

Sport Psychology, COVID-19 And Role of Athletes in Cultivating Resilience and Fostering Spirituality in General Public: A Case Study

Sonia Mukhtar¹

Abstract: This paper serves to provide a rapid analysis into the intersection of sport psychology, COVID-19 pandemic, and the unique role of athletes in nurturing resilience and promoting spirituality within the wider community. The objective of this paper is the identification of strategies for post-COVID-19 sport with a particular focus on the role of athletes' influence. Focusing on a case study of renowned athlete and influencer Yuzuru Hanyu, the study explored how his experiences from previous adversities and actions during the COVID-19 pandemic have served as a source of motivation and resilience for individuals facing adversities. Further, references to the Olympic Games and community recreational motivation and emotional attachment towards their favored athletes' programs are made. Through a qualitative analysis of Hanyu's interviews, public statements, and media coverage, key themes related to the role of athletes in promoting mental fortitude, coping mechanisms, spiritual growth and resilience among individuals facing challenges emerged. The goal of this paper is to stimulate discussion to sport psychology practices, inspire public health research initiatives and attract community resilience programs and encourage sports' governing bodies transformative potential of sports figures in fostering positive psychological outcomes amidst crisis situations.

Keywords:

COVID-19; sport; Olympics; figure skating; sports psychology, spiritual growth, resilience, role models

¹ Department of Medicine, Universidad de Oviedo (Spain), Global Disaster Medicine – Health Needs and response, Karolinska Institutet (Sweden), Department of Primary Care and Population Health, University of Nicosia (Cyprus), sonia.mukhtar12@gmail.com

Introduction

On January 30, 2020, WHO (World Health Organization) announced the occurrence of the novel coronavirus and declared a PHEIC (Public Health Emergency of International Concern), which is the sixth PHEIC under the IHR (International Health Regulations) after H1N1 Influenza (2009), Polio (2014), Ebola in West Africa (2014), Zika (2016), Ebola in DRC (2019) [1]. We are living in a time of crisis – political polarization, poverty, climate change, social and racial disparities, mental illness and a novel pandemic are prevailing across the globe. This infectious disease’s pandemic crisis not only presented high mortality rate but also psychological unrest and mental distress to the rest of the world [2-6]. The viral infection’s uncertainty and unpredictability arose from its clinical presentation, transmission pattern, epidemiological features, novelty, scale, intensity, public health impact and the multitude of psychological problems. At the time of writing this paper, vociferous debates on maintaining equilibrium between interdependent health risks, impending economic collapse, cultural and gender inequality, minimal welfare support, verge of civil disobedience and social unrest among general public has beset the society. These are extraordinary times not because COVID-19 has become a global pandemic rather this is due to the adverse impact on healthcare, vocational, movement, social, cultural, psychological, political, mass/social media misinfodemics and recreational institution on regional, national and global scale.

One of the many dimensions of life is recreational activities which entails sports have been vastly impacted. Nevertheless, not much has been said about the present and future implications of this pandemic on the impact of sport, in general, and sub-fields of sport, in particular. Sports have witnessed the similar repercussions of COVID-19. This pandemic outbreak has limited the extent to which people including athletes and general public interacts and socialize. It is not

fully-assessed that what sport and sport participation will look like in post-COVID-19 era. Nonetheless, it is anticipated that COVID-19 could fundamentally change the way athletes and sport organizations operates as a function of community's recreational activity. The integrative interconnection of sport psychology, global crises, public health emergencies and the influential role of athletes has garnered increasing attention in recent times, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and post-pandemic era. This article aims at exploring the complex dynamics involved in how athletes, such as a renowned ice-skater Yuzuru Hanyu, contributed to cultivating resilience and fostering spirituality among the general public during challenging times of earthquake and global pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted individuals worldwide, leading to increased stress, anxiety, and uncertainty. In the times of adversity, athletes as role models emerged as pivotal figures in promoting mental well-being and coping strategies for the general public at local and international level. Their actions, insights, and experiences served as powerful examples that inspire and uplift communities facing various challenges.

