that contributed to her team's Olympic success.

> Just a little… it just has to be fun, I mean. That's… the main reason, to have fun. You're not making any money, at least not a whole lot, and I think even if you made a fortune doing this, if, if it wasn't fun, I don't think you could do it. You just wouldn't be fast. So that's really important, always being able to have fun. (97)

> And basically that's when we as a team looked each other in the eyes and, and said "Well, either I do it right or not at all!" And, I mean we are just amateurs, and, well, in the past it often happened that some players would drift off, like "Well, I'll try it, I'll give it a shot but if it doesn't work that's fine too." And those athletes were exactly the ones that we, or [the coach], didn't want on the team. He only wanted players that said "I want to give everything and I want the best result possible." . . . And, aehm, I think that everyone agreed on that. Like "Okay, I'll do all I can and… well, do this meticulously also because I owe it to the team." And that's not how it was before. There it felt more like "Well, some players want this." But others had, had their own goals. We just didn't have, we just didn't have this common goal. (98)

Others

The second figural theme identifiable in the overall thematic structure was Others. Other people played a vital part in the life and Olympic experience of the athletes participating in this study. The things that they talked about could be divided into two separate, yet closely related sub themes, Support and The Team. For athletes who competed in Athens on a team, teammates played a bigger role than they did for those that competed in individual events. However, all athletes received support from many people, and also talked a lot about other members of the German team, teammates and coaches. Not always did they feel that they received adequate support from the people who were supposed to help them be successful at the Olympics.

Support

Support staff like doctors, physical therapists or equipment managers, friends and family, other athletes, sponsors, and national government bodies were all seen as valuable resources that supplied support for the athletes as they prepared for Olympic competition. However, the athletes were not always happy with the job some of their "supporters" did, and they complained about how some people they relied on to help them acted "unprofessionally".

This was the case for participant 6 who complained about the equipment manager. When he wanted to use his equipment at The Olympics, it was not ready.

> But when we were getting ready to compete, what hadn't been prepared, wasn't ready, was our [equipment]. . . . And we had to start arguing with our equipment manager, so that he would finally get going to finish his job. And I think that's really unprofessional. Because, he just said "I didn't have any time to do that", stuff like that. But I think if you are at the Olympics then you have to have time, and if it takes you all day to get the job done, or all night. In that situation that is… that doesn't matter. I don't care if that guy can't sleep for a whole week. I mean, that's what he's paid for, that's his job and the Olympics are surely important enough. So that all these things were really unprofessional, that's what makes me upset, that generally we didn't have very good conditions. (99)

Participant 12 complained about her national governing body. She was unhappy that the athletes' opinions were not valued and that oftentimes mistakes made by the administrators hindered the athletes who were trying to perform as well as possible.

> I mean with all the stuff that they have done: enough is enough. Because, aehm, the thing is that… the [sport governing body] has, uhm wants to see, needs some results. But who are the ones that have to get those results? The athletes. But the athletes are the ones that… aren't really asked at all. If at all, only at the very end and their opinion doesn't really

> count. So that's, that doesn't work. . . . And then because of something planned by the [sport governing body]… you end up spending so much energy that a lot of athletes say "What am I doing here? I want to go home." . . . I mean some things that, if the [sport governing body] wasn't there, I think the athletes would have much more freedom and could perform better. Maybe not better results, but at least be happier with their performance. Because, looking back, aehm, you have to say "Well, everything you worked for is being sabotaged!" (100)

Other participants felt that their national governing bodies, including coaches and support staff, had done everything possible to help them prepare for their respective Olympic competition. Participant 2 said:

> As an athlete, our support staff and coaches, they really cared for us, that's for sure. (101)

Participant 4 felt that his national governing body as well as friends and family provided him with great moral support, and support by friends and family also played a vital role for participants 7 and 10.

> Then of course your family… the moral support that they provide, your friends, the sport governing body, like I said. (102)

> Well, I felt it really helped me that prior to the Olympics, that… . . . you just knew that, well, that you are not alone, that your parents are supporting you, that your siblings are supporting you, that your grandparents are supporting you, that even a lot of people, well, that really don't have anything to do with [this sport], aehm, are rooting for you and over all those years or even decades (laughs) really did support you. And, uhm, that you are doing this, well you are doing it for yourself, but really also for your family, so to speak. (103)

> But the conditions that I had, were pretty much perfect. Everybody helped me and I also had the support from my family, things like that. (104)

Something unique that the athletes described about the Olympics was the support from athletes in other sports, from Germany or from other countries, which they perceived as motivating. The Olympic village, and especially the

cafeteria (participant 2), and the German House (participant 9) were places where athletes had these experiences.

> You also talk with others from the German team, well you simply make connections pretty easily down there. As a German athlete you sit with Germans most of the time when you are eating, or with athletes from other countries that you know… And it's great because you have an opportunity to talk with others about their competition, what kind of experiences they had. Or you see someone coming in there with a medal and think "Wow, he made it!" I mean it's definitely motivating. (105)

> Basically it was this, well I'd say this feeling that everyone belonged together. . . . I mean it was just, aehm, well it really was a great experience this, this community in the village, aehm, and also around the German house this, this, well, I'd say this small German city (laughing). That was really neat. (106)

The Team

The second sub theme within the figural theme of Others was The Team. Teammates and coaches make up The Team that athletes are used to having around them when practicing or competing at any kind of competition. At the Olympics, however, some participants felt that they were part of the entire German Olympic team. When talking about their relationships with teammates and coaches, some athletes stressed that they believed it was essential to have constructive conflicts within the team. Coach-athlete relationships were sometimes positive, but sometimes very negative, as the quotes by participant 5 and participant 6 presented earlier demonstrated.

Participant 11 and participant 3 said their experiences with the coaching staff that helped them prepare for the Olympics were very positive. Being able to trust the coach and having him available to guide her during the daily practices

was what stood out for participant 9 about her relationship to her coach. Following are the comments of participant 11, participant 3, and participant 9:

> Just great! Working together with coaches, aehm, has never been as great for me as it was during that time. Aehm, and of course to some extent that also depends on your personal situation, aehm, how well you work with coaches. And, aehm, with the national coach, [name], I really got along very well with him, because he's very professional, not like the guy before. And… aehm, with the [coach], I've known him for years and years, aehm, and he knew me, I know him. So that was, really… very positive. I mean there was nothing, you just can't say anything negative about it. I would really, no, that was just great. (107)

> It was, like I said, I mean, that's what's so great right now about our team, after we got the new coach, because of that new era, that we pushed for as a team, . . . And, aehm, well, you really feel that someone's covering your back and supports you, doesn't put pressure on you, and that really worked. (108)

> Well, what, what I, I have to say that, for, well for me it was a very, very critical factor. . . . I mean I really need someone who's there for me on a daily basis, every day, always. And, basically, that guides me pretty much through this process, or simply, well, who I know I can trust. (109)

For participant 8 it was very important that everybody on her team had a personal goal that matched the common team goal. Participant 5 talked about the importance of constructive conflicts for a team, and participant 2 noticed how, on the one hand, he had to wear equipment, the team uniforms, and how he did not feel as comfortable in them. On the other hand, he also perceived being part of a strong team as a positive experience. Participant 8, participant 5, and participant 2 said, respectively:

> And somehow, well that's just how it was. "No, I have to, I want to do this." Exactly: "I don't have to do this, but I want to do this. Aehm, because I realize that I have this goal and that I want to work towards that and want to reach it." Well, basically being aware of this. And that's what, I think

> that's what started this, this team effort. And the talk we had and working with the psychologist and… that's what got all of this started, aehm… . . . And that's something else we didn't do before: set goals. That way it's a lot easier to stay on track. And if you realize "Nope, that's not my goal." you can quit. But at least you know this is the team's goal and… well. And that's what caused all the other things… the motivation. (110)

> That's, that's another thing, looking back, that we got along too well. You didn't even dare to be frank and tell one another what was on your mind. . . . "We want to build something, everyone speaks up and says what's bothering him, and then things are going to work!" You just have to separate between your job and personal stuff, right. In, in your [sport] you have to be able to yell at each other, but… off the field everything's cool, right? (111)

> Then you have the team uniform, you can't just do your workouts in your individual stuff as leisurely and easy going as you might be used to, and some of the pieces might… (laughs)… how do you say that, those things that you have to wear… be improvised. . . . If you go to the Olympics with such a pretty strong team, of course you feel only half the pressure on yourself. (112)

The Competition / Event

The final figural theme that stood out when the athletes who participated in this study talked about their Olympic experience was The Competition / Event. Among other things, athletes described certain techniques and tactical strategies they used in their respective sports, or the role of performance enhancing drugs. They also provided detailed descriptions of their respective competition sites or specific opponents during their event. Thus, the three sub themes that were identifiable within this figural theme were 1) The Sport, 2) The Setting / Site, and 3) Opponents.

The Sport

The participants pointed out interesting details about their sport that were essential in how they perceived their Olympic competition and how they

performed there. Participant 3 talked about his sport, where there were always two athletes as part of the event. Participant 1 mentioned that in her sport the course in Athens had specific characteristics, which added unpredictability to the event. Participant 4 confirmed participant 1's perception, while participant 6 felt the increased competition in his sport made it harder to be successful at the Olympics. Following are the comments of participant 3, participant 1, participant 4, and participant 6:

> But the [competition] was already pretty much decided by then. He really did a great job there, that's, there's always two people that are part of our event. And if the other one is better, you just have to accept it… (113)

> Every competition is different. Every racecourse is different. And of course some, some like this kind of course better, some others; and every, every race-situation is also different in [our sport]. That's just, well, in [our sport] we have different winners all the time. (114)

> That's because in our sport you just can't predict with 100 percent accuracy prior to the race in which place you'll finish. (115)

> But that's exactly what's different between… the old days and today. Back then . . . the GDR was the only country that . . . did this professionally. . . . But now they don't have that, we don't have an advantage anymore. So now it might not be as effective anymore. (116)

For participant 10 the Olympics were especially challenging because in his sport this was the one competition that counted for everything. He compared this situation with other sports where there are three or four highlights a year, which puts less pressure on the athletes.

> Of course, basically, then one event like the Olympics counts for everything. And, well, that means you have one [competition] during those four years, and, aehm, that's what you really focus on, right? You don't have multiple opportunities like [other athletes] or maybe in tennis with Wimbledon and, where you, or Paris, right? You have four, five highlights a year, you pick one, two, which you prepare for, but in [our sport]

> everyone's just focused on this event. And, well, of course [our sport] is also one where you [might not finish], where you have to be lucky, like in every sport. (117)

Participant 8 offered an interesting discussion about "being lucky", when she reflected on her sport which is often characterized by close games.

> I mean those were all close games. And, one different call or one, one instance where the ball bounces differently (laughing), and the outcome of the game could be differently. And I really think that, for ME, I really think that it's more than just luck. No, you have to believe that it will happen and chase every ball and then… well, then it will all work out. I mean basically the luck you earn by putting in the effort or that… I mean that you earn your luck. It always sounds a little cheesy but basically that's the experience that I've had. Because in the past, those years before, somehow we gave up and: "Man, why isn't this working? Why are the other ones always the lucky ones?" Always had that doubt. And, aehm, of course then we didn't get it. And the other one just put in a tiny bit more effort and ended up winning the game… Especially with teams that are equally good, and now, now it was more like that. Well. And really mentally, the mental aspect, this time we did a good job regarding that: That we believed in ourselves and no matter what, we always pulled through and wanted to fight to the last minute and, uhm, if the game's over you can look at the scoreboard. (118)

The main challenge for participant 9 was to time her training process in such a way that she would be 100 percent fit at the Olympics as her sport offered only a short time, a narrow window of opportunity, for peak performance.

> So basically based on all the exercise science you have three weeks, max, and that's a lot, it's probably more like two weeks, to stay at this optimal level. And these are all factors that, aehm, make it really hard to achieve peak performance in [sport]… or at least make it very complex, because of, aehm, or the coach has to know exactly what he's doing, and the athlete has to be very disciplined, to make that happen… (119)

Finally, both participant 7, who did not believe that doping was of any use in her sport, and participant 5, who did, discussed what role they felt performance-enhancing drugs played in their respective sports.

> Because… just like I said, to take performance-enhancing drugs [in our sport], I don't really know how, of course I can't say, can't say anything about the situation in other countries, and also… Well, especially China and such countries. There're always some rumors that, aehm, they have something that cannot be… detected. Especially since the Chinese would be able to retire if they came home as an Olympic champion. (120)

> And that's when I realized that in other countries, people still think we are taking that stuff, because of, because of the re-unification and all that, because we have so many coaches from East Germany, stuff like that, right? But, knock on wood! We are, well, didn't have a doping case since 1990 in [our sport] in Germany, right. Which isn't something that all other countries could say. (121)

The Setting / Site

The second sub theme within the figural theme of The Competition / Event was The Setting / Site. Besides general characteristics of their respective sports, the athletes who participated in this study also talked extensively about the conditions they encountered at their respective competition site in Athens. Again, each individual athlete's experiences were very different. For example, participant 6 described how he did not even feel like he was at the Olympics at all because there were hardly any fans at his competition site. On the other hand participant 9 described the energizing atmosphere she experienced when entering the Olympic stadium for her competition.

> Because our races were away from the main Olympic complex, everything felt kind of low-key, or at least it just didn't feel like the Olympics, which you always think of as something special, where you get and everything's crowded and busy. But it really was just like a world championship. There were only very few spectators, early in the mornings, sometimes there would still be some fog, mist and morning dew in the air, and everything was, everything felt just normal. (122)

> And, aehm, well, I have to say that was really fascinating, those, I think there were 80,000 people in that stadium, that fit in there, and, aehm, you are sitting at the center of that and realize that, but I mean, only to a

> certain extent. . . . I mean you can't let that affect you too much, because otherwise you would probably freak out or get way too nervous, all that nervousness would reemerge. . . . And, well, the whole atmosphere, this energy in the stadium, right, that's just, I mean as a competition site, there's nothing that compares to this track-and-field stadium. Because of this gigantic atmosphere, I think there's no way to have that in another, aehm, in another, how do you say, arena . . . Such a stadium with 80,000 people cheering, that's gigantic. And if they clap their hands . . . and then they did, everyone in the stadium was celebrating, and they did, they got up and played some music, really, there was all this energy throughout the whole stadium and you could feel how your hair, I mean with all that electricity or whatever that is, the hair on your arms stood up. That was, the whole stadium was just shaking with all that tension. That was just, truly amazing. (123)

Some athletes had to deal with the hot climate or other weather conditions that could possibly affect their performance (participant 6 and participant 10), and some talked about the specific characteristics of the course that had been selected for the Olympic event (participant 1).

> And we knew beforehand that we could have bad weather conditions in Athens. (124)

> Maybe it was also due to the racecourse and the extremely hot temperatures in Athens. But well, basically everyone has to deal with that. (125)

> Well, Athens was special [in our sport] because of the racecourse with the [aspect]. (126)

Some athletes also experienced distractions at their competition site as they had to deal with large crowds in the stands (participant 7), or were not able to stick to pre-performance routines due to security measures that restricted access to the course or their respective competition site prior to their event (participant 11, and participant 2).

> Although at first I thought, when we were standing on the turf and there was [fans] everywhere, I just thought (laughs) "Oh my god! (laughs) I'm

> feeling sick!" Something like that. So there, I really felt, felt… like, well, I felt really dazed, at first. And… somehow that did, well (laughs), I was able to play. But it was really extreme, how much that affected you. Yea. (127)

> At the world championships, . . . the whole team sits somewhere in the stands, you can see [the events], can go next door to warm up […], can go back to your bag from time to time, where your folks are, can sit with them briefly, watch [the events] for a little while, and, and, watch the whole thing, and, you know? Build your arousal level step by step. And there we had to be down there in the catacombs the whole time. I mean I didn't have any chance to get to, to the inside of the arena, tried to, aehm, warm up as well as possible, yea. But somehow, something didn't feel right, it was pretty tough. And then you got out there, and suddenly the crowd was there. You didn't have a chance to balance out your arousal level, somehow. And then we [got ready], and in the end, looking back I'd have to say that, basically everything felt like it wasn't real. I mean I wasn't into the situation at all, right? Until I realized what was going on, there were already two, three minutes [off the clock], right? (128)

> The thing that is a really important part of my ritual, [examining] the racecourse a day before the competition. And there you weren't allowed to [examine it] being right next to it. I mean, you didn't have an opportunity to check out the [racecourse], but okay, that's something everyone had to deal with and, aehm, well… It's just, there are so many details and you are always yourself the one who [examines] the course, checks out the course, much like in F1 racing, and in the end you might just catch that gap that you spied the day before, because you knew this is the ideal line, this is where you have to be and, uhm, during the race that might just cost you a couple of seconds that make all the difference. (129)

Finally, the athletes interviewed also commented on how they felt about Greece as a host of the 2004 Olympics. For example, participant 5 and participant 4 said:

> I mean it was just horrible how at the Olympic g… it was basically the Greek people. Well, they went on vacation. . . . And, well, they didn't put up any big screens for people to watch the Games, I mean in the city you could hardly tell that the Olympics were there. (130)

> In Athens it sometimes felt like the people, the people, and of course you have to be careful saying stuff like that, right, that they just said "Well, it's

> nice to host the Olympic games, but we're also glad if they're over anytime soon." (131)

Opponents

Opponents was the third and final sub theme within the theme of The Competition / Event. Almost all participants in this study talked about one characteristic of their Olympic competition: that they were competing against the best of the best. Participant 8, participant 2, participant 9, and participant 11 all described this fact.

