

Mind the Gap 2025: Building the Profession of Sport Psychology in India

White Paper



Location: Padukone-Dravid Centre for Sports Excellence

Date: 7th and 8th March 2025



This document is the property of INSPA Sport Psychologists' Association. This is used for reading, referencing and citing while writing any academic literature. One cannot edit or adapt this version for any commercial purpose. You must acknowledge INSPA Sport Psychologists' Association as its sole owner.

Recommended Citation:

INSPA Sport Psychologists' Association (2025). Building the Profession of Sport Psychology in India: A White Paper. Chennai, India. (URL)



INSPA Sport Psychologists Association

T 32 A &B, 7th Avenue,
Besant Nagar,
Chennai 600090, Tamil Nadu
email: connect.inspa@gmail.com
web: www.inspasportpsych.com

Acknowledgment

The success of *Mind the Gap 2025* would not have been possible without the collective effort, insight, and commitment of a deeply engaged community. INSPA extends its heartfelt gratitude to every individual who contributed their time, expertise, and perspective in shaping the conference experience and this white paper. We extend our sincere thanks to **Dr. Chris Harwood**, International Society of Sport Psychology (ISSP) Ambassador, for his generous presence, time, and knowledge. His two-day engagement with participants—through workshops, dialogue, and his keynote address—was deeply impactful and elevated the tone of the entire conference.

Conference Team and Volunteers

Manali Kadam, MSc.	Guest Management and Logistics
Diya Valeja, MSc.	Social Media Management
Bhargavi Madgudkar, MSc.	Logistics
Samprita Archana	Information Tech, Guest Management
Bala Ramaswamy, MSc.	Logistics
Mudit Krishnani, MSc.	Comperer
Parinaaz Irani, MSc.	Comperer
Sukhada Bhide	Student Volunteer
Rohit Awasthi	Student Volunteer
Ranjita Sinha	Student Volunteer
Pratiksha Rani	Student Volunteer

Contributors to the White Paper

Compiling and Summarising Credit

Bala Ramaswamy, MSc.	Research Lead, INSPA
Vaishali Choudhary, MA	Practitioner Member
Payal Gore, MSc, SEPIT	Practitioner Member
Malavika Vishwanath, M.Ed	Practitioner Member
Sivanuja Peddada	Student Member
Nicole Menezes, MA, MSc.	Practitioner Member and Moderator
Parinaaz Irani, MSc.	Practitioner Member and Moderator
Mudit Krishnani, MSc.	Practitioner Member and Moderator

A special thanks to all the BSc. students from Christ College who attended the conference and contributed to this white paper proceedings.

INSPA Founding members and Contributors

Keerthana Swaminathan, Msc, ISSP-R	President and Moderator
Maurelle D'Sa, M.A., MSc. (Phd Scholar)	Secretary
Varadayini Gorhe, Msc., ISSP-R	Treasurer and Moderator

We are equally grateful to all the **participants who took the time to fill out the feedback form**, sharing thoughtful insights and reflections that have been instrumental in shaping this white paper. Your voices have not only strengthened the documentation process but also contributed meaningfully to the evolving narrative of sport psychology in India.

Table of content

I. Introduction.....	6
II. Review of 2024 White Paper Learnings.....	6
III. Setting up the theme for Mind The Gap 2025: President's Address.....	6
IV. Keynote on Becoming an Exceptional Practitioner: Components of the Journey towards Excellence in Your Services by Dr. Chris Harwood.....	7
Session Overview.....	7
Detailed Summary.....	7
Reflections.....	9
V. Athlete Driven Session- A Fireside Chat with Olympian Srihari Nataraj.....	9
Session Overview.....	10
Detailed Summary.....	10
Reflections.....	11
VI. Workshops.....	11
A. Exploring Family Constellations in Sport – A Systemic Lens on Athlete Support. A Workshop by Priyanka Prabhakaran.....	11
Session Overview.....	11
Detailed Summary.....	12
Reflections.....	13
B. Dance Movement Therapy – Exploring the Mind-Body Connection through Expressive Movement. A Workshop by Deepthi Ravichandran.....	13
Session Overview.....	13
Detailed Summary.....	14
Reflections.....	14
C. Drama Therapy in Sports – Exploring Creative Techniques for Mental Wellness. A Workshop by Subhiksha Raman.....	15
Session Overview.....	15
Detailed Summary.....	15
Reflections.....	16
VII. Panel Discussions.....	16
A. Panel Discussion on Educational Institutes in India and Sport Psychology.....	16
Panel Discussion Overview.....	16
Key Insights and Arguments from the panellists.....	17
Moderator's reflections.....	17
Present Challenges.....	18
Future Directions.....	18
Conclusion.....	18
B. Panel Discussion on Developing a Psychologically Aware Sports Ecosystem.....	19
Panel Discussion Overview.....	19
Key Insights and Arguments from the panellists.....	19
Moderator's reflections.....	20

Present Challenges.....	20
Future Directions.....	20
Conclusion.....	21
C. Panel Discussion on Technology in Sports Psychology.....	21
Panel Discussion Overview.....	21
Key Insights and Arguments from the panellists.....	22
Moderator's reflections.....	23
Present Challenges.....	23
Future Directions.....	24
Conclusion.....	24
D. Panel Discussion on Modalities of Sport Psychology Practice in India – Mission 2036..	24
Panel Discussion Overview.....	24
Key Insights and Arguments from the panellists.....	25
Moderator's reflections.....	25
Present Challenges.....	26
Future Directions.....	26
Conclusion.....	26
VIII. Student Driven Session: Poster Presentations.....	27
IX. Participants' Reflections.....	28
A. Awareness and Acceptance of Sport Psychology.....	28
B. Challenges Identified by Respondents.....	29
C. Opportunities for Growth and Development.....	29
D. Cultural Considerations in Practice.....	29
E. Ethical Considerations and Professional Conduct.....	30
F. Vision for the Future of Sport Psychology in India.....	30
X. Conference Experience and Ratings.....	30
XI. Conclusion.....	31

I. Introduction

The 2025 edition of "Mind the Gap" marked a significant milestone for the Indian sport psychology community. With an urgent need for structure, visibility, and legitimacy in the profession, this year's conference placed a deliberate focus on what it means to build a professional identity in the Indian context.