This study focused on Yuzuru Hanyu, a renowned figure in the world of ice-skating whose journey during the pandemic offers valuable insights into the influential role of athletes in fostering resilience and spiritual growth. By delving into Hanyu's experiences, public engagements, and responses to the pandemic, this research aims to explore the mechanisms through which athletes as role model influence individuals and community's psychological and spiritual resilience. Sport psychology plays an important role in understanding the mental fortitude, coping mechanisms, and psychological processes, performance optimization strategies employed by athletes. Examining these aspects within the context of a global crisis like COVID-19 provides a unique opportunity to explore the intersection of sports, psychology, and community and individual's well-

being. This case study aimed at exploring how athletes like Yuzuru Hanyu could contribute to fostering a sense of hope, connection, and inner strength among the general public. The findings gained from this research are significant not only to sports enthusiasts/followers but also to mental health professionals, policymakers, and individuals navigating challenges in their daily lives. Therefore, the aim of this paper is the identification of strategies for figure-skating sport (a popular sport in many Asian and European countries) with specific focus on Yuzuru Hanyu's (acclaimed Japanese figure-skater) influence as a symbol of resilience in past and current crisis. The objective of this paper is to stimulate discussion and attract sports' governing bodies on the influence of athletes and their sport on public which could be carefully monitored evaluated and considered in the future implications. Overall, this article will lay the groundwork for a comprehensive assessment of the multifaceted dynamics involving sport psychology, COVID-19 pandemic, and the transformative role of athletes in promoting resilience and spirituality within society, with a specific focus on Yuzuru Hanyu as a compelling case study.

Role of Sports in post-COVID-19

Athletes and their coaches are experiencing emotional and psychological reactions of disappointment, frustration, uncertainty and negative emotions to the repercussions triggered by postponement of qualification tournaments. Years of training of athletes in their last seasons of competition has come to halt suddenly. For some, the postponement meant retirement and loss of opportunity and for others, temporal shift of timing and recovery from injuries. For some players, this means existential crisis; and for others, optimism and positive attitude. Postponement has also shaken the foundation of physical training and mental wellbeing (stamina, mental toughness, practice, motivation, therapies) which relies on the assumingly 'unmoved' official games.

The question on the health of the athletes and sport gatherings has become an unequivocal issue at local and global level in sport industry. Furthermore, structural changes, delays and postponements or cancellations of various sporting events have affected the psychological wellbeing and sense of self and identity of playing and non-playing sport staff, and possibly the enthusiasts' sport participants' as well which could be investigated from multiple perspectives [7]. Further, COVID-19 related research needs to examine role of athletes and sports organizations in encouraging general public is recommended.

The first challenge that piqued the interest of athletes, sport managers and sport organizations, for past months, to the fundamental future of the sport industry (either as part of the welfare system of part of state/private sector). And how this will shape its operation of re-sportization and de-sportization in post-COVID-19 world: challenges, transformation, reconceptualization and sport participation and sport gatherings. For instance, although ice skating has been a popular activity for centuries, figure skating in its current form originate in mid-19th century and bloomed after World War II (past crisis) when United States and Canada began to dominate competitions and introduced technical innovations to international sport competitors. With these changes in post-crisis, the emphasis of competitive figure skating shifted to athleticism and aestheticism, and technicality and artistry. Further, the question on whether the training of Japanese figure skater, Yuzuru Hanyu trained under Canadian coaches will change its operation or international audience viewed a favored Asian figure skater in a new light.

Another challenge is the organizational structure of sport change in post-COVID-19 as the postponement of elite competitive sport such as Olympic Games is ambiguous and instigated the discussion of end of globalization and citing nationalist and populist trends in politics and environmental viability in the

future limits more parameters. Sport is commonly organized through regional and international institutions facilitate sporting community, sport socialization, support sociability and supportive communities of mutually oriented people [8]. For instance, global response has prompted the immediate reticence, total shutdown and postponement of competitive sport events at all levels including 2020 Summer Olympic Games of 206 nations in Tokyo, Japan and EURO 2020 men's international tournament across 12 European cities, and various leagues and diverse cricket, tennis, football and other sport events [9].

