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The role of sports psychology in the management of emotional traits of sportspersons

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Abstract

Psychology is a usual term that everyone listens about time and again. What might we not know here, how it relates to sport. Well, psychology and sports both are different terms from different fields but when they are put together they become essential rules which are used in sport settings. Sport consultants use to check that how psychosomatic aspects can control your physical performance in competition at ground. Added to that, your psychological facets can affect your overall psychological development, performance as well as your health especially when you work hand in practice. Unfortunately this comes into consideration for those who are mentally weak than a normal competitor. Those people, having such issues, are looked after by consultants cautiously while on the real ground every athlete gets affected in same manner by mental game of sports. It does not matter at all, what their strengths and weaknesses are, they feel same mental pressure while gaming professionally. In order to meet their actual potential and do what they are made for, this discipline should be maintained at any cost. There are some generally used techniques in Sports psychology. They are arousal regulation, goal setting, imagery, performance routines and self talk, learning how to focus much concentrating on what they are here for are some techniques. It is not so easy to perform every time to all.

Keywords: Sports, psychology, performance, motivation, physical factor, behaviour, injury, confidence, self control, awareness

Introduction

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 performance and how participation in sport and exercise affect psychological and physical factors. In addition to instruction and training of psychological skills for performance improvement, sport psychology may include work with athletes, coaches, and parents regarding injury, rehabilitation, communication, team building, and career transitions. Sport is an imperative part of human life. There are some specific games that are played or fond of. There are lots of ups and downs included when a game is played. However, when games becomes a profession, it is crucial for players or gamer to act in a positive matter about any success and failure. Sports Psychology started to become visible at the Olympic games in 1984, when the Olympic teams began to hire sports psychologists for their athletes, and in 1985, when the U.S. team employed their first permanent sports psychologist. For the Summer Olympics in 1996, the U.S. already had over 20 sports psychologists working with their athletes, and today, each professional sports team has one that is regarded as an important member of their staff.

Role of sports psychology

Sports performance is determined by a combination of physiological factors, technical skill, tactical insight and state of mind. All four factors are critical to peak performance. One could argue however that the last of these is the executive function, as it is the mind which determines whether or not what you have trained in over the past few years, is brought out on the day at that moment when it matters most. Yet it is this aspect of sports performance which has traditionally been paid the least attention in preparation for competition. Hence, in a world where many athletes are physically, technically and tactically increasingly similar, it is the mind which offers perhaps the greatest scope for a competitive advantage.

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The role of mind has become even more important with the rapidly increasing commercialization of sport, which has presented new pressures for athletes across many levels and ages. Fortunately, like the other three factors, the mind can be improved through training. The more the mental skills are learned and practiced, the better and the more consistent the performances become. There is little doubt that in future, proper mental preparation will become as routinely integrated into training and competition as the other factors already are. 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, carried out in conjunction with other training elements. 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.

Psychosomatic disorders

The health professional often plays a major role in supporting the emotional health of athletes. An athlete's psychological stresses may be manifested as somatic complaints, such as sleep disturbances, irritability, fatigue, gastro-intestinal disturbances, muscle tension, or even injury. Athletes often turn to a therapist or physician for relief, either because they do not recognize the psychological basis of the physical complaint, or because they fear the services of a mental health practitioner due to the perceived stigma, or because no psychologist is available.

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 kinesthetic).
4. Appropriate self-talk.
5. Developing a pre competition.

Mental routine to be employed immediately prior to competition on game day (these routines are short 1-2 minutes and use all of the mental skills just presented).

The Injured Athlete

Athletes have a strong sense of body awareness, and take great pride in the capabilities of their bodies. Thus, injuries can be psychologically as well as physically devastating. The ability to train and compete well involves enormous ego. Athletes often identify themselves by who they are as an athlete. Thus, an injury places considerable stress on this self-identification. The more severe the injury and the longer the recovery-rehabilitation period, the more prolonged and profound the mood disturbance may be. Injured athletes commonly experience at least three emotional responses: isolation, frustration, and disturbances of mood:

1. The injury forces the athlete to become separated from teammates and coaches. Other team members may provide little support, and in fact they may shun their injured teammate to avoid reminders of their own potential frailty.
2. The athlete becomes frustrated because he or she perceives the loss of months of training and skills mastery, although there are many instances where athletes have used the recovery period to master mental and other physical skills to return successfully to competition.
3. Mood disturbances are common. The athlete may be temporarily depressed, or become upset by minor annoyances. An injury can provide the athlete with an opportunity to work with a caring professional to re-assess his or her reasons for being in sport, and for redefining goals in sports participation.