The gathering brought together over 130+ students, practitioners, athletes, researchers, and thought leaders across India, showcasing a diverse representation of approaches and philosophies in sport psychology.

This white paper aims to provide a comprehensive account of the discussions, insights, reflections, and emerging directions from this year's conference, integrating participant feedback and notes from moderators and speakers.

II. Review of 2024 White Paper Learnings

The White paper that was curated after the 2024 Mind The Gap found a lot of gaps in the field of sport psychology. Listed below are the key findings.

- Ambiguity in professional identity and pathway into the field
- Mismatch between theory and field-based competencies
- Lack of clarity in certification, supervision, and ethics
- Minimal stakeholder involvement (athletes, coaches)
- Scarce mentorship and intergenerational knowledge sharing

These findings informed the curation of the 2025 agenda, which not only aimed to address these issues, but also to shift the discourse from problem-mapping to solution-building.

III. Setting up the theme for Mind The Gap 2025: President's Address

Mind The Gap 2025 conference opened with a heartfelt address by Keerthana Swaminathan, President of INSPA Sport Psychologists' Association, who reflected on the rapid growth of sport psychology in India. From just 80 participants last year to over 130 this year, the surge reflected increasing recognition and interest in the field of sport psychology.

While the challenges will always remain, Keerthana emphasised the importance of focusing on thriving, rather than just surviving in the field. Drawing on her own experience of mapping the profession's growth—from identifying 20 known psychologists to over 200 today—she highlighted the importance of collaboration, kindness, and professional introspection.

She introduced this year's theme, "*The Profession of Sport Psychology in India*," as an invitation to deepen reflection on how practitioners define and develop themselves. In closing, she emphasized that *Mind the Gap 2025* had been curated with both the profession and the professional at its heart. With a rich and diverse lineup of sessions ahead, she encouraged attendees to engage fully in breakout discussions, reflect deeply, and take meaningful action in their own work. Special appreciation was extended to Dr. Chris Harwood, ISSP Ambassador, for his two-day workshop on ethics and his keynote contribution.

IV. Keynote on *Becoming an Exceptional Practitioner: Components of the Journey towards Excellence in Your Services* by Dr. Chris Harwood

Session Overview

Dr. Chris Harwood, a leading figure in applied sport psychology, research and academia, opened the conference with a keynote that blended personal narrative, professional insights, and aspirational direction for the field. Drawing from decades of experience, Dr. Harwood painted a nuanced picture of the evolving role of sport psychologists—especially in youth and developmental sport contexts. His talk emphasized practitioner adaptability, relationship-building, ethics, education, and systemic integration of psychological skills into athlete development.

Detailed Summary

Dr. Harwood began by acknowledging the growing complexity of the sport ecosystem, stressing that sport psychologists today are required not only to be experts in theory and application but also to be system thinkers, collaborators, and advocates. The talk revolved around key areas:

- *Psychoeducation with Young Athletes*: Dr. Harwood underscored the centrality of teaching athletes about mental skills before expecting them to apply those skills. In his words, "awareness precedes action."

- ***Beyond the Degree – Applied Know-how:*** Learning in sport psychology doesn't end with academic credentials. Dr. Harwood introduced the “*Know-How Framework*”, which includes:
 - Knowing what the theory is.
 - Knowing how to apply it in practice.
 - Being able to demonstrate its impact effectively.
- **Contemporary Practitioner Attributes:** Just like learnings don't end with the degree, he emphasised continuing to develop certain attributes for a modern sport psychologist.
 - Tech-savvy and ethically grounded.
 - Business-minded with strong interpersonal skills.
 - Socially engaged and capable of navigating complex stakeholder dynamics.
- **Boundary Setting and Self-Care:** In dynamic sporting environments—especially residential academies or elite teams—the practitioner must define and maintain ethical and emotional boundaries. Burnout prevention, clarity in role definition, and time-off from work were presented as essentials, not luxuries.
- **Working with Families and Coaches:** Collaboration was emphasized, particularly when dealing with youth athletes. Dr. Harwood promoted a humanistic approach to working with parents, viewing them not as obstacles but as partners in athlete development.
- **Systemic Vision – Knowledge Transfer:** One of the most forward-looking parts of the keynote was Dr. Harwood's call for institutional knowledge transfer. Drawing on examples from countries that have integrated emotional skills into athlete training frameworks, he proposed that sport psychologists in India should work toward influencing national bodies to embed such practices systemically.
- **Balancing Academics and Sport:** He acknowledged the unique tensions young athletes face—especially those in dual-career paths. The need for balance, life-skills coaching, and post-sport transition planning was emphasized.

- **The Practitioner-Athlete Continuum:** Dr. Harwood introduced a reflective prompt: *"What kind of psychologist do you want to be—practitioner-led or athlete-led?"* He clarified that both ends of the continuum are valid, but self-awareness is necessary for deliberate positioning.