One of the most important challenges in sport participation, as the conduit or vector, is the threat of proximity. The “sport for all” notion could be challenged, altered or enforced in its most literal sense because of the threat of health on the vulnerable population like older adults or pregnant women. The impact of sport organizational blocs which are functioning with funds, financial resources and money specifically which is sought through community participation and that sport participation is the product of inclusiveness and mutual interests and gathering likely to be altered factor. Secondary to biomedical and economic-politico trend is associated with the public response, behavioral modification and adaptability of COVID-19 related social distancing which has been emerging incessantly [10, 11].

Assumptions about sport, playing and non-playing staff, sport people including athletes, managers, sport clubs' owners, sponsors, trainers, teachers and coaches, support staff, media corporations – wages and stark financial inequalities illustrate the gender-based and class-based norms and inequalities that exists in any sport and merit further investigation on the impact of COVID-19 on these circumstances. The coronavirus indiscriminately and disproportionately affect any individual –and yet socio-cultural politico-economic discourse surrounding the labeling, stigmatization, marginalization, exclusion and segregation – even

privileging physical health over mental health – has become a new form of inequality due to internalized cognitive errors, in sport players and sport participants as well – a prevalent context which could reproduce and exacerbate [12, 13]. On these grounds, an influential sports figure from Asian descent such as Yuzuru Hanyu could help de-stigmatized the labeling originated from xenophobia and racism amidst COVID-19 crisis. During the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak Hanyu’s social media communication to coronavirus survivors “I believe a light can be seen just as it was on the pitch black sky on March 11 [2011: earthquake and tsunami]” consoling Japan and his fans is commended. And sport in post-COVID-19 era raised the question whether athletes could impact COVID-19 public perception and response.

Sports figures display extraordinary personal characteristics equivalent to role-models and idol/ideal choices for spectators. Such characteristics effectively influence attitudes of general public because they are revered and esteemed among young people and thus their endorsement has meaningful influence on people’s evaluation of any circumstance [14]. Athletes are perceived to possess positive character traits including perseverance and discipline [15]. Through their fan-following and popularity, they became familiar public figures [16]. For instance, television and internet’s contribution in the sport’s popularity by showing skating programs and showing skaters in kiss and cry area has unprecedented influence of the sport’s wide range interests across Russia, United States, Canada, Japan, China, Korea, France, Germany and Italy and many other countries. Consequently, sportspersons became role models for the multiple segments of the population [17].

Hopefully, sport will continue to play an important role in society in the future. For time being, it is important to demonstrate that sport positively contributes in mitigating the fear related to coronavirus and influential

sport/athletes could play that part in pacifying nations and individuals alike. One of such sport examples is figure skating aimed at conciliating nations at global scale which thrived in its current form after World War II. On February 4-9, 2020 amidst COVID-19 mass sport gathering joined to attend Yuzuru Hanyu's routines despite the virulent threat.

Method

This study used a qualitative case study design to explore the role of athletes, specifically a renowned athlete Yuzuru Hanyu, in cultivating resilience and fostering spirituality in the general public during the COVID-19 pandemic. A case study approach allows for an in-depth examination of the experiences, actions, and perceptions of the athlete within the context of the research objectives. Information and data related to Hanyu's experiences, public engagements, and responses to the COVID-19 pandemic will be gathered from publicly available sources such as interviews, articles, social media platforms, and official statements. The data collection process involved gathering qualitative data from various sources related to Yuzuru Hanyu's activities and interactions during the COVID-19 pandemic. This included: a) Transcripts of interviews conducted with Yuzuru Hanyu were analyzed for insights into his perspectives, coping strategies, and contributions to fostering resilience and spirituality, b) Media Coverage in articles, news reports, and videos featuring Yuzuru Hanyu's public appearances, initiatives, and messages related to the pandemic was reviewed and analyzed, c) Social Media Analysis through social media posts, interactions with fans, and public statements on platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube was examined for themes and patterns relevant to the research objectives, and d) Official Statements or speeches made by Yuzuru Hanyu through official channels or events were included in the data collection process.