> And only the best ones make it to the Olympics, that's why, aehm, well, that's why we always wanted to play and practice against strong teams. (132)

> The level of competition is generally extremely high, everyone is focused on that competition. (133)

> But there it can be like, and that's exactly what happened at the Olympics . . . you have to make sure that you put up a new personal record in your first three [attempts]. Or get at least close to your personal record. (134)

> And if you take a look, aehm, that basically from the 22 athletes that qualified, which are the world's best athletes anyway, I could name 12 guys that all, aehm, won medals at previous European championships, world championships or Olympic games. And every guy was so fit, right there, that they could have won Olympic gold. (135)

Participant 1 expected a high level of competition but was surprised by some competitors who did not show up at international events prior to the Olympics. She had used these prior events to gauge her form and build confidence.

> Well, but the Olympic champion, no one really expected that from her, [name]. The same with the [nationality] girl, who came in third. I can't think of a competition in which I faced her. So because of that it was hard to predict, the level of competition. I mean, those that placed ahead of me, probably 80 percent of those athletes, I didn't even compete with during

> that same year. Although I sought the competition two or three times [in these events]. (136)

Participant 3 described how his coach helped him prepare for his opponent, which helped him with his performance – until he got injured.

> My coach pretty much knew that guy, and could also describe his [strengths and weaknesses] pretty well. I knew what to expect. But… was pretty well prepared and did do well, until I got injured. Well, that really hindered me, at least to some extent. (137)

The only athletes interviewed who did not discuss their opponents during the Olympic competition were participant 10 and 12. Both of these athletes struggled with themselves throughout their respective events more so than with their opponents. Participant 12 also described the extremely negative influence her national coach had on her whole competition and specific performance in particular, which made it almost sound like she considered him an “opponent”.

> Well, and then I tried to pull myself out of this hole, during the race, and managed to find a rhythm again, managed to move up a couple of positions, and… somehow finished. But that was a really brutal [competition], somehow. (138)

> I mean I made the mistake to, but that’s, aehm, the national coach was sitting behind me, so I went to him and, aehm, he just yelled at me “How I could be that stupid that I didn’t know that. […] He had talked to me, talked to me about it.” (139)

Summary

In this chapter I detailed the thematic structure of the experience of the German Olympic athletes interviewed in this study. I started the chapter by describing the overall thematic structure, which included the major ground of Time, three additional main grounds, three figural themes, and the respective sub themes for each. The grounds and themes that stood out when the athletes

talked about their experiences emerging from these athletes' Olympic experiences were the grounds of Time, The Preparation, The Olympics, and The Overall Result, and the figural themes of The Competitor / Self, Others, and The Competition / Event. For every theme and sub theme I presented supporting quotes to illustrate the multifaceted nature of the athletes' experiences (e.g., positive or negative, distracting or motivating, team vs. individual sports, etc.).

In the next chapter, I discuss the results relative to previous literature, provide conclusions, and offer recommendations for researchers and sport practitioners.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to gain a deeper insight into the experiences of German athletes who competed at the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens, Greece. In order to obtain an in-depth description of athletes' experiences a qualitative, existential phenomenological interview approach was used. Twelve German athletes described their experiences of preparing and competing in those Olympics. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and the transcripts served as the primary source of data. During data analysis the following experiential grounds emerged from the interview data, which were sufficient to describe the athletes' experiences: 1) Time, 2) The Preparation, 3) The Olympics, and 4) The Overall Result. Additionally, three figural themes stood out in the context of the four grounds: 1) The Competitor / Self, 2) Others, and 3) The Competition / Event.

In this chapter, I begin by discussing the major findings of the study. First, I talk about the mental aspects of the athletes' experiences as they relate to existing literature regarding successful performance. Second, I relate the findings presented in the previous chapter to organizational factors influencing Olympic athletes' experiences. Finally, I discuss aspects of the athletes' experiences that pertain to issues outside the athletic realm. I then provide a brief discussion of

the research procedures used in the study, offer several conclusions, and list recommendations for future research and practical application.

Major Findings: German Olympians' Experience of Competing in Athens 2004

When the overall thematic structure is considered, three aspects stand out with regard to the experiences of the twelve German Olympic athletes interviewed: 1) the mental approach they adopted, 2) the organizational stress they experienced, and 3) the relationship of the Olympic experience to athletes' lives outside of athletics.

The Mental Approach

Earlier research by Orlick and Partington (1986) on Olympic athletes' experiences at the Games highlighted the importance of mental preparation for Olympic performance success. Throughout the entire thematic structure that emerged in the present study, certain mental aspects of the athletes' experiences were identifiable. Athletes talked about how physically and mentally draining the hard training regimen was that they went through preparing for the Olympics. While they generally felt that the large amount of physical practice they put in prior to the Olympics was a source of self-confidence, some also reported being overtrained and feeling burned out at some point during their preparation for the Games. These athletes experienced a lack of sufficient time for recovery, both physically and mentally, and felt this was detrimental to their performance. One athlete experienced a particularly strenuous training regimen and numerous

tough competitions in order to make the Olympic team. As a result the athlete was physically and mentally drained when the Games started.

All twelve athletes talked about how determined and focused they were during preparation for the Olympic games. Some took a semester or two off from college and others took time off from their jobs in order to devote their entire time and energy into training for their respective sports. While this narrow focus on their athletic pursuits allowed them to devote a lot of time to training, some talked about the negative aspects of this experience. One participant in particular said he felt his sport was not fun anymore because it was the only thing he did day-in and day-out. He felt like he was just “going to work”, and did not genuinely enjoy the sport activity the way he once had. The fact that the athletes spent practically their entire time on physical training put some at risk for symptoms of burnout and overtraining (Grove & Buckworth, 1997; McCann, 1995; Peterson, 2005; Raedeke & Smith, 2004).

Using high-altitude training to prepare physically for peak performance in Athens put additional mental stress on some athletes (Bardwell, Ensign, & Mills, 2005). They noticed how hard it was to get their timing down with respect to their competitive event after training in thinner air at a higher altitude. The athletes who trained at high altitude also commented on the delicate balance between doing too much and not training hard enough. Finally, they talked about how the feel of their body movements changed after training at high altitude and then competing at sea level. Specifically, they felt they had to overcome a “low,” in

that they “couldn’t get the motor going,” or that they just weren’t “sharp” and quick enough in their movements. These negative perceptions of their body’s physical state posed a serious mental challenge going into Olympic competition.

As earlier research with Olympic athletes (Orlick & Partington, 1986, 1988) has shown that being mentally prepared to compete is an important characteristic of successful Olympic performers, an interesting result of the present study was that very few research participants talked about systematic mental preparation for the Games. Background information I was able to obtain indicated that four of the twelve athletes interviewed actually worked with sport psychology consultants while preparing for the Olympics. However, of these four participants, only two mentioned their work with these consultants during the interview. One athlete said she felt the mental approach adopted by her and her teammates, which was facilitated by the sport psychologist and the coach, was the deciding factor in their successful performance in Athens. She talked about how having everyone on the same page, being a close-knit team, having everyone committed 100% to the team, and having effective goal setting strategies were the main things that helped them perform so successfully. The way she described her experience matched all characteristics of teams that were successful in Olympic competition reported in earlier studies (e.g., Gould et al., 1999).

Other athletes experienced one or more “performance blocks” described by Orlick and Partington (1986). For example, one athlete said that his ability to

motivate and prepare himself mentally was one of the signature strengths he had developed over the years. Interestingly, though, this athlete stated that he changed his usual pre-performance routine immediately prior to his Olympic event. Instead of going with what had worked before he tried something new and unproven to come up with a game plan the night before his event. Watching a video of his opponent, he focused on all the things that he should *not* do in order to defeat his opponent. Reflecting on the eventual outcome of his competition, the athlete concluded that what he had done was a mistake. He said he ended up focusing on the things he should not do and therefore was not as aggressive as he should have been. His rationale for changing his mental preparation and strategy at the Olympics was: “You just don’t want to leave anything out . . . I did not want to think back and feel bad about myself or saying ‘I should have tried this and that’.”

One of the research participants talked about contemplating working with a sport psychology consultant (Orlick & Partington, 1987). She had pondered the usefulness of mental preparation and tried to find a sport psychology consultant before the Athens Games, but was unsuccessful. She had a very negative and catastrophic performance at the Games (Edwards, Hardy, Kingston, & Gould, 2002) and discussed her emotional struggles dealing with the many distractions she encountered. Many people close to her recommended that she try to use the available sport psychology services, but she was personally not convinced that they would be beneficial. A factor that contributed to her hesitation to work with a

sport psychology consultant was that her search for the right person to work with hadn't been successful to that point.

Another athlete explained how he thought that being in shape at the Olympics (as a result of an extensive practice schedule) and then tapering in order to achieve peak performance was all that was needed in order to stay focused and "do your thing" at the Olympics. However, he failed to consider the many distracting elements he eventually encountered in the Olympic environment and the psychological impact they had (Orlick & Partington, 1986, 1988). The Olympics make for a unique situation that includes many of the world's best athletes, an unfamiliar city (e.g., Athens), a lively and chaotic Olympic village, thousands of spectators, T.V. and press reporters, transportation problems and a host of other potential distractions. All other international and world championships athletic events are "small-time" in comparison (Gould et al., 2002a; Gould et al., 2002b; Gould et al., 1999; Greenleaf et al., 2001). One participant in particular described how she was unable to keep focusing on her competition because she was so overwhelmed by her emotional response to the unique circumstances at the Olympics. Similar experiences were reported by athletes in earlier studies (Gould et al., 1992a, 1992b). This athlete also talked about how she tried to get some assistance from her more experienced teammates in handling the distractions. However, she found them to be of little help. Finally, one of the athletes pointed out the difficulty of simulating the actual Olympic competition during the training leading up to the event and discovered

that there were many unanticipated aspects of the Olympic environment that affected her performance. Some of the things she experienced during the Olympics that she did not experience at other international competitions were restrictive time schedules, the Olympic village, and unusual rules and regulations (e.g., requirements for team uniforms).

Besides pointing out the importance of systematic mental preparation, Orlick and Partington (1986) discussed several “performance blocks” to successful Olympic performance. One of those blocks is late team selection because of the high amount of physical and mental stress it places on some athletes. This was the case for one of the German athletes in the present study. However, contrary to Orlick and Partington’s findings another participant thought that late selection was an advantage for her and her teammates because it helped them remain motivated during the preparation phase and facilitated team development.

The distractions mentioned by the German athletes in the present study are not surprising in light of Orlick and Partington’s (1986, 1988) research. Being “blown away by distractions” was another performance block described by these researchers and the German athletes in this study experienced many distractions when preparing for and competing in the Olympics. However, they did not appear to be as well prepared as many North American athletes to deal with distractions (e.g., Gould et al., 2002a). Additionally, it seemed like the athletes in the present

study lacked systematic plans for refocusing in the face of distractions (Orlick & Partington, 1988).

Taken together, the comments the German Olympians made in the present study about their perception, use, and experience of sport psychology services suggest that they engaged in relatively little systematic mental preparation for the Games. While these results cannot be generalized to a larger population the use of sport psychology services by these athletes appears to differ in both content and frequency from that of North American Olympic athletes, (e.g., Orlick & Partington, 1986; Eklund et al., 1993).

Previous German publications (Eberspächer et al., 2005; Emrich et al., 2004; Spitz & Ebeling, 2001) support the contention that a systematic approach to German Olympic athletes' mental preparation is not an emphasis. Given the importance of adequate mental preparation for Olympic performance success and peak performance (e.g., Gould et al., 1992a), it is surprising that the German athletes in the present study appeared to have made little use of existing services for systematic mental preparation and aspiring German Olympians have recently been found to have a low interest in and knowledge of sport psychology services provided at the Olympic training centers (Emrich et al., 2004).

Eberspächer et al. (2005) pointed out that, besides the projects that were supported through the specific fund for the 2004 Olympics, German athletes made use of sport psychology services and consultants made available to them at the Olympic training centers. Making sport psychology services available

through different resources and centers is a positive step toward the goal of insuring that as many athletes as possible have an opportunity to learn about these services and make use of them. However, it does not necessarily mean these services are being implemented in the most efficient and coordinated way. As Eberspächer, Immenroth, and Mayer (2002) pointed out that lack of funding and lack of a sufficient number of knowledgeable sport psychology consultants were the two main reasons for not having more mental training programs available, making sure that sport psychology services are provided as efficiently as possible is crucial in order to make them more readily available for German Olympic athletes. The findings by Eberspächer et al. (2005) suggested that the grant program for the 2004 Athens Games seemed to improve the availability and use of sport psychology services. While Emrich et al. (2004) reported that less than 30% of athletes preparing for Olympic competition at Olympic training centers knew of and used sport psychology services, Eberspächer et al. pointed out that in 43.9% of the events German athletes competed in at the 2004 Athens Games sport psychology consultants were involved. Considering the results of the present study, however, suggests that sport psychology services available for German athletes could still be improved in order to bring them to a level comparable to North American standards.

The German Olympians in this study seemed to experience most of the same distractions that their North American counterparts encountered (Orlick & Partington, 1986). Yet, they likely had fewer sport psychology services available

to deal with them. Thus, it might be argued that these athletes would have enjoyed a better Olympic experience (in both a performance and general sense) if they had been more aware of and/or made better use of available sport psychology services.

Organizational Stress

Woodman and Hardy's (2001) case study on organizational stress experienced by elite athletes preparing for major international competitions suggested that organizational issues such as team selection, coaches and coaching styles, team atmosphere, communication, and financing issues are all possible sources of stress for athletes. Additionally, Orlick and Partington (1986, 1988) reported that late team selection and changes in previously successful patterns were serious performance blocks for Olympic competitors. Many of the twelve athletes interviewed in the present study experienced one or more forms of organizational stress. As discussed previously, one athlete described his almost 18-month-long qualifying process that ended only eight weeks before the Olympics. The process left him physically and mentally burned out and unable to first recover and then sufficiently prepare in the limited time left before his Olympic event. Another athlete described the debate within her sport governing body regarding the best time to schedule the Olympic trials. This debate and discussion left many athletes confused and unsure about the support they were receiving from the respective sport organization. When describing the communication athletes had with their respective sport governing body officials

this athlete stated: “The athletes are the ones who… usually don’t get asked at all. And if so, only at the very end and their opinion doesn’t count anyway”.

Another athlete described how her sport organization set an even higher standard and more restrictive timeframe for qualifying for the Olympic team than did other countries. She talked about having only twelve months to achieve the Olympic norm required to make the German team, while athletes in other countries often had up to two years. Due to the nature of her sport in the end she only had two months where she had a realistic opportunity to meet the required Olympic standard. Another athlete discussed the twelve-month timeframe imposed for achieving the qualifying norm. In a similar vein, she pointed out that this only left her with one or two meets where she would have a realistic opportunity to reach the Olympic standard.

Some coaches and coaching styles appeared to have a negative influence on some of the participants in this study. One athlete mentioned problems she had with a particular national coach. She had a very hard time dealing with this coach’s coaching style because she was used to a very different coach-athlete relationship from her daily practices with her club coach. Some other athletes believed their coaches were not providing a motivating, enjoyable environment during practice, nor were they being sensitive to the athletes’ needs when the athletes were getting ready to compete. In particular, athletes discussed the extreme emphasis coaches placed on a high volume of physical practice rather

than on proper technique. Several athletes also described how team meetings conducted by coaches were distracting, too long, and focused only on the negative aspects of athletes' performances. On the other hand, several athletes talked about positive relationships with their new national coaches and praised various aspects of those coaches' coaching styles.

Support staff, including physical therapists, team doctors, and equipment managers, were also sources of organizational stress for some athletes (Woodman & Hardy, 2001). Specifically, athletes talked about issues such as not having physical therapists available when they needed them, doctors not providing them with proper treatment to assist with speedy recovery, and equipment managers not getting their jobs done in time. Some athletes felt that after all the hard work they had put into preparing for the Olympics they were being let down by "unprofessional" support staff who were not doing their jobs. Several athletes said some support staff acted as if the Olympics were a vacation rather than an international competition.

Another form of organizational stress experienced by many of the athletes was related to financial issues (Woodman & Hardy, 2001). One athlete talked about the financial importance of achieving success in this one particular Olympic event in his sport. Media attention, sponsor support, and federal funding all depended on how the athletes did in this one Olympic race. Other athletes spoke about how team success (or lack thereof) could affect the federal funding provided for Olympic sports and how coaches, team managers, or administrators

repeatedly emphasized the importance of performance outcomes in order to achieve a higher level of support – even during the final “pep talk” prior to their event.

Finally, one athlete talked about not being provided with the best material available with regard to the team uniform he was required to wear during his competition. He felt that the poor quality material compromised his performance to some extent and was one of the factors that started a negative chain of events for him that characterized his whole Olympic competition.

All of the previous examples represent just some aspects of the experience of the twelve participants in this study. The examples of organizational stress discussed above all seem to fit into one or more of the four categories of organizational stress discussed by Woodman and Hardy (2001). Environmental issues, personal issues, leadership issues, and team issues all played a role for these German Olympians. It should be noted though that many athletes praised the support they received from their sport governing body, team managers, coaches and other support staff. Thus, it appears that the German sport organizations represented a source of both support and stress for athletes in this study. Further examination of these sources of stress would perhaps provide additional information that could be used to improve the quality of support services available to German Olympians (Woodman & Hardy, 2001).

The Olympic Experience and Outside Life

The Olympic journeys of all twelve German athletes in this study were grounded in real life experiences. One of the participants clearly put her Olympic experience in this perspective. While she was very determined and committed to do as well as she could on the day of her Olympic event, she said “that day is not my whole life.” Instead, she talked about how she enjoyed the daily practice routines and the journey to the Games because she realized that she was able to do something on a daily basis that was a lot of fun. Another athlete pointed out how important it was for him to have fun. These athletes were aware that their enjoyment was based more on the quality of their daily lives than on the results of a single Olympic competition.