Reflections

Practitioner Reflection:

The keynote was a grounding reminder of the multidimensional role sport psychologists play today. Dr. Harwood's personal and professional examples offered clarity on handling organizational dynamics, navigating boundaries, and understanding our evolving identity as practitioners. The "Know-how" framework especially stood out—it challenged us to think beyond academic learning and focus on competency in action. His emphasis on emotional literacy at a systemic level felt like a necessary roadmap for sustainable change in Indian sport.

Student Reflection:

The session prompted deep introspection. Many students realized that while their academic training provided knowledge, it hadn't necessarily prepared them for navigating the practical and relational demands of the field. The idea of being "practitioner-led vs. athlete-led" struck a chord—most students had unknowingly moved between these roles depending on context, but never consciously. Dr. Harwood's insights on working with parents in residential setups sparked ideas like parent orientation programs, particularly in Indian academies. The difficulties around sport-academics balance in India also resonated, especially given the sport-as-employment reality via government quotas.

V. Athlete Driven Session- A Fireside Chat with Olympian Srihari Nataraj

Theme: *Insights from Elite Performance – Lessons from Srihari Nataraj's Journey*

Moderator: Keerthana Swaminathan

Session Overview

The fireside chat with Srihari Nataraj, two-time Olympian and one of India's most decorated swimmers, offered an intimate glimpse into the mental strategies and psychological resilience behind elite performance. Moderated by Keerthana Swaminathan, the conversation, though casual in tone, surfaced rich insights into how top athletes navigate pressure, maintain motivation, and manage their emotional well-being. Srihari's reflective responses blended lived experience with psychological relevance, providing practical cues for sports psychologists working with high-performance athletes.

Detailed Summary

1. **Pre-performance Rituals:** Srihari described his use of pre-race rituals as mental anchors that enhance focus and calmness. What stood out was his flexible approach—he keeps rituals only if they serve performance, and discards them when they don't. This adaptability highlights a personalized and intentional use of routines, underscoring the idea that psychological strategies must be athlete-specific.
2. **Preparation as Anxiety Regulation:** Srihari attributed his minimal pre-race anxiety to thorough preparation and trust in training. This reflects a CBT-aligned principle—reducing uncertainty and enhancing control through structured routines. His example reinforces the value of preparation in managing nerves, particularly before high-stakes events.
3. **Cognitive Reframing of Pressure:** Srihari spoke about viewing major competitions like the Olympics and Asian Games not as burdens, but as bonus experiences. This subtle shift in framing helped him stay grounded and enjoy the moment. The technique aligns with appraisal theory, promoting a “challenge” mindset over a “threat” orientation—a useful strategy for managing competitive stress.
4. **Resilience and Emotional Regulation:** Reflecting on setbacks, Srihari displayed a solution-focused mindset, acknowledging disappointment but quickly pivoting toward constructive analysis and forward-thinking. This pragmatic emotional regulation is a

hallmark of resilience and can be cultivated through interventions that promote cognitive restructuring and emotional agility.

5. **Social Support Systems:** While swimming is an individual sport, Srihari emphasized the emotional and motivational value of friendships and camaraderie in training environments. His experience supports the idea that a strong social support system can buffer stress and sustain motivation, especially during long and demanding training phases.
6. **Intrinsic Motivation and Purpose:** Srihari's advice to young athletes was clear: swim for the love of it, not for the medals. His reflections strongly aligned with Self-Determination Theory (SDT), emphasizing intrinsic goals over extrinsic rewards. This mindset has helped him stay committed to the sport across years of intense training and competition.

Reflections

Practitioner Reflection:

This conversation served as a reminder of how elite athletes often develop high-level psychological strategies through experience, even without formal training. Srihari's approach to rituals, pressure, and setbacks reinforced key theoretical principles, validating their relevance in applied settings. His balance of discipline and joy was a model for how mental skills and motivation can coexist.

Student Reflection:

Students resonated with Srihari's honest and down-to-earth reflections. Many found his mindset around **pressure and preparation** both relatable and aspirational. His call to focus on **passion over performance outcomes** sparked internal reflection on personal reasons for pursuing sport psychology, reaffirming the importance of values and purpose in the field.

VI. Workshops

A. Exploring Family Constellations in Sport – A Systemic Lens on Athlete Support.

A Workshop by Priyanka Prabhakaran

Session Overview

Priyanka Prabhakar’s workshop on *Family Constellations in Sports* provided a compelling and experiential deep dive into the systemic forces that shape an athlete’s emotional landscape. With warmth and clarity, she invited participants to reflect on the unseen dynamics within an athlete's support network—be it family, coaches, or peers—and how these relational structures can significantly influence performance, motivation, and emotional well-being. The session emphasized the importance of working with—not around—these relationships in sport psychology.

Detailed Summary

The workshop began with a **grounding exercise**, helping participants center themselves and prepare for introspective work. This created a safe space for experiential exploration—a hallmark of the constellation approach.

- **Understanding the Constellation Framework:** Priyanka introduced the **Family Constellation model**, which includes the *field* (emotional space), *representatives* (stand-ins for key figures), and the *individual or group* (whose issue is being explored). This method makes relational dynamics visible and accessible.
- **Key Insight – Athletes and Self-Sacrifice:** A powerful message was that athletes often feel the need to **sacrifice themselves emotionally** for others in their support system, especially in family-driven sporting cultures. The workshop challenged this narrative, advocating for healthier relational boundaries.
- **Use of Role Plays and Figurines:** Role plays were used effectively to demonstrate abstract psychological processes. One standout segment showcased **self-talk** through a live role play, where an athlete dialogued with symbolic representations of belief, doubt, and support. This brought internal processes to life in a tangible way. Figurines were also introduced as tools for mapping systemic relationships—allowing clients to externalize and explore complex emotional ties.