The health care team must be aware and include psychological support as an integral part of the treatment and rehabilitation processes. At the outset, the athlete must be fully informed about the nature and severity of the injury, the prognosis for recovery, recommended course of therapy and rehabilitation, and an estimate of the time needed before training can be resumed. The athlete must be made a full partner in the treatment and recovery process, and given responsibility for therapeutic activities that can be carried out at home. The medical team must discuss openly the psychological changes that accompany an injury, and reassure the athlete that this is to be expected. Reassurance and supportive measures are generally adequate, but a visit from an athlete who has recovered from a similar injury may be of great value. This entire process can be facilitated by a supportive and understanding medical staff. The formula: Genuine Caring + Skills + Courage = Positive Outcome for the Injured Athlete must be kept in mind by the staff and the athlete, even though progress may be slow and uneven throughout the treatment and recovery process. Referral to a sports psychologist may be necessary if the athlete is deeply disturbed, or if the injury is severe and a prolonged recovery is anticipated. All injuries involve a certain degree of fear and uncertainty, and the sports psychologist may be great value in helping to deal with this emotion. From common to clinical responses: gauging referrals to therapy.

Psychological characteristics of pre-competition, competition and post competition

Competition: Competitive situations are different than normal situation. It is the situation where a person is given chance to put up his/her. One is declared winner when one performs best or better in a specific situation. Reasons for competing better and approach differently are: Preparedness of competition; Importance of competition; Experience of competition; Motivation of competition and a Individual personality. It has been seen that sport competitions involve individuals and teams. These encounters and sporting situations are full of stress and strain. Physical activity may produce some stress in an athlete. The most powerful stressor operating in the sporting situation is the psychic aspect of sport.

Pre-competitive considerations: The coach advises the athletes to deal with some preparatory exercises. These areas include the elements of the competitive actions, their variants and the actions. For instance, a runner during training runs

distances chosen for the coming competitions with increased speed; a gymnast executes the elements and movements of the competitive combinations. It has been observed that the players imitate exercises based on the elements of the game actions and combinations. During the selection of pre-competitive preparation of an athlete, it is essential to include a comprehensive physical education. Exercises help an athlete to have a sufficient effect on the development of physical qualities and enriching the store of vitally important skills. This is the first requirement before the competition. The second requirement is the content of the general training of a sportsperson must reflect the peculiarities of the sport specialisation. During the process of training between its various aspects of the adaptive process, positive as well as negative effects may occur. It is essential to specialise the composition of an athlete's training for the purpose of using a positive transfer of the level of the training.

It has been observed that an athlete would basically react in three ways. These are discussed below:

- (i) Competition will bring a very high level of arousal. A higher level of arousal will bring many negative feelings (start fever).
- (ii) The athlete may be under arousal (start apathy) lethargetic, fearful, lazy.
- (iii) It is an ideal state where an optimum level of arousal for competition is present.

Start apathy occurs because of fear of losing or sure to win situations. Over arousal is the most experienced characteristic of pre-competitive situation. The level of arousal is high. According to Oxendine a high level of arousal is essential for optimal performance in gross motor activities involving strength, endurance and speed. Over arousal occurs when the outcome is uncertain and the importance of competition is too high. Fears of not performing up to the mark of his/her own or significant others, opponent is tougher than we expected. In general, there is a high level of anxiety because of uncertainty of outcome. It may be due to fear of not doing well (opponent, injury etc.) It leads to different kinds of symptoms which appear before the competition. As the competitions near, the symptoms become more acute. There are somatic symptoms as well as psychological complications. These are discussed below:

Somatic Symptoms: Loose motion, urge to urinate; feelings like vomiting, sweating, increase in heart rate; sleeplessness etc., come under this category.

Psychological Complaints: The athlete feels inadequacy and he/she is unable to control the situation. Lack of enthusiasm, loss of appetite etc., come under this category.

All these lead to a constant feeling of fear in performing below the ability level, losing, pressure to win, fear of criticism of the coach, letting down teammate. A feeling of guilt will also be there due to past experience.

The athletes become aggressive and retaliates to opponent etc. All these psychological and somatic symptoms bring up the anxiety level and affect performance.

Competitive Situation: Once the competition starts the arousal level change because of the involvement. If it is less then the arousal level goes up. The arousal level comes more close to optimum level. The effort has to be made by the sportsperson to bring the arousal level as close or equal to optimum level. It will differ according to individual and

nature of sports. Sports psychologists have tried to relate open and closed skills with different arousal levels required for optimal performance. It has been seen that athletes in closed skills (sprints, field events in track and field) can tolerate higher levels of arousal. Everyone has to find his/her optimum level by making trial and error. The nature of the activity is also influenced. There is high level of arousal in weight lifting. There is medium level of arousal in team games. The sportsperson constantly regulates the level of arousal. This is very important in sports. Open skills which include team games, require more task cues to be attended by the performance.

