







# Leadership under pressure in elite tennis: Real-time coaching communication at the United Cup

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## ABSTRACT

Emotional, behavioural, and cognitive balance is critical for decision-making in elite sport, particularly during moments of maximum competitive pressure. This study examines a real-time coaching intervention delivered during the United Cup, focusing on the psychological content of a coach's message to an elite tennis player during a key stage of competition. A qualitative single-case study design was employed, supported by interpretative content analysis informed by established frameworks in sport psychology. The analytical corpus consisted of a brief in-competition verbal intervention delivered during a third-set break, which was subsequently transcribed for systematic examination. Findings suggest that the coach's message contained psychologically meaningful elements, including recognition of prior success, emotional validation, reinforcement of self-confidence, emphasis on personal agency, and encouragement of adaptive coping under pressure. These communicative elements may illustrate how coaching discourse can address psychological dimensions — such as confidence, emotional validation, and personal agency — at a critical moment in the match. However, the present design cannot establish whether they influenced the athlete's emotional state or performance. The case illustrates how coaching communication may function as a situated psychological resource in real time, extending beyond technical instruction by potentially addressing motivation, emotional regulation, and attentional refocusing. The study underscores the importance of leadership grounded in composure, strategic communication, and emotional intelligence, while suggesting that these competencies should be considered relevant components in the preparation and education of elite-level coaches.

**Keywords:** Coaching communication, Elite tennis, Emotional regulation, Sport leadership, Performance readiness.

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## INTRODUCTION

In elite sport, the relationship between coach and athlete constitutes a determining factor for competitive success. While an athlete's technical and physical capacities are fundamental, the coach's ability to lead and communicate effectively under high pressure can decisively influence competitive outcomes (Davis et al., 2019). Empirical evidence indicates that coaches' communication plays a significant role in emotional regulation and in the development of athletes' resilience, particularly during critical moments of competition (Davis & Davis, 2016; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012). Within this framework, effective communication and strategic leadership have become established as central pillars of optimal sporting performance (Coker et al., 2022). The coach's capacity to convey clear, motivating, and situation-appropriate messages directly affects athletes' mindset and performance, especially under conditions of elevated pressure (Kim & Park, 2020). From this perspective, sporting success does not depend exclusively on athletes' individual abilities, but also on the quality of the interactions established between coaches and athletes (Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Jowett, 2024).

Communication in sport extends beyond the mere transmission of technical instructions. It also involves the ability to influence athletes' emotional and motivational states (Yang et al., 2024). Clear, empathetic, and coherent communication can strengthen confidence, foster cohesion, and create an environment conducive to learning and personal development. Conversely, poor communication may lead to misunderstandings, reduce motivation, and negatively affect sporting performance (Bedir et al., 2023). Consequently, the study of coaches' communicative interventions aimed at strengthening confidence and resilience has gained increasing relevance in recent scientific literature (Karayel et al., 2024; Kim & Park, 2020; Zulham et al., 2024).

Despite this growing interest, most evidence derives from retrospective sources—questionnaires, interviews, or post-hoc perceptions—rather than from coaches' communication as it unfolds during competition. Analyses of real-time coaching discourse delivered in live elite competition, and particularly in individual open-skill sports such as tennis, remain scarce, leaving the in-competition message itself largely unexamined as an object of study.

Within this context, achievement orientation emerges as a central construct, influenced by variables such as self-efficacy, goal valuation, and perceptions of the environment (Siegle et al., 2017a; Siegle et al., 2017b). The interaction between athletes' personal goals, their perceived self-efficacy, and coaches' communicative strategies can significantly shape achievement orientation, particularly in scenarios characterized by highly competitive demands (Isoard-Gauthier et al., 2016).

From a sport leadership perspective, leadership is expressed in the coach's ability to guide athletes towards shared goals, maintain cohesion, and promote a positive psychological environment. Research has shown that effective leadership is characterized by adaptability, empathy, and the capacity to inspire athletes to reach their full potential. According to Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), coaches who foster autonomy and strengthen perceptions of competence contribute not only to increased intrinsic motivation but also to the development of a growth-oriented mindset. These approaches are particularly relevant in critical contexts, where performance may be constrained by adverse factors (Liu et al., 2025). In this regard, the desire to demonstrate competence and the willingness to overcome obstacles, core elements of achievement orientation (Lee et al., 2021; Taşdemir, 2022), acquire particular importance in high-pressure sporting situations (Oudejans et al., 2010).