Some of the athletes discussed how, as elite athletes, they were perceived by the general public. They talked about the fact that many German people seemed to be jealous of them rather than proud of them. Participants perceived that this jealousy was in part prompted by bad press for the German Olympic team when it failed to win as many medals as had been predicted. Some Germans labeled athletes as “Olympic tourists” who were just having a nice vacation paid for by taxpayers’ money. Another reason why public reaction may have been negative during the Athens Games was that Germany was going through an economic crisis in 2004. There was then, and still is, high unemployment in Germany and many people are struggling financially. Many

athletes were aware that the large amount of money the government spent on athletics during these difficult times was a controversial issue in their country.

Another aspect of elite sports and specifically of Olympic competition that has found consistent news coverage is the incidence of performance-enhancing drugs (e.g., Begley, Clifton, Brant, & Liu, 2000; Robbins, 2004). Many participants in the present study discussed this issue very openly, which was something that I did not expect. One athlete described the intimidating atmosphere of having to undergo a drug test at the Olympics. This test was quite different when compared with other drug tests she had taken previously. Others discussed the role they thought doping played in their respective sports (Anshel, 2001). Some thought that the use of drugs was a useless activity; others thought that it could be used as a shortcut instead of engaging in intensive and specialized training phases such as high altitude training. They talked about suspicions athletes from other countries had of German athletes taking performance-enhancing drugs, especially given the East German doping history.

Finally, one athlete described in considerable detail her experience of competing against another athlete who was tried in court for using performance-enhancing drugs, but whose trial had not yet been completed. She also observed several signs and symptoms of drug use at other major international competitions. With extensive drug use in her sport she was acutely aware that her chances of winning in major competitions and the Olympics were limited,

“should the conditions not change”. For her, given the unequal standards for out-of-competition testing in different countries, making it to the Olympics was a great achievement. Being able to compete at a level that would allow her to win at the Olympics was unlikely, however, unless the situation with regard to drug testing changed.

Evaluation of the Procedure

For the present study an existential phenomenological, hermeneutic approach was chosen. One of the main strengths of this approach is that it allows participants to give first-person descriptions of their respective experiences. Providing participants with the freedom to talk about their experiences allowed them to respond in a way that resulted in descriptions of whatever stood out to them. While some participants seemed initially surprised about the lack of specific questions directed at certain aspects of their Olympic journey, they ended up having no trouble talking extensively about whatever they felt stood out to them. The word count of each of the original German researcher-participant dialogues ranged from approximately 6,300 to approximately 15,600 with an average of 9,790 words.

I feel this open-ended approach not only provided me with valid descriptions of what was important for these athletes with regard to their Olympic competition in Athens 2004, but also revealed certain aspects of their experience that I might have missed had I designed a structured interview guide. Compared to more structured interview approaches I feel that the phenomenological

approach also allowed the distinct individual aspects of each athlete's experience to emerge. For one athlete the multiple injuries he had to overcome were a central theme of his Olympic experience – more so than for the others. For another athlete the tedious qualifying process was the most dominating feature of his experience. Athletes who competed on teams emphasized the team aspect as an important part of their performance and total Olympic experience. No previous research had addressed German Olympians' experiences from a first-person perspective. Therefore, the existential phenomenological approach with its open-ended interview format allowed these athletes to expand on their experiences in considerable detail. In the way of a personal observation, I sensed that all of the athletes who participated in this study appreciated the opportunity to tell their stories and most spoke enthusiastically and at great length about their experiences. It is also interesting to note that the use of an existential phenomenological approach with these German Olympians confirmed to large extent earlier findings derived with a more structured interview approach with a larger sample of U.S. athletes (Gould et al., 1992a, 1992b).

Finally, the make-up of the interpretive research groups as well as the dissertation committee, the advantage of having one member of the research group available to double check and discuss translations, and the fact that the study was completed in the U.S. all contributed to the strength of this research project. Translating research data and/or theories while preserving their specific,

unique terminologies can pose a considerable challenge for researchers (e.g., Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). However, being a native speaker of German, I was able to interview participants and translate their comments accurately. I also translated the interviews, quotes and thematic structure, and asked one member of the research group, a native speaker of English with solid knowledge of the German language, assist me in double checking and discussing the translations. These features, I feel, added to the reliability of the data analysis.

Analyzing part of the interviews in German and part of them in English, helped assure that the themes were not restricted to only one language. Additionally, having a German sport scientist on the dissertation defense committee enhanced the reliability of the results. Providing the translated quotes in English and the original quotes in German (see Appendix F) gives the reader with the requisite language skills a unique opportunity to grasp the unique cross cultural aspects of this research project.

One potential limitation of interview studies is their retrospective design. The interviews in the present study were conducted during the summer of 2005, approximately ten months after the 2004 Athens Games. Earlier researchers examining Olympic athletes' experiences (Gould et al., 1999, Greenleaf et al., 2001) discussed how potential memory bias and/or attribution effects may have posed a limitation. Gould and colleagues (Gould et al., 1999, Greenleaf et al.,

2001) interviewed their participants approximately one year following their respective Olympic competition.

I feel, however, that the existential phenomenological approach adopted in the present study helped address the issue of retrospective memory bias and/or attribution effects in two ways. First, The Overall Result emerged from the data analysis as one of the main grounds. Thus, almost one year later it appeared that the result athletes obtained in their event still influenced their perception and recall of their Olympic experience. Second, it appeared to me that participants had no problems remembering details about their respective Olympic journeys, even though almost a year had passed since the 2004 Athens Games. While some athletes may have had initial problems remembering specific details they appeared to recover many of the details when responding to follow-up questions and summarizing their earlier responses.

On a final note, it should be pointed out that existential phenomenological research projects are basically studies in interpretation. As described previously, an attempt was made to derive the results of this study through rigorous and systematic data analysis so that any reader adopting the same viewpoint as the researcher would be able to come up with the same conclusions (Polkinghorne, 1989). In the case of the present study, the question addressed was: “How do German Olympic athletes interpret the experiences they had in Athens 2004?” Completing this project in the U.S. with both a German-speaking and English-speaking research group enhances the prospects that future readers with

proficiency in either or both languages would be able to achieve the same interpretation as the one I and my colleagues obtained.

Conclusions

Based on the results obtained in this study, the following four main conclusions are offered:

1) The experiences of these German athletes seemed to be primarily characterized by an absence of systematic mental preparation for the specific challenges they faced during the 2004 Olympic games.
2) All of these athletes experienced one or more forms of organizational stress described by Woodman and Hardy (2001).
3) The Olympic journeys of all twelve participants were grounded in the context of real life, as they were aware of certain cultural, socio-economic, and other non-sport related factors influencing their athletic pursuits.
4) While falling within each of the primary themes, athletes' stories were characterized by considerable individual differences.

Recommendations for Future Research

Spitz and Ebeling (2001) pointed out that many German Olympians that had won medals at the world championships during the two years prior to the 2000 Sydney Olympics had failed to live up to expectations (i.e., did not medal) in Sydney, a large-scale project. The qualitative data obtained in the present study suggest several possible reasons for these researchers' results. Thus,

future research investigating differences in the experiences of German athletes who succeed in major international competitions, including the Olympics, and those who don't could be beneficial for German sport administrators attempting to improve services available to athletes preparing for international and Olympic competition. Such studies could be designed as a quasi-replication of the previously described research project conducted by Gould and colleagues (Gould et al., 2002a; Gould et al., 2002b; Gould et al., 1999; Greenleaf et al., 2001) on behalf of the United States Olympic Committee.

A more detailed analysis of the sources of organizational stress that affect German athletes' preparation for and performance at the Olympics would appear to be another potentially fruitful project. An approach similar to the one used by Woodman and Hardy (2001) could produce helpful information for German sport officials.

Recommendations for Sport Practitioners

The findings of the present study are relevant to sport psychology practitioners, particularly those working with German athletes, in several ways. First, there appears to be a need to establish a systematic service network that provides mental training for German Olympic athletes. As Eberspächer et al. (2005) pointed out, initial steps in that direction have been made. However, better coordination of the services available to athletes seems to be needed. Additionally, it also appears to be important for sport psychology consultants to

educate athletes about the importance of a systematic approach to mental preparation for peak performance and to reach out to them.

Woodman and Hardy (2001) suggested that sport psychology consultants might offer assistance for coaches, managers, and administrators, as well as for athletes, in order to help reduce organizational stress elite athletes might otherwise experience. These researchers encouraged sport psychology consultants to try doing this by offering workshops on effective communication strategies. As the results of the present study suggested, there seems to be a need within the Germans sport system to address sources of stress for the athletes caused by poor communication within the organization and sport psychology consultants might be the ones who could help with those issues. However, German sport officials should examine the credentials of prospective consultants in order to be sure they are qualified to provide the requested assistance. Previous research (Orlick, 1989) has revealed that athletes' attitudes toward sport psychology consultants can vary considerably and they seem to recognize consultants who are helpful and those who are not. Therefore, care should be taken to provide athletes, coaches, and other support staff, with the most qualified sport psychology consultants possible.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION AND CONSENT FORM

(ENGLISH VERSION)

APPENDIX A: REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION AND CONSENT

FORM (ENGLISH VERSION)

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

German Olympians' Experiences of Competing at the 2004 Athens Games

You are invited to participate in a research study titled "German Olympians' Experiences of Competing at the 2004 Athens Games". The purpose of this project is to obtain the experiences of athletes competing at the Olympic games who were members of the German Olympic team.

Interviews will take approximately 60 minutes and there will be no monetary compensation for participation. However, you may find the interview rewarding in that it promotes self-awareness and stimulates dialogue regarding many issues athletes deal with prior to, during and after competing at the Olympics. As a result, participation in this study might have implications for athletes' preparation and performance at future Olympic games. In addition, emerging themes and topics described by athletes might lead to improved services prior to and during the Olympics for future German athletes.

The only known risks involved in qualitative interviews are the emotions and self-awareness brought on by describing the relevant experiences. There are no known additional risks involved with the interview. The data of the study will be kept confidential and will be made available only to persons conducting the study, the primary investigator, Sebastian Brueckner, and his major professor, Dr. Craig Wrisberg. No reference will be made orally or in written reports that could link participants to the study. Completed interview audio files will be transcribed and paper copies of transcriptions will be kept locked. After the audio files have been transcribed, they will be destroyed. If you have any questions at any time regarding the procedures of the study, you may contact Sebastian Brueckner by email (sebastian@utk.edu) or phone (001-865-974-8891). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you can contact the Research Compliance Services section of the Office of Research at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee, USA at (865) 974-3466.

Your participation is voluntary, refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled and you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Consent
I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form and I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Primary Investigator's Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX B:

REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION AND CONSENT FORM

(GERMAN VERSION)

APPENDIX B: REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION AND

CONSENT FORM (GERMAN VERSION)

INFORMATIONSBLATT UND EINVERSTÄNDNISERKLÄRUNG

Wettkampferfahrungen deutscher Olympiateilnehmer in Athen 2004

Sie sind herzlich eingeladen an dem Forschungsprojekt „Wettkampferfahrungen deutscher Olympiateilnehmer in Athen 2004“ teilzunehmen. Ziel dieses Projektes ist, Erfahrungsberichte von Athleten der deutschen Olympiamannschaft zu sammeln.

Die Interviews mit den Sportlern werden rund 60 Minuten dauern; es gibt keine finanzielle Aufwandsentschädigung. Es besteht jedoch die Möglichkeit, dass Sie die Teilnahme an dem Interview lohnend finden, da diese in der Regel bei den Teilnehmern zu besserer Selbstwahrnehmung führt und den Dialog über Dinge, mit denen sich Sportler vor, während und nach Olympischen Spielen auseinandersetzen müssen, fördert. Folglich könnte die Teilnahme an dieser Studie Auswirkungen auf die Vorbereitung und Leistungen von zukünftigen Olympiateilnehmern haben. Die von den Athleten beschriebenen Themen könnten möglicherweise auch zu verbesserten Serviceleistungen für zukünftige deutsche Olympioniken führen.

Die einzig bekannten Risiken bei der Teilnahme an diesem qualitativen Interviewverfahren sind durch das Beschreiben relevanter Erfahrungen und Erlebnisse bei den Teilnehmern hervorgerufene emotionale Reaktionen und dadurch gesteigerte Selbstwahrnehmung. Es sind keine weiteren Risiken bekannt. Die in der Studie erhobenen Daten sind vertraulich und werden nur Personen, die mit der Durchführung des Projektes beschäftigt sind, dem Studienleiter Sebastian Brückner sowie seinem betreuenden Professor, Dr. Craig Wrisberg, zugänglich sein. Weder in mündlicher noch in schriftlicher Form wird es Hinweise geben, die Rückschlüsse auf die Identität der Studienteilnehmer zulassen. Von den Audio-Dateien abgeschlossener Interviews werden Abschriften angefertigt und Ausdrucke dieser Abschriften werden unter Verschluss gehalten. Nachdem Abschriften von den Audio-Dateien angefertigt wurden, werden diese gelöscht. Sollten Sie Fragen zum Ablauf der Studie haben, können Sie den Studienleiter, Sebastian Brückner, jederzeit per Email (sebastian@utk.edu) oder Telefon (001-865-974-8891) kontaktieren. Sollten Sie Fragen bezüglich ihrer Rechte als Interview-Teilnehmer haben, können Sie das Büro des Research Compliance Service innerhalb des Office of Research der University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee, USA, telefonisch unter (865) 974-3466 kontaktieren.

Ihre Teilnahme ist freiwillig. Nicht-Teilnahme hat für Sie keine nachteiligen Auswirkungen und wird nicht dazu führen, dass Sie Ansprüche auf Vergünstigungen verlieren, zu denen Sie sonst berechtigt wären. Das gleiche gilt bei vorzeitigem Abbruch der Teilnahme, zu dem Sie jederzeit berechtigt sind.

Einverständniserklärung
Ich habe obige Informationen gelesen. Ich habe eine Kopie dieses Formulars erhalten und ich erkläre mich bereit, an der Studie teilzunehmen.

Unterschrift Teilnehmer _____ Datum _____

Unterschrift Studienleiter _____ Datum _____

APPENDIX C:

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS' PLEDGE OF CONFIDENTIALITY

APPENDIX C: RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS' PLEDGE

OF CONFIDENTIALITY

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS' PLEDGE OF CONFIDENTIALITY

German Olympians' Experiences of Competing at the 2004 Athens Games

As a member of this project's research team, I understand that I will be reading transcriptions of confidential interviews. The information in these transcriptions has been revealed by research participants who participated in this project in good faith that their interviews would remain strictly confidential. I understand that I have the responsibility to honor this confidentiality agreement. I hereby agree not to share any information in these transcripts with anyone except the primary investigator of this research project, Sebastian Brueckner (974-8891), or other members of his research team. Any violation of this agreement would constitute a serious breach of ethical standards, and I pledge not to do so.

Research Team Members' Signatures	Date
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

APPENDIX D:

PARTICIPANT FOLLOW-UP LETTER (ENGLISH VERSION)

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT FOLLOW-UP LETTER

(ENGLISH VERSION)

Follow-up Letter

Dear Research Participant,

I hope things are going well for you this spring, as you are training and competing in a new season. I'm sure this time of year is once again busy for you.

Nevertheless, I hope you will be able to have a look at the attached information about the research project that you volunteered to be interviewed for. I have analyzed the interviews and came up with a thematic structure of German Olympians' experience of competing in Athens 2004. I would appreciate it if you could read the thematic structure and verify that I have correctly described your experience.

I have also included a list of quotes from your interview that, as I perceive it, illustrate how what you have told me fits into the thematic structure. This list is not meant to be exhaustive, i.e., there might be other quotes from your interview that would fit into the respective categories. Also, often one quote fits into several categories.

I will be using some of these quotes in my dissertation to provide a detailed description of the thematic structure I developed.

I just want to assure you again that I will omit portions of quotes that might allow someone to identify who you are in order to maintain confidentiality.

Please provide any comments directly in the body of your reply email, or attach a separate Word document, and send them back to me as soon as possible.

Good luck with your upcoming events!

Sincerely,

Sebastian Brueckner

APPENDIX E:

PARTICIPANT FOLLOW-UP LETTER

(GERMAN VERSION)

APPENDIX E: PARTICIPANT FOLLOW-UP LETTER

(GERMAN VERSION)

Projekt-Update

Lieber Teilnehmer an meinem Forschungsprojekt,

Ich hoffe, dass deine Form bereits stimmt während du in diesem Frühjahr die ersten Wettkämpfe für dieses Jahr bestreitest oder sich gut entwickelt während du noch voll am Trainieren bist.

Auch wenn du sicher im Stress bist hoffe ich dennoch, dass du etwas Zeit findest um dir die Informationen über das Interview-Projekt an dem du teilgenommen hast im Anhang dieser Mail anzuschauen. Ich habe die Interviews ausgewertet und eine strukturelle Themen-Gliederung der Wettkampferfahrung deutscher Olympia-Teilnehmer in Athen 2004 entwickelt. Es wäre klasse, wenn du dir diese strukturelle Themen-Gliederung ansehen würdest um zu überprüfen, ob diese Darstellung deine persönlichen Erfahrung korrekt widerspiegelt.

Im Anhang habe ich auch eine Auflistung verschiedener Zitate aus deinem Interview beigefügt, die – in meinen Augen – sehr anschaulich verdeutlichen wie deine Schilderung deiner Erlebnisse in die strukturelle Gliederung passt. Die aufgelisteten Zitate sind jedoch nur beispielhaft ausgewählt und erheben in keiner Weise Anspruch auf Vollständigkeit, d.h. es könnnten durchaus noch andere Zitate von dir in die jeweiligen Kategorien passen. Oftmals würde ein einzelnes Zitat auch gleich als Beispiel in mehreren Kategorien passen.

