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The efficacy of mental preparation on different sports performance in domestic level

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Abstract

Mental training involves the process of developing the mental skills needed to strengthen and condition your mind as you pursue your performance potential. Mental skills training is systematic training of the mind to enhance sporting performance. Mental skills are a key factor in achieving sporting success. Mental skills, just like physical skills, take repetition, practice, and game-time application to develop. When you tell an athlete to concentrate what exactly are you asking them to do? There are different types of concentration or focus or attention and different tasks require the use of different attentional styles. Good performance is dependent on the ability to identify the attentional focus you need for a given task, get this focus, and then switch from this focus of attention to another as the situation demands - you need to focus on the relevant cues while ignoring distractions.

Goal setting is one of the most valuable mental training tools when approached in the correct manner. Goal setting is an effective means of building self-confidence in addition to being an excellent source of motivation. It will also provide a focus for training. Goal setting is like a map. First of all the destination (long term goal) needs to be identified, then the quickest and most economical way to arrive there needs to be determined (each step being a short term goal or "action step"). Through doing this, attention is being directed towards the task in hand and time and energy are not wasted by taking unnecessary detours. Goals should be set for all performance areas (physical, mental, tactical, and technical, enjoyment). Goals may be 'really' long term (dream goals) or 'really' short term (goal for a training run). The ability to relax your muscles and cope with nerves is important for good athletic performance. Nerves often lead us to contract every muscle in the body instead of just the ones necessary. Consequently, this affects our co-ordination and timing which negatively affects our performance. However, in order to reduce muscle tension, you must first be aware that it exists. Therefore, start to become aware of signs of tension in your body both when skiing and going about your daily activities. Once you have identified tension in your body you can work towards reducing it and becoming more relaxed.

Keywords: Mental preparation, mental skills, games and sports, self-talk, Anxiety, imagery, self-motivation, emotion, concentration, sports performance

Introduction

Mental training involves the process of developing the mental skills needed to strengthen and condition your mind as you pursue your performance potential. Mental skills training is systematic training of the mind to enhance sporting performance. Mental skills are a key factor in achieving sporting success. Mental skills, just like physical skills, take repetition, practice, and game-time application to develop. The psychological factors involved in athletic performance have long been of interest to athletes, coaches, sport psychologists and sports scientists. Empirical studies have largely focused on individual psychological factors and their influence on performance which includes confidence, motivation, attention, visualization, and psychosomatic skills. Similarly, some studies indicated that the use of mental skills such as goal setting, imagery, relaxation, and self-talk are important areas in the field of sport psychology. They also asserted that goal setting as attaining a specific standard of proficiency on a task, usually within a specified time limit can increase performance during competition. Moreover, imagery as using all the senses to re-create or create an experience in the mind helps athletes to perform better and increase self-confidence. Furthermore, relaxation acts as a technique to rid the muscles of disorder tension interfering with performance and help the rest of the body and mind. It also promotes confidence in the athletes' ability to lessen or decrease

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the effect of undesirable thoughts and feelings. In addition, self-talk has been defined as occurring verbalizations or statements about something as well as increase performance and skills in sport. In consequence, mental training can improve performance of athletes in order to achieve championship in competition.

Mental skills demands of the sport

One way to identify times when mental skills are especially important is to examine the nature of the sport in question. Clearly there will be different demands for sports depending on whether sports are individual in nature, or team sports. One commonality among sports will be those times when there are breaks in having to perform. These could be due to injury or, breaks that are part of the nature of the game (time between playing periods such as half time), judicial breaks (umpires/referees consulting), or breaks between execution of skills (e.g., in golf, trap shooting etc.).

Sports that involve teams of individuals will require different mental skills for each individual due to the different demands of their specific roles within the team. For example, goalie needs will differ from those who take penalty corners, and roles that are responsible for re-starting a particular phase (e.g., hooker in rugby) will have separate needs. A coach should be able to identify these needs through observation and assessment. The assessment will usually take the form of some form of mental skills profiling. There are many ways this can be achieved, but a coach is usually required to help the individual become self-aware of their perceptions of the mental demands placed upon him or her. Once these have been identified, the athlete should be encouraged to examine where he or she is in terms of his or her mental strengths and weaknesses and processes should be put in place to improve those areas that have been identified as needing improvement.

Individual psychological factors and performance

The study have focused on individual psychological factors (goal setting, relaxation, imagery, and self-talk) and their influences on performance. Recently, this study adopted a holistic approach in which the whole and the interdependence of its parts are emphasized. They also believed that mental skills help athletes and coaches to increase performance during practice and competition and affect the athletes' success in their tournament or game. For example, goal setting improves playing skill, techniques, and strategies.