Recent literature supports the impact of coaches' communicative skills and leadership on sporting performance. Soto et al. (2021) showed that leadership training programmes for coaches enhance athletes' perceptions of competence. Complementarily, Jin et al. (2022) found that democratic leadership, based on shared decision-making and autonomy support, promotes athletes' psychological well-being. Similarly, Mach et al. (2022) demonstrated that, in team sports, transformational leadership enhances performance through the strengthening of cohesion. Along the same lines, Oh (2023) reported that coaches with precise and positive communication skills exert a favourable influence on performance, while Schei et al. (2023) highlighted that identity-based leadership strengthens group dynamics. Although these findings stem primarily from team sports, several of their underlying principles apply to the coach–athlete relationship in individual, open-skill disciplines.

While the literature on coach–athlete relationships continues to grow, the specific impact of the coach–athlete relationship remains an area requiring further exploration, particularly regarding its effects on motivation, athlete commitment, and competitive performance (Pan & Sui, 2025). Accordingly, the challenge of optimizing coach–athlete communication across diverse cultural and sporting contexts persists, as recent evidence indicates that the quality, symmetry, and functions of communication directly influence athletes' satisfaction, motivation, and cooperation (Hoffmann, 2025; Purnomo et al., 2025). Moreover, individual differences among athletes require coaches to adapt their communication and leadership strategies to foster closer, more meaningful relationships (Baumgärtner & Ohlert, 2025; Landman et al., 2024). Complementarily, interpersonal support styles such as autonomy-supportive coaching (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003) are associated with higher levels of resilience, adherence, and long-term development in young athletes (Llanos-Muñoz et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2024). Finally, organizational structures within elite sport shape the context in which communicative practices unfold, exerting significant effects on team climate and sporting performance (Bjørnstad et al., 2024).

In elite sport, the ability to lead and communicate under pressure assumes critical relevance (Ortez et al., 2025). In elite competitions, high-tension moments demand not only solid technical and tactical preparation but also effective emotional management by both coaches and athletes. Sarkar and Fletcher (2014) argue that resilience in elite sporting contexts is mediated by the quality of social interactions, with the coach representing a central source of emotional and strategic support. In individual sports, where the coach–athlete relationship is more direct and personalized, this proximity intensifies both the benefits and the potential limitations of the communicative strategies employed (Kuruzović & Đorić, 2023).

Recent studies have shown that coaches who use positive, specific messages at key moments achieve significant improvements in athletes' performance (Stewart et al., 2024). Similarly, Dobrescu (2014) emphasized the relevance of non-verbal language in coach–athlete communication, demonstrating that congruence between verbal messages and non-verbal cues influences how athletes interpret and internalize coaches' instructions. These findings reinforce the notion that coaches' composure and communicative mastery are expressed not only through message content but also through tone, posture, and facial expressions.

In light of the above, the present study examines the psychological content of a real-time coaching intervention delivered by a tennis coach during an elite-level match under conditions of maximum competitive pressure. Its contribution is primarily methodological: rather than relying on athletes' or coaches' retrospective perceptions, it analyses an actual in-competition message — captured verbatim and publicly verifiable — as a situated object of study in an individual, open-skill sport. Through an interpretative single-case approach, the analysis explores how strategic communication, emotional validation, and leadership are expressed in

the message, and how this content may be read in relation to established psychological processes, while remaining within the limits of an interpretative rather than causal account.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study was framed within a single-case study design (Roth, 2022; Yin, 2018), a methodological approach that allows for an in-depth examination of a specific phenomenon within its real-life context, providing detailed insights and a level of understanding that would be difficult to achieve through more generalizable methods. An interpretative approach was adopted to ensure a reflective and rigorous engagement with the data corpus, with consideration of its theoretical and practical implications. The study employed interpretative content analysis (Bardin, 1996) through a psychological lens, supported by the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA 26 (VERBI Software, 2026).