- **Systemic Imbalance Over Individual Blame:** Priyanka emphasized that **relational difficulties** often stem from systemic imbalances rather than “good” or “bad” people. For example, when a coach is emotionally unavailable or overly controlling, it may be due to inherited dynamics or institutional roles, not individual intent.
- **Core Principles of Healthy Relationships:** The workshop closed with the three foundational principles of constellations:
 - **Belongingness** – Everyone has a place in the system.
 - **Balance** – Give and take must be fair and mutual.
 - **Order** – There is a natural hierarchy and sequencing in relational roles.

Reflections

Practitioner Reflection:

This session expanded the lens through which we typically understand athlete performance and well-being. Rather than focusing solely on the individual, it reinforced the value of examining the **entire ecosystem** around the athlete. The use of figurines and role plays stood out as powerful methods to facilitate insight and emotional release, especially when words fall short. I left the session reflecting deeply on how to **bring systemic thinking** into my own work—not just with athletes, but with coaches and parents too. The embodiment of self-talk through role play made a concept we often over-intellectualize feel accessible and transformative.

Student Reflection:

For many students, this workshop was a shift from traditional cognitive-behavioral approaches. It encouraged a **felt sense** of psychological concepts, allowing participants to “see” and “feel” dynamics rather than just talk about them. The realization that emotional strain in sport can stem from **relational loyalty or inherited patterns** was eye-opening. The session also highlighted that sport psychologists don’t always need to provide solutions—instead, they can **hold space for systemic awareness**, allowing insight to emerge organically.

B. Dance Movement Therapy – Exploring the Mind-Body Connection through Expressive Movement. *A Workshop by Deepthi Ravichandran*

Session Overview

Deepthi Ravichandran facilitated an experiential and engaging workshop on Dance Movement Therapy (DMT), guiding participants through a series of body-based activities designed to explore physical awareness, emotional expression, and interpersonal connection. The session created a safe space for participants to reflect on their internal states using movement as a language. Through a structured yet playful flow, the workshop highlighted how dance and movement can be powerful tools for emotional regulation, empathy, and holistic well-being.

Detailed Summary

- The session began with a **free-form walking exercise**, where participants moved around the space at varying speeds based on numerical cues. This spontaneous pacing emphasized how individuals experience and navigate space and time differently, creating a sense of present-moment awareness.
- A **full-body warm-up** followed, allowing participants to stretch from head to toe and prepare their bodies for deeper engagement. The facilitator then introduced the concept of the **Kinesphere**—the personal space within which one’s body can move, stretch, and extend. Participants were encouraged to explore their Kinesphere, becoming conscious of their physical boundaries and spatial presence.
- One of the key experiential components involved **partnered mirroring**, where participants in pairs or small groups copied each other’s movements to gentle music. This exercise nurtured **empathy**, as it required attuning not just to physical cues, but to the subtle emotional undertones of the other person’s movements—expressions of joy, discomfort, or playfulness.
- Participants were then led into a **choreographed group dance**, creating a shared rhythm and building a sense of community through synchronized movement. This transitioned into a playful segment where participants **exaggerated everyday actions and workout routines** to high-energy Indian music, fostering creativity, body awareness, and emotional release through expressive movement.

- The session closed with **slow breathing and visualization techniques**, allowing participants to ground themselves and reflect inward. A short sharing circle followed, where participants offered feedback and personal takeaways.

Reflections

Practitioner Reflection:

This session served as a reminder that movement can be both diagnostic and therapeutic. Deepthi's facilitation highlighted how body-based methods can deepen emotional exploration without relying on words. The mirroring activity particularly stood out, showcasing the role of **mirror neurons** in fostering interpersonal empathy. The idea of the **Kinesphere** added a layer of body consciousness that is often overlooked in talk-based approaches.

Student Reflection:

The session was unexpectedly powerful. Many students shared that they began the session hesitantly but gradually felt more comfortable using their bodies to express emotions. The music and group engagement helped break initial inhibitions. The concept that “**movement is life**” resonated strongly—reminding participants that motion and emotion are intrinsically linked.

INDIAN SPORTS PSYCHOLOGISTS' ASSOCIATION

C. Drama Therapy in Sports – Exploring Creative Techniques for Mental Wellness. A Workshop by Subhiksha Raman

Session Overview

The workshop conducted by Subiksha Raman introduced participants to the principles and practices of **drama therapy**, a creative and embodied approach to mental health support that integrates storytelling, movement, improvisation, and role-play. Designed specifically for sport psychologists and performance professionals, the session explored how drama therapy can be used to enhance athlete well-being, build resilience, and foster emotional expression in individual and team settings.

Detailed Summary

- Subiksha began by grounding the session in the core philosophy of dramatherapy: that **creative expression can support deep psychological insight, emotional regulation, and narrative transformation**. Participants were introduced to how dramatized

techniques—such as guided role-play, character work, and visualization—can be adapted to sport settings, particularly in helping athletes manage performance anxiety, rebound from failure, and communicate more effectively within teams.

- The experiential nature of the session included a variety of interactive exercises. These ranged from **motivational self-talk through character enactment to externalizing inner critics and strengths**, allowing participants to view internal dialogue from a safe distance. **Improvisational games** were used to reframe failure with humor and spontaneity, while **guided imagery and movement** encouraged participants to mentally rehearse success and process post-performance emotions. Each activity was positioned not just as a technique, but as a method of shifting mindset—one that can be especially powerful for athletes facing high expectations and emotional suppression.
- Subiksha also contextualized these practices for practical application across the sport spectrum. Examples included pre-game role-playing to build confidence, post-match storytelling to process emotional highs and lows, and group improvisation to boost communication and trust in team dynamics. By integrating both **individual reflection** and **collective experience**, the session demonstrated how dramatherapy can serve as a versatile, impactful tool in both high-performance and developmental sport environments.