Post-Competitive Characteristics: Post competitive characteristics are equally important. Different kinds of emotions are there after the total competition is over. It depends upon the outcome of the competition. There is repeated performance. Different kinds of emotions are felt after the total event. The specific reactions should be seen after each phase and after the total competition is over.

After the one phase is over: Here critical evaluation of the performance starting with positive evaluation is done. Based on these experiences the strategy has to be made for the next performance.

After the whole event is over: It should be compared with the aim or goal. Then it can be seen that successful or unsuccessful outcome which affect the athletes are dealt with by the coach to enhance future performance.

According to this, different kinds of emotions are expressed by the athletes. A very honest and sincere approach should be brought according to the goal of the competition. The next competition should be tackled accordingly.

Techniques of Sports Psychology

Following are five of the more common techniques or skills sport psychologists teach to athletes for improving their performance.

Arousal regulation

Arousal regulation refers to entering into and maintaining an optimal level of cognitive and physiological activation in order to maximize performance. This may include relaxation if one becomes too anxious through methods such as progressive muscle relaxation, breathing exercises, and meditation, or the use of energizing techniques (e.g., listening to music, energizing cues) if one is not alert enough. The use of meditation and specifically, mindfulness, is a growing practice in the field of arousal recognition. The Mindfulness Acceptance-Commitment (MAC) Theory is the most common form of mindfulness in sport and was formed in 2001. The aim of ACT is to maximize human potential for a rich, full and meaningful life. It includes specific protocol that involve meditation and acceptance practices on a regular basis as well as before and during competition.

Goal setting

Goal setting is the process of systematically planning ways to achieve specific accomplishments within a certain amount of time. Research suggests that goals should be specific, measurable, difficult but attainable, time-based, written down, and a combination of short-term and long-term goals. A meta-analysis of goal setting in sport suggests that when compared to setting no goals or "do your best" goals, setting the above

types of goals is an effective method for improving performance. Short term goals should be used to help achieve long term goals. It is important to “set goals in positive terms by focusing on behaviors that should be present rather than those that should be absent.” Each long term goal should also have a series of short term goals that progress in difficulty

Imagery

Imagery (or motor imagery) can be defined as using multiple senses to create or recreate experiences in one’s mind. Additionally, the more vivid images are, the more likely they are to be interpreted by the brain as identical to the actual event, which increases the effectiveness of mental practice with imagery. Good imagery, therefore, attempts to create as lifelike an image as possible through the use of multiple senses (e.g., sight, smell, kinesthetic), proper timing, perspective, and accurate portrayal of the task. Both anecdotal evidence from athletes and research findings suggest imagery is an effective tool to enhance performance and psychological states relevant to performance (e.g., confidence). This is a concept commonly used by coaches and athletes the day before an event.

Pre-performance Routines

Pre-performance routines refer to the actions and behaviors athletes use to prepare for a game or performance. This includes pregame routines, warm up routines, and actions an athlete will regularly do, mentally and physically, before they execute the performance. Frequently, these will incorporate other commonly used techniques, such as imagery or self-talk. Examples would be visualizations done by skiers, dribbling by basketball players at the foul line, and preshot routines golfers or baseball players use prior to a shot or pitch. These routines help to develop consistency and predictability for the player. This allows the muscles and mind to develop better motor control.

Self-talk

Self-talk refers to the thoughts and words athletes and performers say to themselves, usually in their minds. Self-talk phrases (or cues) are used to direct attention towards a particular thing in order to improve focus or are used alongside other techniques to facilitate their effectiveness. For example, a softball player may think “release point” when at bat to direct her attention to the point where the pitcher releases the ball, while a golfer may say “smooth stroke” before putting to stay relaxed. Research suggests either positive or negative self-talk may improve performance, suggesting the effectiveness of self-talk phrases depends on how the phrase is interpreted by the individual. The use of words in sport has been widely used.

Conclusion

Time is not same and who would know this fact better than a player. Athletes see many aspects of their gaming life throughout their career. They become happy when they win game. Similarly they become sad as they loss one or they have an injuries. Some of the most common therapy goals for athletes include improving confidence, self-control and self-awareness. To reach these goals, the psychologist may utilize tools such as meditation, visualization, goal-setting and an assortment of other mental training techniques. Another important contribution of sport psychology involves working with injured players because improving an athlete’s mental state may aid in his or her recovery. Recently, the role of sport

psychology has been called on to meet the increasing demand for anger management for athletes. Increasingly, Sport Psychologists have needed to address this topic and provide strategies and interventions for overcoming excessive anger and aggression in athletes, and techniques for athletes to manage emotions.

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