

Beyond Just a Model Teammate: A New Framework to Leverage Character Strengths in Talent Identification and Athlete Development

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MAPP 800: Capstone Project

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July 15, 2024

Abstract

This paper recommends the integration of character strengths into talent identification and athlete development processes. A pivotal element of positive psychology, character strengths offer a valuable lens to view talent identification and athlete development at all ages and stages of an athlete's career. Incorporating character strengths into talent identification processes can provide a more comprehensive understanding of an athlete's potential beyond physical abilities. Similarly, by integrating character strengths into athlete development programs, sports organizations can foster a more holistic growth of key psychological skills in athletes. This paper explores the relationship between character strengths, related psychological frameworks, and sports performance and offers suggestions for assessing and developing character strengths in athletes. Overall, effectively leveraging character strengths in talent identification and athlete development programs may help sports organizations improve athletic outcomes.

Keywords: Character Strengths, Sports Performance, Talent Identification, Athlete Development, Character Strength Assessment, Character Strength Development, Character Strength Interventions, Coaching

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Acknowledgments

This paper would not be possible without the significant contributions and support of numerous colleagues, friends, family, and other trusted advisors. To Ryan Niemiec and Gloria Park, thank you for the spark of the idea (likely unbeknownst to you) in your lectures and publications to proceed down this path of both establishing the link between character strengths and sport performance, and applying these findings to talent identification and athlete development programs. To Shea and Josh, your willingness to lend an ear and support for a rant at any hour of the day (and still reply to my messages) is truly remarkable. To my advisor, Danny, thank you for steering my traditionally legal and business memoranda writing into a more academically appropriate format. To my son, Lucas, and his teammates and coaches at Valencia Soccer Academy in New Jersey, thank you for providing an informal laboratory of observation and idea generation at your trainings and competitions. To my daughter, Ellie, your constant curiosity as to the “book” I was writing gave me the continued motivation and inspiration to drive forward. And finally, to my partner, Emily, thank you for your relentless, unconditional love, support and belief in me in embarking on this new journey to support athletes achieve their peak performance potential.

Introduction

Both professional and amateur sports organizations across the globe have dedicated significant resources to the identification and development of athletes that demonstrate the promise of stellar future athletic performance—a strategy commonly referred to as “talent identification” and “athlete development” (Baker et al., 2017). Talent identification has been described as “the process of identifying and/or selecting individuals who possess a quality (or qualities) that predicts some form of future attainment” (Baker et al., 2017, p. 2). On the other hand, athlete development encompasses “the range of influences on the process of skill acquisition in the high performance sport setting” (Baker et al., 2017, p. 2). Nevertheless, which characteristics, factors, and constructs should be considered as part of each selection and development process are subject to debate.

Talent identification and athlete development have a broad reach from targeting youth athletes as young as seven years old to assessing amateur athletes entering the professional ranks through draft combines and “pro days” on university campuses. Historically, efforts have focused on physical (i.e., height, weight, muscle mass, body fat, etc.) and physiological (i.e., aerobic/anaerobic capacity, power, speed, agility, etc.) attributes as predictors or indicators of future performance in talent identification and athlete development processes (Williams & Reilly, 2000). Although talent identification and athlete development processes sometimes yield success, there are also inherent challenges and uncertainties involved in these activities.

Despite the abundant resources invested and dedicated to talent identification, scouting professionals’ ability to accurately identify promising talent is lukewarm (Baker et al., 2017). Although some talent identification processes have been wildly successful such as Tom Brady (who is considered the greatest late-round pick in NFL history) (Post, 2024), other promising

athletes have failed to live up to their purported potential (Fragoza, 2024). Underscoring the difficulty of talent identification, one study found a significant but limited *negative* correlation between the round of the draft a player was selected and the number of games played respectively within the National Football League, National Hockey League, National Basketball League, and Major League Baseball from 1980-1989 (Koz et al., 2012). Those factors assessed in the talent identification processes become focal points for athlete development programs as well in fostering elite performance training and development (Baker et al., 2017), and therefore possess many of the same inherent flaws as the talent identification process.

But why have talent identification and athlete development results been so mixed given the substantial dedication of resources, financial investment, time, and effort? A simple answer may be that the intentional, deliberate, and specific identification, assessment, and development of character strengths has been ignored in talent identification and athlete development processes at all levels. Character strengths are positive personality traits that are fundamental to our identity to produce advantageous outcomes for both individuals and society (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). When character strengths are considered, talent identification and athlete development seems to be more generically focused on vague and ambiguous terms like “good character” in the locker room rather than identifying specific character strengths that are well defined, identifiable, and potentially improvable. For example, University of Connecticut men’s basketball head coach Dan Hurley explains that in his recruiting process “[t]here’s measurable talents you have to have—the height, the speed, the skill set, [but] are [the parents] going to hold them accountable, have an expectation that when something goes wrong that it’s not the coach’s fault” (CBS Mornings, 2024). In addition, former NBA coach Avery Johnson notes that “[y]ou have to have strong character. A person with strong character is reliable, trustworthy, and

maintains their ethical standards. They consistently do the right thing, even when it's difficult or unpopular, and stand by their principles" (Johnson, 2024). While these coaches recognize the importance of non-physical traits like character in athletic success, it is less clear whether they have a valid and systematic way of identifying and developing these traits.

Character strengths are unique from the wider sweeping view of "good character" and/or virtues contemplated by Coach Hurley, Coach Johnson and others. Rather, character strengths are positive personality traits intrinsic to our identity, generating beneficial outcomes for both the individual and society, and enhancing the collective well-being—essentially forming a unified terminology to encapsulate the best aspects of human nature (Niemiec & Pearce, 2021).

Character strengths can be assessed with formal assessment tools and informal observation by oneself or their peers, and similarly can be developed and/or strengthened through experience and intentional efforts such as interventions (Niemiec, 2017; Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Some academics and mental performance specialists have suggested that character strengths, such as perseverance, prudence, hope, and creativity, create a foundation for other strengths and psychological constructs (Niemiec & Pearce, 2021; G. Park, personal communication, February 10, 2024). However, academic research on leveraging of character strengths for talent identification and athlete development towards improved sports performance is sparse and generally speaks of research that should be undertaken (e.g., Niemiec, 2017; Riedl & Klatt, 2023; Tomé-Lourido et al., 2022). Nevertheless, some research on the relationship between personality and sports performance has occurred in the past 15 years (e.g., Allen et al., 2011, 2014; Bell et al., 2013; Kaiseler et al., 2012; Piedmont et al., 1999; Piepiora, 2021). For example, one study aimed to determine if the five-factor model of personality could predict athletic performance and found that neuroticism and conscientiousness together explained about

12% of the variance in coaches' ratings, while conscientiousness alone predicted 7% of the variance in actual game statistics among 68 female NCAA Division I soccer players (Piedmont et al., 1999). Despite the limited academic research specifically linking personality to sports performance, these existing studies provide a promising foundation for further exploration of the relationship between character strengths and sports performance.

In the current paper, I will build on earlier efforts by exploring the relationship between character strengths and sports performance and recommending ways that sports organizations can leverage the VIA Character Strengths model. First, I will explain the history of character strengths, their importance and key characteristics relevant to sports performance. Second, I will establish the existing relationship of character strengths and related constructs to sports performance and hypothesize that many character strengths directly or indirectly support improved sports performance. Finally, I will propose frameworks for both talent identification and athlete development to leverage of character strengths to improving athlete performance.

The Influence of Positive Psychology in Talent Identification and Athlete Development

A relatively new branch of psychology, positive psychology has gained traction in recent years by focusing on understanding and enhancing human strengths and well-being, in contrast to traditional psychology's emphasis on pathology and mental illness (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The roots of positive psychology can be traced back to the late 1990s when Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi began advocating for a shift in psychological research towards the study of positive human traits and experiences (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Since then, the field has grown exponentially, influencing various domains of psychological practice and research, including sports performance (Mouton, 2016).

Key components of positive psychology include happiness, well-being, and character

strengths—all of which contribute to a comprehensive understanding of human flourishing (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Seligman, 2011; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Central to positive psychology and the focus of this paper is the concept of character strengths—fundamental positive traits that contribute to an individual’s overall well-being and societal flourishing (Niemiec & Pearce, 2021). Peterson and Seligman (2004) classified these 24 specific strengths, such as courage, kindness, and creativity, into six broader virtues: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence—so-called VIA Institute on Character (VIA) character strengths (Niemiec & Pearce, 2021). These 24 character strengths are considered to be fundamental to achieving a fulfilling and meaningful life (Niemiec & Pearce, 2021; Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

This paper seeks to further uncover and develop the connection between character strengths and sports performance, and hypothesizes that identifying, fostering and developing character strengths can lead to improved athletic outcomes.

Character Strengths

Historical Foundations and Theoretical Underpinnings of Character Strengths

The origins of character strengths can be traced back to philosophical traditions and psychological theories that emphasized human potential, flourishing, and the inherent virtues that contribute to a meaningful and fulfilling life, setting the stage for the development of positive psychology (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Character strengths are fundamental positive traits that contribute to an individual’s overall well-being and societal flourishing (Niemiec & Pearce, 2021). These strengths, encompassing a range of virtues, are essential for achieving personal fulfillment, effective functioning, and meaningful engagement in various life domains (Niemiec & Pearce, 2021).

Peterson and Seligman (2004) identified six overarching virtues (wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence) common to the world's most influential cultural traditions—Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judeo-Christianity, Islam and Athenian Greece—and further identified 24 character strengths that represent specific aspects of these six virtues. The character strengths of wisdom involve acquiring and effectively utilizing knowledge to solve problems and navigate life to contribute to personal growth, effective decision-making, and a balanced understanding of the broader context in various situations (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Courage enables individuals to overcome internal doubts and external challenges to achieve goals through an enduring willpower to take principled action despite potential negative outcomes (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The character strengths of humanity involve connecting and empathizing with others on a personal level to collectively foster genuine care, understanding, and selfless assistance to others in both individual and group settings (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Justice involves managing group interactions to ensure fairness by balancing individual desires with the greater good to foster effective collaboration, equitable treatment, and goal achievement within a community (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The character strengths of temperance involve self-restraint and moderation to manage emotions and prevent undesirable actions to collectively foster emotional stability, disciplined behavior, and long-term well-being (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Finally, transcendence is a recognition of the limits of our knowledge and an embracing of profound mysteries to serve the greater good to encourage a broader perspective on life and enhance well-being, resilience, and social harmony (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). See Appendix A for a more detailed summary of all 24 character

strengths.

Numerous studies using exploratory factor analysis on the 24 VIA Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS) scales (see below for more explanation) have revealed a general commonality in factors with differences in the number of factors (ranging from three to five) and their composition due to cultural and methodological variations across the studies (e.g., McGrath, 2014, 2022; McGrath & Walker, 2016; McGrath & Wallace, 2021; Partsch et al., 2022; Peterson et al., 2008; Peterson & Park, 2004; Shubert et al., 2019). For the purposes of this paper, the McGrath (2014) five-factor structure of interpersonal (fairness, kindness, teamwork, modesty, leadership, forgiveness), emotional (social IQ, humor, bravery, creativity, perspective), restraint (prudence, perseverance, self-regulation, judgment, honesty), theological (zest, hope, gratitude, spirituality, love), and intellectual (learning, beauty, curiosity) factors will be used as the primary framework for analyzing the relationship of character strengths to sports performance.

Character Strengths Attributes Are Ripe for Talent Identification and Athlete Development

Character strengths manifest in key life contexts such as work, school, community, and personal relationships, where they shape our identity and influence our actions and interactions (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019). They are seemingly omnipresent, may take different forms, are at risk of over and underuse, can be developed, can be observed, and can be measured (Niemiec, 2017, 2019, 2020; Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Niemiec & Pearce, 2021). Character strengths are essential elements of our being and are deeply integrated into who we are and how we engage with the world—contributing to personal well-being, the quality of relationships, and community enhancement (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019).

