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Mental toughness is the key for success in sports

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Abstract

Physical fitness is considered as the crucial part of a player to get succeed in any sports. But the contribution of mental toughness can't be denied in the success of a player. It is observed that a player who is not mentally strong, can't be much successful in any sport.

Mentally strong player is very determined and performs consistently at every stage of game. It also shows the character of a player who performs in tough situations and shows his/her mental toughness.

These days, it is seen that the pressure of performance on the players is so much that he/se can survive only if there is mental toughness otherwise it is almost impossible for a player to survive without mental toughness. The current article highlights the importance of mental toughness in a player's life.

Keywords: Performance, Mental, Toughness, Sports

Introduction

It is said that a player should be mentally strong so as to perform well as any stage of game. A coach can only prepare a player physically but the mental toughness required to perform consistently in sports; comes from the inner side of a player. So the focus of a player should be on the game whether he/she on field or off the field.

There are many examples of international players who are mentally strong enough to perform even after injuries. If we talk about Cricket then there are many Cricket players who got injured and then came back and perform better.

Some of the examples of players from the field of Cricket are Sachin Tendulkar, Yuvraj Singh, Ashish Nehra etc. Cricketer Sachin Tendulkar got injured and faced an injury named 'Tennis Elbow'. To recover from that he had to pass through an operation and be far away from the game of Cricket for three to four months. In an interview, he accepted that to recover from that kind of injury, his mental toughness played an important role as he wants to play more and more Cricket after getting recovered. The belief of playing again for his country made him to be recovered more easily and effectively.

Similarly, there are more players such as Yuvraj and Ashish Nehra who had serious problems. Yuvraj Singh had to face from the most dangerous disease 'Cancer' after winning the Cricket World Cup 2011. He also accepted in an interview that this self belief helped a lot to recover from this vital disease and he got a chance to play again in national team at international level.

A cool mind is very crucial in every sport. A player should be active and sharp so as to make strategies against the opponents. For that, a player is given Yoga session as a part of training.

These days, it is observed that a player gets disturbed from the external factors and can't concentrate on their game. So coaches facilitate a Yoga session for the players so that the mind of a player can be cool and the concentration level can be raised.

In sports, it is said that a player should be mentally strong along with physical capabilities as a mentally strong player can fight against their opponents more effectively rather than a player with lesser mentally strong.

When it comes to sports, having mental strength is nearly as important for players as physical fitness. Pressure can get to the best sports stars and mental training is therefore a vital skill to possess. "When the going gets tough, the tough get going" is one way to say it. Or, as one sports psychologist put it, mental toughness is "the ability to consistently perform toward the upper range of your talent and skill regardless of competitive circumstances."

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Fig 1: Mental toughness

Mental toughness and performance

With sports psychology a growing field of study, more athletes are looking to improve their mental prowess as well as their physical exercise routines. Here, we look at some of the great cases of sporting mental collapse and how we can all learn from these examples.

There's a thin line that exists between mentally-strong sporting success and under-pressure failure.

"Sport psychology, to put it simply, focuses on the psychological factors associated with physical performance," says Dr. John Bartholomew, an associate professor in the Department of Kinesiology and Health Education.

World sport is packed with examples of those who have come so close to glory yet mentally collapsed at the final moment. Here, we give you a run through some of the most famous sporting moments when the mental pressure proved too much, and give you the experts view, plus some top tips to help you with your mental game.

With the stakes for sporting glory at an all-time high and increasing media scrutiny, help is thankfully at hand for sports stars feeling the pressure. Sports psychology is a developing science that gives competitors mental and emotional support to deal with aspects of their physical performance, including things such as self-belief, concentration and coping with pressure. The role of the sports psychologist is to boost an athlete's confidence, as well as improving their mental endurance for long-term periods of concentration.

'Sports psychology is a growing trend that aims to get players to battle through the pressure of their game and not bottle it by being affected by the noise of the crowd or even the size of an imposing competitor,' she says. 'The ability to get over the fear of failure can definitely be taught through psychology; it just requires a lot of mental strength.'