Reflections

The workshop was a refreshing reminder of the **value of play, imagination, and embodiment** in a field that often relies heavily on verbal and cognitive frameworks. For many participants, it offered a new lens through which to view athlete support—one that centers creativity, emotional nuance, and psychological safety. The session resonated particularly with those working with younger athletes and those seeking alternative pathways to emotional expression and resilience training.

VII. Panel Discussions

A. Panel Discussion on Educational Institutes in India and Sport Psychology

Panel Discussion Overview

The aim of this panel discussion was to highlight the role of educational institutions to advance sport psychology in India. Even today, students are heavily relying on studying abroad as opposed to India due to the gaps found in our education system in sport. This panel aimed to discuss these gaps and find solutions in order to develop a better educational pathway in the country.

Moderator: Nicole Menezes, Sport Psychologist

Panelists:

- Dr. Baskaran Chandrashekar – Head in charge, Sport and Exercise Science, Manipal College
- Dr. Debala Chanu – Assistant Professor of Sport Psychology, Licensed Clinical Psychologist
- Mr. Neel Shah – Head of Sport Education and Associate Dean, India on Track
- Dr. Shiny Raizada – Academic In-Charge, Sport and Exercise Science, Symbiosis Institute, Pune

Key Insights and Arguments from the panellists.

1. The Need for Structured Curriculums in Sport Psychology and Sport Science

The panel highlighted a significant gap in structured and culturally relevant education pathways for sport psychology and sport science students in India. Current programs often mirror Western models, which may not adequately address the unique psychological and cultural needs of Indian athletes.

2. International Collaborations and Community Integration

While international collaboration is valuable, it's equally important to adapt practices to Indian contexts. Institutions must integrate community-based learnings to address the lack of indigenous evidence and contextual applicability.

3. **Establishing formal accreditation and licensing systems.** The panellists also emphasised on accreditation and continued education for sport psychologists and the sport science community at large. This will help prevent unfair practices and illegal practice in the sporting ecosystem.

Moderator's reflections

Nicole Menezes shared her insights on the urgent need for an industry-academia bridge in the field of sport psychology. She emphasized the **importance of integrating practical exposure, mentorship, and direct partnerships with sports federations into academic programs**. Without these elements, many aspiring professionals may struggle to establish sustainable careers in the field. Multidisciplinary collaboration was cited as another key factor, with sport psychologists encouraged to work closely with coaches, nutritionists, physiotherapists, and analysts to support athletes holistically. She also stressed the value of cultural relevance, noting that sport psychology education in India must reflect local realities, athlete needs, and indigenous mental training approaches.

Present Challenges

1. Lack of standardized, India-specific curriculums and programmes at recognised universities.
2. Minimal integration of culturally relevant practices, standardised norms based on Indian population.
3. Absence of sport psychology centers at HPCs causing limited practical opportunities.
4. Over-reliance on theoretical learning with limited applied exposure during the masters programme.
5. Lack of formal supervision after the Masters is the biggest gap between theory and applied work.

Future Directions

1. Development of evidence-based, culturally adapted curriculums across recognised institutions, whilst adding to the evidence-based research through universities.
2. Greater inclusion of practitioners and industry experts in academic teaching.

3. Balancing theoretical knowledge, evidence-based practice and applied work at the postgraduate level, guided by a central system such as the MYAS and supervised by a body like INSPA.
4. Universities should tie-up with governmental organisations like SAI/ NSI- Patiala to encourage smooth transition from theory to practice and opportunities to work with inter-disciplinary staff.
5. Inclusion of modules at a Masters level, that teach basics of entrepreneurship and business in India.

Conclusion

The panel concluded on a hopeful note, with consensus that India has the potential to become a global hub for sport psychology. However, realizing this vision will require collective effort from educators, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to build a sustainable, inclusive, and impactful ecosystem for mental performance in sport.

B. Panel Discussion on Developing a Psychologically Aware Sports Ecosystem

Panel Discussion Overview

The second panel of the INSPA Mind The Gap 2025 Conference focused on the theme “*Developing a Psychologically Aware Sports Ecosystem.*” The discussion emphasized the evolution of sport psychology in India and the collective responsibility of stakeholders in shaping athlete mental well-being.

Moderator: Parinaaz Irani

Panelists:

1. Ashwini Nachappa – Olympian, Founder of Ashwini Sports Foundation
2. Dr. Chaitanya Sridhar – Sport Psychologist, Advisor at INSPA
3. Neelam Babar Desai – Head of Sports, Tata Trusts
4. Darshan NK – Head of Simply Sports Foundation

Key Insights and Arguments from the panellists.

1. **Need of mental training has gone up, especially for residential athletes:** Ashwini Nachappa opened with a personal narrative, reflecting on how the concept of sport psychology was virtually non-existent during her competitive years in the 1980s. She recounted a transformative experience working with a sport psychologist, which later inspired her to advocate for the inclusion of sport psychology within Sports Authority of India (SAI) structures—though initially rejected, the subject is now more widely accepted and openly discussed. She also highlighted the psychological needs of residential athletes and noted that many physical education instructors are not trained to identify mental health challenges among young athletes.
2. **Requirement of psychological interventions for school sports:** Dr. Chaitanya Sridhar reflected on how impactful it might have been if athletes of Ashwini's generation had access to psychological support earlier in their careers. She advocated for the inclusion of sport psychology interventions at the school level and emphasized that any effective ecosystem must support not just athletes, but coaches as well.
3. **Developing a psychologically stronger coach ecosystem even at grassroots:** Neelam Babardesai spoke about the importance of equipping coaches at the grassroots level with life skills and awareness of mental health needs. She stressed that community-specific, structured awareness programs are vital and that coaches must be empowered to facilitate open conversations around mental health—especially because young athletes at that level often lack the vocabulary or confidence to express distress.
4. **Building increased collaboration between sport psychologists and management:** Darshan NK addressed the ecosystem from a management lens. He noted the pressing need for collaboration between organizations and sport psychology experts. His key concerns included lack of adequate funding and the need for standardization in professional practice. He advocated for data-driven program design and regular assessments during team-level interventions to ensure accountability and consistency.

