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Sports psychology

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Abstract

Sport psychology involves the use of psychological knowledge and skills to address optimal performance and well-being of athletes, developmental and social aspects of sports participation, and systemic issues associated with sports settings and organizations. It is about understanding the performance, mental processes, and wellbeing of people in sporting settings, taking into account psychological theory and methods. Sports psychology is now widely accepted as offering a crucial edge over competitors. And while essential for continuing high performance in elite athletes, it also provides insights into optimizing functioning in areas of our lives beyond sports. A sports injury can lead people to experience emotional reactions in addition to their physical injury, which can include feelings of anger, frustration, hopelessness, and fear. Sports psychologists help athletes recover and return to their sport after an injury.

Keywords: sports psychology, athletes, physical

Introduction

Sports psychology is the study of how psychological factors influence sports, athletic performance, exercise, and physical activity. They also help athletes utilize psychology to improve sports performance and mental wellness. As a result, psychological processes and mental wellbeing have become increasingly recognized as vital to consistently high degrees of sporting performance for athletes at all levels where the individual is serious about pushing their limits. The abilities to maintain focus under pressure of competitors and also controlling actions during extreme circumstances of uncertainty can be strengthened by the mental training and skills provided by sports psychologist. Mental preparation helps ready the individual and team for competition and offers an edge over an adversary while optimizing performance. Not only that, but the skills learned in sports psychology are transferable; we can take them to other domains such as education and the workplace.

The earliest known formal study of the mental processes involved in sports can be attributed to Triplett in 1898. Triplett explored the positive effect of having other competitors to race against in the new sport of cycling. He found that the presence of others enhances the performance of well-learned skills. Sports psychology became the subject of a more rigorous scientific focus after 1980. Researchers began to explore how psychology could be used to improve athletic performance.

Types of Sports Psychologists

Educational Sports Psychologists

An educational sports psychologist uses various psychological methods to help athletes improve sports performance. This includes teaching them how to perform certain techniques such as imagery, goal setting, or self-talk to do better on the court or field.

Clinical Sports Psychologists

Clinical sports psychologists work with athletes who have mental health conditions such as depression or anxiety. This involves using strategies from both sport psychology and psychotherapy. A clinical sports psychologist helps players improve their mental health and sports performance at the same time.

Exercise Psychologists

An exercise psychologist works with non-athlete clients or the everyday exerciser to help them learn how to make working out a habit. This can include some of the same techniques used by other sports psychologists, such as goal setting. It also involves practicing mindfulness and the use of motivational techniques.

Facts of Sports Psychology

Sports psychology is not one theory, but the combination of many overlapping ideas and concepts that attempt to understand what it takes to be a successful athlete.

1. Motivation: Motivation has been described as what maintains, sustains, directs, and channels behaviour over an extended amount of time and it applies in all areas of life requiring commitment, particularly relevant in sports. Not only does motivation impact an athlete's ability to focus and achieve sporting excellence, but it is essential for the initial adoption and ongoing continuance of training. There are two types of motivators – Extrinsic motivators are external rewards such as trophies, money, medals, or social recognition. Intrinsic motivators arise from within, such as a personal desire to win or the sense of pride that comes from performing a skill.

2. Mental toughness: Mental toughness helps maintain consistency in determination, focus, and perceived control while under competitive pressure. It is made up of four components

- Confidence in abilities and interpersonal skills
- Seeing challenges as opportunities
- Feeling in control when confronted with obstacles and difficult situations
- Commitment to goals

For athletes and sportspeople, mental toughness provides an advantage over opponents, enabling them to cope better with the demands of physical activity. Beyond that, mental toughness allows individuals to manage stress better, overcome challenges, and perform optimally in everyday life.

3. Confidence: Confidence is ultimately a measure of how much self-belief we have to see through to the end something beset with setbacks. Those with a high degree of self-confidence will recognize that obstacles are part of life and take them in stride. Those less confident may believe the world is set against them and feel defeated or prevented from completing. An athlete high in self-confidence will harness their degree of self-belief and meet the challenge head on. However, there are risks associated with being too self-confident. Overconfidence in abilities can lead to taking on too much, intolerance, and the inability to see underdeveloped skills.

4. Anxiety - It is important to distinguish anxiety from arousal. The latter refers to a type of bodily energy that prepares us for action. It involves deep psychological and physiological activation, and is valuable in sports. Under extreme pressure and in situations perceived as important, athletes may perform worse than expected. This is known as choking and is typically caused by being overly anxious. The degree of anxiety is influenced by Perceived importance of the event, Trait anxiety, Perfectionism – setting impossibly high standards, Fear of failure and Lack of confidence. Pressure

can be managed by Self-talk, Visualization, Breathing and slowing down, Relaxation and Sticking to pre-performance routines.

5. Goal setting and focus: A well-constructed goal can provide a mechanism to motivate the individual toward that goal. Bigger goals can be broken down into a set of smaller, more manageable tasks that take us nearer to achieving the overall goal. Setting goals is an effective way to focus on the right activities, increase commitment, and energize the individual. Goal should be clear, realistic, and possible and should be SMART - Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound.

Techniques in Sports Psychology

Progressive Relaxation: Relaxation techniques offer athletes many benefits. Among them are an increase in self-confidence, better concentration, and lower levels of anxiety and stress—all of which work together to improve performance. One of the relaxation strategies sports psychologists use with their clients is progressive muscle relaxation. This involves having them tense a group of muscles, hold them tense for a few seconds, then allow them to relax.

Hypnosis: Some health professionals use hypnosis to help their patients quit smoking. A sports psychologist might use this same technique to help their clients perform better in their sport of choice. Research indicates that hypnosis (which involves putting someone in a state of focused attention with increased suggestibility) can be used to improve performance for athletes participating in a variety of sports, from basketball to golf to soccer.

Biofeedback: It involves using feedback provided by the body to notice how it feels physiologically in times of stress (elevated heart rate, tense muscles, etc.). This information can then be used to help control these effects, providing a more positive biological response.

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy: Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) is used to help all kinds of people identify and change destructive thoughts and behaviours.

Skills Applied

Many strategies and procedures are used to address problems faced by athletes and other sports participants. Some of the principal areas include:

- Cognitive skills training for performance enhancement. Concentration and attention control strategies, development of self-confidence, self-esteem and competence in sports, cognitive-behavioural self-regulation techniques, emotion management, sportsmanship and leadership skills.
- Clinical interventions. Weight management, substance abuse, grief, depression, loss and suicide, over-training and burnout, sexual identity issues, aggression and violence, athletic injury and rehabilitation, career transitions and identity crises.
- Consultation and training. Sports organization consultation, team building, interpersonal and leadership skills and talent development, education of coaches and administrators regarding early identification and prevention of psychological difficulties.

Conclusion

The use of psychological techniques in exercise and sport offers benefits for athletes and non-athletes alike. It also encompasses a wide variety of techniques designed to boost performance and strengthen exercise adherence. Sport Psychology interventions are designed to assist athletes and other sports participants like coaches, administrators and parents from a wide array of settings, levels of competition and ages, ranging from recreational youth participants to professional and Olympic athletes to master's level performers.

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