Einige ausgewählte Zitate von dir werde ich in meiner Dissertation verwenden, um mir eine möglichst detaillierte Beschreibung der von mir entwickelten strukturellen Themen-Gliederung zu ermöglichen.

An dieser Stelle will ich dir daher noch einmal versichern, dass ich, um die Geheimhaltung deiner Identität zu gewährleisten, in den verwendeten Zitaten alle Textpassagen schwärzen / löschen werde, die eine Identifikation deiner Person ermöglichen würden.

Bitte gib’ mir so bald als möglich Rückmeldung. Du kannst deine Anmerkungen einfach direkt ins Textfeld deiner Antwort-Email schreiben, oder ein gesondertes Word-Dokument anhängen.

Viel Glück bei den kommenden Wettkämpfen und viele Grüße,

Sebastian Brueckner

APPENDIX F:

DIAGRAM AND DESCRIPTION OF OVERALL THEMATIC STRUCTURE

(GERMAN VERSION)

APPPENDIX F: DIAGRAM AND DESCRIPTION OF

OVERALL THEMATIC STRUCTURE (GERMAN VERSION)

STRUKTURELLE THEMEN-GLIEDERUNG

Im Rahmen der Studie wurden zwölf Athleten interviewt, die für Deutschland bei den Olympischen Spielen in Athen 2004 starteten. Eine graphische Darstellung der strukturellen Themen-Gliederung der Wettkampf-Erfahrung deutscher Olympia-Teilnehmer in Athen 2004 bietet Abbildung 1. Darin enthalten sind vier grundlegende und drei figurative Themen. Die Abbildung spiegelt insofern die Erfahrungen der Sportler wider, als dass **Zeit** ein grundlegendes Thema darstellt, das in den Beschreibungen der Sportler in allen anderen grundlegenden Themen sowie allen figurativen Themen vorkommt. Das heißt, dass die Sportler **Zeit** immer im Kontext der anderen drei grundlegenden sowie der drei figurativen Themen erleben. Dies verdeutlicht in der Abbildung die Tatsache, dass die drei grundlegenden Themen **Die Vorbereitung**, **Die Olympischen Spiele** und **Das Endergebnis / Die Platzierung** chronologisch aufeinanderfolgen. Von links nach rechts gelesen, bereiten sich die Athleten zunächst auf die Spiele vor (**Die Vorbereitung**), bevor sie dann bei **Den Olympischen Spielen** ihren Wettkampf bestreiten. Schließlich beenden sie diesen Wettkampf mit einer bestimmten **Platzierung**, die auf vielfältige Weise beeinflusst, was die Sportler für persönliche Erfahrungen bei den Olympischen Spiele machen und wie sie diese wahrnehmen. Vor dem Hintergrund der vier beschriebenen Themen heben sich drei figurative Themen ab. Dies sind 1) **Der Athlet selbst**, 2) **Andere Personen**, und 3) **Der Wettkampf / Das Turnier**. Die vier grundlegenden und drei figurativen Themen mit den jeweiligen Unterthemen sind in Tabelle 1 und 2 dargestellt. Die allseits bekannten fünf miteinander verknüpften fünf Olympischen Ringe können als Metapher für die Beziehungen zwischen den grundlegenden und figurativen Themen sowie Unterthemen herangezogen werden. Die grundlegenden und figurativen Themen sowie die jeweiligen Unterthemen sind stets miteinander verknüpft, überlappen sich und jedes der Themen kann nur im Kontext der anderen betrachtet werden. Die Themen unterscheiden sich jedoch genauso wie sich die fünf Olympischen Ringe in ihrer Farbe unterscheiden. Keines der Elemente der strukturellen Themen-Gliederung kann jedoch entfernt werden, genauso wie keiner der fünf Olympischen Ringe entfernt werden kann, ohne dass dieses Olympische Symbol seine Bedeutung verlieren würde. Diese Eigenschaften einer Gestalt als Ganzem spielen beim Versuch die Bedeutung der Erfahrungen der Sportler zu beschreiben eine wichtige Rolle. Die Themen-Kategorien enthalten jeweils eine Vielzahl an Erfahrungen. Was einige Athleten motivierte, sahen andere als Ablenkung. Einige erlebten bestimmte Faktoren als positiv, während andere diese als negativ betrachteten. Oft war ein Thema für einen Sportler bedeutender als dies für andere der Fall war.

Wie eben beschrieben bietet das Thema **Zeit** einen grundlegenden Kontext für alle anderen Aspekte der Wettkampferfahrung deutscher Olympia-Teilnehmer in Athen 2004. Die drei grundlegenden Themen sind in chronologischer Weise angeordnet. Zunächst kommt **Die Vorbereitung**, die sich auf die Zeit vor dem olympischen Rennen oder Wettkampf bezieht. Die Sportler erzählten, wie sie sich in jahrelangem **Training** auf den Wettkampf vorbereitet haben. Dabei standen sowohl Aspekte körperlichen und mentalen Trainings als auch Höhentraining sowie die Trainingsbedingungen in Athen im Mittelpunkt. Ein zweiter Aspekt **Der Vorbereitung** war die **Qualifikation / Nominierung**. Während die Qualifikation für einige Sportler keine große Herausforderung war, bildete für andere Sportler die Nominierung den am intensivsten erlebten Aspekt ihrer gesamten Olympia-Erfahrung.

Das zweite grundlegende Thema der strukturellen Gliederung sind **Die Olympischen Spiele**. Dabei ließen sich drei Unterthemen identifizieren: 1) **Ablenkungen**, 2) **Das Olympische Dorf** und 3) **Die ganze Welt schaut zu**. Die Sportler lieferten zahlreiche Beispiele für die Einzigartigkeit des Umfelds, in dem sie sich bei den Olympischen Spielen bewegten. Einige empfanden, dass dies motivierend wirkte, für andere waren diese Faktoren eher eine Ablenkung. Einige Beispiele dieser Faktoren im Umfeld sind größere Medienpräsenz, öffentliche Erwartungen, Fans und Zuschauer, der Aspekt der finanziellen Unterstützung, Transport und Dopingkontrollen.

Das dritte grundlegende Thema, das die Athleten beschrieben, war **Das Endergebnis / Die Platzierung**. Welche Platzierung die Sportler belegten, hatte beträchtlichen Einfluss darauf, wie sie die Olympischen Spiele erlebten und was sie davon erzählten.

Das erste der drei figurativen Themen, das sich vor dem Hintergrund von Zeit und den drei anderen grundlegenden Themen abzeichnete, war **Der Athlet selbst**. Die Sportler diskutierten die Unterthemen **Der Körper**, **Emotionen / Gefühle**, **Konzentriert bleiben** sowie **Identität / Persönlichkeit**. Bezüglich ihrem Körper waren Verletzungen und der Versuch gesund zu bleiben Themen, die für die Sportler vor und während der Olympischen Spiele von Bedeutung waren. Sie erzählten auch von ihren Versuchen sich an das heiße Klima in Griechenland anzupassen. Die Unterthemen **Emotionen / Gefühle** und **Konzentriert bleiben** umfassten eine Vielzahl an Erfahrungen: traurige oder glückliche Erlebnisse, das Gefühl überwältigt oder konzentriert zu sein sowie die Dinge unter Kontrolle zu haben, Übelkeit, Ärger, Enttäuschung und Überraschungen. Die Sportler beschrieben auch einige Aspekte ihrer **Persönlichkeit** und diskutierten Facetten ihrer **Identiät** als Olympionike.

Andere Personen, das zweite figurative Thema, spielte für alle Athleten, die an dieser Studie teilnahmen, eine entscheidende Rolle. Zwei Unterthemen

kristallisierten sich heraus: **Unterstützung** und **Die Mannschaft**. Alle Sportler fühlten, dass sie mehr oder weniger viel Unterstützung hatten. Die Unterstützung kam dabei von Team-Betreuern, Freunden, der Familie, anderen Olympia-Teilnehmern der deutschen Mannschaft sowie auch aus anderen Ländern, die in Athen am Start waren, und zumindest in einem gewissen Maße vom jeweiligen Sportverband. **Die Mannschaft** war für alle Sportler von großer Bedeutung. Sportler, die in Athen in einer Mannschafts-Sportart am Start waren, sprachen mehr über **Die Mannschaft**, bestehend aus Mannschaftskollegen und Trainern, als dies solche taten, die in Individual-Sportarten am Start waren. Alle Athleten erwähnten jedoch ihre Mannschafts-Kameraden sowie Trainer und beschrieben ihre jeweilige Beziehung zu diesen. Einige Sportler hatten das Gefühl, dass Personen, die eigentlich bei den Olympischen Spielen waren um sie zu unterstützen, dieser Rolle in keinster Weise gerecht wurden, was ihre Olympia-Erfahrung auf vielfache Art und Weise negativ beeinflusste.

Der Wettkampf / Das Turnier ist das dritte und letzte figurative Thema, das für die Athleten von Bedeutung war. Dieses ließ sich wiederum in drei Unterthemen gliedern: 1) **Die Sportart**, 2) **Der Ort / Die Wettkampfstätte** und 3) **Konkurrenten / Gegner**. Die Teilnehmer erzählten beispielsweise von besonderen technischen und taktischen Aspekten ihrer Sportart, der Rolle der Schiedsrichter sowie von Doping in ihrem Sport oder Dingen wie unterschiedlichen Wettkampfkursen sowie stetig wechselnden Siegern, die ihren Sport charakterisieren, und die ihre Erfahrungen bei den Olympischen Spielen beeinflussten. Ob die Sportler in einer Mannschafts- oder Individual-Sportart starteten, beeinflusste natürlich ebenso ihre Erfahrungen. Viele Athleten beschrieben auch ausführlich **Die Wettkampfstätte** oder Athen im allgemeinen. Hierbei diskutierten sie vor allem die klimatischen Verhältnisse in Griechenland, erzählten von den Wettkampf-Strecken oder der Atmosphäre an den jeweiligen Veranstaltungs-Orten. Schließlich diskutierten die meisten der Sportler auch die Mannschaften oder **Gegner**, auf die sie in ihrem Wettkampf in Athen getroffen waren. Einige wurden von der Konkurrenz überrascht, da sich einige der Gegner vor den Olympischen Spielen nicht bei internationalen Veranstaltungen gezeigt hatten. Oft wurde auch das Thema Doping angesprochen.

Tabelle 1. Die grundlegenden Themen mit den jeweiligen Unterthemen

Grundlegende Themen	
Thema 1.	*Zeit*
Thema 2.	*Die Vorbereitung*
	A. Training
	B. Qualifikation / Nominierung
Thema 3.	*Die Olympischen Spiele*
	A. Ablenkungen
	B. Das Olympische Dorf
	C. Die ganze Welt schaut zu
Thema 4.	*Das Endergebnis / Die Platzierung*

Tabelle 2. Die figurativen Themen mit den jeweiligen Unterthemen

Figurative Themen	
Thema 1.	*Der Sportler selbst*
	A. Der Körper
	B. Emotionen / Gefühle
	C. Konzentriert bleiben
	D. Identität / Persönlichkeit
Thema 2.	*Andere Personen*
	A. Unterstützung
	B. Die Mannschaft
Thema 3.	*Der Wettkampf / Das Turnier*
	A. Die Sportart
	B. Der Ort / Die Wettkampfstätte
	C. Konkurrenten / Gegner



Abbildung 1. Graphische Darstellung der grundlegenden und figurativen Themen der Erfahrung der an dieser Studie beteiligten Sportler in einer strukturellen Themen-Gliederung.

APPENDIX G:

LIST OF ORIGINAL GERMAN QUOTES

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(1) Ja gut, in unserer Mannschaft hatten wir halt das Problem, einfach dass wir halt schlecht [...] sind und dass wir halt die Leistung nicht gebracht haben. Aber das war jetzt kein kurzfristiges Problem, sondern einfach schon längerfristig, dass sich das halt entwickelt hat. Und wir es halt nicht richtig abstellen konnten. Wir waren stark, aber technisch war das halt nicht so das Optimum.

(2) Also wir haben ja in Deutschland auch immer noch andere Nominierungskriterien als sie international meistens der Fall sind. Das heißt wir müssen uns innerhalb von einer viel kürzeren Zeit qualifizieren, also. Während in anderen Ländern durchaus ein Qualifikationszeitraum von zwei Jahren gängig ist, haben wir meistens ein Jahr, allerdings ja aber auch innerhalb dieses Jahres, nämlich letztes Jahr dann in 2004 nur den Zeitraum, äh, vom 30. 4. bis zu den Deutschen Meisterschaften. Und das ist dann extrem schwer. Wenn man dann Pech hat, sag ich mal, dann äh hat, dann kann's passieren, dass man nicht mal einen Wettkampf im Trockenen hat, zum Beispiel. Und das sind, sag ich mal, so Rahmenbedingungen, die geschaffen werden, die dann das ganze etwas, etwas schwerer machen.

(3) Wetter war brutal. Wir sind eben angekommen, hatten gleich mal 40 Grad. Das war einfach wie ein Schlag ins Gesicht. Wir hatten ja dann eigentlich nur 10 Tage zum Akklimatisieren.

(4) Also das waren ja wirklich sechs Monate, ständig Stress, ständig, ähm, sag ich mal, die Hoffnung auf die Olympischen Spiele, auf die Teilnahme bei den Olympischen Spielen irgendwo. Und da dauert es denke ich mal eine Zeit lang, bis man da wirklich, ja, sich entspannen kann, abschalten kann. Und zu sich selbst auch sagen kann, „Jetzt ist es vorbei, versuch doch jetzt mal deine freien Tage zu genießen."

(5) Und hinzu kommt dann halt noch diese, dieser Druck, diese, diese Besonderheit, dieses, dieses Rennens. Und das alles an einem Tag, in diesem bestimmten Rennen zeigen zu können, das ist, äh, ich denke mal, das ist 'ne ganz, das ist die große Schwierigkeit, beziehungsweise die große Kunst. Weltmeister kann jeder werden, das heißt nicht jeder, aber Weltmeister wird man vielleicht, kann man jedes Jahr versuchen zu werden, aber Olympiasieger, beziehungsweise erst mal nur alle vier Jahre und sich dann noch mal zu qualifizieren, also das ist noch mal eine ganz andere Wertigkeit, in meinen Augen.

(6) Ja, also wenn ich dann mit der Vorbereitung anfange, also schon im ganzen Vorjahr, man trainiert ja nicht nur ein Jahr drauf hin, sondern eben schon ganze vier Jahre mehr oder weniger.

(7) Überhaupt so die ganze Vorbereitung auf den Olympiazyklus lief eigentlich sehr gut. Alles vom Verband organisierte hat auch so planmäßig gestimmt in Richtung, äh, Olympische Spiele, uhm, über die Olympiaquali hin waren wir in Top-Form gewesen. Bis hin zur, sag ich mal, nicht ganz unmittelbaren Wettkampfvorbereitung fand ich auch formmäßig, dass ich alles zum Tag X hin auch so aufbaut, dass man dann das Gefühl hatte, man bringt wirklich an dem Tag absolut das Mögliche, was jetzte drin ist.

(8) Und das ist dann hier schon einfach gut, dass man da für so stabile Verhältnisse sorgen kann. Und dass man dann auch einfach so Sicherheit gewinnt, indem man innerhalb des Trainings ja auch Fortschritte bemerkt... die auch unter stabilen Verhältnissen abgetestet werden. Also in meiner Halle, da ist eben einfach, wenn ich da [Übung] mach, kann ich da über die Wochen hinweg kann ich genau, äh, sagen „So und so entwickelt sich das jetzt. Bin ich auf dem richtigen Weg oder bin ich vielleicht sogar auf dem falschen?“ Und wenn ja „Was, äh, was hab ich denn falsch gemacht? Kann ich das noch ändern?“ Und, uhm, ja das ist im Endeffekt wirklich ein großer Vorteil.

(9) Ja, was, was im Hinblick auf Athen, ja positiv war, oder wo man sagt, da konnte man sich dran festhalten ist, dass wir wahnsinnig viel auch Athletik gemacht haben. Und dass man das Gefühl hatte auch, von der Mannschaft, dass, uhm... also auch was jetzt so Hausarbeit angeht, ja, also, es, ich mein wir waren ja schon relativ viel zusammen, aber auch die Zeit, die wir einfach bei uns hier zu Hause verbringen konnten, dass, dass man einfach so auch die Gewissheit hatte „Ich bin nicht die einzige, die das macht. Das lohnt sich, auch für andere das zu machen, und für dich das zu machen!“ Und, also, ja, einfach das Gefühl zu haben, da ziehen alle an einem Strang. Und, uhm, das hat man halt nat... also das hat man dann natürlich auch in den Werten, so Athletikwerten, also Ausdauer, Sprint und so, gesehen. Und, uhm... ja, da wusste man schon, man geht einfach auch, ja, fit da in diese Olympiade rein.

(10) Ja, auf jeden Fall. Es ist schon ein Nachteil gewesen, äh, weil man ja nicht nur das allgemeine Training braucht halt. Bei uns ist halt sehr wichtig, dass man [...] auch trainiert, die Techniken, und das Gefühl halt, dass man ökonomisch arbeiten kann... uhm, ja, das hat mir schon gefehlt, klar.