Mental skills to assist athlete performance

While a coach is not a professional mental skills' trainer, knowledge and understanding of what is required from their athletes in this area will be useful. Coaches can assist their athletes to apply highly effective, basic mental skills.

Skill is a "competency, capability or ability level", while a method used to develop a skill is a "procedure, technique or drill". These authors believe that the major mental skills are motivation (for optimal physical activation), self-awareness and self-esteem (for optimal mental activation), and self-confidence (for optimal concentration). The major methods they encourage athletes to use are goal setting, mental preparation, self-talk, centring and relaxation and imagery.

Mental preparation can take the form of three plans for performance, namely

- Pre-performance
- During performance
- Coping plan

The pre-performance plan is all about your preparation for the day of competition and this may include methods such as self-talk, imagery and centering.

The performance plan assists you to focus on what is important during the event and this might be divided into different stages of the event. Coaches should set up situations in training sessions that utilize the mental skill required in performance.

The coping plan is designed to assist athletes with any hassles or distractions pre, during or post the event. Setting up and discussing potential 'what if' situations as part of preparation for competition will prepare athletes for cope with both the situations discussed and unexpected incidents.

Positive attitude

Positive attitude is Pursue excellence, not perfection, and realise that they, as well as their coaches, teammates, officials, and others are not perfect. Maintain balance and perspective between their sport and the rest of their lives. Respect their sport, other participants, coaches, officials, and themselves.

Self-motivation

Motivation is an internal energy force that determines all aspects of our behaviour; it also impacts on how we think, feel and interact with others. In sport, high motivation is widely accepted as an essential prerequisite in getting athletes to fulfil their potential. However, given its inherently abstract nature, it is a force that is often difficult to exploit fully. Some coaches, like Portugal manager Luiz Felipe 'Big Phil' Scolari, appear to have a 'magic touch', being able to get a great deal more out of a team than the sum of its individual parts; others find motivation to be an elusive concept they are forever struggling to master.

Goal setting

Goal setting has received some attention and its use has been supported by personal trainers and popular fitness magazines. Indicated goals setting affect performance by directing attention, mobilizing effort, increasing persistence, and motivating strategy development. Goals are like magnet that attracts athletes to higher ground and new horizons. They give their eyes a focus, their mind an aim, and their strength a purpose. Goal setting is believed that there is a close relationship between goal setting and imagery during practice and competition.

People can set different types of goals; these can be based upon pure outcome such as "I want to win a particular race" or "beat a particular opponent" etc. However, outcome goals are usually not under your full control and can be a major source of pressure. Consequently it is usually better to set process and performance goals. Process goals are about mastering specific skills such as passing in rugby, turns in swimming or shooting in netball. If you succeed in doing these skills well you will more than likely increase the probability of achieving your desired outcome: winning. Examining the process required to achieve your goals allows you to break your goals down into components or actions and this should form part of your tactical and technical skill development. Combining process goals with performance goals allows you to monitor your progress against yourself, and allows you to honestly evaluate your progress. For example, there may be some technical process goals you set yourself to improve a particular skill (such as tackling in rugby). Combining this with a performance goal (to make

80% successful tackles in a game or training drill) allows you to monitor your progress.

Self-talk

Successful athletes are self-confident athletes. What you think or say about yourself in practice situation is critical to how you will perform. Self-talk can become a self-fulfilling prophecy whether positive or negative. In a positive light, self-talk can facilitate performance and replace irrational thoughts with productive thoughts. Since all athletes can be a great aid in performance. This simply involves using key words or phrases to reinforce performance goals or to create a positive mental state. Positive self-talk is a technique that can be used to enhance motivation across a wide range of achievement domains. It makes use of an athlete's powerful inner voice to reinforce their self-esteem or important aspects of their performance. With appropriate repetition, self-talk can positively alter an athlete's belief system. I use three types of self-talk in my work with athletes and will illustrate each with an example to assist you in coming up with your own.

The first type is known as task-relevant self-talk, which serves to focus an athlete's attention on the task at hand. A karate I worked with used the mantra 'pillar of power' to reinforce his strong posture. The second type is known as mood-related self-talk, which impacts on how athletes feel. An international water skier came up with 'butterflies in formation' to represent how the butterflies in her tummy would work for her rather than against her. The third type is known as a positive self-affirmation statement and the most famous exponent of these was the legendary boxer Mohammed Ali who repeated the claim, 'I am the greatest' so many times that even his opponents believed it.

Self-talk is designed to strengthen self-confidence through focusing on the positive and eliminating the limitations of negative thinking. It only requires a limited number of key words to get an athlete focusing on what needs to be done to ensure success. Self-talk for concentration or focus is assisted by words in the present tense. For example in hitting a tennis ball one might say "bounce" as it bounces and "hit" as the racket makes contact. Hodge, Sleivert and Mackenzie (1996)^[1] refer to mood words required as in "stroke" in batting and "fire" in a dynamic start. These words capture the mood of successful performance and are dependent upon the nature of the skill being performed. If an athlete requires sustained effort with control, key words such as "dig in" or "push through" can be used on a consistent basis to focus on the positive qualities of performance required at the time. It deserves to be restated that all self-talk must focus on positive words that draw the athlete's attention towards that which needs to be done to bring about successful performance.