Case selection followed a purposive, instrumental rationale: the episode was chosen not because it is statistically representative, but because it offers a rare opportunity to examine the phenomenon of interest—real-time coaching communication under maximum competitive pressure—in a naturally occurring elite setting. Three criteria guided this choice. First, the episode constitutes a critical and revelatory case (Yin, 2018): verbatim coaching discourse delivered during live elite competition is seldom accessible to researchers, and this intervention was captured in full at a decisive stage of the match (a third-set break with the outcome still undecided). Second, it occurred under conditions of maximum competitive pressure, the very context in which communicative leadership is theoretically most consequential. Third, the material is publicly available and verifiable through an official source, which allows the analytical corpus to be transparently constructed and independently consulted. Consistent with the logic of single-case research (Roth, 2022; Yin, 2018), the case is therefore treated as instrumental and illustrative rather than typical or generalizable: its value lies in the depth of understanding it affords regarding a specific, hard-to-observe phenomenon, not in its representativeness.

The analytical corpus consisted of a real-time coaching intervention delivered verbally by the captain and coach of the Chilean team (J.F.D.) to the player (N.J.F.) during a match at the United Cup in Sydney (December 2023). The material was retrieved from the official video published on the @ATPTour\_ES account on the social media platform X ([https://x.com/ATPTour\\_ES/status/1792034948397822136](https://x.com/ATPTour_ES/status/1792034948397822136)). Through audio transcription, a textual corpus of 79 words was constructed, distributed across six sentences (consecutively numbered from 1 to 6):

*“The answer is within yourself. You demonstrated it in this game (1). You played this game by yourself. And all the time you're playing it alone (2). It's you who has to fight this. We can't do more than what we are doing here (3). You did well in what you did there. You took the initiative (4). You have more than enough talent. So, trust, trust (5). This is not easy. It's difficult. But you have to trust yourself (6)”*

The intervention under analysis was delivered during a third-set break at a psychologically critical stage of the match, at which point the Chilean player went to the bench to hydrate and change his shirt. During this interval, the coach (J.F.D.) addressed the player (N.J.F. ATP ranking 19), who had won the first set (6–3), lost the second set (3–6), and was leading 5–4 in the third set against a Greek opponent (S.S. ATP ranking 416). Following this break, the opponent (who was serving) held his service game, levelling the set at 5–5. Subsequently, the Chilean player won the next two games, securing the third set 7–5 and ultimately winning the match 6–3, 3–6, 7–5. This match outcome is reported solely to contextualize the episode; the temporal

sequence between the intervention and the subsequent games does not imply any causal relationship, and the result is not treated as evidence of the message's effectiveness.

Consistent with this interpretative orientation, the study relied on a single publicly available data source (the audiovisual record of the intervention and its verbatim transcription) and did not incorporate additional sources such as athlete or coach interviews, physiological indicators, or performance metrics. This single-source design was deliberate: the aim was to analyse the message as naturally occurring discourse, as it was actually delivered in competition, rather than to reconstruct its experienced effects. Accordingly, the analysis is confined to the psychological content expressed in the message. It does not seek to triangulate or to infer its impact on the athlete's emotional state or performance.

## **INTERPRETATIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**

The analysis examined the six communicative units comprising the intervention across three central psychological dimensions: self-efficacy and perceived competence; emotion regulation and coping under pressure; and motivational climate/autonomy-supportive communication. These dimensions were selected because they align directly with the content of the coach's message and established constructs in sport psychology. The purpose of the analysis was not to infer the coach's intentional use of formal psychological theories, but to interpret how naturally occurring communicative content may align with evidence-based psychological processes relevant to elite performance. Other theoretical references were used only as complementary interpretative support when they helped clarify specific nuances of the discourse. This analytical decision was intended to avoid over-fragmentation and to maintain coherence between the brief nature of the communicative episode and the theoretical scope of the interpretation. The psychological frameworks were therefore applied post hoc, as heuristic interpretative lenses rather than as constructs the coach deliberately operationalized. Consequently, the analysis is exploratory rather than confirmatory: the correspondences identified between the message and established constructs represent one plausible reading of the discourse, not evidence that these theories were enacted or that the proposed alignment is the only possible interpretation.

Given that the analytical corpus comprises a single in-competition episode, this analysis is intended as an interpretative illustration rather than as an analytically generalizable account: it aims to characterize the psychological content of the message as discourse, not to establish its effects on the athlete.

