
Psychological Preparation for Sports

¹Dr. Deepali Nigam

¹Associate Professor Physical Education, Mahila Mahavidyalaya (P.G.), Kidwai Nagar, Kanpur

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Abstract

Sport psychology is recognized as 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. Sport psychologists teach cognitive and behavioural strategies to athletes in order to improve their experience and performance in sports. In addition to instruction and training of psychological skills for performance improvement, applied sport psychology may include work with athletes, coaches, and parents regarding injury, rehabilitation, communication, team building, and career transitions. Sports performance is determined by a combination of physiological factors, technical skills, tactical insight and state of mind. All four factors are critical to peak performance. With the formation of the Indian Association of Sports Medicine (IASM), we see the first major development of the Indian sports science movement in 1970. Another important milestone for sports psychology in India was seen in 1977, during the seventh annual conference of the IASM, when some delegates from the IASM interested in the psychological aspects of sports came together to establish a group of their own. With this, we see the conception of the Indian Association of Sports Psychology. Over the years, we see the establishment of many more institutes and associations like the Sport Psychology Association of India (SAPI) that is facilitating the development of sports psychology in the country. Performance in sports is no longer dependent on physiological well-being of the athlete. It is clear now that there are numerous psychological factors which affect and improve the physical performance. . The application of psychological concepts to understanding and conditioning behaviour in activity and sport is more a matter of degree than of kind. Psychological training, coping strategies, interventions, mental skills etc., have greater relevance in competitive sport than activity and recreational sport. Sport psychologists teach cognitive and behavioural strategies to athletes in order to improve their experience and performance in sports. In addition to instruction and training of psychological skills for performance improvement, applied sport psychology may include work with athletes, coaches, and parents regarding injury, rehabilitation, communication, team building, and career transitions.

Keywords: Sport psychology, Personality, Learning, Intelligence, Motivation, Emotions, Stress and Anxiety, and Group dynamics.

Introduction

Sports psychology is the study of how the mind affects physical activity and athletic performance. According to the American Psychological Association, “sports psychology addresses the interactions between psychology and sport performance, including the psychological aspects of optimal athletic performance, the psychological care and wellbeing of athletes, coaches, and sport organizations, and the connection between physical and psychological functioning.” Sport psychology is a proficiency that uses 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. Sport psychology is recognized as 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. Sport psychologists teach cognitive and behavioural strategies to athletes in order to improve their experience and performance in sports. In addition to instruction and training of psychological skills for performance improvement, applied sport psychology may include work with athletes, coaches, and parents regarding injury, rehabilitation, communication, team building, and career transitions. Sports performance is determined by a combination of physiological factors, technical skills, tactical insight and state of mind. All four factors are critical to peak performance. 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. The role of mind has become even more important with the rapidly increasing commercialization of sport, which has opened new pressures for athletes. Fortunately, like other three factors, mind can be improved extensively through training. The more the mental skills are learned and practiced, the better and the more consistent the performances become.

In a Blog of Dr. Tom's from Northeast Texas Community College stated that mentally tough contenders view competition as alluring. They have lives in and out of their sport. Self-image is not based on winning or losing. If they lose, there is another tournament. After a win there is celebration, and life goes on. They don't care so much about what others think. Their self-worth comes from within. Mentally tough competitors are spiritually cantered. They slow down to absorb the present. They understand that competition is part of the journey. Matches are simply a measure of improvement. They enjoy the adrenalin rush of the moment. A win leads to another, building confidence and inner strength. There are no worries. The aura of triumph lasts for days, months, and years depending on the significance of the victory. Blow-by-blow action is replayed in the theatre of the mind. Dr. Tom elaborated some very useful Mental Toughness Tips for the athlete as follow:

1. Stay pumped up even when you are tired or discouraged.
2. Act "as if" you are winning even if you are losing.
3. Stay relaxed and loose during breaks in the action.
4. Plan your strategy prior to each event.
5. Follow the same rituals before beginning each game.
6. The faster and more furious it gets, the more you love it.
7. Thrive on having fun.
8. Stay positive no matter how bad the match gets.
9. Be acutely tuned into your competition.
10. Project a confident image regardless of the score.
11. Toughness is More Important than Talent: Time and again I see well-schooled competitors lose to scrappy ones.
12. You Can Get Tough at Any Age: I see players well into their forties competing and winning against much younger opponents.
13. Keep Your Toughness Skills Sharp: On any given day anyone can be beaten. Be tougher than your opponent.
14. By increasing awareness of your mental strengths and weaknesses, you'll be better equipped to consistently perform toward the upper range of your ability.