Character strengths may take different forms: “tonic strengths,” “phasic strengths,” and

“signature strengths” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Tonic strengths, such as curiosity, modesty, and zest, are consistently displayed except when circumstances dictate otherwise, whereas phasic strengths, like bravery, teamwork, and perspective, are dependent on specific situational demands (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Whilst tonic strengths require minimal encouragement to be maintained, phasic strengths need clear definition, training, and rewards for their appropriate expression—e.g., firefighters whose valor becomes automatic through extensive training (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). A signature strength is a deeply ingrained attribute that an individual authentically owns, frequently exercises, strongly identifies with, and which inherently contributes to their sense of fulfillment and well-being (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). These character strengths are characterized by a natural and enthusiastic expression, rapid learning and continuous innovation in their use, and an intrinsic motivation to utilize them (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The exercise of signature strengths is inherently fulfilling, intertwined with an individual’s identity, and manifests in behaviors that are contextually appropriate and emotionally enriching (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

In addition, character strengths must be balanced in order to enhance well-being and personal growth (Niemić, 2019). Overuse of a character strength can occur when it is applied excessively or inappropriately leading to negative outcomes such as being overly assertive to the point of aggressiveness (Niemić, 2017, 2019; Niemić & Pearce, 2021). On the other hand, underuse of a character strength involves not utilizing a strength enough which can prevent an individual from achieving potential benefits such as missing leadership opportunities due to underused assertiveness (Niemić, 2017, 2019; Niemić & Pearce, 2021). The “golden mean” is the ideal balance where a character strength is neither overused nor underused but instead involves using character strengths in a measured and contextually appropriate way (Niemić,

2017, 2019; Niemiec & Pearce, 2021).

Character strengths are dynamic and can be developed over time, influenced by life changes, unexpected events, and intentional efforts through interventions to cultivate them (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019). While some character strengths may become prominent and easily recognized, others may require more focused cultivation to grow (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019). When an individual scores low on a particular strength, it does not necessarily indicate a weakness—but rather a strength that is less developed, less valued, or that might not come as naturally (Niemiec, 2017). The development of these character strengths, whether they manifest in large or small ways, reinforces the idea that actively engaging with and investing in one’s character strengths can lead to significant personal growth (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019). For example, one may identify a lower strength from a self-assessment (see below for more detail) and actively try to use this character strength in new ways daily (Niemiec, 2017). In some circumstances, it may be helpful to use a signature strength to support and enhance the use of a less familiar one—a strategy known as the “towing effect” (Niemiec, 2017).

Identifying character strengths—known as “strengths-spotting”—is an essential activity for personal development with character strengths through the recognition and labeling of character strengths either in oneself or others (Niemiec, 2017). This practice enhances self-awareness and aids to identify personal characteristics that are crucial for growth and well-being (Niemiec, 2017). Techniques to foster strengths-spotting include taking assessments, self-monitoring activities, and reflecting on personal stories that illustrate these strengths in action (Niemiec, 2017). These strategies help individuals appreciate their unique character strengths and encourage the expression of these strengths in daily life to thereby promote a deeper understanding of self and improving interactions and relationships with others (Niemiec, 2017).

Moreover, by affirming these strengths, individuals can expand their self-concept and resilience against stress (Niemiec, 2017).

A corollary to strengths-spotting, the Aware-Explore-Apply model is a three-phase approach to personal development that begins with increasing self-awareness, often initiated by taking the VIA-IS (see below for more explanation) to identify personal strengths (Niemiec, 2017). In the “Aware” phase, individuals reflect on how their top character strengths relate to their past experiences, successes, and challenges in order to enhance their understanding through self-reflection and discussions (Niemiec, 2017). The “Explore” phase deepens this understanding by linking character strengths to personal history and value with the possibility of involving more reflective practices like journaling (Niemiec, 2017). Finally, the “Apply” phase focuses on integrating these character strengths into daily life through action planning and routine establishment with dual aims for practical application / behavioral change and maintenance as a crucial ongoing effort (Niemiec, 2017).

Assessments can support practitioners and clients to understand and cultivate their best qualities, foster self-awareness, and grow. Peterson and Seligman (2004) created the VIA-IS as a 240-item self-report instrument with 24 scales, each representing a character strength and consisting of 10 items. Respondents rate items on a 5-point scale from “very much like me” to “very much unlike me,” with all items keyed in the same direction so that “very much like me” always indicates a higher presence of the strength (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Research on the VIA-IS scales has shown internal reliability, test-retest reliability, and validity (Park et al., 2004; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). While the original model of 24 character strengths classified into six virtues guided the VIA-IS’s development, Peterson and Seligman (2004) acknowledged that an alternative latent variable model might better describe the relationships among the strength

scales (e.g., the McGrath (2014) five-factor structure).

An Opportunity to Assess the Relationship of Character Strengths to Sports Performance

With a few exceptions (e.g., Riedl & Klatt, 2023; Tomé-Lourido et al., 2022), existing research on the relationship of VIA Character Strengths and sports performance is tangential and peripheral at best. Niemiec (2017) notes that “flagship papers for character strengths would be welcomed in . . . sport (performance enhancement)” (p. 289). Similarly, Riedl and Klatt (2023) emphasize the potential of character strengths to enhance performance in sports and call for further research to explore their applicability across different sports contexts and their role in personality development. In addition, Niemiec and Pearce (2021) hypothesize that:

character strengths are the central mechanisms that allow these other strength categories to operate. For example, if someone has a talent for playing the guitar, they need to invest in ~10,000 h of deliberate practice over a 10 years period (Ericsson and Ward, 2007) to really develop that talent/intelligence; this requires depths of perseverance, self-regulation, hope, prudence, creativity, and other character strengths to maximize that talent. In this way, character strengths are the driving force for other types of strengths.

(p. 4)

Relatedly, Tomé-Lourido et al. (2022) has developed a program of more than 35 interventions over eight weeks aimed at enhancing character strengths in young soccer players from a Spanish professional club. For example, athletes watched and discussed the film “Inside Out” to deepen their understanding of emotions and targeting the character strengths of self-regulation, creativity, and social intelligence (Tomé-Lourido et al., 2022). Similarly, athletes were asked to write stories that demonstrated how personal strengths had been used or reflected to increase awareness as to how they use their character strengths (Tomé-Lourido et al., 2022). Results of

the study indicated that such interventions could significantly improve performance satisfaction, well-being, and reduce the percentage of time feeling unhappy (Tomé-Lourido et al., 2022). Although not focused on the impact on sports performance, the study highlights the potential of character strengths interventions in sports.

This paper builds upon suggestions from Niemiec (2017) and Riedl and Klatt (2023) to leverage character strengths to improve sports performance and seeks to build on the work of Niemiec and Pearce (2021) and Tomé-Lourido et al. (2022) to further develop and improve talent identification and athletic development programs.

Character Strengths Positively Influence Sports Performance

Athletic performance is meaningfully influenced by various character strengths across different domains. The McGrath (2014) five-factor structure—interpersonal, emotional, restraint, theological, and intellectual—can collectively contribute to an athlete’s overall success in several ways.

Interpersonal

The interpersonal character strengths factor, such as kindness, teamwork, humility, leadership, and forgiveness, plays a pivotal role in enhancing sports performance. By fostering a supportive sports environment, interpersonal character strengths enhance individual athletic ability and boost overall team dynamics and effectiveness (Gill, 2018).

Kindness and positive emotions are believed to play an important role in sports for both individual athletes and teams (Gill, 2018; McCarthy, 2011). In looking at the impact of positive emotions in various contexts, which can be fostered through acts of kindness, some have suggested that positive emotions can enhance sports performance by improving motivation, attention, and coping strategies (McCarthy, 2011). In addition, after interviewing numerous

current and former elite athletes, coaches and other sports figures, others have suggested that kindness is a moral virtue that acts as a strategic tool for sports leaders to boost team cohesion, resilience, and effectiveness (Gill, 2018). Thus, fostering kindness within athletic teams can theoretically contribute to an enhanced athletic performance (Gill, 2018; McCarthy, 2011).

Likewise, the character strength of teamwork emphasizes how effective teams function like cohesive, living organisms (Barker & Rossi, 2012; Duarte et al., 2012; Halldorsson et al., 2017; McEwan & Beauchamp, 2014). Whilst teamwork is often idealized in theory, it can also present certain challenges where conflict in theories of teamwork can impact performance outcomes negatively if not managed well (Barker & Rossi, 2012). In a case study of seven physical education teachers from a secondary school in Australia, three rounds of interviews with each teacher revealed that these teachers used various discursive resources to describe teamwork, often differing significantly from each other and existing theories and sometimes offering vague descriptions or alternative concepts (Barker & Rossi, 2012). Moreover, a deep understanding of group dynamics and shared goals by team members is imperative for optimal sports team performance (Halldorsson et al., 2017; McEwan & Beauchamp, 2014). For example, by applying classical sociological concepts, researchers examined two internationally successful Icelandic sports teams and discovered that teamwork, secrecy, and backstage behavior bond teammates (Halldorsson et al., 2017).

Humility can have a profound impact on sports performance in both individual and team contexts (Austin, 2014; Brymer & Oades, 2009; Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004). For example, in employing a phenomenological method, researchers conducted unstructured interviews with 15 participants in extreme sports such as BASE jumping, extreme skiing, and solo rope-free climbing that revealed that humility can support individual extreme sports athletes by enabling

them to embrace risks and challenges with a clear perspective of their abilities and limitations to enhance their courage and performance under pressure (Brymer & Oades, 2009). Humility is also believed to foster a healthy team environment and enhancing individual athletic performance by supporting athletes in acknowledging their strengths and limitations accurately, which can lead to improved learning and personal development (Austin, 2014). In team sports, humility is believed to enhance teamwork and cohesion to enhance overall team performance (Austin, 2014), and in leadership roles, humble athletes can inspire their teammates and followers by modeling dedication, respect, and modesty (Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004)—qualities that are vital for team success and morale.

The interplay between leadership and sports performance demonstrates a profound influence that effective leadership exerts on both individual and team dynamics by enhancing team cohesion and athletic performance (Chelladurai, 1980, 2007, 2012; Cotterill & Fransen, 2016). Leadership adapted to the unique demands of sports—acknowledging team dynamics and individual athletes' needs—fosters more effective management and elevated performance outcomes (Fransen et al., 2017). For example, in examining three professional teams during their preparation phase for the 2016 Australian Football League season, players and coaching staff were assessed for leadership in four roles (task, motivational, social, and external leader) via an online survey (Fransen et al., 2017). Using social network analysis to calculate leadership quality, the results showed that the team with the highest-quality athlete leadership excelled in all indicators of team effectiveness, including a shared sense of purpose, commitment to team goals, confidence, and performance (Fransen et al., 2017).

Finally, the relationship between forgiveness and sports performance encompasses various psychological and social dimensions that indicate that athletes who practice self-

forgiveness may experience better mental health, resilience, and ultimately enhanced performance (Cowden et al., 2018; Killham et al., 2018). Female athletes, in particular, benefit from self-compassion practices that may be viewed as closely linked to forgiveness (Killham et al., 2018). One study investigated the relationship between self-compassion, self-criticism, and perceived sport performance in 82 young female athletes (Killham et al., 2018). Participants completed measures of these variables around a scheduled competition, indicating that self-compassion was inversely related to self-criticism and positively associated with perceived athletic performance (Killham et al., 2018). Hierarchical regression analyses further showed that self-compassion accounted for 5.4% unique variance in perceived sport performance beyond self-criticism, suggesting that self-compassion significantly enhances sport performance while self-criticism does not (Killham et al., 2018).

Emotional

The influence of emotional character strengths, such as social intelligence, humor, bravery, and creativity, on sports performance is multifaceted. High social intelligence allows athletes to navigate complex interactions and enhance team dynamics, humor reduces training and competition stress, bravery fosters resilience and performance under pressure, and creativity provides strategic advantages through innovative plays.

Athletes with high social intelligence are believed to navigate interpersonal interactions more effectively to enhance team cohesion and individual performance (Liu & Boyatzis, 2021; Rayat, 2016). Athletes proficient in social intelligence should be better equipped to interpret social cues and regulate emotional responses effectively to promote a healthier psychological state even under competitive pressures (Liu & Boyatzis, 2021). In sports like boxing, weightlifting, and wrestling, where individual performance is intensely scrutinized, social

intelligence helps athletes gain critical social support and constructive feedback to further influence their training and competitive outcomes (Rayat, 2016). One study randomly selected 240 college male athletes (boxers, weightlifters, and wrestlers) and utilized the Social Intelligence Scale to assess levels of social intelligence amongst these athletes (Rayat, 2016). The results revealed that boxers exhibited higher levels of social intelligence compared to weightlifters and wrestlers (Rayat, 2016).