The verbal intervention was first segmented into six communicative units corresponding to the six consecutive sentences of the transcript, each treated as a meaning unit suitable for interpretative coding. A coding frame was defined a priori from the sport-psychology literature, comprising the three dimensions described above. Each dimension was given a working definition derived from its source constructs (Bandura, 1997; Gross, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000), and a communicative unit was assigned to a dimension when its content was judged to express the corresponding psychological process; a unit could be associated with more than one dimension when its content warranted it. The corpus was coded by one of the co-authors, who has academic training and expertise in sport psychology; the resulting coding and interpretations were subsequently reviewed independently by the co-authors, and any divergences were discussed until consensus was reached. Given the interpretative nature of the analysis, analytical memos were kept throughout coding to make interpretative decisions explicit and to reduce confirmation bias; interpretations are accordingly reported in tentative terms.



**(1) “The answer is within yourself. You demonstrated it in this game”.**

This segment of the intervention appears to strengthen the athlete’s self-efficacy, consistent with Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1997), which proposes that confidence in one’s own capabilities is a key determinant of performance under pressure. By directing attention to previous successful actions within the same match, the coach’s message could be read as reinforcing

perceptions of competence and personal control. Such references to recent mastery experiences may be particularly relevant in elite competition, where confidence can fluctuate rapidly across critical moments.



**(2) “You played this game by yourself. And all the time you’re playing it alone”.**

This segment of the intervention may be interpreted as emphasizing personal agency and responsibility within performance. From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), the message may be read as reinforcing autonomy by reminding the athlete that decisive actions remain under personal control. In high-pressure moments, such cues

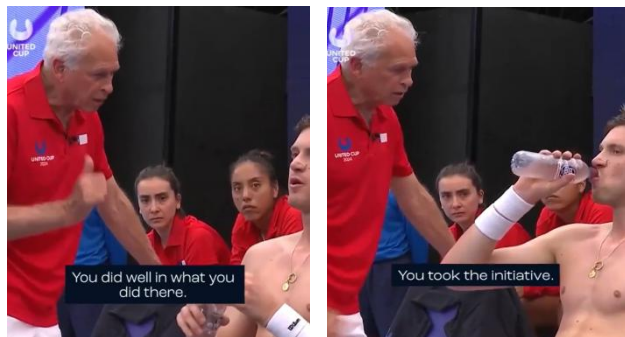
help redirect attention toward controllable aspects of performance, strengthening commitment and task-focused engagement. At the same time, the same wording (“you’re playing it alone”) could be read less as autonomy support than as a reminder of the athlete’s isolation under pressure; this ambiguity underscores the interpretative — rather than definitive — nature of the present reading.



**(3) “It’s you who has to fight this. We can’t do more than what we are doing here”.**

This segment of the intervention can be read as emphasizing personal responsibility in confronting the immediate competitive challenge. Rather than offering technical instruction, the coach appears to redirect the athlete toward active engagement, which may reinforce the idea that the decisive response must come from within performance itself. In psychological terms, such communication

may support coping under pressure by promoting agency, persistence, and readiness to act during a critical moment of the match. Alternatively, the statement that the coaching staff “can’t do more” could be interpreted as a withdrawal of support, or as added pressure, rather than as an invitation to agency; the present reading is therefore one plausible interpretation among others.



**(4) “You did well in what you did there. You took the initiative”.**

This segment of the intervention provides immediate positive feedback regarding the athlete’s recent actions. By validating proactive behavior, the coach appears to reinforce perceptions of competence and to encourage continued assertiveness in play. In high-pressure situations, brief affirmations of effective decisions may help stabilize confidence in the moment,

without this implying a measurable effect on subsequent play.



**(5) “You have more than enough talent. So, trust, trust”.**

This segment of the intervention appears oriented toward restoring confidence at a decisive stage of the match. By affirming the athlete’s existing capabilities, the coach could be read as reinforcing perceived competence and encouraging trust in the skills that have been developed. In high-pressure moments, reminders of one’s readiness and ability may help counter

self-doubt and foster a more confident stance.



**(6) “This is not easy. It’s difficult. But you have to trust yourself”.**

This segment of the intervention may be interpreted as combining emotional validation with confidence restoration. By openly acknowledging the difficulty of the situation, the coach appears to normalize competitive stress rather than deny it. At the same time, the invitation to trust oneself can be read as pointing the athlete toward coping resources already available. From a psychological

perspective, such communication may support emotional regulation and resilient functioning during moments of heightened pressure.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study contribute to a more situated understanding of coaches’ communication under highly competitive pressure, particularly in elite individual sports. Because these findings derive from a single brief intervention (79 words across six units), they should be read as an interpretative illustration of the message’s psychological content rather than as evidence of its effects on the athlete’s emotional state or performance.