(11) Und jetzt bringt dich das, jedes Training bringt dich halt weiter, dass du das Gefühl hast, ja, du hast jetzt wirklich so trainiert, dass du was davon hast, dass du besser geworden bist, ob das jetzt Kondition, Kraft, oder technisch-taktische Seite ist. Und, uhm, zum anderen, dadurch dass wir sehr viel weltweit jetzt mit den besten der Welt trainieren hast du auch die Erfahrung, dass du [mithalten] kannst, du hast die Sicherheit, dass du mit jedem mithalten kannst. Und du siehst auch, dass die auch ganz, also ihre Schwächen haben. Zwar auch ihre Stärke, aber dass du, äh, da halt mit deinen Stärken dich durchsetzen kannst, ohne weiteres. Und das gibt schon ein gutes Stück Sicherheit und Selbstvertrauen.

(12) Normalerweise brauch ich, um jetzt eine gute Form wirklich aufzubauen, schon circa acht Wochen. Und, ähm, ja die, die Zeit hatte ich einfach nicht mehr. Ich hab nicht die Zeit gehabt, noch mal voll rauszunehmen, mich zu erholen, und dann wieder frisch vorzubereiten.

(13) Es gibt ein paar Leute, die in den vier Jahren dann Bundeswehr machen, halt nur trainieren und die sind zwar stark, aber irgendwie kommen die auch nicht vom Fleck. Weil die glaube ich einfach auch, die trainieren halt das ganze Pensum ab, aber die sind dann nicht mit dem Kopf dabei und wissen halt nicht genau, oder überlegen halt nicht genau was sie denn da wirklich machen. Und ich glaube, das ist halt auch wichtig, dass man einfach nicht abtrainiert, sondern auch wirklich das mit Qualität füllt, und das fehlte glaube ich einfach in dem Jahr. Und das wird auch, wenn das wieder so ist wieder fehlen, weil man einfach nicht die Kraft hat, wenn man da 25 Stunden die Woche trainiert, jede Einheit so konzentriert zu sein, weil man irgendwann, dann fehlt die Kraft, dann kann man nicht mehr die Spannung im Körper halten, was man halt so einfach braucht und... Ich glaub, da ist weniger mehr.“

(14) Und das ist dann ’ne Sache, die gerade in [Wettkampf] für mich deutlich geworden ist, dass ich es geschafft hab, mich auf die [Events] mich so einzustimmen und so zu motivieren, dass ich gegen wesentlich jüngere Leute, gegen Weltmeister oder Olympiasieger auf einmal, äh, gewonnen hab. Das weiß man ja, ist ja bekannt. Und was eigentlich rein von der Papierform keiner erwartet hätte. Deswegen sag ich jetzt mal, äh, Motivationskünstler, weil ich es eben geschafft hab, da mich so punktuell fit zu machen, mental fit zu machen.

(15) Also wichtig für mich ist halt immer vor allen Dingen vor so einem Wettkampf, dass du deine Ruhe hast, zumindest auf deinem, also ein Zimmer hast, wo du, wo, wo du die Tür zumachen kannst, abschalten kannst. Das war da und, äh, dass die Trainingsmöglichkeiten gegeben

sein müssen, dass du keinen großen Aufwand hast, irgendwo noch großartig Stress einzusetzen, wenn du noch ’ne Stunde hinfahren musst zum Training. Und das hatten wir halt nicht, dort vor Ort. Also das ist für mich so ein Punkt, der wenn, wenn das stimmt dann, dann ist das für mich, äh, zufriedenstellend. Dann kann man sich, finde ich, am gezieltesten auf so einen Wettkampf vorbereiten.

(16) Und jetzt ist dieser Zeitraum, der sich über anderthalb Jahre erstreckt hatte, der war dann für mich abgeschlossen. Jetzt, das ging dann los, weil ich hab, sagen wir mal vor der Qualifikation, ja, bevor ich die Qualifikation nicht hatte, hab ich überhaupt keinen Gedanken an die Olympiade verschwendet, oder an die Vorbereitung. Weil für mich war erstmal ausschlaggebend erstmal dabei zu sein. Ich konnte nicht im Januar oder Februar sagen „Ah, wie sieht denn jetzt mein Plan aus für die Olympiade im August?“ Ich war ja gar, ich konnte nicht davon ausgehen, dass ich dabei bin, ja? Sondern für mich hat die ganze Zeit nur gezählt, wie sieht die Vorbereitung aus für die Qualifikations... für die Qualifikation für die Olympiade. Das war für mich der große und entscheidende Schritt. Und erst als ich das hatte hab ich gadacht „Okay, jetzt Olympiade. Wie krieg ich das hin?“ Ja. Aber der, der Zeitraum war halt dann relativ gering. Und wie gesagt, das ist halt dann, man hat gerade die eine Riesen-Prüfung abgelegt und direkt die nächste wartet...

(17) Weil, ja, es gibt ja, es spielen ja so viele Gefühle immer da mit rein, auch allein schon wer die Qualifikation, also im Vorfeld schon, wer die Qualifikation schafft und wer sie nicht schafft. Da gibt’s immer ja Freuden und Tränen und immer gleichzeitig... Es ist halt, es spielen da immer auch so viele Gefühle mit rein. Das ist...

(18) Aber man ist doch so gut, dass die Qualifikation nicht so die Rolle spielt.

(19) Bei uns sind die Leute, die da oben sind, sind die einzigen, die da sind. Wir haben keine Masse dahinter. Jetzt wieder: Da ist einer krank geworden, da können wir [in dem Wettkampf nicht starten].

(20) Also ich muss sagen, ich war sehr gut vorbereitet auf den, äh Wettkampf. Das war das große Ziel, wo ich vier Jahre lang drauf hingearbeitet habe. Mit ein, zwei Hindernissen natürlich im Vorfeld auf Grund der Qualifikation, weil man ja nie die komplette Sicherheit hat. Erst wenn man, äh, die Qualifikation geschafft hat.

(21) Das heißt nach der schweren Saison 2003 ging’s 2004 nahtlos weiter durch die Qualifikationsmühlen, die... dann halt auch ziemlich hart waren, für mich, mich da durchzusetzen. So dass ich praktisch erst im

Juni die eigentliche Qualifikation hatte für die Olympiade.
Und, Ende August war sie ja dann. Und dann muss ich sagen, ja, pfff, da bin ich nach der Qualifikation erst mal ein bisschen in ein Loch gefallen. Und es war dann schwer für mich, mich wieder rauszuziehen. Und von daher war die Vorbereitung dann auf das, auf den eigentlich, auf den eigentlichen Event nicht mehr optimal für mich. Ich hab zwar versucht noch zu machen, was zu machen ging, aber... Ja, ich hab mich eigentlich nicht sehr gut gefühlt, bin auch nicht sehr gut [gewesen]. . . . Und der Hauptgrund liegt sicher daran, dass ich einfach ein bisschen ausgebrannt war.

(22) Also es war dann auch, es war so geplant von meinem Trainer, der gesagt hat er möchte ganz am Anfang möglichst die Olympia-Norm direkt in der Tasche haben und dann möglichst viel eben auch schon weiter dann trainieren.

(23) Und, uhm, ich mein, was natürlich krass gezehrt hatte, war, war die späte Nominierung. Also da... ja, ich weiß nicht, einerseits hat’s schon ein bisschen Energie geraubt, andererseits war’s natürlich für den Konkurrenzkampf gut, und das ist in einer Mannschaft, ist das immer... ist das immer schwer zu sagen, wann nominiert man, wann nominiert man nicht. Und, ja... Also von daher kann man da auch nicht sagen, dass das ein Nachteil war, dass das so spät war. Eigentlich war’s ein Vorteil, weil wir... ja, weil wir trotzdem also bis zum Schluss, jeder noch nicht so die Sicherheit hatte, ob er dabei ist. Und das war eigentlich, waren eigentlich so die Sachen, wo man auch gesagt hat, man war vorher schon, also nicht erst in Athen, dass man gesagt hat, man ist zu einer Mannschaft zusammengewachsen, sondern das war vorher schon. Dieser Prozess. Und der hat uns eigentlich wirklich nur durch diese ganzen Spiele und die vielen Lehrgänge und so was weitergebracht.

(24) Und das ist ganz komisch, wenn ich erzähl, uhm, wenn, wie das mit der Nominierung war. Ähm, also es sind, bis einen Lehrgang vorher waren wir [Anzahl Spieler], zwei oder drei, nee genau, drei Lehrgänge vorher waren wir noch [Anzahl Spieler]und davor waren wir [Anzahl Spieler]. Und als die ersten rausgeflogen waren ist es eigentlich noch relativ leicht, weil die sind noch nicht so nah dran. Und, ähm, also klar, für jeden ist es schwer. Aber für die letzten ist es am Härtesten. Und, ähm, das Komische ist, dass... ähm, also es wurde diesmal so gemacht, dass die letzten beiden rausgeflogen sind, aber den allerletzten Lehrgang noch mitmachen mussten. Falls sich da eben jemand verletzt, dass sie trotzdem noch im, im Training sind und dann nicht irgendwie sagen „So, tschüss. Jetzt fahr ich in Urlaub und mir stinkt alles!“ Und, ähm, das haben die so gut gemacht, also die waren dabei und, und haben sich,

man, also es hätte kein Außenstehender sagen können, welche beiden es sind, die rausgeflogen sind. Weil die so motiviert waren und das, also jeder hatte irgendwie das Ziel, dass wir die beste Leistung erbringen. Und, klar, direkt als sie rausgeflogen sind, waren sie natürlich erst mal fertig, aber das war, so das fand ich erstaunlich. Also viele haben auch gesagt, sie hätten das nicht so gekonnt wie die beiden. Ich weiß nicht, vielleicht hätten die beiden das auch behauptet, wenn sie dabei gewesen wären, dass sie eben das nicht gekonnt hätten. Und, ähm, ja, also das find ich zeigt, dass in der Mannschaft das irgendwie gestimmt hat. Wodurch das ist, das ist, ja irgendwie so der Mannschaftsgeist war auf alle Fälle enorm diesmal. Und das sagen ja auch viele, die die Spiele gesehen haben, dass es bei uns so war, dass, ähm, ja wir wirklich wie eine Mannschaft gewirkt haben.

(25) Ähm, 2000 hab ich die Qualifikation nicht geschafft, da wurd ich dann, war ich während der Qualifikations-Wettkämpfe krank, und, äh, letztes Jahr war’s dann mehr oder weniger für mich so’n, so ’ne Pflicht einfach das zu schaffen, weil ich vor vier Jahren dann so wahnsinnig enttäuscht war. Und ich hätt auch, wenn ich mich nicht qualifiziert hätte, hätt ich die Auswirkungen dann auch nicht... also es hätte sein können, dass ich, äh, dann meine Karriere auch beende.

(26) Da lohnt es sich auch dafür zu qualifizieren, aber... halt, ja gut, man muss halt dann echt abwägen: Wie kann ich meine Leistung am besten bringen? Und da ist halt so’ne Olympische Spiele halt einfach... nicht, also ich find halt, nicht so sehr für geeignet. Weil da ist einfach zu viel drumherum einfach.

(27) Ja, also was ich sagen will ist halt, es gibt halt viele Dinge die, die neben dem eigentlichen Wettkampf halt einfach wirklich noch so, uhm, mit zu beachten sind. Dann ist das ganze Umfeld, das ist natürlich, so ein Umfeld hat man bei anderen Wettkämpfen nicht. Die ganzen, ja so viele andere Sportler sind da, dann die ganzen Teambegleiter, und man merkt natürlich, dass alle auch irgendwo angespannt und aufgeregt sind. Und ja, es ist halt einfach eine ganz andere Situation, die man vorher so gar nicht üben kann.

(28) Olympia ist dann so ein bisschen auch als Athlet wie ein Abenteuer. Man kann jetzt sich noch so sehr auf den Wettkampf, äh, fokussieren wollen: Wenn man das erste Mal dabei ist, kommen einfach so viele Eindrücke und Impressionen auf einen zu, und Dinge, die jetzt auch so von organisatorischer Seite einfach ganz anders ablaufen, als man es vielleicht von Weltcups kennt, oder anderen Highlights.

(29) Und ich, das sind natürlich super interessante, ich hab seit, vorher, ich war ja noch nie dabei, und dann auch mit der Mensa, und die ganzen Leute dort überhaupt zu sehen, das ist einfach einzigartig. Und das spornt auch so an.

(30) Und ähm, also es ist schon irgendwo was Besonderes und da gibt's halt viel zu gucken (lacht) und da kann man sich auch schön von ablenken lassen. . . . Also... schon so ein bisschen, ja, „Dabei sein ist alles. Und guck mal da, und lass mal da noch gucken." . . . Und jetzt war es so, das haben wir auch vor den Spielen, oder als wir dort ankamen, dort haben wir das besprochen, ähm, dass es eben so was Tolles ist und wir das auch alles genießen wollen und mitnehmen wollen, ähm, aber eben das Ziel nicht aus den Augen verlieren dürfen. Und dass da eben auch jeder für sich selbst verantwortlich ist, und ähm, zum Teil ist es ja auch mal gut sich abzulenken. Man kann ja auch nicht jede Sekunde ans nächste Spiel denken. . . . also einfach dieses Bewusstsein dafür, dass wir darüber gesprochen haben, hat glaube ich schon dazu geführt, dass das gut lief. . . . „Ah, können wir nicht mal bei den Handballern zugucken oder so?" Das haben wir jetzt auch gemacht, aber immer eigentlich mit dem Bewusstsein „Das machen wir jetzt, weil wir die Ablenkung wollen." Also auch begründet sozusagen immer.

(31) Und dort hab ich den Fehler gemacht, dass ich mir, weil ich ihn eben nicht kannte, aber wusste, dass er bei der Weltmeisterschaft [gestartet war], gegen einen mir bekannten [Athleten], den [Sportler], den [Nationalität], und hab mir das Video angeguckt. Und hab geguckt wie er [im Wettkampf ist], und hab mir dann über Nacht im Grunde genommen so, so'n Schlachtplan zurecht gelegt, äh, was ich nach Möglichkeit nicht machen darf. Und das hat mich aber in gewisser Weise so ein bisschen eingeschränkt. Und das war ein Fehler. Und meine Erkenntnis aus der Situation ist die, dass man also gerade in Bezug auf Olympische Spiele normalerweise nit experimentieren darf. Sondern du musst mit dem, womit man die ganzen Jahre erfolgreich war, mit dem muss man arbeiten. Und nit irgendwie versuchen was Neues und hin und her, und dort noch, weil das, äh, mitunter ablenkt und auch einfach verunsichert. Und genau das war auch die Situation bei mir gewesen. Ich hätte mir das Video vorher nicht noch mal angucken dürfen. Das war ein Fehler.

(32) Ich weiß nur, wir sind da, man geht da ja durch lauter verschiedene Call Room-Geschichten.

(33) Und, ja, was, was am gravierendsten war, waren zwei Dinge im, waren zwei Dinge im Vorfeld: Das war, wir kommen [zur Wettkampfstätte], nach diesem Training waren wir ja noch mal in unserer Unterkunft,

kommen [zur Wettkampfstätte] und auf einmal war unser [Equipment verändert]. Also man, man [macht das damit] man dann schneller ist. Naja, jedenfalls haben wir dat noch nie gemacht in den letzten vier Jahren und ausgerechnet bei Olympia probieren wir dat aus. Nich? Und alle dann ja, „Was soll denn so wat? Kann doch nicht sein. Wir wollten dat gar nicht. [Equipment] war schon recht, so haben wir das bisher immer gemacht.“ Und der [Techniker]: „Ooch, ich hatte Zeit. Uhm, können wir doch eh mal machen, hier bei Olympia.“ Na, das hat uns, war der erste, äh, so Punkt, wo man sich dann so, der in der Konzentration gestört hat, und wo dann halt so Aufregung war.

(34) Und dann, was mich noch gestört hat, war die Wettkampfansprache von unserem Trainer. Die war halt sehr schlecht. Also es gibt ja so Förderstufen, Eins, Zwei, Drei, im deutschen Sport. Wir waren Drei, weil wir 2000 nicht dabei waren, also nicht wir, die [Mannschaft] davor, ich war da nicht dabei, uhm, und wir hatten halt, wollten halt Förderstufe Eins wieder bekommen, weil es da halt mehr Fördergelder gibt. Ja, und vor dem Olympiafinale war dann Rennbesprechung „Männer, wir brauchen noch ein paar Punkte für die Förderstufe Eins!“ Was mir in dem Augenblick völlig egal ist. Von mir aus können wir Förderstufe Zehn sein, also Hauptsache da, du [findest deinen Rhythmus im] Rennen. Ja, das war halt... also sehr schlecht.

(35) Ja, es ist halt... es ist schon vom Feinsten im Olympischen Dorf.

(36) Ja, das Olympische Dorf ist dann im Prinzip wie so ein Paradies. Man, man kriegt alles irgendwie umsonst und so. Und man braucht nie sich um irgendwas kümmern. Da ist dann alles irgendwie vorhanden (lacht). Wenn man mal drinnen ist, dann ist alles gut.

(37) Und, äh, ich hab mich auf jeden Fall für’s Olympische Dorf entschieden, weil ich es im Vorfeld von Sydney kannte, weil die, das Leben im Olympischen Dorf, man kann dort trainieren. Und das ist halt diese gigantische Atmosphäre, die möchte man natürlich, das ganze Umfeld, das möchte man natürlich genießen in dem Moment auch. Und wie gesagt, also von den Voraussetzungen her war eigentlich alles, also war vieles optimal. Wobei man optimal in Anführungsstriche natürlich setzen muss, weil unter den Gegebenheiten, unter denen alle dann, äh, uhm, mit denen alle zu kämpfen haben. Also Hitze, äh, Transport, wie auch immer. Ich meine, im Endeffekt haben alle die, die gleichen Probleme dann vor Ort. Und wie gesagt, wir hatten sie eigentlich dann sehr gut gelöst.