Planet Hanyu. Population: 1

Yuzuru Hanyu is the man that the fans want to see in Beijing 2022. Yuzuru Hanyu (羽生結弦) is 25 years old Japanese Figure skater who competes in men's singles figure skating discipline. He is a two-time Olympic champion (2014 Winter Games in Sochi, Russia; 2018 Winter Games in P'yŏngch'ang, South Korea), a two-time World champion (2014, 2017), a four-time Grand Prix Final champion (2013–2016), a Four Continents champion (2020), the 2010 World Junior champion, the 2009–10 Junior Grand Prix Final champion, and a four-time Japanese national champion (2012–2015). He is the first men's singles skater from Asia to win multiple World Championships; at age 19, he is the youngest male skater to win Olympic medal; and first Asian figure skater competing in men's singles to win the Olympic gold; and first man to win two consecutive Olympic gold medals in six decades [18]. Since in singles' figure skating, sole athlete performs skating on ice which reduces the chances of virulent transmission and thus the probability of skating is likely in post-COVID-19.

Two-time Olympic gold medalist achieved Super Slam and set world record in the Four Continents figure skating competition on February 4-9, 2020 in South Korea held during the COVID-19 outbreak (before being declared a pandemic) which was un/surprisingly joined by mass sport public gathering only to attend the Yuzuru Hanyu's routines. Having won all major competitions in his senior and junior career and achieving Super Slam in the 2020 Four Continents Championships, Hanyu has become the first male singles skater to archive this feat. And by doing so he has bridged the link between European-American and Asian countries as one of the most accomplished, acclaimed and influential athlete. This celebrity-like fame and sport-like spirit has garnered cult-fan-following in many Asian and European countries where athletes' role is more pertinent and influential in public perception and response. Such impact could be

directed to encourage COVID-19 related behavioral-modification, healthy-behaviors and compliance with quarantine in public.

‘Super heroes that can fly’

Yuzuru Hanyu is regarded by analysts as one of the greatest figure skater in history, known for his ability to combine technique with versatile artistry, consistency in results in a highly competitive field and ability to deliver under pressure is highly acknowledged [19]. He is known for his astonishing ability to combine technique with creativity and artistry in a high quality of execution of precision, flow and ice coverage. Hanyu has broken world records nineteen times. He is known for his difficult skating technique including triple axel entries, back counter or twizzles, doughnut spin, Biellmann spin, layback Ina Bauer, hydroblading and the side lunge – he is the only skater who has landed a quadruple toe loop-triple axel sequence in competition.

While skating competitions are mainly about quads as cleanly as possible to maximize points, Hanyu has raised the bar with his well-rounded performance with combined technical precision and artistry. Hanyu modeled himself after Evgeni Plushenko and Johnny Weir, eventually mastered such difficult elements as the Biellmann spin and the quadruple jump. Hanyu’s performance cross gender boundary through his incorporation of elegant, dramatic and emotional dance choreography and the way he pruriently executes them – Hanyu’s executed Biellmann spin, a spin which is more popular in female skaters and so few male skater could execute, is so effortlessly done that it has been name “Hanyu spin” by media outlet [20]. His figure skating features artistic poise, diverse melodies, aesthetically-pleasing performance and precision in a sporting environment which requires a high degree of both athletic and technical skills. Such feats has surpassed the national boundary and attracted international audience. In post-

COVID-19, public might want to enjoy a leisure sport activity which hold more poise than higher-degree and brings out emotions and aesthetical appeal making Hanyu's routines all the more desirable.

“He is one of the Usain Bolts.”

"He is one of the best the world has ever seen in any sport. He's one of those Usain Bolts. He is that rare athlete that is to be seen," an Olympic medalist Tracy Wilson says, Yuzuru Hanyu's coaching specialist at Toronto Cricket Club in Canada [21]. "He is on another level", she added, "he is like a rock-star, he goes into the rink and he's got this schtick, this star quality and he puts on a show. You can't miss it. You can't ignore it. "And it's beautiful on TV but to see it live you can really see it and experience what he is truly capable of" [21]. "He is a superhuman", says American Asey Wagner, 2014 Olympian and 2016 world silver medalist. "I am in awe of what he is capable of doing within this sport. He is one of those once-in-a-lifetime athletes". "He's the most complete athlete in figure skating, probably ever," said Stephane Lambiel, a 2006 Olympic silver medalist. "He is definitely bigger than figure skating" says Akiko Tamura, a figure skating journalist [21]. He is deemed as the goat of the sport by international figure skating experts and his influence has introduced this sport to international viewers. This attraction and acceptance from international market can be directed to neutralize racism and xenophobia related to COVID-19.

