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Sports psychology in India: Current and future perspective

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Abstract

Consider the following situation – a highly talented player on who rests a million hopes is well prepared physically and dreaming of gold. But then just at the start of the match, he realises he hasn't learnt to deal with his nerve and thoughts, which are essential to focus and perform. Now it is only the player's fault that he didn't know how to manage the psychological aspects of the game. It is a well established fact that mental skills training are an integral component to achieve peak performance. Why then is sports psychology still in its infancy in India? Why it is still not developing in our country? One of the main reasons could be the negative suggestion associated with psychology. Till date many players and coaches think going to a psychologist means there is a problem. Some of the reasons are the lack of resource personnel, lack of awareness, following traditional methods of coaching with little emphasis on sport psychology and sports sciences. Also image management is a key issue in India, especially in sports. Players have to maintain 'I m cool and have no problem attitude' Mental skills training ought to be treated as a component of peak performance similar to physical training only then we can think achievement.

Keywords: Mental skills, sports psychologist, performance anxiety, mind game, somatic complaints

Introduction

Sport psychology is an interdisciplinary science that draws on knowledge from many related fields including biomechanics, physiology, kinesiology and psychology. It involves the study of how psychological factors affect performance and how participation in sport and exercise affect psychological and physical factors. Benefit of sport psychology training is that it enhances performance of the athlete. Winning is one of the main objectives in sports, but winning requires consistent performance at a high level. Mental ability helps to ensure this steadiness, guarding against fluctuations in performance, as the game becomes more complicated. Sports psychologists can teach skills to help athletes enhance their learning process and motor skills, manage with competitive pressures, awareness needed for optimal performance and stay focused among the many distractions of team travel in the competitive environment. Psychological training should be an integral part of an athlete's holistic training process, carried out in combination with other training elements. A full investment in sport psychology may spell the difference between high achievement and weak point of players. It has long been recognized that psychological skills are critical for athletes at the elite level. 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 health professional often plays a major role in supporting the emotional health of athletes. Athlete's psychological stresses may be manifested as somatic complaints, such as sleep disturbances, irritability, fatigue, gastrointestinal disturbances, muscle tension, or even injury. Athletes often turn to a therapist or physician for relief, either because they fear the services of a mental health practitioner due to the perceived shame, or because no psychologist is available.

The Role of a Sport Psychologist

The roles of sports psychologists are numerous, but the areas of sports psychologists teach vary from one person to another depending on their experience and qualifications.

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Below are the top roles of an applied sports psychologist, a person who helps athletes to improve performance through mental training.

1. **Help the athlete to cope with performance fears:** Sports psychologist can help athletes overcome fears, such as fear of failure, fear of embarrassment, and general performance anxiety. This is common among athletes who are perfectionist or highly dedicated athletes that worry too much about what other people think about their performance
2. **Help the athletes to improve the mental skills for performance:** The most common role for a sports psychologist is to teach mental skills for enhanced performance. A mental game expert can help the athlete to improve confidence, focus, composure, intensity and trust in athletic performance. These mental skills help the athletes to improve performance and can help in other areas of an athlete's life.
3. **Helps the athletes to mentally prepare for competition:** Another common role of a sports psychologist is to help the athletes to prepare mentally for competition and practice. This includes many of the mental skills mentioned above, but applied to specific situations on the athletic field.
4. **Help the athletes to return after injury:** Returning to play after an injury can sometimes be difficult for many athletes depending on the nature of the injury. Athletes are often left with mental scars long after an injury is physically healed. Sports psychologists can help injured athletes cope better with the pressure associated with returning to a prior level of performance pre injury.
5. **Help the athlete to develop pregame routine:** As part of mental preparation, the role of a sports psychologist includes helping athletes to develop mental skills used during pregame or pre-race routines. Athletes learn how to focus on the process instead of results and be more practical with their confidence prior to competition.
6. **Help athletes to improve practice efficiency:** Another common role of a sports psychologist is to help the athletes to improve the quality or efficiency of their practice. Many athletes, such as collegiate athletes, have limited practice time. Coaches want to help these athletes get the most out of their practice time by understanding principles of motor learning and performance.