(38) So lange Fahrten, das war [bei dem Wettkampf] auch, vom Hotel bis zur [Wettkampfstätte]. Und... ja, das war so eine kleine Fehlinformation. Sonst hätten wir da im Hotel, äh, äh... im Olympischen Dorf geschlafen. Wenn ich da noch mal hinfahre, dann will ich das auch. Dann, äh, kriegt man... da ist einfach das Leben so. Und, äh, die Handballer zum Beispiel, die haben zwee Wochen im Olympischen Dorf gewohnt. Und die sagen, das hat denen so geholfen, wenn dann... In der zweiten Woche habe ich die dann noch gesehen und ein bisschen mit denen gequatscht. Wenn dann halt andere ankommen und denen viel Glück wünschen und so, da merkt man halt, dass man ein Teil der großen Mannschaft ist, und nicht als Einzelkämpfer draußen, und so waren wir ja letztendlich...

(39) Ansonsten hatten wir halt außerhalb gewohnt, nicht im Olympischen Dorf, manche fanden das schlecht, ich fand’s eigentlich ganz gut, weil man die langen Wege nicht hatte.

(40) Und es wird natürlich, es ist DAS Event und die ganze Welt guckt drauf und man ist bestimmt schon ein dreiviertel Jahr vorher nervös. Allein schon wenn ich den Gedanken, also dran dachte.

(41) Ja, positiv auf jeden Fall generell, äh, erst mal dieses... dieses zu wissen, das ist das weltweit größte Event! Das ist auf jeden Fall, und unter diesem Eindruck, äh, ist natürlich auch eine große Erwartungshaltung da. Und unter diesem Eindruck fährst du natürlich da auch hin. Und das dann zu erleben . . . das ist schon, also, gigantisch! Das ist auch mit nix zu vergleichen.

(42) Man steht dann schon so im Brennpunkt. Überall sind schon Kameras und Zuschauer auf den Tribünen, was jetzt vielleicht auch nit bei jedem Weltcup so der Fall ist.

(43) Das ist, auf eine Art ist es auch ganz schön mal ein bisschen mehr Aufmerksamkeit auf sich gezogen zu haben. Also grad wenn man weiß, jetzt läuft das Rennen und jetzt gucken so viele zu, das ist wiederum ’ne extra Motivation und, und setzt dann schon ein bissel Adrenalin frei, das ganze.

(44) Du stehst halt quasi vor dem Wettkampf am Start, und wenn der, äh, bist nervös, überall Kameras und so weiter, und du bist dermaßen aufgeregt, weil du jetzt sagst „Jetzt bist du hier dabei, und...“

(45) Jeder wusste von den 50 Athleten „Okay, jetzt schaut gerade, schauen gerade eine Millarde Menschen zu und verfolgen das Rennen!“ Man hat

bloß diese eine Chance bei diesem Rennen, sich so zu präsentieren, beziehungsweise ein Medaille zu machen, wie auch immer. Und, äh, da kann halt in dem Moment, kann alles passieren, zum Positiven als auch zum Negativen.

(46) Auf jeden Fall, und überall wo man sitzt, im Auto, hier in der Mensa, da hängt dann das Plakat und dies, alles ist von, von wirklich im Endeffekt vom 1.1.2004 war das komplett auf Olympia ausgerichtet. Das heißt man, äh, wird da auch direkt in so einen Strom dann mitgerissen. Und wenn man dann ja sagt, auch dann nachher sicher ist, dass man dabei ist, dann genießt man das natürlich auch noch viel mehr. Und vorher ist es auch irgendwo so eine Art Ansporn, ne, weil man denkt so „Oja, dies und jenes!“ Und dann sieht man die Bilder und denkt „Oa, da muss ich unbedingt dabei sein!“ Und dann... fällt einem alles andere rundherum auch irgendwo leichter.

(47) Aber ich sag mal, wenn man zu Olympia fährt, da kann man, ja entweder du bist halt so ein Typ, der so locker ist wie die [Nationalität], also generell so, gehst da ran so „Ja komm, wir fahren los und dann gucken wir, wo wir rauskommen“, oder du hast dann halt eine Nation hinter dir, die sagt „Ja, [dieses Team, das] darf nur gewinnen! Alles andere ist schon eine Niederlage.“

(48) Also aber mir hat das Spaß gemacht, mir ging’s immer eigentlich gut und mir, es lief im Training immer und ich hab immer das Gefühl gehabt, es geht aufwärts, es geht vorwärts. Also das ist das, was mich dann eigentlich eher zufrieden stellt. Also ich muss dann nicht die, ich steh da auch nicht am Start und denke „Oh, ich muss jetzt hier ’ne Medaille holen.“ Sondern ich steh eigentlich am Start und denke „Naja, jetzt haste so gut trainiert, jetzt hast du alles gemacht, was in deinen Händen ist, und jetzt stell dich hin und jetzt streng dich an und geb’ dein Bestes und dann schaun wir mal, was bei rauskommt!“ Also ich hab nie die Einstellung, „Oh, ich muss jetzt da irgendwie was reißen!“ Sondern ich guck dann eigentlich mehr eigentlich auf mich. Und ich weiß nur, dass ein paar Journalisten nach dem Zieleinlauf blöd ankamen und sagen, ja, „Oh, wie enttäuschend! [Platzierung].“ Ich konnte das überhaupt nicht verstehen. Ich war überhaupt nicht enttäuscht. Aber was will man da zu solchen Fragen dann sagen. Dann denke ich auch so „Na toll!“ Ich weiß nicht, da ist der deutsche Journalismus so, die erwarten halt immer große Platzierungen, und wenn’s halt nicht passiert, dann ist man total enttäuscht. Und ich seh’s halt andersherum. Es ist halt ’ne Chance was Gutes zu erreichen und wenn man’s nicht geschafft hat, ja dann ist man doch nicht schlecht, oder ich weiß nicht. Dann ist man doch kein Versager, nur weil man dann keine Medaille geholt hat.

(49) Ja natürlich, das kriegst du schon mit, doch schon. Medaille, ja, der Sieg zählt, ja... Das ist die Story für die Medien. Also das hast du schon mitbekommen. Und du bekommst auch, oder was du halt auch selber merkst, dass halt deine, deine persönliche Einschätzung von deinem Rennen, deine Zufriedenheit, die kannst du natürlich nicht gleich projezieren auf die, auf, beziehungsweise es wird nicht ganz so aufgenommen, wie du es empfindest. Aber das ist ja ganz klar. Von, von den, von den Medienvertretern. Also für mich persönlich, [Platz], war das ein riesen Ergebnis. In dem Moment war „Du hast alles gerechtfertigt, du hast alles umsetzen können, es hat sich gelohnt, dass es für dich persönlich ’ne, ’ne, ’nen tolles Ergebnis!“ Und für die Medienvertreter: „Klar, [Platz]. Super! Bestes Ergebnis in ihrer Karriere, Herr [Sportler]! Und viel Glück quasi für, für alles weitere!“ Aber da hast du es dann... klar, das ist aber auf der anderen Seite eigentlich denke ich mal normal. Weil, weil die Leute natürlich auch nicht sehen, was da an, an Einsatz und an Engagement dahinter steht... Was persönlich dann natürlich für einen dann so plötzlich alles abfällt, in dem Moment.

(50) Also gemessen an der Zielsetzung die ich hatte, ich wollte ’ne Medaille und... vom Leistungsniveau her war ich auch in der Lage, ich sag mal, eine Medaille zu [gewinnen]. . . . Aber letzten Endes hat es für eine Siegleistung nicht gereicht. Von daher muss ich jetzt rückblickend analysieren, dass also... das Ergebnis zum einen erst mal nicht zufriedenstellend war.

(51) Und in der Erinnerung, jetzt, im Nachhinein, muss ich sagen, dass mir die Vorbereitungszeit, also Olympia als solches, viel mehr gegeben hat als die Olympischen Spiele selbst. Ja da, hätt ich da ’ne Medaille gemacht, wär’s ’ne andere Situation. Dann wär’s natürlich, wahrscheinlich das i-Tüpfelchen gewesen. Aber so muss ich sagen, erinner ich mich eigentlich lieber an die Zeit vor Olympia als an die Olympischen Spiele selbst. Weil die ist bei mir immer mit so einem Beigeschmack.

(52) Zum Schluss war es dann eben [Platz], ich meine, das war jetzt für mich net völlig enttäuschend, aber ich hätte mir selber schon mehr erhofft.

(53) Ja, also ich sag mal, es war eine Sensation überhaupt, dass ich dabei war, dass ich da [teilnehmen] konnte.

(54) Ja, wie gesagt, da war ich schon ziemlich geknickt gewesen, zwei, drei Tage lang. Bis ich zu mir gesagt habe „Gut, okay, das war eine

besondere Situation, an sich, und zum anderen hast du ja alles gegeben, du kannst dir jetzt keinen Vorwurf machen.“

(55) Und... ich weiß nich. So innerlich, also im ersten Moment hat’s mich nicht interessiert, weil ich einfach nur sauer war. Aber so hinterher denkt man „Ej, du hast darauf so lange und so hart trainiert. Wie viel Schmerzen hattest du, was musstest du alles mit dir machen lassen?“ Wie viel Ärger ich dadurch auch hatte und so. Und dann klappt das halt nicht.

(56) Ja, und so war’s dann halt ein bisschen, äh, ärgerlich mit dem [Platz], was ja für mich also wirklich ein riesen Erfolg war. . . . Damit darf man sich aber als Athlet nicht besonders beschäftigen, sag ich mal, sondern man muss halt sehen, dass man im Wettkampf selber, um den Wettkampf rum sich ganz auf sich selber konzentriert. Weil sonst wird man ja verrückt. Sonst macht man sich vielleicht auch kleiner, als man eigentlich ist. Also ich muss sagen, ich hab einfach großes Talent, uhm, ich hab gute körperliche Voraussetzungen für meine Sportart, die ich mir jetzt ausgesucht hab, und insofern, ähm, werd ich zwar nie Olympiasiegerin sein unter... sag ich mal, äh, gleichen Bedingungen, wie sich das, also wenn die Bedingungen jetzt so bleiben wie sie sind. Mit uneinheitlich geklärten Trainingskontrollen, international, aber ich hab ja zumindest die Chance dabei zu sein. Und, uhm, so denk ich mal muss man einfach dann... die, die Wünsche, Träume, die man vielleicht mal hatte, muss man realistisch werden lassen, und muss das ganze irgendwie ja, auf, auf den... vorherrschenden Fakten einfach dann so ein bisschen... ähm, einordnen, und, und, uhm, neu ordnen einfach für sich selber, so zurecht basteln, dass man weiß: „Das kann ich und das kann ich nicht. Und das liegt aber vielleicht auch gar nicht an mir.“

(57) Das find ich einfach unprofessionell. Das hab ich auch mehrfach gesagt, aber es ändert sich halt... nichts. Also es ist immer das gleiche. . . . Deswegen war ich auch so frustriert nach Olympia. Und hab auch rumgemeckert . . . weil ich halt wollte, dass sich irgendwas ändert. . . . Ich hatte einfach keine Lust, in vier Jahren wieder dazustehen und zu sagen „Ich hab alles gegeben, viel getan und viel trainiert, aber es hat wieder nicht gereicht, weil man einfach die Fehler nicht erkannt hat und wieder den gleichen Mist gemacht hat wie vorher schon!“

(58) Und irgendwie, also wenn’s jetzt nicht geklappt hätte, also es musste jetzt nicht [Platzierung] sein, aber das Ergebnis, das wir haben wollten, ich weiß nicht (lacht), ich glaub ich wär kurz davor gewesen aufzuhören. Also ich, also das, das war gut und ich hätte auch trotzdem gesagt es war ’ne gute Zeit, aber es war irgendwie so „Das gibt’s doch nicht.“ So:

„Warum, wie schaffen das die anderen?“ Und „Was machen die besser?“ Schon öfters gefragt. Und jetzt hat sich’s eigentlich wirklich umgedreht. Ja.

(59) Neenee, alles in allem muss ich sagen, ja, ich kann froh sein, dass ich das, dabei sein durfte. Ja, das ist, also das ist für mich auch so das Resümee im Prinzip. Jetzt, gut der Platz war nicht das, was ich mir gewünscht hatte, aber das kann so den Gesamteindruck jetzt für mich auch nicht kaputt machen oder so.

(60) Ich sag mal, man bewegt sich halt immer so in Grenzbereichen, körperlich wie psychisch.

(61) Naja, wie sich rausgestellt hat, war’s vielleicht ein bisschen viel, . . . ab Februar bei mir hatte ich so, so ’ne Phase, da sag ich, ich war definitiv übertrainiert. . . . So als Athlet merkt man das ja, wenn man dann... nichts mehr isst oder uhm, auch super schlecht schläft und auch zu nichts mehr Lust hat. Und das ist ja dann auch so, dass man dann auch irgendwann so aggressiv wird (lacht). Und ja, das will man dann in dem Moment ja nicht, aber wenn sich das dann... also das waren bestimmt, ja, fast vier Monate wo sich das so hinzog. Und das war so eine Durstphase, da hatte ich so die Schnauze voll. . . . Und dann macht man sich ja auch so Gedanken, ähm... „Ja... wehrt sich mein Körper schon dagegen, was ich mit dem veranstalte? Oder ist das jetzt wirklich nur so, dass das rein psychisch von mir ausgeht, dass ich mir diese Probleme selber mache?“ Man weiß es ja nicht, ne?

(62) Und außerdem ist es halt auch die Frage, ob man wirklich, wenn man ein Jahr trainiert, direkt in dem Jahr auch fit ist, . . . also ich hab dieses Jahr weniger gemacht und wurde immer besser. Einfach weil sich der Körper vielleicht mal erholt und wieder Kraft tankt.

(63) Und bei Olympia konnten wir uns gar nicht richtig schnell bewegen, weil wir wie gesagt so viel in der Höhe gemacht haben, mit dem Höhen-Konzept, . . . vielleicht nach, da ist uns dann richtig klar geworden, dass wir einfach bei Olympia viel zu müde noch waren. . . . Einfach mal den Mut zur Entlastung haben, nich? Dass man da Luft ran lässt, so ein ausgeruhter Körper, auch frisch vom Kopf, der ist viel leistungsfähiger als einer, der hoch... hochtrainiert ist und vielleicht sogar übertrainiert und dann müde, als einer der wirklich da ran geht „So, jetzt machen wir was!“

(64) Im Hochleistungssport ist das ja eine absolut entscheidende Rolle. Weil, ich sag mal, wir sind so trainingstechnisch oder so... alle ziemlich am

Limit irgendwie und, äh, ja, bringen die körperlichen Voraussetzungen schon mit. Aber um das zu hundertprozent abzuschöpfen, ähm, muss man auch das optimale Gewicht haben. Ja, und das heißt auf gut Deutsch halt, mit dem Gewicht nach unten gehen. So lange wie es geht halt, ohne Kraftverluste. Und ja, das ist aber ziemlich viel, also man kann ziemlich weit runter gehen bevor man mal Kraft verliert.

(65) Also ich weiß, ich hab letztes Jahr vor den Olympischen Spielen hab ich auch wirklich ganz, ganz eisern 'ne Diät gehalten. Also insofern nicht Diät, um abzunehmen, aber einfach um, uhm, sag ich mal wenig Zucker zu haben, also einfach, äh, rundum mich gesund ernähr.

(66) Und grad wenn jetzt klimatische Extrembedingungen herrschen, dass man vorm Start eben schon seine 30, 35 Grad hat, ist natürlich jede Zeit, die man zu lange in der Sonne verbringt, kostet schon wieder den Körper Kraft.

(67) Also ich bin dort angereist und da war's, hast du schon gemerkt „Oh, hoppla, das ist, also hier das ist was Besonderes!" Und in dieser Situation hätte ich in den Wettkampf starten müssen und es wär gut gewesen. Und dann hatt ich aber zu viel Zeit, mich zu akklimatisieren, um, äh, zu begreifen „Naja, hm, so was Besonderes ist es ja eigentlich gar nicht!" (lacht) Ja? Und auf einmal wird das alles zur Normalität, und in dem Moment geht Spannung aus deinem Körper raus.

(68) Und ich hab dann auf einmal gemerkt, dass ich so ein bisschen Herzrasen krieg und einen hohen Puls hab, aber überhaupt keine Power mehr [hab]. Und, äh... da hab ich das, das hab ich natürlich schon so registriert und dachte „Ah, scheiße, jetzt läuft's nicht und es geht nix!" Na, und hab mich dann da auch so rein verrannt, und bin dann von unheimlich vielen [Sportlern] überholt worden.

(69) Jetzt auf einmal das Gefühl zu haben, auch mit [Alter], auf einmal wieder jung zu sein, dazu zu gehören, genauso zu trainieren wie die jungen Leute auch, dich gegen wesentlich jüngere auch durchzusetzen, und das, das ist einfach ein motivierendes Gefühl, wenn du merkst „Oh hoppla, ich bin jetzt keine [Alter] mehr, ich geh jetzt auf [Alter] zu, und bin trotzdem noch körperlich fit und kann mit den Jungen allemal noch mithalten, und erfahr dann auch die Anerkennung, die, die, von den jungen Athleten!"

(70) Da wird dann angefangen, keiner darf mehr studieren, wir müssen den ganzen Tag lang trainieren. . . . Und da denkste echt du gehst wie zur

Arbeit immer hin zum Training, du hast keinen Spaß mehr daran, [Sport], das ist halt so was Natürliches, das macht dann auch keinen Spaß mehr, und da geht halt total der Spaß verloren.