Yuzuru Hanyu "ice-prince" has the delicate balance of artistry and athleticism and the skill required to glide and jump across the ice has dubbed him "the god of figure skating". His legion of loyal fans "Fanyus" obsessively follow Hanyu to competitions in every corner of the world is a spectacle to watch – spend tens of thousands of dollars each year for his competitions, waving

handmade banners, hysterically cheering and throwing Winnie the Pooh which is Hanyu's unofficial mascot since 2010 [22]. Many inspired emotionally-attached viewers from all over the world travels to watch Hanyu's performances and tickets are sold exponentially faster when Hanyu is to perform. Tickets are notoriously hard to secure at competitions where Hanyu is to perform, also ticks to competitions in Japan are offered on lottery-only basis – turning the phenomenon of Fanyu movement as “Fanyuism” [22]. Hanyu's influence on this sport, local Fanyus and international viewers' attraction is expected to revive this sport post-COVID-19.

Personality, performance and charisma connects people

Behind Yuzuru Hanyu's humility, composure and determinedness lies his true faith and confidence in his own self. “I don't want to wait until the next Olympics to be the Olympic champion; I want to be the Olympic champion now. And I'm willing to do anything to make that happen” David Wilson, Hanyu's choreographer quoted his email before his first Olympics winning [23]. His dominance in the sport, his meticulous attention to details, his ambition for smooth transitions, his desire for deeper connection with the audience, his passion to raise higher than technicality and yet raising the bar for technically difficult steps, sequences and jumps, and unparalleled drive to aim and archive higher goals are some of his best arsenals [23]. But Hanyu had to overcome more than the natural disasters (discussed later), his abdominal surgery, asthma, several injuries, and severe ankle injury (which caused bond, tendon and ligament damage) kept him off the ice for more than two months before Olympics.

Yuzuru Hanyu's public presence and actions during the pandemic were found to have a significant impact as a catalyst for public resilience enhancement through his displays of hope, determination, perseverance, compliance with

precautions and optimism resonated profoundly with individuals navigating their own adversities during the pandemic. Through his performances, interviews, and social media interactions, Hanyu influenced a sense of resilience that resonated deeply with individuals facing adversity during the pandemic. A study by Masten and Motti-Stefanidi (2020) emphasized that witnessing resilience in others can inspire and fortify one's own resilience, substantiating the findings in this article. Individuals from the different communities reported feeling inspired, motivated, and empowered by Hanyu's resilience, leading to the development and reinforcement of coping mechanisms, a sense of collective empowerment and a more resilient outlook on perspective-taking in the face of challenges.

What resonated with people, and not just his fans, is more than his skating, is how he managed himself amidst the past and current COVID-19 traumas of crisis, highest psychological pressure, demands of practice, competitions, press conferences, Gala exhibitions, closing banquet, media's scrutiny, endorsement of events and much more. His sportsmanship, mental toughness, fortitude and endurance are some of his athletic characteristics which could cultivate resilience in public and other athletes' post-COVID-19. His on and off-ice considerate attitude, thoughtful actions, humor and wisdom towards any traumatic crisis in his insightful responses and regard for other individuals is what his fans and even his opponents find endearing – personality, performance and charisma [24]. Fans from America quoted that '...emotion will heal your heart'; Manhattan bookstores found 19 magazines and books publications with Hanyu on cover; fans pray for his health and recovery at shrines and churches [19].