In line with the literature on competitive stress, performance-related pressure may generate emotional disturbances that compromise athletes’ functioning, reinforcing the potential value of timely communicative interventions that promote psychological balance (Lopes, 2024). Within this context, the present case illustrates how the content of a brief real-time coaching message delivered at a critical stage of competition

can be interpreted as psychologically supportive —addressing emotional regulation, attentional refocusing, and confidence restoration—while the design does not allow any claim that these functions were actually produced in the athlete.

From a sport psychology perspective, the findings align with Self-Efficacy Theory, suggesting that validation of effort and emphasis on prior achievements may reinforce athletes' beliefs in their own capabilities, which could facilitate adaptive responses under pressure (Bandura, 1997; Beattie et al., 2015). Emotional regulation also emerges as a central component of this process and may facilitate cognitive reappraisal of the competitive situation, reducing the negative emotional load associated with decisive moments (Biggin et al., 2017; Gross, 2014). Consistent with Lazarus and Folkman's (1986) transactional model, the way athletes cognitively appraise the situation is key to modulating their emotional responses, positioning coaches' communication as a strategic resource for mitigating anxiety and fostering resilience (Smith et al., 2022).

A relevant contribution of this study lies in illustrating how the coach–athlete relationship manifests not merely as a general source of support, but as a form of situated psychological intervention that may be interpreted as oriented toward athletes' motivation and emotional control in real time. As noted by Jowett and Shanmugam (2016), the quality of this relationship affects motivational and emotional processes, an assertion illustrated by the present analysis, which suggests how a strategically framed message could orient the motivational climate toward task involvement while maintaining awareness of competitive outcomes (Knight et al., 2017). In this way, the analysed case illustrates how coaches' communicative leadership may operate as a regulator of attentional focus and psychological arousal in high-demand scenarios. In addition, the content of the intervention was oriented toward narrowing attentional focus toward controllable actions; whether it actually reduced distraction associated with score pressure cannot be determined from the present data.

This discussion also engages with recent literature highlighting emotional regulation as a cornerstone of psychological preparation in elite sport. Evidence suggests that athletes with stronger emotional competencies display a greater capacity to cope with competitive challenges and to sustain an achievement-oriented mindset (Montenegro-Bonilla et al., 2024). Within this context, the message analysed may be interpreted as oriented toward emotional stability and confidence; whether it facilitated a resilient stance in the athlete remains beyond the scope of this interpretative analysis. This interpretation is consistent with studies emphasizing cognitive reappraisal as an effective strategy for optimizing performance in high-demand situations (Aiba et al., 2023), as well as with research underscoring the importance of flexibility in emotional regulation to respond to changing competitive scenarios (Kucharski et al., 2018).

From the coach's perspective, the case points to the potential relevance of communicative styles that foster athlete autonomy and intrinsic motivation. In line with Ortega and Montero (2021), coaches' support not only contributes to more effective adversity management but also strengthens long-term commitment and performance. Moreover, satisfaction of basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) is associated with more effective emotional regulation and greater well-being in competitive contexts (Robazza et al., 2023). The present case illustrates how these needs can be implicitly addressed through a brief yet strategically structured message.

Furthermore, the existing literature indicates that the use of adaptive emotional regulation strategies is associated with more positive cognitive appraisals and favourable emotional experiences throughout the competitive season (Cece et al., 2021). In this regard, the present analysis suggests that the content of coaches' communication may be relevant to such processes; the data, however, do not permit claims about

anxiety reduction, intrinsic motivation, or adherence to the training process (Leñador-Albano et al., 2023). The framing of the competitive challenge in terms of an internal locus of control, present in the analysed message, aligns with evidence highlighting the importance of setting clear and challenging goals to enhance self-regulation and athlete commitment (Pop et al., 2021).

Taken together, this study offers a situated and contextualized perspective on coaches' communicative leadership in elite sport, highlighting its potential relevance for emotional regulation, motivation, and performance readiness under pressure. Rather than seeking a causal explanation, the present analysis provides an in-depth illustration of how psychologically meaningful communication may emerge in real time during competition. Accordingly, the psychological functions attributed to the message should be read as interpretative hypotheses to be tested in future research, rather than as established effects. This perspective contributes to broader discussions on psychological preparation in sport by underscoring the value of integrating communicative and emotional competencies into coach education and athlete support, particularly within the temporal and psychological demands of elite tennis.

