



Dr Sandy Wolfson of Northumbria University pictured in Newcastle United's first team dressing room

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Academic recognised for distinguished contribution to sport psychology

A Northumbria University academic who specialises in the psychological factors around football has been recognised for her distinguished contribution to sport and exercise psychology.

Dr Sandy Wolfson, who has held roles as Head of Department and Director of Postgraduate programmes in the University's Department of Psychology, is one of the most prominent sport and exercise psychologists in the UK with a specialist interest in football.

She has been commended by the British Psychological Society's Division of Sport and Exercise Psychology for her outstanding contribution to professional practice.

Dr Wolfson's research centres around the advantage that teams have when they play at their home ground and the release of the testosterone hormone before home games. She has worked with clubs including Newcastle United, Sunderland AFC, Sheffield Wednesday, Middlesbrough and Hartlepool and with the Football Association.

As well as looking at the psychological factors around players, Dr Wolfson has also researched the impact of football on both referees and fans.

She has explored the coping mechanisms used by referees in the face of constant criticism from fans and players. She has also looked at fans' perceptions of their own role in helping to give their team a home advantage and how they see themselves in comparison to fans of other teams.

She has also helped to coordinate an internship programme where sport psychology trainees provide psychological support to individuals and teams at Northumbria's Sport Central.

She was instrumental in setting up the British Psychological Society's Division of Sport and Exercise Psychology following the Health and Care Professions Council's decision to begin regulating psychologists in 2009. Her work helped to ensure that psychologists working in these areas were regulated to the same standards as those working in clinical, educational and counselling fields.

She received the Distinguished Contribution to Sport & Exercise Psychology award at the Division's annual conference in Glasgow this week.

Dr Wolfson said: "I felt very honoured to be notified that I had been chosen for this award. I never expected to get it so it's a personal pleasure to see that my peers have recognised the contribution I have made to the discipline.

"Psychology is so important within the field of sport and exercise. For example, I've found that footballers individually think they are the only ones in the team to have self-doubt about their performance. Perceptions of

masculinity can make them think they shouldn't disclose information about their worries or their performance to their team-mates.

“Working with them, we can help them to develop better resilience and enhance their coping skills which can help to improve their focus and concentration, and ultimately, their performance.”

Dr Mark Moss, Head of the Department of Psychology, said: “Sandy’s contribution to the success of the Department of Psychology cannot be overstated. Having designed and led the MSc Sport and Exercise programme at Northumbria, she took on a number of senior leadership roles whilst continuing to work tirelessly with the British Psychological Society to establish and ensure high quality provision across the UK.

“Her research has benefitted many local and national sports teams, as well as supporting the development of doctoral students and trainees in their transition to professional practice. I think it is a timely recognition of her achievements that she should be presented with this award.”

Dr Wolfson, who is originally from Cincinnati, Ohio, moved to the North East 45 years ago to study for her PhD at Durham University. Despite knowing nothing about football on her arrival in the UK, she quickly fell in love with the region, and with football, and has been a Newcastle United season ticket holder for many years.

She teaches counselling and interpersonal process on Northumbria’s Masters in Sport and Exercise Psychology programme, as well as an undergraduate option in sport and exercise psychology, and she has supervised many PhD students over the years.

For more information on Northumbria’s Psychology courses, visit www.northumbria.ac.uk/psychology

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