Humor is considered an important tool to ease the seriousness of training and competition by fostering a more enjoyable environment (including team atmospheres) in an otherwise stressful situation and by enhancing athletes' psychological resilience (Aggerholm, 2015). For example, in one study data were collected from 201 basketball players via a questionnaire and analyzed using correlational and covariance analyses to show a statistically significant relationship between humor styles and anxiety-related performance (Dakwo et al., 2023). This suggests that humor can mitigate the severity of anxiety in basketball practices which in turn can improve learning and execution of sports skills (Dakwo et al., 2023).

The construct of bravery, often equated with courage in sports, is a pivotal element in understanding athletic performance. Bravery has consistently been shown to influence success in sports by enabling athletes to face fears and uncertainties with resilience and determination (Cigrovski et al., 2018; Konter & Ng, 2012). Specifically, in higher-risk sports like downhill skiing, bravery is directly linked to athletes' learning success and performance, by empowering athletes to undertake challenging tasks and push their boundaries without succumbing to worry or fear (Cigrovski et al., 2018). For example, one study investigated the impact of psychological traits on learning new motor skills in alpine skiing by examining 337 students through a four-part questionnaire, including measurement of courage, worry and fear through the Sports Courage

Scale, Penn State Worry Questionnaire, and Alpine skiing fear inventory (Cigrovski et al., 2018). The results showed that for beginners, lower fear and higher self-efficacy and mastery were associated with better performance, while experienced skiers demonstrated better determination, mastery, and self-efficacy. Moreover, males scored higher in sport courage and females exhibited higher fear levels, which negatively correlated with skiing performance (Cigrovski et al., 2018).

Creativity in sports, particularly in team sports like soccer, hockey, lacrosse and basketball, is increasingly recognized for its critical role in enhancing performance by enabling athletes to produce unpredictable and innovative plays that can change the outcome of games. For example, creative actions in soccer, such as unexpected passes or novel strategic runs, often lead to demonstrable advantages on the pitch by disrupting standard defensive formations and creating new scoring opportunities (Kempe & Memmert, 2018; Martin & Cox, 2016; Morris, 2000). Researchers examined 208 athletes (94 males and 114 females, aged 14 to 37, participating in 17 different sports) to determine the relationship between creativity and skill levels using various adapted creativity measures from the Runco Creative Assessment Battery (Richard et al., 2017). The participants were grouped by skill level (intermediate, advanced, expert) and their creativity was assessed through divergent thinking tasks, attitude and values scales, self-report measures, and accomplishment checklists (Richard et al., 2017). The results indicated that expert athletes scored significantly higher in creativity, particularly in divergent thinking flexibility, and years of practice correlated with fluency, flexibility, and originality (Richard et al., 2017).

Restraint

The character strengths of the restraint factor guide athletes to make judicious decisions,

adhere to disciplined training regimens, and manage their emotional and physiological states.

Often viewed through the lens of risk management and decision-making, prudence plays an important role in athletes' performance and career longevity (Brown, 1990). Athletes who demonstrate prudence in sports often exhibit lower risk-taking behaviors and higher levels of aggression management, which are positively correlated with enhanced sports performance (Predoiu et al., 2022). Prudence also enables athletes to make judicious choices about training intensity, competition participation, and overall career management—balancing immediate desires against long-term health and success (Woodman et al., 2013). For example, researchers investigated the relationship between risk-taking and overuse injuries in 73 talented junior tennis players (45 boys and 28 girls, ages 11-14) over 32 weeks, using the Oslo Sports Trauma Research Centre Questionnaire on Health Problems and the Iowa Gambling Task to measure risk-taking. Linear regression analyses showed that in boys, risk-taking significantly predicted time loss due to overuse injuries and overuse severity (Van Der Sluis et al., 2017).

Grit, mental toughness, and resilience in sports all represent facets of the broader character strength of perseverance that emphasizes sustained effort and resilience in the face of challenges that can collectively contribute to athletes' capacity to stay committed to long-term goals, manage stress, and overcome setbacks effectively. The concept of grit involves a blend of passion and perseverance towards long-term goals (Duckworth et al., 2007), and is increasingly recognized as a key factor that enhances athletic performance by encouraging persistence and resilience in training and competition (Cormier et al., 2021). In one example, researchers investigated the relationship between grit and perceptual-cognitive skills in 385 elite youth male soccer players (aged 12-15) from national youth soccer championships in Australia by using the Short Grit Scale (Grit-S) scale and Participation History Questionnaire (PHQ) to measure grit,

and various perceptual-cognitive activities to assess decision making, situational probability, and pattern recognition (Larkin et al., 2016). The results showed that players with higher grit accumulated more hours in soccer-specific activities and performed better on decision-making and situational probability tasks (Larkin et al., 2016). In a similar study, 388 elite youth male soccer players selected by regional development programs to compete in national youth championships in Australia (average age of 13.8 years) were observed using the Grit-S scale and PHQ to evaluate both structured and unstructured practices (Larkin et al., 2023). Results indicated that players with higher grit accumulated more hours in structured soccer activities and performed better in perceptual-cognitive tasks, which highlights the importance of grit in the development of young athletes' cognitive skills and overall performance (Larkin et al., 2023). Moreover, engaging in a variety of challenging and competitive situations appears to foster the growth of grit by enhancing an athlete's capacity to persevere through setbacks and failures (Moles et al., 2017). Exploring the moderating role of grit, researchers used a motivational research paradigm to assess how mastery- or ego-involving feedback affects the performance of 71 high school soccer players on a kicking task (Moles et al., 2017). The results demonstrated that athletes performed better with mastery feedback, and grit significantly moderated the relationship between feedback and performance, with low-grit athletes benefiting more from mastery feedback than high-grit athletes (Moles et al., 2017).

Similar to grit, mental toughness is “a psychological capacity to deliver high performance on a regular basis despite varying degrees of situational demands” (Gucciardi et al., 2016, p. 81) that enhances sports performance by enabling athletes to endure challenges and recover from setbacks effectively (Jones et al., 2002). For example, one study examined the relationship between mental toughness and the use of psychological performance strategies in athletes (Crust

& Azadi, 2010). Sixty-seven male and 40 female athletes in the United Kingdom, competing at various levels, completed the MTQ48 to measure mental toughness and the Test of Performance Strategies to assess psychological strategy use in practice and competition (Crust & Azadi, 2010). The results showed that higher levels of mental toughness were reported by athletes of county standard and above compared to club/university athletes, with the commitment subscale of mental toughness frequently associated with performance strategies (Crust & Azadi, 2010). Moreover, athletes with strong mental toughness exhibit sustained commitment to their goals (similar to grit) that contributes to long-term success and the ability to perform under the intense pressures of elite sports (Thelwell et al., 2005; Weissensteiner et al., 2012). For example, researchers subjected adult cricket batsmen of differing skill levels to a series of psychological tests, including the Mental Toughness Inventory, the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale, the Athletic Coping Skills Inventory, and the Attributional Styles Questionnaire (Weissensteiner et al., 2012). The results indicated that highly skilled batsmen were primarily distinguished by their higher levels of global mental toughness (Weissensteiner et al., 2012).

Resilience in sports is recognized as another important factor for performance and psychological robustness in athletes by influencing an athlete's ability to cope with adversity and enhance their competitive edge. Resilience is not just about enduring but also about thriving in the face of challenges—both impacting sports outcomes (Galli & Gonzalez, 2015; Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014). One study examined the relationship between resilience and coping strategies in 235 Spanish athletes, assessed at the start of the last competitive mesocycle and after a major competition using the Coping Inventory for Competitive Sport and the Resilience Scale, and demonstrated that athletes with higher resilience tended to use more adaptive coping strategies, suggesting a link between resilient qualities and effective coping mechanisms in sports (Secades

et al., 2016).

Self-regulation involves the ability to set goals, monitor progress, and adjust behaviors to achieve long-term success in highly competitive environments (McCormick et al., 2019). For example, elite soccer players who excel in self-regulation are better equipped to refine their tactical and technical skills through continuous self-assessment and feedback integration (Jonker et al., 2010). This study examined self-regulatory skills in 222 talented athletes aged 12–16, focusing on competitive sport levels (junior international vs. junior national) and types of sport (individual vs. team) (Jonker et al., 2010). Multivariate analyses of covariance and discriminant function analysis revealed that “reflection” distinguishes top athletes, while individual sport athletes scored higher on “planning” and “effort” compared to team sport athletes (Jonker et al., 2010). Moreover, athletes with robust self-regulatory skills tend to engage more in deliberate practice, which facilitates the mastering of complex physical and strategic demands of their sports (Toering et al., 2009). Researchers investigated the relationship between self-regulation and performance in elite and non-elite youth soccer players aged 11–17 in the Netherlands and asked participants to complete a questionnaire assessing planning, self-monitoring, evaluation, reflection, effort, and self-efficacy (Toering et al., 2009). Logistic regression analysis, controlling for age, revealed that higher scores on reflection and effort were significantly associated with elite performance levels suggesting that elite players are more self-aware and willing to invest effort compared to non-elite peers (Toering et al., 2009).

Theological

The theological character strengths, such as zest, hope and gratitude, guide athletes to maintain high energy and enthusiasm, foster resilience and strategic goal pursuit, and cultivate a positive team environment.

Characterized by high energy and enthusiasm, zest can improve athletic performance through increased overall participation enjoyment (Russell et al., 2019). Zest motivates athletes to initiate action and to sustain efforts even in the face of challenges resulting in a positive and energized sporting environment (Totterdell, 1999). One study involved 33 male professional cricketers from four teams, aged 19 to 37, who used pocket computers to record their moods and performance ratings three times daily over the course of a championship match (Totterdell, 1999). Using pooled time-series and correlation analyses, the results revealed that players' subjective and objective performances were positively associated with feelings of happiness, energy, enthusiasm, focus, and confidence (Totterdell, 1999).

Hope, characterized by the desire and pathway to achieve goals, influences athletic performance by fostering resilience, motivation, and strategic goal pursuit (Curry et al., 1997; Feltz, 1988; McCarthy, 2011). Some argue that athletes with high levels of hope are better equipped to deal with adversity due to their ability to envision multiple pathways to meet their goals; thus, enhancing their persistence in training and competitive environments (Feltz, 1988). In addition, hopeful athletes tend to exhibit greater psychological robustness due to the well-documented positive correlation between hope and mental skills like optimism (Woodman et al., 2009) that translate into better performance under pressure by fostering a resilient mindset (Gustafsson & Skoog, 2012). For example, one study explored the link between explanatory style, as measured by the Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ), and athletic performance using correlational designs (Gordon, 2008). After completing the ASQ, the performance of 22 male soccer players were analyzed over eight matches to reveal that optimistic players performed better overall, particularly during losses (Gordon, 2008).

Gratitude can enhance performance by fostering a positive team environment and

strengthening athlete relationships (Gabana et al., 2022; Howells & Fitzallen, 2020). Gratitude interventions that encourage athletes to recognize and appreciate the contributions and support of their peers and coaches are shown to positively impact athletes' performance by fostering a supportive atmosphere and increasing cohesion among team members (Gabana et al., 2022; Howells & Fitzallen, 2020). For example, researchers examined the effects of a gratitude intervention on state and trait gratitude, mental health, resilience, team cohesion, and coach-athlete relationships among 18 female high school soccer players divided into two groups, with one group including the coach's active participation (Gabana et al., 2022). Measures used included the Gratitude Adjective Checklist, Gratitude Questionnaire, Mental Health Continuum, Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale, Youth Sport Environment Questionnaire, and Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (Gabana et al., 2022). The results showed that gratitude interventions can enhance interpersonal variables related to sport performance, as evidenced by significant improvements in team cohesion and coach-athlete relationships post-intervention (Gabana et al., 2022).