'Ice-Prince on Coronavirus'

NBS sports highlighted Hanyu's chronological choreography of his figure skating programs from 2011 till now, during the coronavirus pandemic. This

video has garnered more than a million views and his off the ice and without skates' video is applauded for encouraging social-distancing among athletes and general public. Olympic Channel covers the Hanyu's plea on twitter to stay home during the coronavirus crisis. Many athletes are connecting with fans using social media platforms. Hanyu is sharing his training regimes, his skating routines, his activities, charity work and motivational messages. His messages on twitter garnered leverage from fans, other athletes and public during this pandemic. Hanyu's interaction with fans deemed credible and convincing more than an average celebrity, as shown in previous sport's researches [25]. Athletes can thus make a difference in the combat against COVID-19. Yuzuru Hanyu joined other athletes in a social media service campaign promoted by the Japanese Olympic Committee for public awareness. In a video message on the Japanese Olympic Committee's official Twitter account, Hanyu appealed people to "refrain from going out unnecessarily and to cooperate with each other to prevent the spread of infection." He reflected back on the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami that devastated northeast Pacific coast of Japan including his hometown Sendai and quoted "I believe a light can be seen just as it was on the pitch-black night sky on March 11. "Yet like the evening skies during March 11, you can see the light only because there is darkness. Please trust those around you and turn to them when and where necessary" [26].

This statement is a paramount suggestion of his acute senses, imagery, mindfulness, empathy and environmental attunement – in one of his interviews he stated that *Notte Stellata* (starry night) was chosen deliberately because he recalled the stars were shining brightly the night of the earthquake and a music expert accounted that Hanyu was able to locate and noticed the 'noise' behind the music by merely listening a musical piece which musical experts could identify. This statement is also indicative of his reflection of bright and beautiful stars as

“little lights of hope” were the emotions of a 16-year-old Yuzuru Hanyu. Additionally, his Japanese language expressions and quotations are expressive accounts of his wisdom, empathy, courage, vision, emotional connection, Hanyu further extended his gratitude towards healthcare workers on the frontline to combat COVID-19 and said “I pray a day comes when we can chat with heartfelt smiles on our faces.”

Sport from the Perspective of Trauma: Throughout history, in times of uncertainty, the world looks for heroes (Google, 2019, 0:03) [27]

Sport in COVID-19 pandemic outbreak can be viewed from the perspective of trauma [28]. Crisis is likely to be a turning point in the values, values of athletes and sports, to give a sense of purpose (personal terminal and instrumental values) and meaning of values (societal values) that society places on sports [29]. Athletes embraced personal and societal values and construct their identity as sportspersons which are challenged in the absence of reinforcement and social support. Sport fans are no longer passive in the ‘devotion’ towards the sports and athletes but rather active co-creators of societal and commercial values [30].

Hanyu’s devotees and admirers hailed from all nations and this devotion is not the product of his undeniable dominance in the sport. It is the admiration and reverence towards his resilience in the face of adversity which he overcame to become the greatest figure skater of all time. In 2011, Sendai in northeastern Japan (Hanyu’s hometown) suffered a 9.0 magnitude earthquake and resulting tsunami caused by Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disasters – which destroyed his training ice rink while he was skating at ice-rink near the epicenter. After witnessing his hometown’s devastation, he became humbler and more strived for a sense of *know-thyself* towards his life. “It was at that point he connected with

higher purpose of what he does... Yes, it's a sport. Yes, it's about winning. But he wanted to connect with people emotionally, to take people out of their troubles, just for a moment, and move to another place, to find inspiration" said Brian Orser and Tracy Wilson [19].

In his autobiography, *Blue Flames*, Hanyu wrote (at the age of 17) that the earthquake "totally changed my values" "I often feel that things you take for granted are not always guaranteed," he reflected. "Everything exists by luck. Because I almost lost everything, I came to feel this way. The disaster totally changed my values. I want to make every single day, every practice and every competition count." He later joined others to raise recovery funds marking his altruism and prosocial behavior and when he won Olympics three years later at Sochi in 2014, his program was imbued with symbolic meaning for his homeland and Hanyu attributed it to "a gift for my country". Hanyu became an inspirational symbol of resilience for his fans in the wake of the disaster. Further, Hanyu could promote a sense of connectedness, unity and positive traits in anxious and overwhelmed public from the coronavirus crisis.