Imagery

Imaging a sport skill is similar to performing the skill, except that athletes experience the action only in their mind. The imagery was used as the method in which people feels themselves through their minds. They can imagine themselves that ways have directed them to learn and improve skills. This imagery can make performance simple as it is out of individual's skills. As the research on exercise imagery is positive, more action is needed to better understand how imagery affects exercise behavior. Imagery as an element of sport psychology skill or mental training tool can be useful on the success of athletes and prolong physical performance especially during competition.

Imagery is the ability to create in one's minds eye the people, objects and skills present in a competitive sport situation while not being in the specific situation. It engages all the senses operating in that the specific situation through images that can be seen, felt, smelt, tasted and heard. For example: An opening batsman can picture him or herself walking out to the pitch to face the first ball of the cricket match. He/she can see him/herself taking guard, assessing the field placing and settling into his/her stance for the first ball. He/she can hear the umpire call play and see the opening bowler approach the wicket. He/she senses his/her sharpening focus on the rectangle above the bowler's delivery shoulder and he/she sees the ball emerge. He/she can feel his pre-move back and across his/her stumps with his/her weight perfectly balanced. He/she moves his/her head into line and plays a compact, defensive stroke close to his/her body with a vertical bat, the ball striking the very "meat" of the bat. A perfect start.

Imagery can be used to control emotions, anxiety and anger while also assisting with the coping of unexpected situations that might arise. Imagery can be used to sharpen concentration, mental preparation and also as a replacement for physical practice. Some people find imagery more difficult than others and being taken through the process by someone skilled in directing imagery is a good way to start. The athlete can then learn to record his/her own imagery script on tape, ensuring that the words embrace all the senses and are vivid and clear. It is helpful to progress from simple skills to the more complex. Imagery can be applied pre-competition, during competition and even during a pre-performance routine.

Anxiety

Performance anxiety in sports sometimes referred to as 'choking,' is described as a decrease in athletic performance due to too much-perceived stress. Perceived stress often increases in athletes on game day because (1) they have an audience and (2) they have extremely high expectations of their success. This type of stress is often based on the way the athletes interpret the situation. It is rarely the external situation that causes stress, but rather the way the athlete's self-talk describes the situation that creates feelings of stress, anxiety, and fear. For athletes who choke during the competition, it is important to understand that the thoughts you have regarding the event can be modified, adjusted or controlled with appropriate sports psychology and mental practice.

Emotion

Emotions will ultimately dictate how you perform throughout a competition. Emotions during a competition can cover the spectrum from excitement and elation to frustration, anger, and disappointment. Emotions are often strong and, most troublesome; they can linger and hurt your performances long after you first experience them.

Concentration

Concentration, or focus, enables an athlete to devote their full attention to internal and external cues in the sporting environment. The ability to focus on the task at hand is among the most important skill for an athlete to attain. Focus is a skill like any other, meaning it can be learned. Dedicating time to practice this skill can yield measurable benefits for sport performance and participation. Distractions in sport are inevitable and can be both internal (e.g., worry, frustration, negative thoughts) and external (e.g., noise from spectators,

weather and playing conditions, visual distractions). An athlete who can avoid distractions can enhance their chance of success and personal achievement. Therefore, being able to tune out irrelevant stimuli and focus on what matters to optimize sport performance is essential in an athlete's quest for excellence. Further, emotions, whether they are negative or positive, have the potential to influence sporting behaviors and actions through their effect on an athlete's focus. Research has highlighted how both positive and negative emotions can influence concentration. For example, positive emotions like excitement and happiness are more likely to lead to performance related concentration than negative emotions such as anxiety and anger.

Conclusion

In conclusion, sport psychology consultants should examine the performers' mental skill training and sources of concern very carefully. They are very important because they are often the result of long periods of training, repeated competitive experiences of success and failure. They also are important as educational influences of significant persons, such as coaches, teachers, and parents. In an attempt to

Prepare systematic programs to develop mental skill, sport psychologists should pay attention to the individual differences as well as the specific physical, technical, and psychological necessities of a sport. A basic knowledge of the characteristics of a certain sport and a deep understanding of the athletes' thoughts and behaviors pre, during, and after competition are necessary to help performers achieve their personal in the best way. For any mental skills training to be effective, it must be accepted by the athlete (and the coach) as a useful tool and it is this acceptance which is often the most difficult to achieve.

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