Intellectual

Intellectual character strengths, such as appreciation of beauty and excellence, drive athletes to continuously seek knowledge, embrace challenges, and find inspiration in their surroundings, which contribute to improved skill acquisition and resilience. The character strength of the appreciation of beauty and excellence can positively influence athletic performance by fostering inspiration, motivation, and emotional upliftment. Athletes often draw inspiration from the beauty and excellence they observe in their surroundings—the elegance of a well-executed play, the harmony of teamwork, or the awe-inspiring natural environments where many sports take place. This sense of awe and inspiration can enhance athletes' focus, increase

their motivation, and elevate their overall performance levels (Gonzalez et al., 2011). For example, one study examined the impact of pep talks on 151 college football players' inspiration and motivation using a simulated pep talk scenario (Gonzalez et al., 2011). Each player was randomly assigned to either a treatment group, which viewed an inspirational speech by a coach, or a control group, which viewed a coach giving game instructions (Gonzalez et al., 2011). The results from a one-way ANOVA showed significant group differences, with the experimental group reporting higher levels of inspiration, inspiration to perform, and emotional dominance compared to the control group; however, the pep talk did not significantly influence motivation, pleasure, or arousal (Gonzalez et al., 2011).

In conclusion, the McGrath (2014) five-factor character strengths—interpersonal, emotional, restraint, theological, and intellectual—are integral to enhancing sports performance. Interpersonal character strengths foster team cohesion and support, while emotional character strengths help manage stress and encourage innovation. Restraint character strengths ensure wise decision-making and sustained effort, theological character strengths provide motivation and resilience, and intellectual character strengths drive continuous improvement and engagement. Collectively, these five character strength factors create a holistic framework that supports both individual and team athletic success. With this detailed analysis of how nearly all 24 VIA character strengths influence (or have the potential to influence) athletic performance, sports teams, organizations, coaches and mental performance specialists are now equipped to assess and develop these character strengths to lead to more effective talent identification and athlete development efforts.

How Can Character Strengths Improve Talent Identification Frameworks?

Talent identification in sports is a multifaceted process that spans from youth to

professional levels, involving a systematic process of scouting, testing and evaluation of physical, technical, tactical, and psychological attributes to predict athletes' future success (Hambrick et al., 2016; Johnston et al., 2018). In professional sports in the United States, this often includes combines and draft days where athletes undergo a series of physical, psychological, and skill-based assessments (Baker et al., 2017). At the youth level globally, soccer academies and other youth programs focus on basic skills, physical attributes, and potential for growth (Morris, 2000). With the increasing recognition of psychological factors as potential indicators of future performance potential, this process continues to evolve to comprehensively consider characteristics which may predict and enhance athletic performance (Abbott & Collins, 2004; Hamidi & Norjali Wazir, 2022). But, why are we not also considering character strengths systematically?

Although the measures of various psychological factors may be imprecise, attributes like resilience, motivation, and confidence all being evaluated by talent scouts and evaluators (Hamidi & Norjali Wazir, 2022). These attributes and many others contribute to an athlete's development and performance, thus necessitating their inclusion for a holistic assessment (Gould et al., 2002; Hamidi & Norjali Wazir, 2022). In addition, personality assessments have been utilized to understand an athlete's potential beyond physical capabilities (Gee et al., 2010). However, talent scouts and evaluators still need to find ways to continue to bridge the gap between performance psychology theory and practice—particularly regarding psychological assessments—to further improve the talent identification process (Abbott & Collins, 2004).

From a sport-specific perspective, research on talent identification in soccer has examined physical, physiological, psychological, and sociological predictors of talent (Williams & Reilly, 2000). Physical predictors include anthropometric characteristics such as stature, body

composition, and physical maturity, while physiological measures focus on aspects like maximal oxygen uptake and anaerobic power (Williams & Reilly, 2000). Psychological predictors highlight the importance of mental attributes such as self-confidence, motivation, and coping strategies, and sociological considerations emphasize the influence of familial support, social class, and coaching on the development of soccer talent (Williams & Reilly, 2000). Others have examined various psychological factors such as mental toughness, motivation, self-confidence, and stress resilience to highlight the importance of these psychological attributes in predicting future success and performance in young athletes (Morris, 2000).

On the positive side, some talent identification practices successfully incorporate a multifaceted approach, as evidenced above, to evaluate a range of physical, technical, and psychological attributes. The recent inclusion of personality assessments offers additional valuable insights into athlete potential to further enhance the talent identification processes (Gee et al., 2010). However, there remain areas for improvement in ensuring the appropriate factors are being considered, assessed and examined. Various factors such as environment, coaching quality, and support systems are just some examples of the additional interconnected factors impacting the efficacy of talent identification processes that are not often considered (Johnston et al., 2018). Understanding this full universe of factors impacting performance ensures that talent identification assessments are part of an integrated approach (Côté et al., 2007; Johnston et al., 2018).

Despite the empirical evidence and theoretical foundations set forth above in “The Relationship of Character Strengths to Sports Performance” that character strengths and their related constructs positively influence athletic performance, there does not appear to be any inclusion of the systematic assessment of character strengths in the talent identification process

at any level, which provides an opportunity to provide a more holistic evaluation of athletes by capturing critical psychological dimensions often overlooked by traditional methods.

Assessing Character Strengths in Athletes

Providing the requisite insights into the character strengths that an athlete has that may contribute to their success, character strengths assessment will become the cornerstone component of any comprehensive talent identification process that leverages character strengths. These assessments can be conducted using both formal and informal tools—each offering unique advantages in different contexts—from youth soccer academies to professional draft combines.

Tools and Training for Character Strength Assessment

Understanding that the Big Five personality dimensions (a close relative to character strengths) influence various aspects of athletic performance, coping strategies, and interpersonal dynamics, talent evaluators have already integrated personality assessments into talent identification processes (Bell et al., 2013; Kaiseler et al., 2012). Formal and informal assessments of personality, such as the NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R) and the Big Five Inventory, are now commonly used in sports to evaluate these traits (Piedmont et al., 1999). For example, the NEO-PI-R has been utilized in professional soccer to predict player performance and tailor mental conditioning programs (Piedmont et al., 1999). Borrowing from this groundwork laid in the area of personality assessment and sports performance, talent identification programs should similarly expand their scope to include character strengths assessments.

Formal assessment tools such as the VIA-IS and other psychometric tests are widely recognized for their reliability and validity in measuring character strengths (McGrath, 2014; Niemiec & Pearce, 2021; Peterson & Park, 2004; Peterson & Seligman, 2004); however,

consideration should also be given to the risks of dishonest self-reporting, including, but not limited to, social desirability effects, given the high stakes in competitive sports (see “Key Considerations for Character Strength Assessment” below for more discussion). In the context of youth sports, formal character strength assessment tools can be integrated into scouting and training programs to identify young athletes with certain character strengths. For example, prior to youth soccer academy tryouts, coaches can administer the VIA-IS to assess character strengths such as teamwork, perseverance, and self-regulation that they may view as most important or impactful for their team’s performance. This allows for a more nuanced understanding of each athlete’s potential beyond physical abilities to ensure a holistic approach to talent identification (Christensen, 2009). Similarly, in college recruitment, coaches can administer the VIA-IS during campus visits to evaluate character strengths to provide a more complete profile of a recruit’s potential both on and off the field. At the professional level, formal assessments are equally valuable. During draft combines and pro days on university campuses, structured psychometric evaluations are already used to gauge athletes’ psychological readiness for the demands of professional sports, including personality assessment as discussed above. In addition, the VIA-IS or a variation thereof could be given to former coaches and teammates as another measure of third-party character strengths assessment. Other character strength-specific tools like the Sport Courage Scale can assess an athlete’s ability to handle pressure and adversity, which are critical for success at the highest levels (Konter & Ng, 2012). Similarly, the Humor Climate in Sport Scale, which measures and enhance humor’s positive effects within sports teams, may be used to reinforce humor’s role in promoting a healthy psychological environment and enhancing team cohesion and performance (Schei et al., 2021). These formal assessments in addition to the VIA-IS can be integrated into interviews, other psychological testing, and physical testing to provide a

comprehensive profile of each prospective athlete.

Informal assessment tools, such as peer and coach observations, can complement more formal assessment methods by providing additional context and real-time insights into an athlete's behavior and interactions. These tools are particularly useful in dynamic and collaborative environments where character strengths are displayed in action.

Strength-spotting can be a powerful informal assessment tool for identifying character strengths in athletes. This process should involve recognizing and labeling specific character strengths exhibited by athletes, specific training for talent evaluators, a structured evaluation process, and detailed documentation of observations. Talent evaluators, including coaches, scouts, performance coaches and peers should undergo training to become proficient in strength-spotting. This training should cover the “language” of character strengths, which includes understanding the definitions, synonyms, correlates, and dimensions of each character strength (Niemic, 2017). Such knowledge equips talent evaluators with a systematic framework for identifying character strengths in various contexts beyond simply identifying “good character” and should enhance talent evaluators' observation and listening skills to detect nonverbal and verbal cues that indicate the presence of character strengths (Niemic, 2017). Talent evaluators should approach each evaluation with a mindset focused on identifying strengths—in essence, wearing “character strengths glasses” (Niemic, 2017). As noted below, they should observe athletes in both formal settings, such as training sessions and competitions, and informal settings, like team meetings and casual interactions.

The strengths spotting process should be structured around three key steps: labeling, explaining, and appreciating (Niemic, 2017). Talent evaluators should identify and name the specific strength they observe in the athlete (Niemic, 2017). For example, if an athlete shows

perseverance by continuing to practice despite setbacks, the talent evaluator should label this behavior as perseverance. After labeling the character strength, the talent evaluator should provide a rationale or evidence for why they identified this particular character strength (Niemic, 2017). For example, the talent evaluator might note that the athlete demonstrated perseverance by consistently attending extra practice sessions after a loss. The final step involves expressing appreciation for the athlete's character strength (Niemic, 2017). This could be done verbally or in written form, highlighting the value of the character strength in contributing to the athlete's success and the team's overall performance. This step reinforces the athlete's positive behavior, encourages continued development of the strength (Niemic, 2017), and will become an important aspect to the integration of character strengths into the athlete development program detailed below.

Talent evaluators should meticulously document their observations to ensure they provide clear, actionable insights. Each assessment form should include the observed character strength (e.g., perseverance), the context and behavior observed (e.g., "During the last training session, [Athlete] displayed perseverance by completing additional drills despite visible fatigue"), an explanation and rationale for the behavior demonstrating the character strength (e.g., details about the behavior and its impact on performance or team dynamics), and an appreciation or rationale for why the observed behavior is important (including notes on how the talent evaluator expressed appreciation for the observed strength, such as verbal praise during a team meeting or a written note acknowledging the athlete's effort, if applicable). Specificity in observation and assessment will allow talent evaluators to understand precisely why and how the identified character strength will support future individual and team performance as opposed to evaluations of "good character" under current talent identification models.

Talent evaluators should also be keen to observe a variety of behaviors that may indicate different character strengths. For example, an athlete who suggests new strategies during a game or comes up with innovative solutions to problems may be indicative of creativity. Curiosity may be shown where a player frequently asks questions to understand the game better or explores new techniques during practice. An athlete who challenges conventional ideas or takes risks in critical moments of a game may be exhibiting bravery. Kindness may be present where a team member who goes out of their way to support a struggling teammate by offering encouragement or assistance. Finally, a player who actively seeks input from all team members and ensures everyone feels included during group activities may be displaying teamwork. By implementing strength-spotting as an informal assessment tool, coaches, scouts, and peers can provide valuable insights into athletes' character strengths.

In sum, talent identification programs should borrow from the existing work done with personality assessments to include also character strengths evaluations. Formal tools like the VIA-IS offer a comprehensive framework for assessing traits such as perseverance, teamwork, and leadership (McGrath, 2014; Niemiec, 2017). Additionally, informal methods like peer and coach observations through strength spotting can offer real-time and retrospective insights into an athlete's behavior and interactions and counterbalance any potential self-reporting biases with VIA-IS; however, limitations may exist where athletes progress through several different sports organizations such as from high school to college in comparison to soccer academies and baseball minor league systems where organizational consistency is more likely. By incorporating these character strengths assessments into talent identification processes, sports organizations can better identify athletes that are best positioned for peak performance in the future.

