Commentary on *Reflections on the 2010 ECSS Annual Meeting*

Franco M Impellizzeri

Sportscience 14, 48, 2010 (sportsci.org/2010/fmi.htm)
CeRiSM Rovereto, Università di Verona, Italy. Email.

Reprint pdf · Reprint doc

The ECSS conference has become the most important on the international circuit for sport and exercise scientists. The wide range of topics and countries represented is evident in the analysis of presentations I have summarized in this spreadsheet.

The report by Will Hopkins offers a critical evaluation on the ECSS 2010 logistics and scientific content. The studies reviewed in the report are those with a focus on athletic performance. This perspective represents a welcome breath of fresh air on this conference. The applied sport-science studies are sometimes less appreciated by the conference committee, judging by the bias towards mechanisms and health in the list of the Young Investigator Awards in the media release.

Several concerns reported by Hopkins about the quality of chairing, poster and presentation format and style may be prevented simply by improving the instructions. Detailed guidelines can also indicate the essential information to report in the abstract and/or talk, and how the results should be presented. This is an important issue, since it is often not easy to understand from the abstract the appropriateness of the research design, and some important results are sometimes omitted. This information would also simplify the work of Will Hopkins for the next report! Unfortunately, there are several parallel sessions in these large congresses and therefore it is not always possible to attend the presentations to ask the authors for more details.

Most of the studies reviewed by Hopkins (but also several others in the abstract book) have used sample size lower or close to 10 (a sort of magic number). In addition the precision of the effect is in general not shown, just $p<0.05$–the exact p value should be provided, in my opinion. The same practice can be seen in journals, despite many articles in different scientific areas underscoring the inappropriateness of interpreting the p level in terms of significance and the importance of presenting the confidence intervals of the effects.

I am concerned about the widespread use of the time trial. It is still in use for its supposed superiority in terms of reliability (something that often comes out when I discuss it with my international colleagues/friends). The superiority of a time trial in terms of ecological validity is certainly an advantage but also a disadvantage, because performance is influenced by pacing. In my experience working 10 years with professional cyclists, even they may not judge the pace well in the lab. Whether the athletes were familiarized is an important detail that should be provided when presenting these studies, and pacing data may also be useful in interpreting the results.

It seems there is a continuous increase in team-sport studies based on match-analysis data. Much more can be done with these data beyond just descriptive studies comparing countries or competitive levels.

As a European sport scientist and fellow of the ECSS, I am happy to see the increasing interest in this congress, and I hope this report encourages attendance at future congresses. I also hope that Will Hopkins will attend and report on athletic performance at the Liverpool meeting next year.

Back to article/homepage

Published July 2010