Moderator's reflections

Parinaaz Irani shared her observations on the panel discussion and expanded on stakeholder expectations for sport psychologists. A key insight was the importance of aligning sport psychology programs with both cultural and organizational contexts. Programs, especially at the grassroots level, must respect and respond to community-specific dynamics.

Present Challenges

1. Lack of culturally relevant programmes catering to the community and sport.
2. Gap between performance psychology based interventions and mental health related interventions.
3. Inadequate funding for sustained sport psychology programmes.
4. Lack of right psychology based education for coaches especially at school and grassroot level.

Future Directions

1. Smaller groups can come together to get educated and to break the stigma around psychology and sport psychology especially in smaller communities in rural India.
2. Corporate India should specifically list down CSR exclusively for sustained sport psychology and Mental well-being in sports.
3. There should be formal inclusion of sport psychology services and mental health provision in the national budget, while planning for schemes such as Khelo India.
4. Along with performance psychology interventions, sport psychologists should mainly focus on development of holistic emotional literacy, life skills and development of positive identity through sports.
5. Emphasis on coach education and sport psychology based awareness is critical for the implementation of any sport psychology programme. Coaches act as critical gatekeepers and influencers in an athlete's journey, and their active involvement can determine the reach and impact of any psychological program.

Conclusion

To conclude, a psychologically aware ecosystem depends on collaboration, sustained awareness efforts, and the empowerment of coaches and support staff. Apart from the above mentioned actionables in order to develop this ecosystem, program implementation must consider both broader social and localised organisational cultures.

C. Panel Discussion on Technology in Sports Psychology

Panel Discussion Overview

The panel discussion on "*Technology and Sport Psychology*" offered a compelling look at how emerging technologies are reshaping the way mental training and athlete well-being are understood and supported. The session delved into how real-time data, digital tools, and AI are becoming integral to performance enhancement and psychological intervention, while also underscoring the importance of retaining human connection and interpretive insight within this shift.

Moderator: Mudit Krishani

Panelists:

1. Nimrod Mon Brokman (Founder, Behavioural Foresight)
2. Subhasis Banerjee (Founder, SynPhNe)
3. Teja Prakash Karkala (Co-founder and Operations Lead, Netrin)

Key Insights and Arguments from the panellists.

1. Technology as a Tool to Break Plateaus and Understand Off-Ground

Performance. A central idea explored on the panel was the recognition that athletic performance is not confined to the training field or competition arena—athletes are “on” 24/7. Technology allows practitioners to monitor this full spectrum by capturing data related to recovery, mood, stress, and cognitive function through tools like wearables and mental wellness apps. This comprehensive visibility opens up new opportunities for proactive and preventive mental health support, which traditional methods might miss.

- #### **2. Precision and Objectivity in Athlete Monitoring.**
- One of the strengths of technology highlighted in the discussion was its role in removing guesswork. With access to reliable, quantitative data, sport psychologists can better detect patterns and track progress, which improves the precision of mental training plans. Importantly, this objective feedback can be demystifying for athletes, allowing them to see tangible evidence of improvement or concern.

- #### **3. Customization and Personalization Through Data.**
- The panel emphasized the value of tailoring interventions to the individual, and how technology makes this possible at scale. For instance, data from biofeedback sessions or mood trackers can help

psychologists craft customized relaxation protocols or performance routines. This aligns well with client-centered approaches in psychology, reinforcing both efficacy and athlete buy-in.

4. **Enhancing Collaborative Roles and Stakeholder Communication.** Sports psychologists, the panel noted, are uniquely positioned to act as translators—bridging the gap between raw data and actionable insight for athletes, coaches, and families. By contextualizing the “what” and “why” behind the data, psychologists can foster more informed decision-making and cohesive support systems around the athlete.
5. **Early Detection of Mental Health Needs.** An important point was the use of technology as a proactive flagging system. Changes in metrics like sleep quality, nutrition, or HRV (Heart Rate Variability) could indicate the need for psychological check-ins. This interdisciplinary lens positions sports psychologists not just as responders to mental health needs, but as anticipators of them—enabling earlier, more effective interventions.
6. **Data Literacy and Evolving Professional Competence.** A recurring theme was the rising importance of data literacy. As AI and digital platforms become standard tools in sport, the psychologist’s role is shifting—not only to interpret psychological constructs but also to make sense of interconnected physiological and behavioral data. Embracing this change involves continuous learning, especially in understanding which data points matter and how to extract meaningful narratives from them.

Moderator’s reflections

Mudit felt the panel agreed that the purpose extends beyond innovation for its own sake; rather, it is rooted in the need to measure, track, and improve the quality and effectiveness of mental performance interventions.

He highlighted that one of the most compelling insights of the session was the panel’s focus on data accuracy and relevance. The emphasis was not just on collecting more data, but on ensuring that the data is trustworthy, valid, and actionable.

Mudit reflected on how the panel effectively addressed the challenge of navigating large amounts of information and using it as a **signal for when and how to intervene psychologically**. This included interpreting patterns, understanding athlete states over time, and learning to work with tech interfaces that can complement practitioner judgment rather than replace it.