Scenarios for Character Strength Assessment

Both formal and informal character strengths assessments for youth, college and professional athletes can be implemented in a variety of ways based upon the relevant circumstances. In youth sports, coaches and other talent evaluators can observe how young athletes interact with peers during training and competitions. For example, observing how a player encourages teammates after a mistake or takes on a leadership role during a game can provide valuable information about their character strengths. Self-assessments, where athletes reflect on their own behaviors and attitudes, can also be incorporated into regular training routines to promote self-awareness and personal growth. During college recruitment, coaches might look for athletes who not only excel in their sport but also display perseverance and teamwork as evidenced by their responses in structured interviews and their behavior during campus visits. As previously discussed with respect to Coach Hurley's recruitment focus, how a player interacts with his parents may be indicative of character strengths of love, kindness and gratitude. At the professional level, peer observations are crucial during team drills and competitive scenarios. Coaches can evaluate how athletes respond to high-pressure situations, handle conflicts, and support their teammates.

Generally, integrating character strengths assessments into scouting and recruiting processes will require a strategic approach that combines both formal and informal tools. During initial screenings and recruitment, character strengths assessments can be used alongside physical and technical evaluations to provide a balanced view of an athlete's potential. This holistic approach ensures that athletes are not only physically capable but also possess the psychological attributes necessary for long-term success. For example, during professional draft combines, activities, and scenarios can be designed to observe character strengths in action.

Team drills can be used to assess leadership and teamwork, while individual challenges can test resilience and self-regulation. Structured interviews focusing on past experiences and hypothetical scenarios can further reveal an athlete's character strengths to provide a comprehensive understanding of their psychological makeup.

Key Considerations for Character Strength Assessment

To effectively integrate character strengths into the talent identification process, it is essential to address five key considerations: bridging the gap between research and application, ensuring objectivity, enhancing reliability, maintaining validity in assessments, and tailoring assessments to sport-specific requirements. First, both formal and informal assessments of character strengths should be integrated into talent identification processes to address the gap between research and application in the assessment of psychological characteristics in talent identification processes (Musculus & Lobinger, 2018). For example, soccer clubs typically rely on coaches to assess players using informal, self-created scouting sheets which lack rigorous validation (Musculus & Lobinger, 2018). Meanwhile, academic research tends to emphasize formal self-assessments by the players themselves (such as VIA-IS), largely overlooking the valuable insights of expert coaches and other talent evaluators regarding key performance traits (Musculus & Lobinger, 2018). To bridge this gap, talent identification processes should incorporate both formal self-assessments and informal peer/coach evaluations of character strengths.

Second, to improve objectivity in the use of character strength assessments for talent identification, scouting or assessment sheets should clearly define each character strength to ensure consistent understanding among raters (Musculus & Lobinger, 2015). As noted above, coaches, scouts and other talent evaluators should undergo training to become proficient in

character strengths and the identification and evaluation thereof. These character strength definitions, developed with input from coaches, sports psychologists, and mental performance coaches, should refer to observable behaviors and be included in standardized evaluation sheets with clear instructions and predefined rating scales (Abbott & Collins, 2004; Musculus & Lobinger, 2018). In addition, Niemiec (2017) provides 24 character strengths spotlights for practitioners that includes a one-page summary with core features, a circumplex snapshot, top 5 correlations, strength-building questions, research highlights, interventions, and a continuum of overuse and underuse. These spotlights provide practitioners with practical tools and insights to integrate character strengths into their work with clients (Niemiec, 2017), and may also be adapted / tailored to meet the specific needs of a sports organization. Overall, this approach should enhance the objectivity of assessments to support more effective assessment of character strengths in athletes.

Third, to ensure reliability of assessments of character strengths in talent identification, multiple items should be used to evaluate each characteristic to increase the accuracy and reduce measurement error (Musculus & Lobinger, 2015). As mentioned above, both formal and informal assessments would significantly support this goal. Moreover, multiple items should be used to evaluate each character strength to ensure that every aspect is assessed individually for greater accuracy (Musculus & Lobinger, 2015). Additionally, using at least two independent raters to assess each athlete can improve inter-rater reliability and provide a more comprehensive evaluation (Musculus & Lobinger, 2015). While some research suggests that psychological constructs, including personality traits, are generally considered to remain relatively consistent over time and across different situations (e.g., Cobb-Clark & Schurer, 2012), character strengths are perceived as adaptable and capable of being developed through training (Niemiec, 2017;

Niemiec & Pearce, 2021; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Therefore, regular assessments should also be conducted to measure changes over time as well as to differentiate between signature strengths and phasic strengths.

Fourth, to ensure validity in the character strength assessments, it is essential to consider coaches' expertise and beliefs to determine relevancy and importance of each respective character strengths (Musculus & Lobinger, 2015). Sport psychologists and mental performance coaches can support by clearly defining these character strengths both conceptually and theoretically for coaches, scouts and talent evaluators to ensure each are coherent and behaviorally relevant (Musculus & Lobinger, 2015). As demonstrated above, many character strengths have some relevance for sports performance; however, adjustments and a weighting-system may be required for sport-specific considerations (e.g., individual sports such as fencing may be less concerned with teamwork whereas dynamic, team sports such as soccer may have a particular focus on teamwork and social intelligence) (Christensen, 2009; see also, "Limitations" below). Similarly, validating these character strengths assessments involves correlating them with performance criteria, such as game statistics and long-term success indicators like professional contracts, through systematic and well-designed validation processes (Musculus & Lobinger, 2015).

Finally, sport-specific adaptations should be made to ensure coaches and scouts are observing and evaluating the appropriate character strengths given the nuances of the of the particular sport. For example, soccer, with its emphasis on teamwork, strategic thinking, and resilience (Christensen, 2009), requires a bespoke approach to evaluating character strengths such as teamwork, creativity, and perseverance. Likewise, endurance sports like cross-country are more focused on grit, patience, and passion suggesting that coaches should measure for

perseverance, self-regulation, and zest.

By integrating character strengths into talent identification processes, talent evaluators are equipped with better tools to identify potential in athletes and to then allow coaches and mental performance specialists to take the next steps to leverage character strengths in athlete development programs.

Challenges to Integrating Character Strengths in Talent Identification Programs

Integrating character strengths into talent identification processes presents five challenges: uncertainty about which strengths to evaluate and their relative importance, subjectivity in assessments, balancing these character strengths with physical and technical skills, adapting assessments for younger athletes, and ensuring the validity and reliability of evaluation tools require continuous refinement and collaboration with academic institutions. Although each of these challenges presents unique issues, there are pathways to mitigate and address each.

First, a substantial challenge in integrating character strengths into talent identification processes is the uncertainty regarding which character strengths to evaluate and the relative weight each should be given. The importance of specific character strengths can vary widely depending on the sport, the team's current situation, and the unique dynamics at play. For example, a team with a losing season may benefit more from players exhibiting the character strengths of hope, while a team with new players might want to prioritize teamwork and social intelligence to foster cohesion. Similarly, the critical character strengths in a high-pressure situation, such as a team losing late in a game (zest), might differ from those more important when a team has a large lead (prudence). Moreover, there is no empirical evidence comparing the relative importance of each character strength in influencing sports performance generally

speaking or even at a sport-specific level. This lack of data makes it challenging to develop standardized criteria for evaluating and weighting character strengths. Sport-specific considerations further complicate this issue—for example, teamwork and creativity might be more crucial in soccer, while individual sports like fencing may place higher importance on self-regulation and bravery.

To address the challenges of uncertainty and lack of empirical research, a flexible and context-sensitive approach is needed. This could involve developing sport-specific guidelines for character strength evaluation that is informed by input from coaches, sports psychologists, mental performance coaches and athletes. For example, with respect to personality assessments, specific sport-related assessments have been developed to evaluate psychological characteristics more accurately than general personality questionnaires (Musculus & Lobinger, 2018). Regularly reviewing and updating these guidelines based on emerging research and practical experience can ensure they remain relevant and effective. Additionally, fostering a culture of continuous learning and adaptation within sports organizations can help coaches and talent evaluators remain responsive to the unique needs of their teams and athletes. Engaging in empirical research to compare the impact of different character strengths on sports performance across various contexts and sports will also provide valuable insights and improve the accuracy and utility of these assessments in the talent identification process.

Second, integrating character strengths into talent identification processes can introduce subjectivity, as evaluations may vary depending on the observer's perspectives and biases. To mitigate this potential subjectivity, assessments should be standardized to the greatest extent possible to ensure consistency and reliability across evaluators. As discussed above, training programs for scouts and coaches can be developed to familiarize them with the definitions and

observable behaviors associated with each character strength. Additionally, incorporating multiple evaluators and utilizing both formal tools, such as the VIA-IS, and informal observations can provide a more balanced and objective assessment.

Third, while character strengths are vital, they should not overshadow essential physical and technical skills. Striking a balance between traditional metrics and character strength assessments is crucial for a holistic evaluation. Developing a scoring system that integrates all types of assessments can help ensure that no aspect is disproportionately weighted. For example, using a balanced scorecard approach that allocates specific points to physical, technical, and character strengths can create a comprehensive and equitable evaluation framework. Nevertheless, the small effect sizes in personality related-research further suggest that any psychological assessments, including character strengths, should not be the sole basis for talent assessment and selection (Musculus & Lobinger, 2018).

Fourth, adapting character strengths assessments for younger athletes presents unique challenges. Younger athletes may not have fully developed their character strengths, and their behaviors can be more variable (McGrath & Walker, 2016). Tailoring assessments to be age-appropriate and ensuring that they are integrated seamlessly into existing scouting and training programs is crucial. For example, the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-Youth) is a self-report questionnaire designed to assess the 24 character strengths in youth from ages 10-17 with a demonstrated internal consistency, stability, and validity for research and practice purposes (Park & Peterson, 2006). Youth programs should also consider focusing on fostering the development of character strengths through targeted activities and interventions to gradually building these character strengths over time rather than placing a heavy reliance on the presence or absence of any particular character strength. Additionally, engaging parents and

guardians in the process can help reinforce the development of these character strengths outside of the sports environment.

Finally, to ensure the validity and reliability of character strength assessments, it is important to continuously evaluate and refine the tools and methods used in evaluation. This involves conducting longitudinal studies to track the development of character strengths over time and their impact on athletic performance. Collaborating with academic institutions and research organizations can provide valuable insights and help validate the assessments. Regular feedback from coaches, athletes, and other stakeholders can also inform improvements and adaptations to the assessment process.

Integrating character strengths into talent identification processes offers a more comprehensive approach to evaluating athletes by considering psychological attributes typically ignored alongside physical and technical skills. Formal tools like the VIA-IS and informal methods such as strength-spotting provide coaches and scouts with reliable assessment techniques that have application across various settings. To facilitate the most effective integration, talent identification organizers should bridge the gap between research and application, ensure objectivity, enhance reliability, and tailor assessments to sport-specific requirements. Despite related challenges such as identifying relevant character strengths and balancing assessments, continuous refinement and collaboration with peer mental performance professionals academic institutions can maintain validity and reliability. Moving forward, leveraging character strengths in talent development programs can then maximize athletic potential identified and ultimately improve the performance of such athletes and their respective teams.

How Can Character Strengths Improve Athlete Development Programs?

Character strengths are not static—rather, they can be developed through deliberate effort and practice (Niemi & Pearce, 2021). Research has increasingly demonstrated that character strengths are more changeable than traditionally believed (Niemi, 2017). For example, a middle-aged woman who ranked self-regulation as her weakest strength in the VIA-IS worked diligently over six years to improve it, and when she retook the assessment, self-regulation had risen to her second strongest character strength—illustrating that deliberate efforts can noticeably enhance specific strengths (Niemi, 2017). In addition, studies indicate that character strengths are adaptable and can be influenced by life experiences, deliberate interventions, and changing social roles (Niemi, 2017). For example, gratitude, hope, and kindness increased in a sample of United States resident after the September 11th attacks—demonstrating that extraordinary events can lead to shifts in character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2003). Moreover, longitudinal data from over 11,000 repeat VIA-IS takers show that while character strengths are generally stable (with 76% of individuals having 3-5 strengths in common in their top 5 over time), they can change with deliberate interventions (Niemi, 2009). This balance of steady state stability and active and deliberate malleability underscores the potential for targeted interventions to enhance character strengths in athletes, and therefore makes character strengths a compelling target for athlete development.

