

IMPORTANCE SPORTS PSYCHOLOGY IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORTS

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Abstract

-It has long been acknowledged that psychological skills are critical for athletes at the elite level. Athletes with the requisite “mental toughness” are more likely to be successful. In the past, it was assumed that these skills were genetically based or acquired early in life. Now, it is commonly accepted that athletes and coaches are capable of learning a broad range of psychological skills that can play a critical role in learning and in performance.

The popularity of sport psychology, both as an academic discipline and an applied practice, has grown substantially over the past two decades. Few within the realm of competitive athletics would argue with the importance of being mentally prepared prior to an athletic competition as well as the need to maintain that particular mindset during a competitive contest. Nevertheless, recent research has shown that many athletes, coaches, and sporting administrators are still quite reluctant to seek out the services of a qualified sport psychologist, even if they believe it could help. One of the primary reasons for this hesitation appears to be a lack of understanding about the process and the mechanisms by which these mental skills affect performance. Unlike the “harder sciences” of sport physiology and biochemistry where athletes can see the tangible results in themselves or other athletes (e.g., he or she lifted weights, developed larger muscles, and is now stronger/faster as a result), the unfamiliar and often esoteric nature of sport psychology appears to be impeding a large number of athletes from soliciting these important services. As such, the purpose of this article is to provide the reader with a simple framework depicting how mental skills training translate into improved within-competition performance.

Keywords: sport psychology, physical education, sports.

Introduction:

According to John Luther, “Sports psychology is an area which attempts to apply psychological facts and principles learning performance and associated human behaviour in whole field of sports.” According to K.M. Burns, “Sports psychology for physical education is

that branch of psychology which deals with the physical fitness of an individual through his participation in games and sports.

Sport psychology is an interdisciplinary science that draws on knowledge from the fields of Kinesiology and Psychology. It involves the study of how psychological factors affect on performance and how participation in sports and exercise affect psychological and physical factors. In addition to instruction and training of psychological skills for performance improvement, applied sport psychology may include work with athletes, coaches, and parents regarding injury, rehabilitation, communication, team building, and career transitions. Sport psychology is commonly referred to as “sport and exercise psychology,” as it is used for team sports as well as individual fitness endeavors.

Sports psychology is the study of how psychology influences sports, athletic performance, exercise and physical activity. Some sports psychologists work with professional athletes and coaches to improve performance and increase motivation. Other professionals utilize exercise and sports to enhance people’s lives and well-being throughout the entire lifespan. Sports psychology is a relatively young discipline within psychology.

The increased stress of competitions can cause athletes to react both physically and mentally in a manner that can negatively affect their performance abilities. They may become tense, their heart rates race, they break into a cold sweat, they worry about the outcome of the competition, they find it hard to concentrate on the task in hand, This has led coaches to take an increasing interest in the field of sport psychology and in particular in the area of competitive anxiety. That interest has focused on techniques that athletes can use in the competitive situation to maintain control and optimize their performance. Once learned, these techniques allow the athlete to relax and to focus his/her attention in a positive manner on the task of preparing for and participation in competition.

Role of Sports Psychology

The specialized field of sports psychology has developed rapidly in recent years. The importance of a sports psychologist as an integral member of the coaching and health care teams is widely recognized. Sports psychologists can teach skills to help athletes enhance their learning process and motor skills, cope with competitive pressures, fine-tune the level of awareness needed for optimal performance, and stay focused amid the many distractions of team travel and in the competitive environment. Psychological training should be an integral part of an athlete’s holistic training process. This is best accomplished by a collaborative effort among the coach, the sport psychologist, and the athlete; however, a knowledgeable and interested coach can learn basic psychological skills and impart them to the athlete, especially during actual practice. To help the parties’ air and resolve differences.

Preparing for Competition

Simple psychological skills to help the athlete manage the competitive performance environment include;

1. Learning relaxation skills (e.g. Progressive relaxation, slow, controlled, deep abdominal breathing or autogenic training)
2. Mastering all of the attentional styles (types of concentration).
3. Imagery (both visualization and kinaesthetic)
4. Self talk.
5. Developing a precomputations mental routine to be employed immediately prior to competition on game day.

The Injured Athlete

Injured athletes commonly experience at least three emotional responses: isolation, frustration and disturbances of mood. The Sports Psychologist in consultation with the medical team must make ready the injured athlete to participate in sports and games.

From common to clinical responses: gauging referrals to therapy.

Temporary Responses	Emotional	Ongoing Emotional Patterns
Sadness		Depression
Feeling isolated		Withdrawal
Irritated		Explosive
Neutral		Numb
Unmotivated		Apathetic
Frustration		Frequent crying or emotional outbursts
Anger		Rage
Moderate change in appetite		Rapid weight loss or gain, or disordered eating pattern
Minor sleep disturbance		Insomnia

Discussion

Success or failure on the field often depends on mental factors as much as physical ones. Sport psychologists recognize the dramatic impact of the athlete's mindset, and focus on preparing the mind to overcome obstacles on the field while boosting confidence for optimal performance. Each and every one of us has an untapped energy source that can be drawn upon to bring about superior results. Enhancing motivation is fundamentally about a change of attitude, developing a positive 'can do' mindset and engaging in systematic behaviours- the short-term process goals –that facilitate improvement. If you have a leadership role in sport you will have considerable influence on how motivated your athletes or team might feel. You can instill a good work ethic, recognize individual effort and instigate transparent reward structures that reinforce people's sense of competence. To work best, the techniques mentioned in this article need to be moulded around specific circumstances and the needs of individual athletes. Always strive to be original and innovative in the application of motivational techniques.

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