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## Role of sports psychology and psychologists on sports persons

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### Abstract

The popularity of sport psychology, both as an academic discipline and an applied practice, has grown substantially over the past two decades. Few within the realm of competitive athletics would argue with the importance of being mentally prepared prior to an athletic competition as well as the need to maintain that particular mindset during a competitive contest. Nevertheless, recent research has shown that many athletes, coaches, and sporting administrators are still quite reluctant to seek out the services of a qualified sport psychologist, even if they believe it could help. One of the primary reasons for this hesitation appears to be a lack of understanding about the process and the mechanisms by which these mental skills affect performance. Sports psychology has significantly changed lives of many athletes, coaches and other sports and exercise professionals. Mental Game Coaching is that the segment of sports psychology that concentrates specifically on helping athletes break through the mental barriers that are keeping them from performing up to their peak potential. By focusing on the mental skills needed to be successful in any sporting competition, mental game coaching seeks to achieve the overall goal of performance improvement. Sports psychology encompasses various branches of psychology as they are related to our ability to understand athlete performance, how to make it better, and how to improve exercise programmes.

**Keywords:** Sport psychology, physical education, sports

### Introduction Meaning

Sport psychology is not just about improving athletic performance. Sport psychology plays a much larger role within performance. Sport psychology can be about developing interventions which help to prevent mental health among the athletic population. Sport psychology can be about teaching athletes transferable skills that they can use in not only sport but also in work and family life. Sport psychology can be about helping athletes to manage transitions and deal with issues associated with retirement. Athletes can be particular vulnerable to mental health problems due to the intense pressure associated to elite sport and sport psychologists can help athletes to deal with some of these issues.

Coaches and athletes must move past the short term benefits of sport psychology. They must start to see the bigger picture and what sport psychology can do for athletes 2 or 3 years down the line. The sport community must start to realise that sport psychologists are not employed to just work with problems and when things don't go well. Often we hear coaches or athletes say "I don't have any problems or issues so why would I need sport psychology support?" Sport Psychology is not just to help people when things go wrong. Sport Psychology is a field which can help to move athletes to the next level. There are a number of athletes who will be seeing a sport psychologist every week to not just talk about problems but to learn more about the field. To learn how basic psychological tools such as goal setting, imagery, self talk and relaxation skills can help to boost their performance. To learn how to become the best possible athlete from a psychological point of view. To learn how to manage their family, work and sport life. The next time you think about using or adopting sport psychology to your performance don't just think about the short term benefits, think about what sport psychology could do for you in the long term. Think about how it can help to develop you into not only a better coach or athlete but a better person. Think about how certain theories and principles can be applied to not only your sporting environment but to all different environments that you associate

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yourself with. Sport psychology won't just help you to deal with problems or issues, it will help you to learn more about how you can be in the best psychological state of mind. It will help you to understand how your self talk can influence your emotions and behaviour. The next time you think about sport psychology think about how often you spend every week training your body physically and learning about technical and tactical skills. Then think about how often you spend every week training your brain and your mind. What goes on inside your mind will influence everything that you do in training or competition. By learning to understand, manage and use your brain in an effective way you will achieve peak performance.

### **Bauman**

"I have often compared elite athletic performance to our modern-day computer systems-it's similar in terms of hardware, software and disk operating system (DOS). Hardware is your body below the chin, software is your body above the chin, or your brain, and your DOS is the operating system that makes your body and brain work together."

"All three components are necessary for the system to work at maximum potential. All three need to be at increasing higher levels to keep up with the industry, whether that's the field of computers or human performance. Athletes who work on and improve their hardware, software and operating systems will far outperform athletes who focus on just one system."

### **Following ten ways that can benefit from sports psychology**

1. Improve focus and deal with distractions. Many athletes have the ability to concentrate, but often their focus is displaced on the wrong areas such as when a batter thinks "I need to get a hit" while in the batter's box, which is a result-oriented focus. Much of my instruction on focus deals with helping athlete to stay focused on the present moment and let go of results.
2. Grow confidence in athletes who have doubts. Doubt is the opposite of confidence. If you maintain many doubts prior to or during your performance, this indicates low self-confidence or at least you are sabotaging what confidence you had at the start of the competition. Confidence is what I call a core mental game skill because of its importance and relationship to other mental skills.
3. Develop coping skills to deal with setbacks and errors. Emotional control is a prerequisite to getting into the zone. Athletes with very high and strict expectations, have trouble dealing with minor errors that are a natural part of sports. It's important to address these expectations and also help athletes stay composed under pressure and when they commit errors or become frustrated.
4. Find the right zone of intensity for your sport. I use intensity in a broad sense to identify the level of arousal or mental activation that is necessary for each person to perform his or her best. This will vary from person to person and from sport to sport. Feeling "up" and positively charged is critical, but not getting overly excited is also important. You have to tread a fine line between being excited to complete, but not getting over-excited.
5. Help teams develop communication skills and cohesion. A major part of sports psychology and mental training is helping teams improve cohesion and communication. The more a team works as a unit, the better the results for all involved.
6. To instill a healthy belief system and identify irrational