A specific interpretative caution concerns the risk of outcome bias. Because the athlete ultimately won the match, the coaching intervention could be read retrospectively as effective. The present analysis explicitly avoids this inference: knowing the final result may colour the interpretation of the message, but a favourable outcome cannot be used as evidence that the communication caused, or even contributed to, the athlete's performance. The interpretation offered here pertains exclusively to the psychological content of the message as discourse and is deliberately decoupled from the competitive result.

### ***Limitations and future directions***

This study should be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, the analysis focused on a single communicative episode in a single elite tennis match, limiting transferability beyond this specific competitive context. Second, the analytical corpus consisted of a brief naturally occurring verbal intervention, meaning that interpretations were necessarily based on bounded discursive material rather than on extended interactional data. Third, and most critically, the study relied on a single data source and therefore lacks triangulation: no athlete or coach interviews, physiological indicators, or performance measures were available to corroborate the interpretation. As a result, the psychological functions attributed to the message remain interpretative, and the study cannot establish how the message was subjectively experienced or whether it produced measurable changes in emotional state or performance.

Fourth, the analysis is inherently interpretative and therefore shaped by the researcher's subjectivity. The psychological frameworks adopted as interpretative lenses inevitably directed attention toward certain features of the message and away from others, and the authors' prior knowledge of the match outcome may have predisposed them to read the intervention as effective (an outcome-bias concern addressed in the Discussion). To mitigate these influences, the coding and interpretations were cross-reviewed among the authors until consensus, analytical memos were used to make interpretative decisions explicit, and the findings are reported in deliberately tentative terms; nonetheless, alternative interpretations of the same material remain possible.

In addition, the intervention was examined retrospectively through publicly available audiovisual material, which may omit contextual elements not visible during broadcast coverage. Accordingly, the findings should be understood as interpretative rather than causal. Future research may build on this work by combining real-time coaching discourse analysis with athlete interviews, psychophysiological indicators, observational

designs, or longitudinal approaches examining how communication influences coping and performance readiness across repeated competitive situations.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This study offers a situated, interpretative reading of coaches' communicative leadership under highly competitive pressure. Drawing on a single, publicly documented real-time intervention in elite tennis, treated as an instrumental and illustrative case, the analysis characterizes the psychological content of the message as discourse —encompassing confidence support, emotional validation, personal agency, and coping under pressure— without inferring its effects on the athlete's emotional state or performance. Its main contribution is to show how, even within a brief in-competition exchange, coaching communication can be read as a situated psychological resource that extends beyond technical instruction; the psychological functions identified should be understood as interpretative hypotheses rather than as established outcomes.

Read in this light, the case underscores the potential relevance of communicative competence — alongside technical and tactical expertise — in the preparation and education of elite-level coaches, particularly the capacity to frame messages that acknowledge athletes' experience and orient attention toward controllable actions under pressure. Because these conclusions rest on a single interpretative episode, they are offered as a contribution to be tested rather than generalized, inviting future work that links real-time coaching discourse to athletes' and coaches' own accounts and to performance-related measures across repeated competitive situations.

## **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

All authors meet the criteria for authorship in accordance with established ethical guidelines. Contributions are specified according to the CRediT (Contributor Roles Taxonomy) as follows:

Conceptualisation: Claudio Hinojosa-Torres. Methodology: Juan Pablo Zavala-Crichton. Formal analysis: Claudio Hinojosa-Torres. Data curation: Dilan Galeano-Rojas. Writing – original draft: Paula Ortiz-Marholz, Juan Pablo Zavala-Crichton. Writing – review & editing: Paula Ortiz-Marholz, Juan Pablo Zavala-Crichton. Supervision: Rodrigo Yáñez-Sepúlveda. All authors have critically reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this manuscript.

## **AI USE DISCLOSURE**

In accordance with current publishing ethics and transparency recommendations, artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used solely to assist with translation and language editing, with the aim of improving clarity and readability. No AI tools were used in the generation of scientific content, including the study design, data

collection, analysis, interpretation of results, or the formulation of conclusions. The authors retain full responsibility for the content of the manuscript and confirm its originality, integrity, and accuracy.

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