Conclusion

Hanyu's determination, perseverance, and optimistic outlook served as a powerful source of inspiration, leading to the development and reinforcement of coping mechanisms among individuals facing challenges. This aligns with Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), emphasizing the role of observational learning and modeling in shaping behavior (Mukhtar & Mahmood, 2019). Athletes and community (social media) influencers like Hanyu serve as influential role models, demonstrating resilience in the face of adversity as impactful as the COVID-19, thereby empowering others to navigate their own difficulties with greater strength and resilience.

The exploration of Hanyu's impact on fostering spiritual reflection and growth divulged a compelling narrative of personal transformation. Through introspective interviews, personal reflections, and interactive discussions on the deeper meaning of his sport of figure skating, Hanyu encouraged individuals to explore their spirituality/spiritual guidance and find solace in moments of uncertainty during the pandemic. Individuals reported a heightened sense of inner strength, purpose, and a sense of connection to transcendent values, attributing much of this spiritual growth and well-being to Hanyu's influence, echoing the principles of existential psychology.

Analysis of Hanyu's coping strategies and mindset revealed valuable insights into how athletes can navigate challenges, maintain a positive outlook during crises and influence their followers' lives. Hanyu's emphasis on mental fortitude, self-belief, and maintaining a positive mindset revealed valuable insights into how athletes can navigate challenges and maintain a positive outlook during crises. Hanyu's emphasis on mental strength, perseverance, and self-belief as coping strategies resonated with individuals struggling with anxiety, stress, and uncertainty which influenced individuals to adopt similar strategies in their lives, including setting realistic goals, focusing on personal growth, and cultivating resilience through adversity. Hanyu's influence on promoting a positive mindset and resilience strategies was evident in community's response, indicating the power/influence of athletes in shaping mental well-being. This aligns with Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (1984), highlighting the significance of cognitive appraisal and adaptive coping strategies in managing stressors and adversities. Athletes like Hanyu are the example of the power of resilience-focused coping strategies in promoting adaptive responses to adversity and fostering a positive outlook.

Yuzuru Hanyu's engagement with fans and communities through social media platforms and virtual interactions played a crucial role in strengthening social support networks during the pandemic. The felt connected and supported by Hanyu's messages of unity, solidarity, and compassion, particularly during periods of isolation and uncertainty. Hanyu's efforts to engage with his audience, share personal experiences, and promote mental well-being initiatives contributed significantly to building a sense of community resilience and mutual support. This aligns with theories of social support (Mukhtar & Mahmood, 2018), emphasizing the protective role of social networks in moderating stress and promoting well-being. Athletes, as community influencers, have the potential to cultivate strong social support networks, contributing significantly to community resilience and mutual cohesion.

This paper begins by discussing the role and challenges of sports and possible role of athletes in post-COVID-19 in certain perspective, context and linguistic frame of reference. This further explained the specific sport of figure skating and more specifically the role of Yuzuru Hanyu as one of the most acclaimed and influential sportspersons. Yuzuru Hanyu, besides his status of one of the greatest figure skaters of all time, is compassionate, resilient, altruistic and prosocial which makes him the well-suited sportsperson to advocate the globalized version of sport in post-COVID-19 era. Based on his sport, fame, personality, characteristic and character strengths that connect him to the public – it has demonstrated his impact on public response and perception. Perhaps considering the awareness of the COVID-19 related difficulties and post-COVID-19 sport participation could be utilized through his celebrity influence across multiple countries.

In summary, Yuzuru Hanyu's role as an athlete and influencer during the COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on fostering resilience, spirituality,

and community support. Through the lens of sport psychology, this study has provided valuable insights into how athletes can serve as inspirational figures, promote coping strategies, and contribute to community well-being. This paper contributes to a growing body of literature emphasizing the transformative potential of sport figures and athletes like Hanyu in positively influencing individuals' mental and emotional resilience, as well as fostering spiritual growth and reflection. The insights from this study have practical implications for sports psychology, mental health interventions, and community well-being initiatives. By understanding this influence effectively, sports psychologists, mental health professionals, and community leaders can leverage athletes' platforms for meaningful societal impact and resilience-building efforts.

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