(71) Also ich hab da zum Beispiel draufgeschrieben, ähm, dass ich eigentlich fertig und zufrieden nach jedem Spiel vom Platz gehen will. Und dass dann eigentlich auch egal ist, dann kann man auch gegen [Gegner] verlieren. Wenn sie stärker waren und wir, wenn ich das Gefühl hab, deswegen das zufrieden, wenn ich das Gefühl hab, uhm, ich hab alles gegeben, und dann ist das auch okay.

(72) Aber ich kann mich nur erinnern, dass ich halt vorm Start da gestanden hab und es war alles so schön, so die Tribüne und der Start und unsere Wettkampfstrecke war einfach so schön und es war alles perfekt. Und dann spielte die Musik, und alles auf den Teppich und der Teppich war halt, das war halt alles wunderschön wie es bei keinem anderen Wettkampf ist. Und da hab ich so'ne Stimmung „Ach, das ist doch total schön hier." Und jemand sagte dann noch vorm Wettkampf so zu mir „Ja, wir machen das doch alles nur aus Spaß. Hab Spaß! Das ist doch wirklich eigentlich was total Schönes." Und dann hab ich mir auch gesagt: „Ja, das stimmt eigentlich! Ich bin doch hier eigentlich freiwillig. Mich zwingt ja keiner!" Und dann hab ich das, also ich kann das dann immer, das ist dann irgendwie wie so ein großes Fest halt. Das ist halt alles total schön aufgebaut halt. Und jeder ist in 'ner feierlichen Stimmung und irgendwie, ja... da kann ich nicht abschalten oder so. Also das beeinflusst einen dann auch.

(73) Ja, man versucht sich natürlich auf diesen Tag vorzubereiten. Und dann spielen natürlich sehr viele Gefühle da mit rein. Weil es ist schon was ganz Besonderes und es kann natürlich ein ganz freudiges Ereignis werden, also ich habe noch nie so freudige Menschen wie bei Olympia gesehen, aber ich hab auch noch nie so, ja, so doll enttäuschte Menschen gesehen.

(74) Und man selber ist ja dann schon so richtig emotional dabei und so, ja. Also ich konnt halt, konnte halt damit überhaupt nicht umgehen. Das ist jetzt auch so... ja, dadurch ist halt wirklich, also für mich war der Wettkampf völlig in den Hintergrund gestellt. Also ich hab ihn nicht vergessen, aber das ist da echt so... ja, teilweise zweitrangig.

(75) Und, ähm, das war schon ein bisschen traurig (lacht). Also wenn man dann da, da raus... äh, rausgeht und die anderen [sind] noch weiter [im Wettkampf]. Das ist dann, uhm, ja das fällt einem halt schon nicht so leicht.

(76) Und nach der Meisterschaft waren die Olympischen Spiele so gut wie vorbei gewesen. Und da waren wir auch schlecht, also ich war zumindest mal schlecht gelaunt gewesen, so noch zwei, drei Tage. Weil ich doch nicht die Leistung gebracht hab, die ich mir erhofft hab.

(77) Ja. Und, uhm, also ich hätte nicht gedacht, dass ich, äh, dass ich noch so spielen kann. Wirklich! Also ich war dann auch vom Kopf her einfach fertig. Ja.

(78) Und dort standen sie alle so da, mit verschränkten Armen. Und dann hab ich auch gedacht „Oh Gott, Hilfe!“

(79) Aber ich kann mich erinnern, wenn ich dann ins Ziel [komme], bei Olympia, dann... weiß nicht. Also im ersten Moment bin ich dann eigentlich, eigentlich glücklich.

(80) Aber leider darüber hinaus, äh, hab ich dann meine Grenzen aufgezeigt bekommen. Das war in dem Moment schon eine bittere Erfahrung, weil du dann plötzlich, äh, in so ein kleines Loch während des Wettkampfes fällst. Weil das dann quasi die Entscheidung ist. Du weißt ganz genau, „Jetzt bist du nicht dabei und vorne gehen die Medaillen weg!“ Und, äh, „Das ganze Training...“ du, du warst, oder ich persönlich war dann so, so ein bisschen, bisschen frustriert in dem Moment, weil du gesehen hast... Es, leistungsmäßig hat’s in dem Moment nicht gereicht. Die anderen waren definitiv an dem Tag stärker. . . . Man erlebt relativ viel, komischerweise, während des Wettkampfs, was man so an, an Emotionen und so, so aufnimmt und verarbeiten muss.

(81) Aber, ja, man versucht sich dann natürlich auf seinen Wettkampf zu konzentrieren und da eigentlich ganz cool ranzugehen und zu sagen, ja, „Das ist jetzt ein Wettkampf, ich stell mich an den Start und los geht’s.“

(82) Also wir haben uns eigentlich selber im Weg gestanden, und nicht der Gegner. Und dass wir das ändern müssen, das, das war eigentlich klar. „Dann spielen wir und dann gucken wir am Ende, was rauskommt.“ Und, und wenn man, ja, eigentlich wenn man sich im Spiel mit dem Ergebnis befasst, dann ist eh, ja, geht nicht. Also man muss sich eigentlich im Spiel auf, auf die Situationen konzentrieren, die gerade passieren und ja, das möglichst gut machen und dann kommt meistens auch was Gutes bei raus. Und das haben wir eigentlich das ganze Jahr über gemacht.

(83) Zum Schluss muss einfach die, die Leistung muss zu dem Zeitpunkt schon stehen und dann ist man auch so selbstbewusst und zieht sein Ding durch, egal was für äußere Einflüsse oder was auch immer gegeben ist. Ich denke, das ist zum Schluss, wenn man wirklich topfit ist nebensächlich.

(84) Und wenn dann dein Startschuss kommt, oder beziehungsweise sagt der, was weiß ich, „Take your marks!“ und dann ist es bei mir komischerweise so, dann bin ich, äh, in dem Moment das, komplett entspannt ist auch übertrieben, aber dann bin ich nur noch konzentriert auf das Rennen. Dann geht das Rennen ab, du versuchst halt das beste in dem Moment aus dich her... aus dir rauszuholen.

(85) Das Wichtige ist dann halt, dass man in dieser Wartezeit... die Spannung, uhm, und die Konzentration natürlich hält, aber auch nicht die ganze Zeit irgendwie auf so einem maximalen Niveau. Sondern das geht ja gar nicht, also über, über zweieinhalb Stunden oder drei Stunden das ist dann auch nicht möglich. Sondern das ist dann so, so’ne Mischung zwischen Entspannung halt direkt nach dem [Versuch] und dann steigern der Anspannung bis hin zum nächsten [Versuch].

(86) Also, ich sag mal, ich war zwar in der Form meines Lebens, also so gut vorbereitet war ich wohl nie gewesen, weil ich mich wirklich darauf konzentriert hab auch, und den Beruf jetzt komplett vernachlässigt hab in der Zeit.

(87) Ja, jetzt abschalten in dem Sinne, sagen wir mal, das ist ein bisschen schwierig dort. Weil es ist jetzt natürlich nicht so viel Platz, dass man sich da so isolieren kann mal irgendwie oder so. Ja, aber man muss dann halt ein bisschen spazieren gehen oder irgendwas. Dann geht das auch.

(88) Die letzte... Einstimmung, und die war eigentlich, die hat ganz super angefangen. Also da sacht er „Jungs, wat soll ich euch noch großartig sagen? Geht raus und [und legt los]!“ Und alle so: „Jawoll! Jetzt, jetzt reicht’s, jetzt können wir raus.“ Und so: „Coolste Ansprache überhaupt!“ Und dann fängt der, hat er aber angefangen noch mal eine Viertelstunde zu labern, was alle falsch machen. Und dann war’s vorbei. Also da war bei mir die Spannung raus, so och aus dem Körper . . . Weil einfach: ’ne Viertelstunde haben wir dann da abgeschaltet, mit den Gedanken abgeschweift, . . . und er hat dann da auch so monoton gesprochen und so. Das war... war auch so ein Ding. . . . Dat war so ein ganz gravierender Punkt. Da ist dann im entscheidenden Augenblick so die, äh, ja die mentale Anspannung weg gewesen.

(89) Und ich sag halt, ich bin dann auch so psychisch ein bisschen... ja, nicht ganz stabil. Also ich nehm das immer gleich mehr zu Herzen, und denk halt mehr drüber nach. Uhm, das hab ich aber auch bei so nationalen Wettkämpfen . . . wo's um irgendwas geht. Da werd ich meistens grundsätzlich krank bei der Qualifikation (lacht).

(90) Und, das war... also ich bin da sowieso nicht so der Typ (lacht), der da so drauf steht, dass da irgendwas in der Zeitung steht.

(91) Ja, ich mag das halt nicht so. Ich bin mehr so ein ruhiger Typ und hab's dann eigentlich lieber ruhig.

(92) Und für mich persönlich, was ich hier noch sagen kann, also mir kommt unheimlich entgegen wenn ich, wenn ich relativ großen Druck habe. . . . dass mich das noch zusätzlich motiviert.

(93) In Deutschland fühlt man sich da teilweise schon, äh, ja als Außenseiter, als Leistungssportler. Dass wenn du den Leuten erzählst, du bist Leistungssportler, und die sagen „Was, du machst nur Sport? Das ist ja schon fast asozial." Und dass die das im Endeffekt gleich negativieren und sagen „Mann, der lebt von unseren Steuergelder!" und das Gefühl, was man dann hin und wieder vermittelt bekommt, sicherlich auch nicht förderlich ist, äh, zukünftig, dass jemand dann die Schiene Leistungssport einschlägt... Naja, es sollte, es sollte einfach wieder in der Gesellschaft vielleicht einen anderen Stellenwert haben. Und die Frage ist, ob's geht. Es gibt einfach immer mehr Neider, in schlechten Zeiten. Das hängt sicherlich damit zusammen. Schlechte Wirtschaftslage, und schon...

(94) Also es war ja, oder es war im letzten Jahr dann viel auch in den Medien: „Ja, die Olympia-Touristen! Und die dürfen dann da alle bleiben!" Und das ist ja so ein bisschen die deutsche Mentalität, dass man, ähm, eher neidisch ist als stolz . . . Jemand, der ausscheidet und der dann mit seiner eigenen sportlichen Leistung nicht zufrieden ist, für den ist das nicht der allergrößte Spaß dann dort zu bleiben, weil dafür haben wir Leistungssportler auch glaub ich einfach alle zu hohe Ansprüche an uns selber, als dass wir das dann genießen können. Und zum anderen . . . ist man ja einfach auch in einer repräsentativen Funktion dort. Also in dem Moment, wo einfach noch ein paar Leute da in diesen Deutschland-Sachen, äh, durch die Gegend laufen, repräsentieren die ja einfach, also so ist zumindest mein Verständnis, einfach unser Land. . . . Oder, ähm, wir hätten, ja sag ich mal, im Deutschen Haus vielleicht weniger Werbung auch für, für uns und den

Sport und Deutschland als Sportland machen können und so weiter und sofort. Also ich, ähm, ich muss sagen, das hat mich letztes Jahr wirklich so ein bisschen gestört. Weil niemand scheidet mit Absicht aus und, äh, niemand fährt jetzt hin „Och, ich scheid am Anfang aus und dann mach ich mir zweieinhalb Wochen klasse Urlaub auf Staatskosten!“ (lacht) oder so ungefähr, ne? Ähm, da muss ich sagen, da kann man das den Leuten dann irgendwie auch, auch gönnen, dass sie dann, dann dort sind.

(95) Äh, dass man, nee, dass man dort erstmal immer seinen Ausweis dabei haben muss, aber, okay, das sind Sachen, auf die stellt man sich dann ein. Also ohne Ausweis ist man eigentlich dort nix im Olympischen Dorf. Ausweis ist das A und O.

(96) Wie gesagt: Es gab noch keine Olympischen Spiele, von denen ich so wenig mitbekommen habe. Das war schade gewesen. Aber wenn man selbst dann halt der Aktive ist, dann muss man halt etwas Show bieten, anstatt das zu genießen.

(97) So ein bisschen... es muss halt immer Spaß sein, also. Das ist halt... echt Hauptantrieb, dass es halt Spaß macht. Geld verdienen tut man da nicht, oder nicht viel, und ich glaub, auch wenn man damit reich werden würde, würde, wenn’s keinen Spaß macht, könnte man das glaube ich nicht machen. Da wäre man nicht schnell. Das ist halt wichtig, dass man immer den Spaß dabei hat.

(98) Und da haben wir eigentlich als Mannschaft dann auch uns quasi in die Augen geguckt und, und gesagt „Entweder mach ich’s ganz oder gar nicht!“ Und, also wir sind halt reine Amateure, und ja, da ist es eigentlich früher immer leicht passiert, dass ein paar so ein bisschen abgedriftet sind „Ja, ich probiers, ich mach mal mit und wenn’s nicht klappt ist es auch okay.“ Und genau die wollten wir, oder eben [der Trainer] nicht haben. Der wollte eigentlich nur welche, die, die sagen „Ich will dafür alles geben und das beste Ergebnis dort erzielen.“ . . . Und, ähm, da hatte ich auch das Gefühl, dass das jeder so gesehen hat. So „Okay, ich mach alles dafür und... ja, mach das gewissenhaft und auch weil ich der Mannschaft gegenüber eine Verantwortung hab.“ Und das war vorher so nicht. Da war’s schon so, dass man immer das Gefühl hatte „Ja, es ziehen schon einige mit.“ Und einige für sich selber haben, haben bestimmte Ziele. Aber da war’s nicht so, wir haben wirklich dieses gemeinsame Ziel.

(99) Und als es dann so weit war, war unser [Equipment] nicht präpariert, nicht fertig. . . . Und da mussten wir uns mit unserem [Techniker] da

rumärgern, dass der das jetzt endlich mal macht. Und das find ich einfach total unprofessionell. Also, weil der meinte „Ja, ich hatte keine Zeit“ und so. Da ich bin aber der Meinung, wenn Olympia ist, dann muss man dafür Zeit haben und wenn man dafür den ganzen Tag arbeitet, oder die ganze Nacht arbeitet. Das ist dann in dem... das ist doch auch egal. Wenn einer die ganze Woche nicht schlafen kann, dann ist mir das auch egal. Also dafür kriegt er Geld, dafür muss er arbeiten und da ist Olympia wichtig genug. Und dass halt viele Sachen einfach unprofessionell waren und das stört mich halt, dass die Rahmenbedingungen halt in diesen Punkten nicht passten.

(100) Also es geht halt einfach nicht mehr so, wie die sich da teilweise echt aufführen. Weil, ähm, das Ding ist halt einfach... der [Verband] hat halt, uhm, der will ja irgendwelche, der braucht ja irgendwelche Leistungen. Aber wer muss die Leistungen bringen? Die Athleten. Aber die Athleten sind diejenigen, die... eigentlich gar nicht gefragt werden. Wenn überhaupt zum Schluss, und die Meinung zählt eh nicht. Und das ist halt, das passt ja nicht. . . . Und dann durch irgendeine Aktion die der [Verband] startet, dadurch... geht halt dann wirklich so viel Kraft verloren, dass dann halt schon viele sagen „Was mach ich denn hier? Ich will nach Hause“. . . . Also manche Sachen, wenn der [Verband] nicht wäre, dann denke ich wären die Athleten viel freier und könnten andere Leistungen bringen. Vielleicht nicht besser, aber jedenfalls so, dass sie damit glücklicher wären. Weil halt so im Nachhinein, ähm, sagt man sich „Ja, einem wird halt alles kaputt gemacht!“

(101) So als Athlet, von unseren Betreuern und Trainern, da wurden wir auf jeden Fall sehr, sehr gut umsorgt.

(102) Dann natürlich die Familie... auch den Zuspruch, den man erfährt, aus dem Freundeskreis, vom Verband, wie gesagt.

(103) Also bei mir selbst war im Vorfeld auch positiv, dass... . . . man wusste man, also, man steht nicht alleine da, sondern dass die Eltern dahinter stehen, dass die Geschwister dahinter stehen, dass die Großeltern dahinter stehen, dass einfach so viele Leute auch in deinem, ja, Nicht-[Sport]umfeld im Endeffekt, äh, mit dir mitfiebern, und dich über Jahre hinweg, oder Jahrzehnte hinweg (lacht), eigentlich unterstützt haben. Und, uhm, dass du das ganze, machst du schon für dich, aber machst du eigentlich auch für... also für deine Familie, sozusagen.

(104) Aber meine Voraussetzungen, die ich hatte, die waren optimal, also. Jeder hat mir geholfen, und ich hatte auch von der Familie die Unterstützung und so.

(105) In der deutschen Mannschaft dann unterhältst du dich mit dem, ja man kommt sich einfach schnell näher dort. Du wirst als Deutscher, sitzt dann meistens mit den Deutschen beim Essen, oder die, die du kennst von anderen Nationen... Da ist es mal gut mit anderen über ihre Wettkämpfe zu reden, was die jetzt für Erfahrungen gemacht haben. Oder du siehst'se mit Medaille reinkommen und denkst „Wow, der hat's geschafft!" Also es ist auf jeden Fall dann auch Motivation.

(106) So war dann schon irgendwie so'n, so'n bisschen sag ich mal Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl war dann da. . . . Also es war, ähm, ja es war also wirklich einfach ein Erlebnis, so diese, diese Dorfgemeinschaft oder, ähm, auch dann um das Deutsche Haus herum, so diese, diese, ja, kleine deutsche City (lacht) sag ich mal. Das war, war schon gut.

