



REHEARSING RESILIENCY: IMPROMPTU ROLE-PLAYING IN SPORT

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Further Information
This poster and further information is available at <http://www.theibsc.org/>

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Introduction

My interest in the topic of adaptability was borne largely out of frustration. I often felt that I was coaching an ever-increasing number of "fair-weather" teams — teams that performed well when everything went to plan, but collapsed when it mattered most or when something unforeseen was encountered. They were inflexible, as was I, and I wanted to change that.

I identified two of the problems within my own practice that I believed were contributing to the inflexibility of the players I coach. I then designed a research project aimed at mitigating these problematic areas so that I could produce athletes who were more adaptable and willing to accept responsibility for tackling problems that were not of their own making.

The boys I coach and teach love to play games and I hoped to tap into this, so I designed a Monopoly-style deck of chance cards that was used during practice matches. Throughout practice, the boys would take turns drawing cards for their team. The scenarios presented to them on these cards ranged from unanticipated injuries to poor adjudicating by the referee. Ultimately, what I hoped to do was make change part of the game and the result was that boys in my team actually enjoyed drawing their cards and looked forward to and actually had fun while developing their adaptability skills.

The Research Question

How might the use of impromptu role-play games in sport enhance a student-athlete's ability to cope with adversity?

Research Context and Participants

Jeppe High School for Boys is located in the heart of Johannesburg, South Africa's Central Business District. My action research project took place over the course of an 8-week water polo season. I worked with the 15 boys in my under-15 water polo team. The boys trained four times per week for 90 minutes and played one match per week.

The Research Action

Once the initial survey and discussion were completed, I explained the chance game to the team. I incorporated the game into our weekly practice games over the course of 8 weeks. Throughout the project I closely monitored the boys' reactions to the cards they were dealt over the course of the project. I interviewed boys three times over the eight-week period in the hope that they would be able to see an improvement in their adaptability skills or, at the very least, an acceptance that change in sport, as in life, was inevitable albeit unpredictable.

Data Collection and Analysis

By utilising qualitative research methods, I was able to gain clarity about whether or not the boys were becoming more adept in their approach to difficult scenarios. It was important for me to collate the data in a way that would give me, the researcher, a better understanding of the unique perspective that each participant brought to this project.

- All interviews and questionnaires were transcribed
- Recorded discussion sessions were transcribed
- Commonalities were identified and dominant themes became evident

Key Findings and Discussion

As I navigated my way through the data generated over the course of this project, three main themes clearly emerged. Through participation in the chance-card games, which were used to augment their regular training regime, and once results were coded, it became clear that the boys, having completed the programme, demonstrated improved adaptability in the following areas:

- Teamwork
- A willingness to engage with adversity
- Self-awareness and accountability

Conclusions

I have seen first-hand the effect that this project had on the boys I coach. For the first time, many of the boys began, much like me, to empathise with their teammates, and I witnessed a marked decline in self-destructive and impulsive behaviour. This IBSC action research project also made me acutely aware of the fact that I cannot, and should not, try to separate myself from the learning process. I have realised that I, too, am not the finished article.

Key Readings

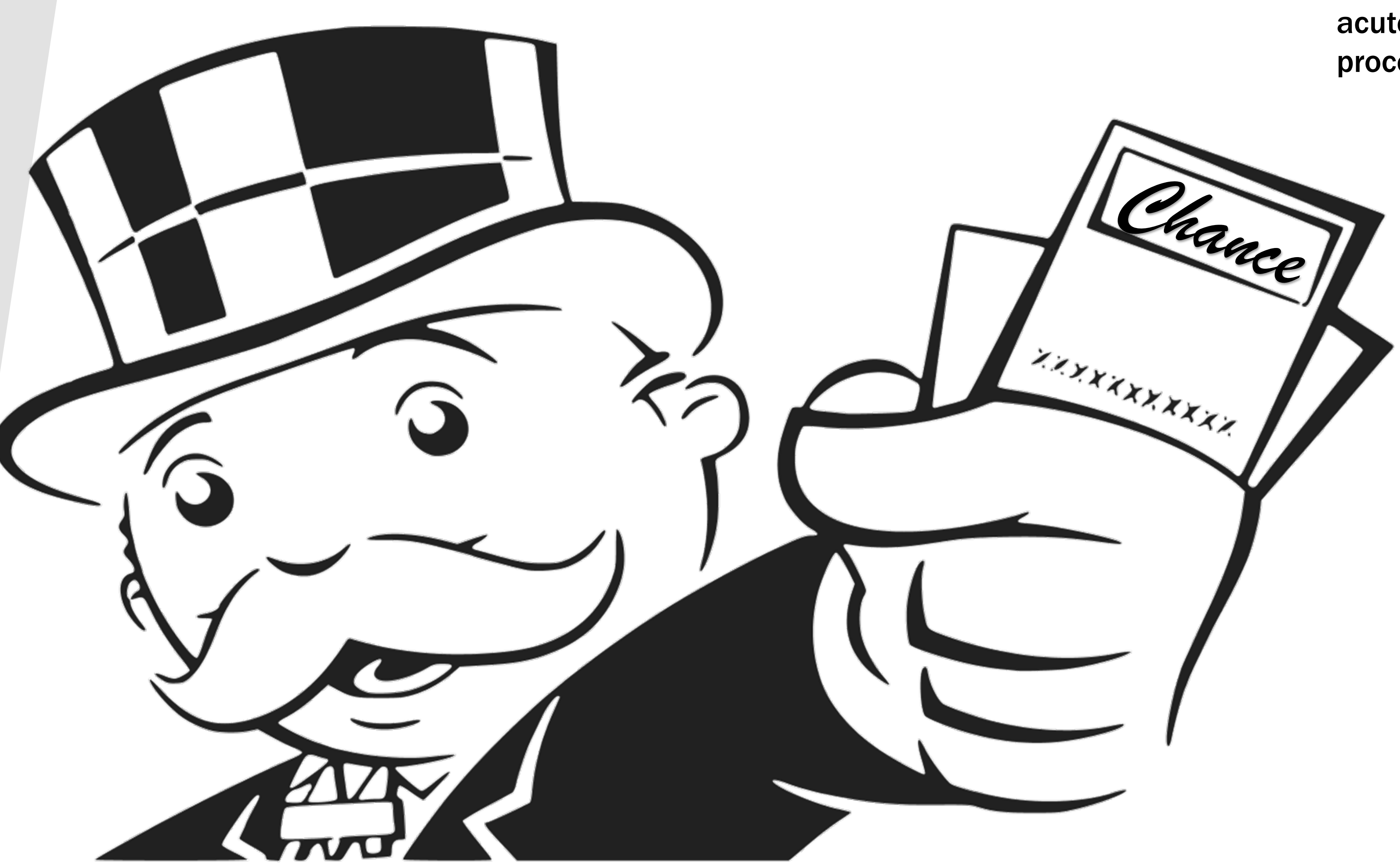
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"In training I looked forward to my captain receiving a red card or my goalie being stung by a bee."

"When Mr Allan refs us we know we'll never get any decent calls."



International Boys' Schools Coalition Action Research Program 2017 - 2018:
Adaptability in a Changing World