Present Challenges

1. Subjective and non-tangible parameters in psychology makes sports psychology parameters least trusted especially in a huge academy or organisation. Technology can make it more tangible so as to develop standardised norms even for future Indian athletes.
2. Lack of literacy about technology and data driven intervention amongst sport psychologists.
3. Lack of communication between stakeholders like coaches, sport science staff, with the data obtained from biofeedback equipment.
4. Less evidence based research on importance of technology in a sport psychologists' office.

Future Directions

1. Driving collection of data with a purpose and connecting it to actionable interventions.
2. Use data to track impactful data such as mood and state, correlate it to session interventions and exercises to connect data.
3. Use data from other physiological areas such as HRV and sleep in order to correlate it to psychological state.
4. Include modules in universities that not only teach usage of machines but also understanding and studying a variety of parameters that can be measured and has psychological implications.

Conclusion

Data fluency will soon become a core competency for sport psychology professionals. With AI-driven tools becoming increasingly integrated into performance ecosystems, practitioners must cultivate comfort and competence with technology. The session left participants with a clear message: embracing technological literacy is not about replacing human insight, but enhancing it.

D. Panel Discussion on Modalities of Sport Psychology Practice in India – Mission 2036

Panel Discussion Overview

The concluding panel discussion on "Modalities of Sport Psychology Practice in India – Mission 2036" served as a platform to understand the current landscape, challenges, and future directions for sports psychology practice in India. With speakers from varied years of experience and professional backgrounds—including private practice, government sectors, athlete foundations, and mental health services—the discussion provided a holistic view of what it means to be a sport psychologist in India today, and what it could look like in the years leading up to 2036.

Moderator: Varadayini Gorhe

Panellists:

- **Disha Musaadi** – *Sports Psychologist, Reliance Foundation for youth sports*
- **Gayatri Vartak** – *Co-Founder, Samiksha Sports*
- **Sanika Divekar** – *Senior Sports Psychologist, MPower AMP*
- **Laxmi Mishra** – *Sports Authority of India (SAI), Bangalore NCOE*

Key Insights and Arguments from the panellists.

- 1. Aligning Goals with Athlete-Centric Practice.** A key insight was the importance of young sport psychologists directing their aspirations toward the athlete's best interests. The panel stressed the need for intentionality in practice, encouraging early-career professionals to focus less on titles and more on meaningful impact.
- 2. Drawing Boundaries in Residential Set-Ups.** The panel addressed the complexities of working in residential environments where roles often become blurred. In Indian cultural contexts, sport psychologists may find themselves taking on responsibilities beyond their scope—at times becoming a parent figure, warden, or mentor. While this flexibility can help athletes feel more supported, the panel emphasized the practitioner should be mindful of ethical and professional boundaries at all times.
- 3. Distinguishing Between Mental Health and Performance.** A significant insight was the need to clearly differentiate mental health issues from performance concerns. The panel urged practitioners to educate athletes, coaches, and stakeholders about the differences in symptoms, interventions, and outcomes between these two domains.

Building this awareness ensures that athletes receive the right kind of support at the right time, and that sport psychologists are not misinterpreted as only addressing one aspect of psychological care.

- 4. Managing Professional Identity in the Age of Social Media.** The discussion brought attention to the growing pressure on young professionals to constantly update their work on social media. The panel highlighted the need for digital discernment—knowing what to post, what to keep private, and how to maintain athlete confidentiality and professional decorum online. Social media can be a tool for visibility, but must never come at the cost of ethical integrity.

Moderator's reflections

In her reflections, moderator Varadayini Gorhe summarized the key insights while adding her own perspective on the path forward. She proposed three actionable goals to strengthen the profession towards 2036. Firstly, focusing on stronger normatives around education and evidence based research to support the education pathways. Secondly, emphasis on supervised practice should be included as a mandated pathway. Thirdly, organisations should ensure the ratio of sport psychologists to athletes to be 1:20.

Present Challenges

1. Hiring sport psychologists at a national level and international level has become a box to check or like a formality, rather than role or competence based.
2. Funding to hire sport psychologists is not widely available especially for long-term projects or for the whole Olympic cycle.
3. Unethical practices and marketing have become prevalent, which can harm the relationship between the sport psychologist, athlete and sometimes even the organisation.

Future Directions

1. Hiring sport psychologists should have a direction towards performance or mental health of the athletes and the organisation. Sport organisation leaders must note that a single sport psychologist cannot cater to performance of the athlete, mental health of the organisational staff.
2. Hiring a sport psychologist should also mean them travelling with the team or the high performing organisation for camps. It should be for a long term engagement that can ensure the implementation of psychological interventions for a longer cycle.

3. Supervised practice and mentoring should be made mandatory as a prerequisite for hiring at any center of excellence or high performing center.
4. Lastly, associations and institutes like SAI must emphasise on ethical practices, and also make sure every staff is educated about confidential data and storage. This will ensure development of trust and a safe space for the athlete.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the panel discussion painted an honest and inspiring picture of the evolving field of sport psychology in India. With passion, structure, and collaboration, there lies immense potential to shape a profession that is sustainable, impactful, and globally respected. As India prepares for opportunities like the 2036 Olympics, now is the time to invest in systemic changes that empower sport psychologists to support athletes with integrity, competence, and heart.



VIII. Student Driven Session: Poster Presentations

A significant highlight of *Mind the Gap 2025* was the **Poster Presentation**, which showcased innovative research from budding scholars in the field of sports psychology. This year, we received **four compelling submissions**, each exploring critical themes aligned with the conference focus on the profession of sports psychology in India.