thoughts. One of the areas I pride myself on is helping athlete identify ineffective beliefs and attitudes such as comfort zones and negative self-labels that hold them back from performing well. These core unhealthy beliefs must be identified and replaced with a new way of thinking. Unhealthy or irrational beliefs will keep you stuck no matter how much you practice or hard you try.

7. Improve or balance motivation for optimal performance. It's important to look at your level of motivation and just why you are motivated to play your sport. Some motivators are better in the long-term than others. Athletes who are extrinsically motivated often play for the wrong reasons, such as the athlete who only participates in sports because of a parent. I work with athlete to help them adopt a healthy level of motivation and be motivated for the right reasons.
8. Develop confidence post-injury. Some athletes find themselves fully prepared physically to get back into competition and practice, but mentally some scars remain. Injury can hurt confidence, generate doubt during competition, and cause a lack of focus. I help athletes mentally heal from injuries and deal with the fear of re-injury.
9. To develop game-specific strategies and game plans. All great coaches employ game plans, race strategies, and course management skills to help athletes mentally prepare for competition. This is an area beyond developing basic mental skills in which a mental coach helps athletes and teams. This is very important in sports such as golf, racing, and many team sports.
10. To identify and enter the "zone" more often. This incorporates everything I do in the mental side of sports. The overall aim is to help athletes enter the zone by developing foundational mental skills that can help athletes enter the zone more frequently. It's impossible to play in the zone everyday, but you can set the conditions for it to happen more often.

**The following are the value of sports psychologists who can assist athletes in developing the skills necessary to succeed.**

#### **1. Confidence and Self-Esteem**

Sports psychologists assist professional athletes in building confidence, self-esteem, and expectations of success. NHL hockey player Olli Jokinen credits his sports psychologist John Murray for improving his game and mental outlook in a quote from Murray's website: "Thanks so much for making me mentally stronger this year. You are the best... nothing like the rest <sup>[1]</sup>."

#### **2. Focus and concentration**

Rather than requiring more mental effort, ideal levels of focus demand less of the athlete, as described by the sense of being "in the zone." Sports psychologists help athletes to tap into this type of concentration and learn how to cultivate the ideal type of focus.

#### **3. Motivation**

Professional athletes must maintain a high level of motivation both during competitions and in practice. Sports psychologists help to define specific, measurable, challenging, and realistic goals to keep athletes motivated during times of stress.

#### **4. Managing Emotions**

Professional athletes benefit from sports psychology by

learning to manage negative thoughts and bodily arousal that can contribute to choking under pressure. During the 2007 British Open, professional golfer Padraig Harrington had a string of misfortune - hitting two consecutive balls into a creek on the 18th hole and forcing a playoff against Sergio Garcia. Before the playoff, Harrington spoke to sports psychologist Bob Rotella on the practice green, who boosted his confidence enough to come back strong. Harrington is quoted as saying: "I wouldn't have won the British without Bob [2]."

### **5. Coping with Setbacks**

Professional athletes must cope with setbacks such as a losing slump, injuries, and mental blocks. Former professional basketball player Tracy McGrady describes how sports psychologist John Murray helped him through micro fracture surgery on his knee: "Dr. Murray helped me regain my focus after being out of the game for a long period of time. I used Dr. Murray's techniques of positive imagery and felt the benefits immediately. It helped my game tremendously [1]."

### **6. Communicating with Teammates**

Not only must professional athletes perform at a high level - but they are also expected to function well as part of a team and demonstrate good sportsmanship. Sports psychologists can aid in improving an athlete's ability to communicate with teammates and demonstrate grace under pressure.

### **7. Off-Field Issues**

Professional athletes also benefit from assistance targeted at personal issues that affect performance. For example, basketball star Ron Artest completed anger management classes after a domestic violence issue in 2008, and went on to meet with a sports psychologist to improve his mental game. After winning the 2010 NBA title with the Lakers, Artest publicly offered thanks to his psychiatrist: "Thank you so much, so difficult to play, so much emotion going on in the playoffs, and she helped me relax [3]."

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