Sub division of Sports Psychology

Experimental	Educational	Clinical	Developmental
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It deals with research and studies, both field and experimental.	It imparts knowledge to the sports person and all other concerned.	It helps prevent and solved problem of athlete and enhance performance.	It focuses on youth and children as the involved in competitive experience
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Development of Sports Psychology- The historical development of sports psychology indicate that it begin with the application of general principle of psychology to the process of skill acquisition and gradually to other specific areas. Most of the first experimental psychologist focused on movement and motor related factors, and thus a kind of motor psychology preceded the emergence of sports psychology, and a broad foundation of movement psychology was established. This resulted in opening of motor learning laboratories where the focus was on physical skill and skill execution. Coleman Griffith is known as a father of sports psychology. He organized and directed the first sports psychology laboratory focusing on learning psycho-motor skill and personality variables. Since then sports psychology has never looked back. During 1920's and 1930's, sports psychology came to be recognised as a scientific field in Eastern Europe. The international society of sports psychology, focused in early 1960's, is the oldest organisation in this field. It can be well said that field of sports psychology was born in Rome in 1965 at the first International Congress of Sports Psychology, held just after the Rome Olympic Games. In 1980's, sports psychology become very popular and national society was established in many countries providing impetus to its growth. The sports psychologist Dani Landers has categorised the process of sports psychology in three stages: first stage (1950 to 1965) was dominated by research on how the personalities of athlete related to performance, the second stage (1966 to 1976) was dominated by the borrowing of then current theories from main stream psychology and to test them in sports setting, and the third stage (1976 to the present) has focused more on developing information and theories directly derived from sports, and on developing and refining psychological skill and strategies to enhance sports performance.

With the formation of the Indian Association of Sports Medicine (IASM), we see the first major development of the Indian sports science movement in 1970. Another important milestone for sports psychology in India was seen in 1977, during the seventh annual conference of the IASM, when some delegates from the IASM interested in the psychological aspects of sports came together to establish a group of their own. With this, we see the conception of the Indian Association of Sports Psychology. Over the years, we see the establishment of many more institutes and associations like the Sport Psychology Association of India (SAPI) that is facilitating the development of sports psychology in the country.

Psychological Factors Effecting Physical Performance- Performance in sports is no longer dependent on physiological well-being of the athlete. It is clear now that there are numerous psychological factors which affect and improve the physical performance. The important psychological factors which affect the physical performance and sports are as below:-

Individual Differences among the Athletes- Each athlete is unique to oneself. Apart from physiological differences such as height, weight, etc., there are bound to psychological differences as well. Some athletes may be outgoing and extrovert whereas other may be shy, introvert and withdrawn, and they may also differ in their levels of perception. Some athletes are born strong psychologically while others have weak dispositions. Athletes with weak disposition fail to accomplish their task. Thus individual differences in sports performance are an inevitable phenomenon, and the teacher or coach has to modify his approach according to the nature of each individual athlete.

Personality- Personality differences are inevitable, as two individuals cannot possess similar personality traits. Personality traits are basic to sports excellence. It is necessary to identify and cultivate those personality traits which are most conducive to the performance in sports. Hence personality is an important psychological factor which, to a great extent determines the result of any athletic output.

Learning- It is impossible to explain behaviour without reference to learning; it is the process comprehensively covering all interactions, experiences and transformations, which an individual happens to have during his lifetime, and which leave, more or less, permanent effect on him. If learning were removed from human life, a person would be helpless. Beside this, there would be no such general characteristics of social behaviour such as intolerance, hate, love, shame, envy, jealousy, sympathy, etc., because these all are learnt. Educational psychologists have identified several principles of learning, also referred to as laws of learning, which seem generally applicable to the learning process. These principles have been discovered, tested, and used in practical situations. They provide additional insight into what makes people learn most effectively. Edward Thorndike developed the first three "Laws of learning:" readiness, exercise, and effect. Since Thorndike set down his basic three laws in the early part of the twentieth century, five additional principles have been added: primacy, recency, intensity, freedom and requirement.