Deliberate interventions focused on improving specific character strengths have shown promising results. For example, character strengths are stable in their consistency among individuals but are also highly adaptable within individuals based on situational contexts (Niemi, 2017). This duality means that athletes can develop character strengths through intentional practices and adaptive strategies. Moreover, a strengths intervention study found that

employees who participated in a brief strengths-based intervention showed improvements in their ability to identify and use their character strengths, set goals, and engage in meaningful conversations about strengths, which led to greater overall engagement, flourishing, and a sense of being valued (Niemiec, 2017). In the context of athlete development, the ability to enhance character strengths through intentional practice provides a unique pathway for athletes to learn to be more resilient, exhibit greater leadership, and develop stronger teamwork skills through targeted interventions.

The DÉPORVIDA program implemented among young soccer players at Real Club Deportivo de La Coruña S.A.D. aimed to enhance character strengths based on the VIA model (Tomé-Lourido et al., 2022). This eight-week intervention included activities designed to develop a broad range of character strengths through 38 different positive psychology interventions which in aggregate indicated a meaningful effect over time for seasonal performance satisfaction, percentage of time experienced as happy, and percentage of time experienced as unhappy (Tomé-Lourido et al., 2022). These results further showed that the experimental group experienced increased performance satisfaction and decreased time feeling unhappy, while the control group had opposite trends (Tomé-Lourido et al., 2022). Post-test comparisons also indicated the experimental group had less time experienced as unhappy compared to the control group, with no significant differences in seasonal performance satisfaction and time experienced as happy (Tomé-Lourido et al., 2022). Although the results focused on self-assessment of performance (i.e., performance satisfaction) and athlete well-being, the DÉPORVIDA program provides a roadmap for integrating character strengths interventions to enhance sports performance by fostering those essential character strengths.

The dynamic nature of character strengths and their potential for development through

intentional practice make them a valuable focus for athlete development. By incorporating character strengths assessments and interventions into training programs as discussed below, sports organizations can foster the character strengths and correlated mental performance constructs necessary for athletes to excel on the playing field.

Developing Character Strengths in Athletes

A holistic approach to athlete development integrates character strengths into training routines and developmental strategies and emphasizes the importance of psychological attributes alongside physical skills. Coaching strategies should model and reinforce character strengths to create a positive team culture and provide continuous feedback. Evidence-based or -inspired interventions, such as mindfulness training and strength-based goal setting, can further support the development of these character strengths. In addition, training sessions can be designed to target specific character strengths through collaborative drills, leadership roles, and reflective practices. Mentorship programs and role models can offer practical guidance and inspiration by helping athletes to develop and apply character strengths. By integrating these elements, sports organizations can create an environment that nurtures the complete athlete to promote sustained success.

A Holistic Development Approach

Incorporating character strengths into athlete development programs necessitates a holistic approach that integrates these psychological attributes into the fabric of training routines and developmental strategies. This integration recognizes that developing character strengths is as important as honing physical skills for an athlete's overall success and well-being. To achieve this, training programs should be designed to foster character strengths through specific activities that align with the development of physical abilities.

For example, activities that promote teamwork and perseverance can be embedded into regular practice sessions. Team-building exercises, such as collaborative drills and group problem-solving tasks, can enhance teamwork by encouraging athletes to communicate effectively, trust each other, and work towards common goals. Similarly, perseverance can be developed through challenging drills that push athletes beyond their comfort zones to help them learn to cope with adversity and persist despite setbacks. These activities not only build physical endurance and skill but also cultivate mental toughness and cooperative spirit (Christensen, 2009).

A holistic approach also means focusing on both athletic performance and personal growth. Emphasizing character strengths in training programs addresses the comprehensive development of athletes to ensure that they are equipped to handle the psychological demands of high-level competition. This dual focus supports athletes' overall well-being and contributes to their long-term success in both sports and life. For example, mindfulness training, including meditation and deep-breathing exercises, enhances self-regulation and focus, crucial for performing under pressure by improving athletes' self-awareness and stress response control (Brenner, 2024; Niemiec, 2017). Programs that prioritize character strengths alongside physical training can help athletes develop a more balanced skill set.

Ultimately, integrating character strengths into athlete development programs fosters a holistic environment that values psychological attributes as much as physical conditioning to prepare athletes for multifaceted challenges and ensure sustained success.

Coaching Strategies and Philosophies

Whilst more-traditional “deficit-based” coaching usually centers on identifying and correcting athletes' weaknesses (Gordon & Gucciardi, 2011), a coaching philosophy that

emphasizes character strengths not only nurtures athletes' physical and technical skills but can also cultivate strengths like perseverance, perspective, and social intelligence. Coaches can play a pivotal role in modeling and reinforcing character strengths within their teams. By consistently demonstrating character strengths such as fairness, perseverance, and humility, coaches set a standard for athletes to emulate. This modeling effect is supported by Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which posits that individuals learn behaviors through the observation of others. Therefore, when coaches embody character strengths, they create an environment where these qualities are valued and likely to be adopted by athletes.

Moreover, integrating character strengths into coaching philosophies involves explicit communication and reinforcement of these strengths and behaviors. Coaches can start by clearly defining and discussing the importance of various character strengths with their athletes. For example, during team meetings or one-on-one sessions, coaches and training staff can highlight how perseverance contributes to overcoming challenges, how teamwork enhances collective performance, or how humility fosters a supportive team culture. These discussions can be framed within the context of the team's goals and the specific demands of the sport.

Practical strategies for integrating character strengths into coaching philosophies could include setting team norms and expectations that reflect these character strengths and virtues. Coaches can develop team charters or expectations that outline the character strengths deemed essential for success and incorporate them into daily routines and rituals. For example, a ritual could be a periodic "strengths spotlight" session where team members recognize and celebrate instances of character strengths recently displayed by their peers. This not only reinforces the desired behaviors but also promotes a sense of community and mutual respect among athletes.

In addition to setting expectations, coaches should provide regular feedback that

emphasizes character strengths. Positive reinforcement and constructive feedback help athletes understand how their behaviors align with the team's values and contribute to their overall development. Coaches can use formal and informal tools discussed above such as VIA-IS and strengths spotting to systematically assess and discuss these character strengths with their athletes. This approach ensures that feedback is specific, actionable, and aligned with the overarching coaching philosophy.

Research also supports the benefits of integrating character strengths into coaching philosophies. For example, athletes who perceive their coaches as supportive of their psychological and emotional needs are more likely to experience higher levels of motivation, satisfaction, and performance (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). By adopting a coaching philosophy that visibly and vocally prioritizes character strengths, coaches can create a positive and empowering environment to further enhance athletic performance.

Bespoke Interventions

Performance psychology interventions that focus on developing specific character strengths should be the foundation for an athlete development program that integrates character strengths. Although little research exists on the efficacy of character strength building interventions and their relationship to sport performance (see e.g., Tomé-Lourido et al., 2022), some work in the area of personality interventions and sports performance has been fruitful (Bell et al., 2013; Piedmont et al., 1999). For example, the NEO-PI-R has been utilized in professional soccer to predict player performance and tailor mental conditioning programs by evaluating players' personality traits and then using this data to design personalized training interventions that focused on enhancing conscientious behaviors, such as maintaining rigorous training schedules and setting high-performance goals (Piedmont et al., 1999). Moreover, neurotic cricket

players who received tailored cognitive-behavioral strategies were able to improve their decision-making accuracy by learning to manage their anxiety and focus better under stress (Bell et al., 2013). Such interventions in the realm of personality provide an important comparable to underscore the importance assessments in developing comprehensive athlete development programs and also provide a roadmap for similar interventions focusing on character strengths development in sports.

Given that the focus on character strengths within athlete development programs is still nascent and in many cases not yet specific and measurable (e.g., Coach Hurley recruiting for “good character”), one particular challenge is the development and design of appropriate interventions to further develop and build the character strengths desired by the particular team or sports organization. This paper proposes four research evidence-based or research evidence-inspired interventions as examples of how to adjust, customize, or draw inspiration from existing character strengths interventions to better suit within the sports realm. First, mindfulness-based strengths practice (MBSP) is an intervention that integrates mindfulness exercises with the development of character strengths (Niemic et al., 2012). This approach would involve athletes engaging in mindfulness practices, such as meditation and deep breathing, while simultaneously focusing on specific character strengths like perseverance, self-regulation, and curiosity. MBSP programs have been shown to help individuals shift from habitual reacting to skillful responding, which is crucial in high-pressure sports scenarios (Niemic & Lissing, 2016) and also to improve attention, reduce stress, and enhance overall well-being (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). In the context of athlete development, MBSP can be particularly effective in helping athletes manage performance anxiety and maintain focus during competitions. By incorporating mindfulness exercises into their training routines, athletes can learn to stay present and calm (focusing on the character

strength of self-regulation), which enhances their ability to perform under pressure.

Second, strength-based goal setting involves athletes setting specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals that align with their identified character strengths. This intervention encourages athletes to leverage their unique character strengths to achieve personal and team objectives. Goal setting is a well-established technique in performance psychology that enhances motivation and performance (Locke & Latham, 2002). When goals are aligned with an individual's strengths, they become more meaningful and attainable, leading to higher levels of engagement and success (Locke & Latham, 2002). Coaches can use tools like the VIA-IS to assess athletes' character strengths and design interventions that build on these attributes (Niemic, 2017; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). For example, a basketball player with strong leadership qualities might set a goal to improve team communication during games. By focusing on their leadership character strength, they can create actionable steps, such as organizing team meetings or leading by example during practices. This approach helps to achieve the athlete's set goals and at the same time further strengthens the athlete's signature leadership skills.

Third, strength spotting involves athletes reflecting on their performance and identifying instances where they or their teammates demonstrated character strengths (Niemic, 2017). This practice encourages athletes to recognize and appreciate character strengths in action to foster a positive team culture and develop the character strengths of social intelligence, gratitude, and humility. Strength spotting helps individuals become more aware of their own and others' strengths and promotes a culture of appreciation and positive reinforcement (Niemic, 2017). In a team sport like volleyball, players might engage in reflective sessions after matches to discuss moments where teamwork and perseverance were evident. This practice highlights positive

behaviors and encourages athletes to continue displaying these character strengths to improve team dynamics and overall performance.

Finally, resilience training through cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) involves using cognitive-behavioral techniques to help athletes develop resilience by changing negative thought patterns and behaviors (Beck, 1970). This intervention would focus on building mental toughness and emotional regulation and develops the character strengths of perseverance, self-regulation, and bravery. CBT has been extensively researched to be effective in treating anxiety, depression, and stress (Hofmann et al., 2012). In sports, CBT can help athletes develop coping strategies for dealing with setbacks and maintaining a positive mindset (Gucciardi et al., 2009). For example, a track and field athlete might use CBT to manage pre-race anxiety. By identifying irrational fears and replacing them with positive affirmations and realistic appraisals of their abilities, the athlete can enhance their confidence and performance. This intervention helps athletes remain composed and focused, even in high-pressure situations.

In tailoring interventions to meet the needs of particular athlete development programs and their individual athletes, many considerations need to be accounted for—namely, the empirical evidence backing or inspiring the intervention, the longevity of the impact of the intervention, the tailoring of the intervention to the characteristics and needs of the particular athlete or team, and cultural considerations and sensitivities (Bao & Lyubomirsky, 2014; Pawelski, 2020; Pedrotti & Edwards, 2017; Schueller, 2014). Performance psychology interventions that focus on developing specific character strengths should serve as the foundation of athlete development programs, as they can effectively enhance sports performance by leveraging bespoke and evidence-based techniques.

Training Sessions and Activities

Character strength development should be incorporated into training sessions because these sessions offer a controlled, more natural environment where athletes can repeatedly practice and reinforce these character strengths, making it more impactful than other scenarios or environments where such systematic and focused development is less feasible.

To effectively incorporate character strengths into training sessions, coaches can design activities that explicitly target these attributes. For example, coaches may design drills to include small-sided games, relay races, or obstacle courses that emphasize communication, cooperation, and mutual support with an ultimate goal of developing the character strength of teamwork. By engaging in these activities, athletes can develop a deeper understanding of the value of teamwork and how it contributes to their overall performance. Similarly, leadership can be cultivated through rotational leadership roles within the team. Coaches can assign different athletes to lead warm-ups, facilitate drills, or organize team discussions. This practice develops leadership skills and encourages athletes to take responsibility and make decisions that benefit the entire team. Finally, training sessions can be designed to enhance perseverance and self-regulation. High-intensity interval training or endurance challenges can simulate the physical and mental demands of competition, teaching athletes how to manage stress and maintain focus under pressure. Coaches can incorporate mindfulness exercises, such as deep breathing or visualization techniques, to help athletes develop self-regulation skills.