The posters presented were:

1. **The Influence of Team Cohesion and Family Support on Team Motivation among Amateur Athletes**

By Shane Thomas & Shilpa Grace

This poster examined how familial and team-based emotional ecosystems contribute to motivation in amateur athletic settings.

2. **Unrevealing Religiosity on Coaching Experiences and its Impact on Athletes**

By Kashish Pandey

The study probed into how religious beliefs and values shape coaching styles and the resultant athlete-coach dynamics.

3. **Exploring the Role of Self-care on Performance and Wellbeing among Sport Coaches: An Ethnocultural Study**

By Nandini Choudhary, David Price, Sahen Gupta

This work offered a cross-cultural lens into how self-care practices influence both the professional effectiveness and personal wellness of sports coaches.

4. **Psychological Well-being in Injured Athletes**

By Sivanuja Peddada

A deeply insightful exploration into the mental health trajectories of athletes dealing with physical injury.

➤ *This entry was awarded the **Merit Position** for its academic rigour and real-world relevance.*

The presentations were reviewed by **Dr. Baskaran** and **Dr. Debala**, who provided expert feedback and acknowledged the originality and applied value of each submission.

IX. Participants' Reflections

To complement the learnings and outcomes from *Mind the Gap 2025*, a post-event feedback form was disseminated among attendees to gather insights regarding their experience of the conference as well as their broader views on the field of sport psychology in India. The responses, drawn from students, practitioners, educators, and interdisciplinary professionals, offered valuable perspectives on the profession's current status, future potential, and pressing needs.

A. Awareness and Acceptance of Sport Psychology

Participants generally acknowledged a growing awareness of sport psychology in India, particularly in metropolitan and elite sports settings. However, many highlighted that this awareness remains uneven across regions, institutions, and stakeholder groups. Several respondents pointed out that while athletes increasingly accept psychological support, coaches, parents, and administrators still often misunderstand or underutilize the profession.

Key Insight: Awareness has improved, but systemic understanding and stakeholder engagement remain areas for significant growth.

INDIAN SPORTS PSYCHOLOGISTS' ASSOCIATION

B. Challenges Identified by Respondents

The most frequently cited challenges included:

- Lack of formal educational pathways and accredited postgraduate programs in sport psychology
- Limited supervision and mentorship opportunities for early-career professionals
- Stigma surrounding mental health support, especially in grassroots contexts
- The prevalence of unqualified or under-trained individuals practicing under the sport psychology title
- Language and cultural mismatches between practitioners and athletes

Key Insight: There is a need for robust, standardized training structures, clearer regulation of professional titles, and efforts to increase regional accessibility.

C. Opportunities for Growth and Development

Participants identified several promising avenues for development:

- Expanding sport psychology services to grassroots and school-level athletes
- Promoting interdisciplinary collaboration between psychologists, coaches, nutritionists, and physiotherapists
- Encouraging context-sensitive research grounded in Indian cultural realities
- Integrating sport psychology modules into coach education and certification programs

Key Insight: The future of the profession lies in integrated, multidisciplinary work and regionally relevant approaches.

D. Cultural Considerations in Practice

A unanimous theme across responses was the critical importance of cultural sensitivity in sport psychology practice. Participants stressed that interventions must reflect India's linguistic diversity, social structures, and collective value systems.

Key Insight: Culturally adapted frameworks and training resources are essential for ethical and effective practice.

E. Ethical Considerations and Professional Conduct

Respondents emphasized the importance of:

- Maintaining confidentiality and clear boundaries with athletes and coaching staff
- Respecting cultural norms without compromising evidence-based care
- Establishing ethical oversight mechanisms to protect both clients and practitioners

Key Insight: A comprehensive, context-aware ethical code of conduct is necessary to uphold professional standards.

F. Vision for the Future of Sport Psychology in India

Many participants envisioned a future where sport psychologists are integral members of an athlete's support team across all levels—from grassroots to elite sport. They advocated for:

- National-level licensing or credentialing frameworks
- Increased research output rooted in Indian sporting contexts
- Greater visibility through public education campaigns and storytelling

Key Insight: Participants expressed cautious optimism for the future, emphasizing that sustained advocacy, training, and institutional support will be essential.

X. Conference Experience and Ratings

The overall response to the conference was overwhelmingly positive. On a scale of 1 to 5, participants provided the following average ratings:

Category	Average Score (out of 5)
Overall Satisfaction	4.82
Quality of Keynotes and Panel Discussions	4.89
Relevance of Topics and Content	4.85
Networking and Community Building Opportunities	4.40
Diversity and Inclusion in Programming	4.75
Logistics, Communication, and Venue	4.70
Likelihood to Recommend to Peers	4.90

Respondents appreciated the thematic coherence of the event, the diversity of speakers, and the opportunities to engage in honest dialogue about the profession. Notably, several attendees remarked that this was one of the first events where they felt “seen” as emerging professionals navigating a still-developing field.

The feedback gathered from *Mind the Gap 2025* reflects a profession in motion—fueled by passion, tempered by structural challenges, and sustained by community. Participants echoed a strong desire for mentorship, ethical clarity, cultural relevance, and greater access to quality

education. The insights gained from this feedback will continue to inform INSPA's strategic goals and programming in the years to come.

XI. Conclusion

Mind The Gap 2025 was not just a dialogue but a declaration. The community is ready for action. From embodying ethical, systemic, and artistic tools to co-authoring a shared vision, this year's event showed what is possible when intention meets collaboration.

As we build toward *Vision 2036*, the profession of sport psychology in India must now leap into its next chapter: one that is local, ethical, bold, and collectively held.