(107) 1A! Ich hab noch nie so gut, äh, mit Trainern arbeiten können wie zu diesem Zeitpunkt. Äh, hängt natürlich auch immer so ein bisschen von der persönlichen Situation ab, äh, wie man mit Trainern kann. Und, äh, zu dem Bundestrainer, [Name], hab ich einen super Draht gehabt, weil er sehr professionell auch arbeitet, anders als sein Vorgänger. Und... äh, mit dem [Trainer], den kenn ich schon so viele, viele Jahre, äh, der kannte mich, ich kenne ihn. Und das war, also... 'ne absolut homogene Sache. Also da kann man gar nit... nichts anderes sagen. Das würde ich also auch blind unterschreiben. Das würde ich wirklich, nee, das war einfach nur super.

(108) Es war, wie gesagt, also, das ist ja das gute im Moment bei uns in der Mannschaft, nachdem jetzt der neue Trainer kam, durch den Umbruch, den wir auch als Mannschaft bewirkt haben. . . . Und, äh, jo man hat halt das Gefühl, dass da hinter dir jemand steht und dich unterstützt, nicht unter Druck setzt und das hat eigentlich schon gestimmt.

(109) Ja, also das, das halt ich, muss ich auch sagen, für, jetzt für mich, für einen ganz, ganz, ganz entscheidenden Punkt. . . . Also ich brauch schon jemanden, der mit mir vor Ort ist, also täglich, immer. Und, sag ich mal, der mich einfach da auch noch sehr anleitet, oder einfach, ähm, ja, dem ich rundum vertraue.

(110) Und jetzt war das irgendwie selbstverständlich. „Nee, ich muss das, ich will das machen." Genau: „Ich muss das nicht machen, sondern ich will's machen. Ähm, weil mir bewusst ist, dass ich das Ziel hab und dass ich dadran ziehen will und das erreichen will." Ja, im Prinzip dieses Bewusstsein. Und daraus, glaub ich, entstand das, diese Welle. Und die wurde schon ausgelöst durch die Besprechung, durch Psychologen,

durch, ähm... . . . Das haben wir vorher auch nicht gemacht: Ziele formuliert. Das ist leichter danach sich auch auszurichten. Wenn man merkt „Nee, das ist nicht mein Ziel.“, kann man’s ja lassen. Aber man weiß, was das Mannschaftsziel ist und... ja. Und daraus ist, ist auch das alles andere entstanden dann... die Motivation.

(111) Das war, das ist auch so eine Sache im Nachhinein, dass wir uns zu gut verstanden haben. Man hat sich nicht so richtig getraut, die Meinung gegenseitig zu sagen. . . . „Wir wollen nach vorne, jeder sagt dem anderen, was ihm nicht passt an ihm, und dann wird dat auch!“ Du musst immer Beruf und Privates trennen, hier. Im, im [Sport] kann man sich da mal richtig ankacken, aber... aber draußen ist dann halt auch Schluss, ne?

(112) Dann ist eben die einheitliche Teamuniform, dass, dass man jetzt nit so locker und leger, wie man’s sonst gewohnt ist, in seinen Individualklamotten seine Einheiten macht und das ein oder andere ist dann vielleicht doch...(lacht)... wie sagt man, an den Sachen, die man dann tragen muss, eher improvisiert. . . . Wenn man mit so einem schlagkräftigen Team eigentlich dann zu Olympia anreist, dann halbiert sich natürlich irgendwo der Druck von einem selber.

(113) Und da war eigentlich der [Wettkampf] schon entschieden. Das war eigentlich von ihm gut gemacht, bei uns gehören halt immer zwei dazu. Und wenn der andere besser ist, dann muss man das akzeptieren...

(114) Jeder Wettkampf ist anders. Jede Wettkampfstrecke ist anders. Und klar, manche, manch einem liegt dies besser, manch einem das, und jeder, jede Wettkampfsituation ist ja auch [in meinem Sport] immer verschieden. Das ist halt, ja, [in meinem Sport], da wechseln die Sieger ja auch immer ständig.

(115) Weil in unserem Sport ist es halt so, dass man halt, du kannst im Vorfeld nicht hundertprozentig sagen, du machst die und die Platzierung.

(116) Aber das ist ja auch der Unterschied zwischen... früher und heute. Früher . . . war die DDR die einzige Nation die . . . es halt professionell gemacht hat. . . . Nur jetzt haben sie halt keinen, haben wir halt keinen Vorsprung mehr.

(117) Und dann zählt natürlich ein Event wie die Olympischen Spiele, der zählt alles in dem Moment. Und, ja, das heißt ein [Wettkampf] in den vier Jahren, und, äh, da ist man total fokussiert drauf, ja? Man hat nicht mehrere Möglichkeiten wie [andere Sportler] oder meinetwegen im

Tennis mit Wimbledon und so, wo man, oder Paris, ja? Man hat vier, fünf Höhepunkte im Jahr, man pickt sich ein, zwei raus und bereitet sich dadrauf vor, sondern [bei uns] ist eigentlich alles nur darauf fixiert gewesen. Und, ja, dann ist [bei uns] natürlich auch ein Sport, wo man schnell mal [ausscheidet], wo dann auch ein bisschen Glück dazu gehört, wie in jedem Sport.

(118) Also es sind ja eigentlich immer enge Ergebnisse gewesen. Und, wenn da ein Pfiff anders ist, oder ein, eine Situation, der Ball ein bisschen anders abspringt (lacht), dann kann das Spiel anders ausgehen. Wobei das schon auch so ist, dass ich, ICH das eigentlich nicht nur als Glück empfinde. Sondern auch wenn man da dran glaubt und das, weiter jeden Ball haben will und dann... ja, dann schafft man das auch. Also schon das Glück des Tüchtigen oder das... aber man muss es sich irgendwo auch verdienen. Es klingt immer ein bisschen blöd, aber eigentlich ist es so die Erfahrung, die ich auch gemacht hab. Weil vorher haben wir in den Jahren vorher schon immer so ein bisschen aufgesteckt auch: „Oh Mann, warum, warum klappt das nicht? Warum haben wir nicht mal das Glück?“ Schon so ein bisschen dran gezweifelt. Und, ähm, dann haben wir’s auch nicht bekommen. Und der andere hat halt doch einen kleinen Tick mehr gemacht und dann hat er auch das Spiel gewonnen... Gerade bei Mannschaften, die eng beieinander sind, und das, das war ja jetzt so. Ja. Und diesmal wirklich auch so diese Kopf-Sache, die mentale Sache, haben wir jetzt sehr gut gemacht: Dass wir an uns geglaubt haben und egal wie es war, wir ziehen das durch und wollen bis zur letzten Sekunde kämpfen, und, uhm, wenn abgepfiffen ist, dann kann man auf die Anzeigetafel gucken.

(119) Das sind maximal eigentlich vom Trainingswissenschaftlichen ist es möglich drei Wochen, und das ist schon sehr viel, eigentlich sind eher so zwei Wochen, diesen maximalen Höhepunkt zu halten. Und das sind alles so diese Faktoren, die, ähm, diese Spitzenleistungen in [dem Sport] schwierig gestalten... oder sehr aufwändig gestalten, weil dadurch, äh, oder dazu muss der Trainer einfach dann auch genau wissen, was er macht, und der Athlet muss auch sehr diszipliniert sein, um das dann so zu ermöglichen...

(120) Weil... also wie gesagt, also bei uns zu dopen, also ich weiß jetzt nicht wie, ich kann natürlich nichts sagen, nicht sagen wie das bei anderen Nationen ist, auch... Ja, gerade China und so. Also man munkelt ja schon ein bisschen, dass sie, äh, sie irgendwas haben, was man nicht... erkennt. Vor allem, weil die Chinesen ja auch, ähm, ja, wenn sie Olympiasieger werden würden, ausgesorgt hätten.

(121) Und da hab ich gemerkt halt, dass andere Nationen noch denken, wir nehmen was, durch unser, durch die, durch die Wiedervereinigung und so weiter, weil so viele Osttrainer da sind, und so weiter, ne? Aber, Daumen hoch! Wir sind, ja seit 90 hatten wir keinen Dopingfall mehr im [Sport], also in Deutschland, nich. In anderen Nationen gibt's die schon noch.

(122) Es wirkte halt alles, weil es außerhalb war, sehr provinziell, oder es wirkte halt nicht wie Olympia, wo man halt denkt, man kommt da hin und es ist alles voll, und irgendwie was Besonderes. Es war halt wie eine WM. Waren also wenig Zuschauer da, es waren morgens um ja, so im Halb-Nebel noch manchmal, wenn da noch ein bisschen Morgentau in der Luft lag oder so, und es war halt alles, wirkte alles ganz normal. Es war halt nichts Besonderes.

(123) Und, ähm, ja, das war, muss ich sagen, das war schon einfach faszinierend, diese, es waren ja 80,000 Leute glaub ich in dem Stadion, die da reinpassen, und, ähm, dann sitzt man da in diesem Innenraum und realisiert das aber, sag ich mal, nur so unterschwellig. . . . Also man darf das auch gar nicht jetzt so nah an sich ranlassen, weil sonst würde man wahrscheinlich total überkandidelt oder viel zu nervös, dann bricht die Nervosität doch wieder raus. . . . Und, ja einfach so diese ganze Atmosphäre so dieses Knistern im Stadion, ne, das ist halt, äh, einfach als, als Wettkampfstätte ist so dieses Stadion, das Leichtathletik-Stadion auch einfach einmalig. Weil das ist also eine gigantische Atmosphäre, ich glaub, das kriegt man so in keinem anderen, äh, in keiner anderen, wie sagt man, Sportarena . . . kriegt man das . . . hin. So ein Stadion mit 80000 Leuten, das ist einfach gigantisch, also. Und wenn die dann klatschen, . . . und da haben sich, da war da ja so ein Jubel hinterher im Stadion, und die haben auf, sind aufgestanden, und haben dann die, irgendwelche Musik gespielt und da war also wirklich, das ganze Stadion hat geknistert und man hat dann richtig gemerkt, wie sich die Haare, also vor lauter, was, Elektrizität oder was das dann ist, wie sich die Haare am Arm wirklich so aufgestellt haben. Das war, das ganze Stadion, das hat, äh, hat vor Spannung irgendwie gebebt. Das war, äh, also wirklich Wahnsinn.

(124) Und wir wussten halt schon, dass Olympia in Athen schlechte Wetterbedingungen haben könnte, also Wind und Wellen.

(125) Es lag vielleicht auch ein bisschen an der Strecke und an der extremen Hitze in Athen. Aber gut, die Bedingungen haben ja im Prinzip alle.

(126) Na, Athen war für uns [Athleten] halt eine ganz besondere Strecke, mit dem [Aspekt].

(127) Obwohl ich am Anfang wirklich dachte, so auch als wir auf dem Platz standen, und überall nur [Fans], da hab ich dann gedacht (lacht) „Oh Gott! (lacht) Mir wird schlecht!“ So ungefähr. Also da, uhm, war’s, war’s schon so, dass ich... ja, dass man wie so benebelt war, erst mal. Und... das hat sich aber irgendwie, ja (lacht), konnte ich dann doch spielen. Aber es war schon extrem, wie das einen auch beeinflusst hat. Ja.

(128) Bei ’ner Weltmeisterschaft, . . . da sitzt die Mannschaft komplett irgendwo auf der Tribüne, du hast Einblick [in die Arena], kannst dich dann im Nebenraum warmmachen [...], kannst zwischendurch mal wieder an deine Tasche gehen, zu deinen Leuten, dich noch mal kurz hinsetzen, noch mal ein bisschen [...] gucken, und, und das ganze so, äh, beobachten und so, weißt du? Dich so Schritt für Schritt so nach oben schaukeln. Und dort war’s so, dass ich die ganze Zeit unten in den Katakomben war. Also ich hatte überhaupt keinen Kontakt, zum, zum Innenraum, hab mich dann dort, äh, versucht optimal warm zu machen, ja. Aber irgendwas, irgendwie war’s komisch, das ist ziemlich schwer. Und, dann bist du nach draußen gekommen, und dann war auf einmal die Kulisse da. Du hattest überhaupt nicht die Möglichkeit gehabt, dich da so noch mal so ein bisschen, so, so einzupegeln, irgendwo. Und dann [ging’s los], und das am Ende, so zurückblickend muss ich sagen, das lief im Prinzip alles irgendwie wie in ’nem Film ab. Also ich war gar nit richtig bei der Sache, ne? Bis ich dann begriffen hab, was hier eigentlich läuft, und da waren dann schon zwoeinhalb bis drei Minuten [vorbei], ne?

(129) Das, was eigentlich so bei mir zum Ritual gehört, den Wettkampfparcours einen Tag vorher [zu inspizieren]. Und dort durfte man eben nur oder noch nicht einmal durfte man nebendran [sein]. Also es war jetzt nicht die Möglichkeit gegeben den Wettkampfparcours [zu inspizieren], aber okay, das Schicksal hatte jeder und, äh, ja... Es ist eben, es sind halt vielleicht so Details und man selber ist eben immer der, der sich [orientiert], man lotet für sich die Strecke aus, wie in der Formel 1, und erwischt zum Schluss eben genau die Lücke, die man am Tag vorher schon erspäht hat, wo man weiß, das ist die Ideallinie, da muss man lang [...] und, uhm, im Wettkampf kann eben das gerade dann die entscheidenden Sekunden kosten.

(130) Also ich fand eine Katastrophe, dass bei den Olympischen Sp... das war auch ein bisschen das griechische Volk. Ja, die sind in Urlaub gefahren.

. . Aber ja, es waren nirgendwo Großbildleinwände aufgebaut, also in der Stadt hat man kaum gemerkt, dass Olympische Spiele sind.

(131) In Athen hat man manchmal das Gefühl gehabt, bei den, bei den Leuten, wobei man natürlich vorsichtig sein muss, ne, dass die, dass sie gesagt haben „Ist zwar schön, dass wir die Olympischen Spiele haben, aber wir sind auch froh, wenn sie jetzt irgendwann wieder vorbei sind."

(132) Und bei Olympia sind eben nur die Stärksten, dewegen, ähm, ja wollten wir da immer nur gegen die Stärksten spielen und üben.

(133) Das Niveau ist allgemein extrem hoch, jeder ist fokussiert auf den Wettkampf.

(134) Aber da kann's sein, und so war's ja bei den Olympischen Spielen dann auch, . . . da muss man dann schon in den ersten drei [Versuchen] irgendwie sehen, dass man Bestleistung springt. Oder zumindest in die Nähe der Bestleistung kommt.

(135) Und wenn du jetzt siehst, äh, dass bei diesen 22 Qualifizierten, die ohnehin schon die besten der Welt waren, äh, könnte ich jetzt zwölf Leute aufzählen, die alle, äh, Medaillengewinner von Europameisterschaften, Weltmeisterschaften oder Olympischen Spielen im Vorfeld waren. Alles Leute, die aktuell so fit waren, dass sie im Grunde genommen hätten Olympiasieger werden können.

(136) Ja, na die Olympiasiegerin, das hat ja eigentlich auch keiner erwartet, die [Sportlerin]. Dann die Dritte geworden ist, die [Nationalität der Sportlerin] ich glaub, ich kann mich gar nicht erinnern, dass ich einen Wettkampf gegen sie gemacht hab. Von daher war es auch schwer einzuschätzen, die Konkurrenz. Also die, die vor mir waren, also 80 Prozent von denen, gegen die hatte ich in dem gleichen Jahr keinen Wettkampf gegen die gemacht. Obwohl ich mich [in den Wettkämpfen] schon zwei-, dreimal gestellt hatte.

(137) Der war zwar bekannt gewesen, dem Trainer, und der hat eigentlich auch seine [Stärken und Schwächen] gut beschreiben können. Ich wusste schon, was auf mich zukommt. Aber... war eigentlich gut eingestellt gewesen und bin auch klar gekommen mit dem, bis zu dieser Verletzung. Ja, das hat mich schon nachher etwas gehindert.

(138) Ja, und dann hab ich versucht während dem Rennen wieder so aus dem Loch rauszuziehen, und hab dann auch wieder so einen Rhythmus gefunden, konnte wieder ein paar Plätze gut machen, und... bin dann

halt so ins Ziel gekommen. Aber das war schon ein ziemlicher Gewalt-[Wettkampf], irgendwie.

(139) Also ich hab halt den Fehler gemacht, aber das, ähm, hinter mir saß der Bundestrainer, ich zu ihm gegangen und ähm, der hat mich dann zusammengefaltet „Wie ich denn so blöd sein könnte, das ich das nicht wüsste [...]? Er hätte doch mit mir, sich mit mir darüber unterhalten!“

VITA

Sebastian Brueckner was born in Saarbrücken, Germany, on November 19, 1973. He attended elementary school in Saarbrücken, Germany, and graduated from the Gymnasium am Rotenbühl, Saarbrücken, in 1993. He fullfilled his civil service duty from October 1993 to October 1994 with the regional office of the Roman Catholic church, diocese Trier, in Saarbrücken, Germany. Sebastian entered Saarland University in Saarbrücken, Germany, in October 1994, majoring in physics and sport science. From October 2000 to July 2001 he spent nine months as a research scholar in the Human Motor Behavior Lab at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas. In June 2001, Sebastian received the degree of Diploma in Sport Science / Physical Education from Saarland University.

From March 1997 to August 2003, Sebastian worked as a freelance journalist for several local newspapers, sport magazines, and sport organizations. Since May 2003, he started working for the Center for Experiential Outdoor Education in Saarbrücken, Germany. He works there as a staff member teaching participants life skills through activities such as climbing, adventure games, kayaking/canoeing.

In August 2003, Sebastian entered the University of Tennessee, Knoxville as a doctoral student in Sport Psychology. From August 2003 to May 2005 he was employed in the Applied Motor Behavior Lab within the Department of Exercise, Sport, and Leisure Studies as a graduate teaching associate. Since

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