However, caution needs to be exercised to find the appropriate structure training sessions and drills for character strengths development. For example, organized sports programs may often suppress creativity by focusing too rigidly on structured play and standardized training routines (Rasmussen & Østergaard, 2016). Thus, training formats that encourage young athletes

to explore and express their creativity through less structured and more playful practice environments should be promoted (Rasmussen & Østergaard, 2016). Similarly, fostering an environment that promotes diverse experiences and broad attentional focus can enhance creative problem-solving skills in sports by encouraging athletes to perceive more game elements simultaneously to allow for the generation of unique and effective responses to game situations (Memmert, 2011).

Character strengths can also be reinforced through reflective practices embedded in training sessions. Coaches can encourage athletes to engage in self-reflection and peer feedback to identify and appreciate instances of character strengths in action. For example, after a challenging drill or game, athletes can participate in a debrief session where they discuss how perseverance, courage, or humility contributed to their performance. This reflective practice of strengths spotting helps athletes internalize the importance of character strengths and recognize their application in real-world scenarios. By designing training sessions that foster character strengths, coaches can create a holistic development environment that supports both athletic success and personal growth. In integrating these targeted activities and reflective practices into training, coaches can lay the groundwork for comprehensive personal development plans that further nurture athletes' character strengths and overall growth.

Personalized Development Plans

Creating personalized development plans that incorporate character strengths provides a clear roadmap for the assessment, development and tracking of individual athlete's character strength journey. Tailoring these plans to address the unique needs and character strengths of individual athletes ensures that training is relevant, effective, and holistic. This personalized approach begins with a comprehensive assessment of each athlete's character strengths using

tools such as the VIA-IS to identify signature strengths and lower strengths as discussed above. To the extent the formal and informal character strengths assessments did not already take place as part of the talent identification or selection processes (e.g., an athlete was already a part of the team before the organization integrated character strengths assessments as part of their talent identification process), athletes should undergo the same formal and informal character strength assessment processes described above. For example, coaches and mental performance coaches may elect to use the Strengths-Based Performance Profile, which is aimed at identifying and leveraging athletes' character strengths in single-session consultations (Castillo & Bird, 2022). This method, based on positive psychology principles and solution-focused strategies, involves stages such as construct elicitation, strengths-spotting, and exploring positive emotions to build mental readiness and evoke positive psychological outcomes (Castillo & Bird, 2022).

Once the assessment is complete, development plans can be customized to leverage these identified character strengths while also addressing areas for growth. For example, an athlete who demonstrates high levels of perseverance but struggles with teamwork might benefit from interventions designed to enhance their collaborative skills. Group exercises, team-building activities, and peer feedback sessions can also help such an athlete develop better communication and cooperation to thereby improve their overall performance and contributions more effectively to the team.

Personalized development plans should also consider the specific demands and challenges of the athlete's sport and/or position. For example, sports that require high levels of individual focus and discipline, such as tennis or gymnastics, might place a greater emphasis on self-regulation. Similarly, the position of striker of a soccer requires high levels of quick, clever decision-making and risk-taking, and therefore there may be an emphasis on signature strengths

of creativity and lower strengths of prudence. Furthermore, personalized development plans should incorporate strategies to enhance specific character strengths that are critical for the athlete's success. For example, CBT can be used to improve self-regulation and focus, helping athletes manage stress and maintain their composure during high-pressure situations. By aligning character strength development with the specific requirements of the sport and/or position, coaches can ensure that athletes are well-prepared to meet the unique demands of their disciplines (Niemic & Pearce, 2021).

Regular assessments and adjustments are crucial for the effectiveness of personalized development plans. Athletes' needs and character strengths can evolve over time (Niemic & Pearce, 2021), and continuous monitoring ensures that their development plans remain aligned with their goals and progress. Periodic re-assessments using tools like the VIA-IS, combined with ongoing feedback from coaches and peers, can provide valuable insights into the athlete's development trajectory. This iterative process allows for timely modifications to the training regimen, ensuring that it remains effective and relevant (Niemic, 2017).

In summary, personalized development plans that integrate character strengths ensure targeted and effective training tailored to each athlete's needs and sport-specific demands, creating a foundation for continuous growth and adaptation.

Mentorship and Role Models

Promoting mentorship programs and highlighting role models are vital strategies for integrating character strengths into athlete development programs. These approaches provide practical, real-world examples of how character strengths can be developed and applied to offer athletes valuable guidance and inspiration.

Mentorship programs pair experienced athletes with younger or less experienced ones,

creating a supportive relationship that fosters the development of character strengths. Mentors can provide guidance and suggestions drawn from their own experiences, helping mentees address the challenges of their sports careers. For example, a mentor who has a signature strength of perseverance can share strategies for overcoming setbacks and maintaining motivation for a mentee. This guidance can be particularly valuable for younger athletes who are still developing their protective factors and resilience.

In addition to providing practical advice, mentors serve as role models, embodying the character strengths that mentees aspire to develop. Seeing these character strengths in action can be incredibly motivating for young athletes by showing them the tangible benefits of cultivating character strengths like leadership, humility, and teamwork. Mentors can also provide feedback and encouragement to reinforce the mentees' efforts to develop these character strengths and to support them build confidence in their abilities.

Highlighting role models within the sports community further supports the development of character strengths. Role models who exemplify strong character strengths can inspire athletes to strive for similar qualities (Klein et al., 2018). For example, showcasing the perseverance and humility of renowned athletes can motivate others to strive to emulate these character strength. Whilst simple motivation to persevere or be humble may not be adequate, this motivation is key for athletes to intentionally engage in activities to develop the character strengths they wish to build. Coaches and sports organizations can highlight role models through various means, such as featuring their stories in training materials, organizing talks or workshops where these athletes share their experiences, or recognizing them in team meetings and events.

Role models also play a crucial role in shaping the culture of sports teams and organizations. By exhibiting character strengths values like fairness, honesty, gratitude, and

teamwork, role models help establish a positive team culture that prioritizes character strengths. This culture can then influence all team members and encourage them to adopt and exhibit these character strengths in their daily interactions and performances (Niemi, 2017). A positive team culture not only enhances individual character strength development but also improves team cohesion and overall performance (Niemi, 2017).

Both mentorship programs and the promotion of role models contribute to a comprehensive approach to athlete development that values character strengths by providing athletes with practical examples and support systems that facilitate the cultivation of these strengths.

Character strengths are dynamic and can be developed through deliberate effort, making them a crucial focus in athlete development. By integrating these strengths into training routines, coaching strategies, and mentorship programs, sports organizations can create a holistic environment that nurtures both the psychological and physical aspects of athletes.

Challenges to Integrating Character Strengths in Athlete Development Programs

As with incorporating character strengths assessment into talent identification, integrating character strengths into athlete development processes presents common and unique challenges, including uncertainty about which strengths to develop and their relative importance, the efficacy of newly developed or adapted interventions, balancing these character strengths with physical and technical skills, and adapting character strengths development for younger athletes.

Although each of these challenges presents unique issues, there are pathways to mitigate and address each as noted below.

First, determining which character strengths to focus on for development is difficult. The relevance of specific character strengths can vary depending on the sport, the athlete's role, and

the team's dynamics. For example, teamwork might be crucial for team sports like soccer, whereas self-regulation could be more important for individual sports like gymnastics. As noted above with respect to talent identification, the lack of empirical evidence on the relative importance of different character strengths in various sports contexts complicates the development of standardized criteria for training programs. Coaches and sports organizations need to establish sport-specific guidelines for character strength development to ensure that training programs are effectively tailored to the needs of their athletes.

Another challenge lies in integrating character strength development into existing training programs without overshadowing essential physical and technical skills. Athletes and coaches often prioritize physical conditioning and technical skills over psychological attributes, especially when time and resources are limited. Developing a balanced training regimen that incorporates character strength interventions alongside traditional training can help address this issue. For example, integrating mindfulness exercises to enhance self-regulation and focus during physical training sessions can provide a holistic approach to athlete development.

Third, as many of the interventions used with athletes will initially be evidence-based or evidence-inspired, ensuring and testing their efficacy over the long-term will be challenging. This requires ongoing research of the newly developed interventions and adaptation of existing methods to fit the specific needs of different sports and athletes. Coaches must be equipped with the knowledge and skills to implement these interventions effectively—including staying updated with the latest research, understanding how to measure the impact of these interventions, and being able to adjust training methods based on feedback and observed outcomes. Continuous evaluation and adaptation are key to maintaining the relevance and efficacy of character strength development programs.

Finally, tailoring character strength development interventions to suit different age groups and developmental stages presents a unique challenge. Younger athletes may not have fully developed their character strengths, and their behaviors can be more variable. Age-appropriate assessments, such as VIA-Youth, and interventions are necessary to address these developmental differences. Programs should focus on gradually building character strengths through targeted activities and interventions rather than placing heavy reliance on the presence or absence of specific strengths (Niemi, 2017). Engaging parents and guardians in the development process can also reinforce character strength development outside the sports environment. By adopting a flexible, context-sensitive approach with continuous evaluation and collaboration with academic institutions, sports organizations can navigate the challenges of incorporating character strengths into athlete development programs, such as determining which strengths to develop.

Integrating character strengths into athlete development programs can foster both psychological and physical growth by emphasizing holistic development of character strengths, creating positive team cultures with clear coaching philosophies and strategies, and utilizing evidence-based interventions that are combined with personalized development plans and mentorship programs to promote sustained success and well-being.

Limitations and Future Research Opportunities

Whilst this paper offers an approach to leveraging character strengths in talent identification and athlete development programs, several limitations should be acknowledged—a lack of longitudinal data supporting the recommendations herein, the difficulties in identifying the appropriate character strengths, the omission of well-being as a consideration of character strength utilization, and potential barriers to implementation.

First, although this paper provides empirical evidence that numerous character strengths and/or their related psychological constructs are positively correlated to sport performance, it lacks longitudinal data to demonstrate the long-term effects and sustainability of many of the recommendations for implementation herein. Long-term studies are essential to validate the impact of character strengths on athletic performance. Without this data, it is challenging to determine whether the benefits of these recommendations persist over time or if they diminish once an initial intervention period concludes.

As already noted as a challenge to implementation for both talent identification and athlete development, there is no available empirical evidence demonstrating which character strengths are most relevant and impactful for sports performance. As a result, there is no clear guidance on whether all character strengths should be developed equally or if some should be prioritized over others, and how and whether this relative importance may adjust for sport and position-specific considerations. This lack of specificity poses a challenge for coaches and practitioners who need to make informed decisions about which character strengths to focus on. Future research, such as exploring the links between character strengths and performance outcomes in various athlete populations to design targeted interventions (Riedl & Klatt, 2023), is necessary to compare, contrast, and analyze the influence of individual character strengths on athletic performance. Identifying the most critical character strengths can help tailor development programs more effectively and ensure that the interventions have the maximum possible impact.

Moreover, this paper intentionally omits references to the impact various character strengths may have on the well-being and happiness of athletes. Whilst mental health and well-being of athletes are currently in vogue and rightfully so, and may certainly have indirect impacts

on performance, this paper's focus remains on the more direct linkages of character strengths and sports performance. This omission may overlook important holistic benefits that could contribute to a more wide-ranging understanding of athlete development. For example, incorporating well-being and happiness into the framework (as was the focus of the DÉPORVIDA program) could provide a more rounded approach to athlete development by recognizing that mental health influences performance.

Furthermore, integrating character strengths into sports programs presents common challenges, including resistance to change, lack of specialized training for coaches, and difficulty aligning with existing training routines (see above "Challenges to Integrating Character Strengths in Talent Identification Programs" and "Challenges to Integrating Character Strengths in Athlete Development Programs"). These potential barriers to implementation need to be carefully addressed to ensure the successful adoption of the proposed framework. Strategic planning, pilot testing, and providing adequate support and resources for coaches are crucial steps to overcome these obstacles and facilitate a smooth integration of character strengths into athlete development programs. Additional empirical evidence supporting many of the considerations above, such as which character strengths to focus on, would greatly serve to address these concerns.

