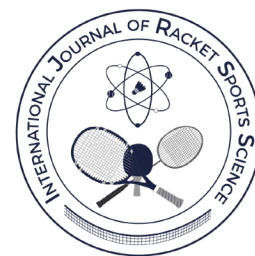# Editorial

Julian North¹ , David Alder² and Jamie Poolton²

1 Associated Editor, IJRSS
2 Centre for Sport Coaching, Carnegie School of Sport, Leeds Beckett University, UK

Many thanks to David Cabello and Adrian Lees for the invitation to contribute to the International Journal of Racket Sport Science both as an associate editor and to offer some editorial thoughts at the time of Issue 5.

My colleagues, Dr David Alder, and Dr Jamie Poolton, and I (all based in the Centre for Sport Coaching, and Carnegie School of Sport, Leeds Beckett University, in the United Kingdom), will offer some thoughts on the racket sports research space, as seen through the articles published in the IJRSS.

David and Jamie offer a perspective from performance analysis, skill acquisition, and expert performance. My perspective is much more about performer development and high-performance systems, culture, and workforce, and notably the role and practices of coaches.

We took this editorial opportunity to review the IJRSS output from the first volume in 2019, to latest volume 5, which covers 2023. There have been 55 articles published excluding editorials – so well done to David Cabello and to the racket sports research community for generating this knowledge, for taking the time to clearly articulate it, and to the editors and peer reviewers for helping researchers to get their articles 'over the line'.

We attempted to categorise the articles published so far by looking at their titles. This was, we admit, a somewhat crude exercise and we are certain that the researchers and authors whose work we quickly inspected would, in many instances, offer alternative categorisations. Our job here is not to be overly systematic just to offer some higher-level observations, and others may take up the challenge of a more systematic and rigorous review.

We calculate that of the 55 articles, 30 (55% of the total) are concerned with what we have called 'analysis of performance'. This is understood as the objective examination of sporting performance with the aim to improve future performance attempts. A further 7 explored technology and its application, and 6 had a physiology (with an injury/health) orientation. Most of these 43 articles (78% of the total) offered substantive findings, but some are more methodologically orientated (e.g. how we measure and analyse performance).

There was less publication activity in the discipline of psychology (3 articles), and in systems, workplace, culture, and workforce; for example, performer development systems (2 articles), physical education (2 articles), and coaching (3 articles). There were also 2 articles on racket sport events.

We are not surprised by the balance between sport science (with the exception of psychology in this instance), and systems, workplace, culture and workforce, since this is fairly typical of sport and sport science publication more generally. We have no doubt that the former offers some excellent insight, and we will say more about the analysis of performance shortly.

However, we also ask, in a world where individuals, groups, organisations, and societies are becoming increasingly sensitive to cultural and well-being issues, whether we, as a racket sport research community, should look to focus more on interpersonal, cultural, and workforce issues as we grow? This may well include a broader view of psychology within cultural and behavioural concerns and interests. We note that in the truly international world of racket sports, there may be particular benefit in cultural comparative research between east and west, and the global north and south. This would mean being sensitive to global differences, but also noting societal and sporting change.

Whilst the practical application of analysis of performance is widespread across many sporting contexts, there is limited research examining best practice examples, principles and ways of working. Most previous efforts have focused on the what (i.e. key performance indicators, technique analysis etc.), whilst little attention has been given to the how (i.e. the integration of performance analysis into player development systems). Despite analysis of performance increasingly being considered as a cornerstone of an ever-evolving coaching process, it is still unclear what the optimal processes are to deliver such support.

We were pleasantly surprised that there were three articles on coaching, but also make the point that much more could be done. Coaches are often the first line of support to athletes, and can be the filter, enabler, but also blocker, of performance analysis and other sport science services and research. We note an ongoing mismatch between the importance of coaching to player development and high performance and the value attached and attention given to it. We would like to see this addressed in racket sports research, and more generally.

Finally, we note an article exploring the role of artificial intelligence in performance analysis. We are aware of other colleagues internationally applying this exciting but also controversial technology. It will be interesting to see how this strand of work evolves, and whether researchers can both maintain a broader gaze and a critical eye on its philosophical, social, and practical implications.