Present Status

India has one of the oldest civilizations in the world. Writing from early holy books, indicate that Indians had a good idea of the body and mind relationship as early as 4000 years ago. Similarly, yoga, which in recent years has become popular in the world, has this existed for centuries in Indian culture and demonstrates the importance that physical activity can have on mental states. Given this background, one might expect that sports psychology would be well established in India.

India is still lagging behind other countries in sports primarily because we do not give due importance to the role of sports psychology. It is because India is one of the most religiously diverse nations in the world, with some of the most deeply religious societies and cultures.

Religion plays a central and definitive role in the life of many of its people. The culture of India is the way of life of the people of India. India's languages, religions, and customs differ from place to place within the country; this is always adversely affected for introducing new systems and theories for the development of sports and games in India

There is a political and economical crisis. Indian politics is destroying our sports and games. Under these circumstances only few traditional sports were played at local levels and even these sports could not be promoted for want of outside support from the corridors of sports in our country. Indian sports continue to be infancy because the sports organisations and the government are not using the fund properly and no sincere efforts are being made to refresh this sector. There are a number of factors responsible for the poor sports in our country; main motive is the influence of politics.

Sports spirit and professionalism is lacking in the people of our country which is so important towards promoting healthy sports. In India people are overjoyed about winning but not about its true spirits. In fact true sports lovers love the game for its sake. One important factor contributing to poor sports is that physical education teachers appointed in schools generally do not come from sports background although these teachers have diplomas and degrees to their credit.

Another thing is that Indian sporting culture never matured because of schooling system, lack of facilities for skill development in sports, poor understanding and underestimating mental training, lacking of economic support to sportsmen and lack of will etc. The result of this is that research in this field is not promoted. In the absence of research sports psychology cannot be promoted.

Many sports federations have been established but due to lack of sound financial backing these federations have become nominal. Sponsors are also not coming forward except for a few sports. In such a situation, where no favourable atmosphere is being created, sports are not evolving here. In such, sports in our country are in a disorder. Organising bodies of sports are lacking in discipline, coordination and control. Selection process is doubtful and every time fingers are raised. There is lot of undesirable interference from various quarters. So fairness and clearness is not achieved. Time has come for rethinking and taking a relook at the whole situation. A holistic approach has to be made which will cover all the factors and found work has to be done to address this issue of poor sports and games.

Future Directions

There is a great need of sport psychologists in all the sport. Sports psychology is like a medicine to a sportsperson. If a team has mental skills of coach, it will have a better understanding of the dynamics of performance. For developing sports psychology in India, there was an all round recognition especially among the sports scientists (physiologists, sports medicine practitioners, experts in biomechanics) of the fact that the performance enhancement both in exercise and sport could not be assured without consideration of certain crucial psychological factors. The availability of experienced and qualified sports psychologists is also necessary. Another thing is cooperation from the side of coaches and athletes. In India researches are going on but not in proper and valuable way, for the development of sports psychology promote research in the subject of sport psychology.

We live in a sport loving society. We have numerous sports in India, and we also have many people participating in some sport or other. Usually for people who are training at the competitive level, sport becomes a part of their life. Indian athletes have always put in the hard work and effort; these are the physical efforts sports people put in. However very rarely it is believed that any sport is a mind game. What we play or perform on the actual day of a competition or a tournament is

played much in advance, may be days or months in advance, in our mind. However, we usually ignore this, the reason are the lack of sports psychologist.

Conclusion

Excellence in sports events brings honour and glory to the nation. Advanced and developed nations excel in sports events and it speaks of great mess of those nations. Sports contribute towards the physical, mental and psychological health of peo ple. It is obvious that in those nations where there is healthy sports culture, people stay healthy and remain fit both physically and mentally. These result in a healthy work culture and people become hardworking, dedicated and disciplined which has a deep influence on the progress and development of the nation.

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