Further research on the application of character strengths in sports performance should focus on longitudinal studies, diverse sample populations, and empirical analysis of individual character strengths' impact on performance. Additionally, exploring the holistic benefits of integrating well-being and happiness into athlete development programs can provide a more comprehensive approach to fostering both athletic success and personal growth. Moreover, consideration should be given to how technological advances, such as artificial intelligence, may

aid in the assessment and development of character strengths in athletes (e.g., leveraging artificial intelligence to engage in strength-spotting in game film). In conclusion, whilst the proposed framework for leveraging character strengths in talent identification and athlete development offers a promising approach, addressing these limitations through further research and practical considerations will further enhance its effectiveness and applicability in diverse sports contexts.

Conclusion

This paper addresses a noteworthy yet generally ignored gap in current talent identification and athlete development programs by proposing the incorporation of character strengths as a core component. Traditionally, these programs have focused primarily on physical and technical skills, often overlooking the psychological attributes that contribute to an athlete's overall performance and potential and failing to observe and develop the specific qualities of individuals' character strengths. By providing a comprehensive analysis of various character strengths factors—interpersonal, emotional, restraint, theological, and intellectual—this paper demonstrates theoretically and empirically how these attributes can enhance athletic outcomes and support holistic athlete development.

Moving forward, leveraging character strengths in talent identification and athlete development programs offers a promising avenue for enhancing the performance of athletes. By continuing to explore and refine these approaches, sports organizations, coaches, and mental performance specialists can better support athletes in achieving sustained success in their careers. Although many coaches like Coach Hurley are on the right track of generally identifying “good character” as important in the talent identification and athlete development processes, coaches should implement a more structured, precise approach to talent identification and athlete

development by focusing on specific character strengths and by utilizing tools like the VIA-IS and strengths-spotting to identify those specific character strengths most desired by a particular team or sports organization. This would allow for a more holistic and accurate evaluation of an athlete's potential and future development beyond just a model teammate.

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Appendix A

First, the virtue of wisdom involves acquiring knowledge and also effectively utilizing it to solve problems and navigate life—distinct from mere intelligence (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019). It includes a commitment to learning and openness to being wrong, embodying “practical wisdom” which aids in setting and achieving meaningful goals and using personal strengths to foster positive outcomes (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019). Within the virtue of wisdom are the character strengths of creativity, curiosity, judgment, love of learning, and perspective (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Creativity is the process of generating original ideas or behaviors that are also useful or adaptable (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It is characterized not merely by originality but by the utility of the resulting ideas or products, distinguishing creative contributions from those that are simply novel but impractical (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Curiosity is a keen desire to explore and discover new experiences and knowledge for the sheer pleasure of learning, characterized by seeking novelty and openness to various experiences (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It is intrinsic to personal growth and associated with numerous benefits, including increased life satisfaction, better health, and more meaningful social relationships (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Judgment is the ability to make reasoned decisions by critically analyzing ideas, opinions, and facts, considering multiple perspectives, and remaining open to changing one’s mind based on new evidence (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It involves a balanced evaluation process that aims for objectivity and minimal bias, and is crucial for effective decision-making and open-mindedness (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Love of learning is a deep-seated passion for acquiring knowledge for its own sake and is distinct from but related to

curiosity (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It involves a deliberate effort to deepen and retain knowledge (often through reading extensively, taking courses, or exploring various educational resources) and is driven by a desire for mastery and a profound appreciation of learning as an ongoing life-long process (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Finally, perspective is the ability to see and understand the larger context or the “big picture” in situations, thereby facilitating a balanced view that transcends getting caught up in minor details (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This character strength enables individuals to offer valuable advice, apply life lessons effectively, and approach problems by considering both broader implications and practical outcomes (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Second, courage is a virtue that involves a broad attitude or approach to life to enable individuals to overcome internal doubts and external challenges to achieve their goals (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019). Unlike the character strength of bravery, which focuses on specific acts often in the face of risk, the virtue of courage is characterized by an enduring will-power that also includes other character strengths of honesty, perseverance, and zest to permit one to act in a principled manner despite potential negative outcomes (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019). The character strength of bravery is the willingness to confront challenges, threats, or difficulties and is motivated by a valued goal or conviction despite the presence of fear (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It manifests in three forms: physical (as in risking one’s safety), psychological (which includes tackling personal emotional struggles), and moral (which involves standing up for ethical principles despite opposition) (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Bravery also involves acting based on what one believes is right and facing the associated fears and risks of such action along the way (Niemiec & McGrath,

2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Perseverance is the commitment to complete tasks despite encountering obstacles and setbacks and is characterized by both substantial and sustained effort (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It involves organizing oneself, using challenges as opportunities for growth, and is fundamental in achieving personal and professional goals with a deep-rooted sense of dedication and enjoyment in the process (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Honesty is the character strength of being truthful, genuine, and sincere—all whilst consistently presenting oneself truly across different areas of life and taking responsibility for one's actions and feelings (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This character strength is essential for maintaining integrity and building trust in relationships, as it involves aligning one's actions with one's values and leads to authenticity and dependable interpersonal connections (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Finally, zest is defined as approaching life with enthusiasm, energy, and a full commitment to engagement, and is often characterized by a vivid sense of vitality and aliveness in both body and mind (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It not only enhances personal happiness and well-being but also contributes to a meaningful life by both making one's work feel like a "calling" and fostering positive, energizing relationships (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019).

Third, humanity is primarily concerned with connecting and empathizing with others on a personal level—extending beyond one-on-one interactions to include group settings where justice may also play a role (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019). This virtue involves developing an innate attraction to others into genuine care, understanding their emotions, and often assisting them selflessly and is guided by the character strengths of love, kindness, and social intelligence (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019). Love is a character strength that emphasizes valuing and nurturing

close relationships in a reciprocal and warm manner that is distinguished from the character strength of kindness that applies more broadly (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Love encompasses various forms, including familial, romantic, and friendship-based connections, and involves strong emotional commitment and often sacrifices (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It is central to personal fulfillment and is marked by a give-and-take of positive emotions that define significant relationships and self-worth (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Kindness is the character strength of being generous, compassionate, nurturing, and caring towards others with an aim to positively impact those in need without expecting anything in return (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This character strength is universal and extends beyond intimate relationships to involve actions that are often instinctive and aimed at making others feel cared for and supported (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Kindness is associated with numerous personal benefits, including increased happiness, improved health, and the ability to foster meaningful relationships (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019). Finally, social intelligence is the ability to understand and navigate the motives and feelings of oneself and others to adapt effectively to various social settings (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This skill involves recognizing and appropriately expressing emotions in order to facilitate reading social cues and nuances to enhance empathy and social interactions (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). High social intelligence allows an individual to adeptly manage both verbal and non-verbal communication—a pivotal strength for building relationships and achieving success in diverse environments (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019).

Fourth, the virtue of justice relates to how individuals manage interactions within groups, and focuses on navigating competing goals and intentions to ensure fairness (Niemiec &

McGrath, 2019). Unlike the virtue of humanity, which centers on personal and emotional connections, justice involves balancing various forces to achieve equitable outcomes, often requiring compromises between individual desires and the greater good of the group (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019). The character strengths of teamwork, fairness, and leadership are crucial for fostering a healthy community or group environment (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019). Teamwork is viewed as a commitment to contributing effectively to the success of a group—whether in a work environment, sports team, family, or community (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It involves a sense of social responsibility and a dedication to the group’s overall good rather than personal gain and is often characterized by pulling one’s weight and engaging actively for the collective benefit (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This character strength fosters social trust, connectedness, and meaningful collaboration within the group (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Fairness involves treating people justly without bias with an aim to provide equal opportunities while recognizing that fairness may vary among individuals (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It involves both “justice reasoning” (a logical analysis of what is objectively right) and “care reasoning” (incorporating empathy and understanding others’ perspectives) (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Finally, leadership as a character strength involves the ability to organize and motivate a group towards achieving goals while maintaining harmonious relationships within the group (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It encompasses goal setting, team management, and inspiring and empowering individuals by fostering an inclusive environment that values each member’s contributions (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Effective leadership manifests through a blend of strategic direction, motivational communication, and adaptive interpersonal skills to enable

leaders to enhance group functionality and achieve collective objectives (Niemic & McGrath, 2019).

Fifth, the virtue of temperance involves self-restraint and moderation to prevent socially undesirable actions in comparison to the virtue of courage, which propels one to take action despite fear (Niemic & McGrath, 2019). Temperance encompasses managing emotions like anger, laziness, and arrogance through four character strengths of forgiveness, humility, prudence, and self-regulation (Niemic & McGrath, 2019). Forgiveness is the act of understanding and releasing the negative feelings towards those who have wronged us by overcoming resentment and embracing benevolence (Niemic & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It is a psychological process that aids in personal healing to allow one to see the humanity in the offender and fostering compassion (Niemic & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This character strength does not necessarily involve reconciliation but emphasizes emotional recovery and maintaining a realistic perspective of the situation (Niemic & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Humility is an accurate self-assessment of one's achievements whilst still recognizing one's flaws and limitations without drawing undue attention to oneself or being overly self-critical (Niemic & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It involves a balance of self-awareness and modesty, often expressed through actions that deflect the spotlight while fostering relationships (Niemic & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Humble individuals are appreciated for their ability to elevate others, and their self-view is neither inflated nor unduly diminished (Niemic & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Prudence is the careful consideration of one's actions to avoid unnecessary risks and potential regrets with a focus on the long-term consequences and wise caution in decision-making (Niemic & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It involves

a blend of practical reasoning and self-control to allow prudent individuals to manage risks intelligently and act in ways that promote growth and achievement while at the same time safeguarding their well-being and success (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Finally, self-regulation is the ability to control one's emotions and behaviors towards maintaining discipline and balance in life (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It enables individuals to manage their impulses and reactions, particularly in challenging situations, and to stay focused on long-term goals over immediate gratifications (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This character strength is crucial for achieving personal and professional success, maintaining health habits, and enhancing emotional stability and well-being (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

The final virtue, transcendence, involves the recognition of the limits of our knowledge and the acceptance of the profound mysteries beyond our understanding to serve the greater good. It contrasts with wisdom, which is focused on acquiring and applying knowledge (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019). Transcendent character strengths, which include appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, and spirituality, encourage individuals to look beyond the mundane towards the divine or larger existential questions to foster a broader perspective on life (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019). The character strength of appreciation of beauty and excellence is the ability to recognize and value the exceptional qualities in everyday environments, situations, and individuals, which others might overlook (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This strength manifests in three distinct ways: the appreciation of natural beauty, which evokes awe; the admiration of skill or talent, which inspires feelings of admiration; and the recognition of virtue in others, which leads to a sense of elevation (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). These experiences enhance the human experience to encourage

self-improvement and greater kindness towards others (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Gratitude involves feeling and expressing deep thankfulness for the positive aspects and people in one's life, whether these are specific acts or general contributions (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It encompasses a warm appreciation, goodwill towards others, and a disposition to respond positively based on this appreciation (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This character strength fosters a variety of positive emotions to enhance openness and agreeableness, and it also encourages the expression of other character strengths like kindness and empathy (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Hope entails maintaining a positive and optimistic expectation about the future, coupled with the motivation and belief in one's ability to achieve future goals through various effective means (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It is not merely a passive feeling but rather an action-oriented attribute that enables one to remain resilient and perseverant despite challenges—contributing to well-being and life satisfaction (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Hope involves applying a positive outlook towards future achievements and relationships, fostering resilience, and promoting overall health and success (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Humor is the ability to perceive and express what is amusing in situations—playing an important role in easing social interactions and strengthening group dynamics (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It involves recognizing the absurdities of life and using lightheartedness to reduce seriousness to help build social bonds and coping with stress (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Humor not only lightens the mood during difficult times but also enhances interpersonal relationships and mental health by offering a playful or sarcastic perspective that is socially engaging and often therapeutic (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson

& Seligman, 2004). Finally, spirituality is the belief in and connection to something sacred, transcending human understanding, whether this involves divinity or a secular sense of meaning and purpose (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It encompasses coherent beliefs about one's place in the universe to influence interactions with the world and others, and is often expressed through practices like meditation, prayer, or communion with nature (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Spirituality fosters a set of virtues that enhance personal well-being, resilience, and social harmony to contribute to physical and psychological health (Niemiec & McGrath, 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004).