'Players need to learn to focus on their goal, taking each kick or shot at a time and removing the crowd and tiredness from their thoughts. I believe this can be taught through sports psychology.'

"When it comes right down to it, you're just trying to help an athlete consistently execute those behaviors that he's practiced to virtual perfection so many times in training. During a match, Tiger Woods doesn't have to puzzle over how to make a particular swing and the mechanics of his arm movements--he's executed every single one of those physical moves before and could do all of them in his sleep. What he's got to be able to do is allow his body to deliver the desired results. Ironically, you want to keep the mind from getting in the way of the performance."

For athletes to deliver their best performance, they have to have the necessary physical gifts and aptitude, of course--the

mental discipline and emotional steadiness don't mean anything without that. If they're more focused on the implications of their actions or what will happen if they win or lose, though, then their speed or strength won't mean anything.

It's now accepted that it is the mental game that ultimately wins any race or competitive game. It is what distinguishes the very top athletes from the ordinary. So, why are mental skills so important for success in sport? Find out what Bo Hanson has to say on this critical topic in the below video. In the end, having solid mental skills can be more important for elite performance than an athlete's physiological capabilities.



Fig 2: The importance of mental skills in sport

The importance of mental skills in sport

Often people put too much emphasis on the physical capabilities of an athlete, when the mental skills they may have, or lack, are just as critical to their success. It's as though they don't acknowledge the fact that mental skills, self-awareness and the ability to understand and work with other people, are just as vital to your success as being able to run fast or step off of both feet, or throw a long ball.

Imagine that elite performance is about creating a perfectly circular wheel with spokes shooting out from the hub. The spokes represent all the different elements needed to create peak performance. This includes physiology, tactics, strategy, mental skills, conditioning, nutrition, and physiotherapy. In essence all of these spokes combine to create a perfectly round wheel which runs efficiently.

Setting short term goals keeps an athlete focused on productive actions. This avoids the mind wandering off into unproductive thoughts, which in turn impacts emotions and physiology.

People who are mentally tough, have a sense of positive self-efficacy. They inherently believe they are going to achieve a positive outcome and their thoughts express this.

The ability to manage your emotions to ensure you are in the most productive state to compete is a skill most elite athletes develop to some degree. It also includes the ability to stay composed to make quality decisions.

Visualizing a successful end result is a hallmark of mental toughness. Every coach knows that visualization is a key skill athletes can develop which helps them to become better at performing at their sport. This vital mental skill prepares an athlete's body to execute under pressure and to keep doing so in the heat of competition.

Sports can encourage children to be outgoing and build social skills. Participating in a sport can even instill important characteristics such as teamwork, time management, and discipline. Children learn how to push themselves and push

their teammates while developing friendships and coordination skills in the process. In order for an athlete to be as successful as possible, they must work to develop mental toughness.

When exploring the depths of mental toughness, it is important to note that athletes shouldn't just find a way to continue going through the motions. Athletes need to remain just as engaged and focused on delivering a high-quality performance in dire situations as when they are feeling fresh. Whether someone is racing against the clock or competing against other athletes, this toughness should allow the athlete to remain competitive and at the front of the pack, not just a presence on the field. It is easy to deliver a top-notch performance when the pressure is off or when people feel fresh. It is more important to keep that level of energy when fatigue or pressure sets in.

Conclusion

When pushing athletes to develop this toughness, there are some important facts that coaches need to remember. Remind the athletes that they possess more heart and strength than they give themselves credit for. Help remind them that their limits are only perceptions developed by their mind.

No matter the activity, always encourage athletes to practice visualizing their success. This is a great way for athletes to overcome any mental limitations. Success for most athletes is achieving something that they have never done before. In order to accomplish this, they will need to break down their mental barriers. Recommend meditating or going for a walk to think about their success.

When athletes start to have their doubts, encourage them to have faith and stay mentally strong. They have worked hard developing the skills necessary to enjoy success. Tell them to trust in their training, their teammates, and themselves to overcome any obstacle. Mental toughness comes with experience.

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