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A study on mental toughness of volleyball players

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Abstract

Volleyball, probably the most popular indoor game in the world, is an Olympic sport played in virtually every country. In Holyoke, Massachusetts, (USA), on February 9, 1895, William G. Morgan, a YMCA Physical Education Director, created a new game called "Mintonette" as a pass time to be played indoors. Later in 1896, this game was renamed by Alfred Halsted, an observer from Spring Field College as "Volleyball". Mental toughness is the attitude that makes a successful volleyball player willing to do what it takes to get the job done. It takes more than relaxation, visualization, meditation and other quick fix self-improvement techniques to achieve success. In volleyball a player have to develop the attitude of "you don't have to like it, you just have to do it" is at least the beginning a substantial key to successful performance. The demand for peak performance is simply a form of challenge.

Keywords: Mental toughness, volleyball players

Introduction

The popularity of this game made most of the countries to accept and implement in both men and women sections and since it was safe (no body contact with the opponents), it was successfully introduced in the 1964 Tokyo Slimmer Olympics (both for men and women).

In volleyball a player have to develop the attitude of "you don't have to like it, you just have to do it" is at least the beginning a substantial key to successful performance. The demand for peak performance is simply a form of challenge. The better our mental toughness, the more likely we are to handle the challenge rather than give away. So a volleyball player's level of mental toughness also exerts a major influence over the extent to which she is able to perform to her best abilities. Mental toughness is the link between peak performance and stress management because; any player cannot function to the best of her abilities unless it is being dealt with effectively with stressors and challenge.

Becoming a champion on the court requires any player to "pay her physical dues". There are no short cuts to reach the goals. Volleyball players have to work hard, build muscle strength, improve quickness, increase endurance and sharpen the skills required to play the game at a high level. By making this kind of physical investment and working hard at it, players move closer to achieve success. But one just cannot stop at this point like lot of volleyball players do. To become champion all the team members must also work on the mental side of the game.

Once the players walk onto the volleyball court for an important game, the difference between playing well or poorly lies completely between their ears. When the game is on the line and the competitive pressure is turned up high, playing to one's potential is all about how well a player can execute mentally. That is, are you able to stay calm and composed under pressure? If you go into a game too nervous, you play tentatively, make lot of mistakes and come out of it bitterly disappointed. Staying relaxed under big game pressure is one of the secrets to being able to play the game, the way you are capable of playing.

Concentration, when controlled is the key to performance excellence in volleyball. If a player loses control of focus and concentrate on wrong things either before or during the game then she undermine (damages) her confidence, will become nervous and underachieve. Volleyball is too fast a game to play well unless the concentration of a player is in right place when it counts the most. The ability to focus on what is important and block out everything else is one of the primary keys to performance excellence. This can be practically seen during execution

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of service, serve reception, blocking, organization of set, attack combinations, and defensive formations. All the six players' attention will be on the ball and any player on the court may have to receive the ball irrespective of the game situations. Poor concentration is the major reason why players choke and get stuck in declined performance. Getting psyched out or intimidated is a direct result of concentrating on the wrong things.

Mental toughness depends on a player's ability to quickly leave the mistakes and failures behind. Hanging onto the already committed mistakes will get that particular player into big trouble, performance wise. She should forget the mistakes and mentally bounce back quickly. This can be seen if a player misses the service and the opponents definitely make her to receive the first pass. So the quality of reboundability is a must for a volleyball player irrespective of game situations.

Volleyball players must possess the ability to handle the pressure. They must stay calm and come upto the expectations at times of crisis. Peak performance demand that you are relaxed once the performance begins. Even though the team is trailing back by more than 5 or 6 points, the players on the court can handle the game situation with utmost care and come out of the pressure.

One of the best characteristics of a mentally tough volleyball player is confidence. The level of confidence should be high enough in all the players to come out of the setbacks and failures. Under the pressure of competition, low confidence will neutralise natural ability, hard work and talent. Similarly, high confidence will enhance a player's training and hidden talents, lifting their performance to a higher level.

Motivation is the fuel to volleyball players to drive the overall training to a successful completion and accomplishment of the given goals. Without adequate motivation the players get stuck having "Permanent Potential". Without motivation players or the entire team won't put in the work necessary to become a winner. A good motivation makes the team to perform better even after a setback.

Mental toughness is learned, not inherited. This is an important understanding. Tough mindedness plays a significant role in volleyball performance. Mental toughness is nothing to do with heredity, intelligence or your character-mental toughness is an acquired skill. The process through which it is acquired is precisely the same as that which applies to physical skills-hard work, understanding and practice. If you want to be a mentally tough player, you can. Performance in Volleyball is task oriented. Any good team performs better against an inferior team. Whereas, playing against an equally good team or superior team requires a good amount of physical, physiological and mainly psychological preparations. Specifically the mentally tough teams can create surprises by winning against superior teams. There are many areas a team can excel and over power their opponents. For example, serve placement. An intelligent player, after getting some feedback from her coach focuses herself to serve to the weak point of serve reception formation of their opponents. For this, that particular player should be mental tough to go for an effective serve placement and scores a point. Likewise, an attacker or a blocker can also score points with grit and determination. Ultimately success in performance at higher levels of competitive volleyball can be seen by mentally tough players only.

Mental or psychological training helps Volleyball players to summarise and adopt a set of working formulae, creeds or tenets as a habitual model for action, for self-encouraging, self-consoling, self-assessing, self restricting, self-motivating

and self-mobilising. Mental toughness training is a method whereby, through self-hinting or self-suggestion, one train to relax, to remain in a state of calm and composure, to imagine emotions or maneuvers, to idealise and to fancy, concentrating and so forth. Such an exercise in the regular training work outs will be good to eliminate fatigue, storing up a maximum amount of pre-match energy and preventing pre-game excitement and nervousity. Such an exercise may be done after a session of practice in techniques and tactics or done prior to a formal game. This method of training is essential to expect higher level of performance especially among female volleyball teams.

It is well understood that volleyball game requires a perfect blend of physical, technical, tactical and psychological capabilities. Out of the psychological traits required for successful volleyball game, the most important are team cohesion and mental toughness. Team cohesion plays a vital role because it is a team game and the success depends on the collective efforts of all the players. This collective effort is possible only when each player is playing her role and putting up her best efforts in her position. Volleyball is a tough game by nature and at higher level it becomes the war of nerves. The mental toughness of the players is a determinant factor in the game situation and the players who have better mental toughness usually win the match.

Conclusion

Volleyball is a very popular game in our country and a huge number of youth are training throughout the year. In the recent past, Indian volleyball men teams have made some substantial achievements and won some international tournaments. Unfortunately Indian Women volleyball team could not make any remarkable achievements at the international scenario, even though our women teams are participating in many international tournaments. But they could not make any podium finish. The reasons could be many. But one of the most important factors of this failure could be their poor mental make-up especially poor team cohesion and mental toughness. The investigator himself is a volleyball coach having 28 years of service experience, also produced international players in volleyball and also worked as National Panel Coach for senior men volleyball team during 1989. The investigator is presently training the women volleyball team of University of Mysore which won Bronze medal in All India Inter University Tournament held at LNUPE, Gwalior (M.P.) during October 2010. This was the maiden medal for University of Mysore in Volleyball and First of its kind for Karnataka State in women section at Varsity level.

It is the personal feeling of the investigator out of many years of experience in handling the women volleyball team that the women are good in skills and to a great extent in physical fitness, but very much lacking the mental skills such as team cohesion and mental toughness. Hence it is the felt need to investigate the difference of mental toughness and team cohesion among senior, junior and sub junior national level women players.

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