Intelligence - Intelligence is aggregate mental capacity or energy of an individual to act purposefully, to think rationally, and to deal effectively with one's environment. Defining intelligence in concrete terms has all through been a challenge with psychologists, philosophers and educationist over centuries probably because the list of functions, operations and activities attached to it is so exhaustive. Individuals differ from one to another in their ability to understand complex ideas, to adapt effectively to the environment, to learn from experience and to engage in various forms of reasoning. Intelligence of an individual plays an important role in effecting physical performance. The more complex and interpretative the movement, the greater the amount of intelligence necessary to comprehend. Sports activities involve complex skilled actions. Since all skilled behaviour is intelligent behaviour so, the relationship between sports performance and intelligence cannot be denied.

Motivation - It is difficult to imagine anything being more important to success in sport than motivation. In psychology, motivation refers to the initiation, direction, intensity, and persistence of behaviour. Motivation is the foundation for all athletic effort and accomplishment. Without your desire and determination to improve your sports performances, all of the other mental factors, confidence, intensity, focus, and emotions, are meaningless. Motivation is a force, a drive which prompts, compels, and energizes an individual to act or behave in a particular manner, at a particular time, for attaining the specific goal or purpose. Motivation is basic to overcome the hurdles which otherwise could have influenced the performance negatively. Without proper attention, Keen interest, setting of right attitude, and the resulting optimum level of motivation, many top class athletes have failed to accomplish their task. It is thus necessary to find out ways and means of motivation athletes for better physical performance.

Emotions - Emotions are our feelings. Literally, we feel them in our bodies as tingles, hot spots and muscular tension. Emotions are biologically based adaptations that assist us in responding to particular external stimuli. We win a soccer match, we jump with joy, we lose a dear one, we feel sad, we see a beggar, and we laugh, and so on. Almost every situation evokes some feeling, and as the situation becomes intense, it is expressed as emotion. No aspect of our mental life is more important to the quality and meaning of our existence than emotions, because emotions actually express our true feelings. Emotions have either positive or negative effects that can be seen when examining the role of emotions on motivational functioning, cognitive functioning, health, interpersonal functioning and performance.

Attention and concentration - Everything in life responds to attention. Attention is the concentration of consciousness upon one object rather than upon another. It is the process of getting an object or thought clearly before the mind. It helps in bringing mental alertness and preparedness, and as a result, one becomes alert and alive, and tries to exercise one's Mental and physical power as effectively as possible. Giving high quality attention to the skill during sports competition is important for effective performance. Various cognitive strategies and intensive over learning of skills may enhance the capacity to focus attention on the task at hand, resulting in better performance. There are number of factors which distract and reduce attention and concentration, which in turn will result in poor performance.

Aggression- Aggression is a part of human behaviour and is necessary for an individual to live and struggle for higher achievements. Struggle for supremacy, dominance, and excellence in sports obviously involve aggression. Aggression in one form or the other is inevitable and inescapable in sports activities. When hostility takes over aggression, the situation becomes alarming and it becomes anti-social behaviour. Aggression may help in the performance of an athlete to put in harder effort for the success of the team. Athletes must be helped to reduce and control aggression in order to play calmly and perform the best. Appropriate level of aggression, as permitted under the rules governing the game, tends to improve the skill and enhance the effort, and on the other hand, high or low level of aggression will hamper and retard the performance in sports.

Stress and Anxiety - In psychology, stress is a feeling of strain and pressure. Small amounts of stress may be desired, beneficial, and even healthy. Positive stress helps improve athletic performance. It also plays a factor in motivation, adaptation, and reaction to the environment. Excessive amounts of stress, however, may lead to bodily harm. Stress can increase the risk of strokes, heart attacks, ulcers, dwarfism, and mental illnesses such as depression. Anxiety is one of many emotions that may arise in response to a competitive situation. An emotion is associated with a physiological change, a subjective experience, and an action tendency. As we can see anxiety includes state and trait dimensions both of which can show themselves as cognitive and somatic symptoms. An athlete with high anxiety trait is likely to be more anxious in stressful situations. To help the athlete control competitive anxiety somatic techniques (relaxation) and cognitive techniques (mental imagery) can be used.

Group dynamics- A sports team is comprised of various individual athletes, each having different orientations and perceptions, and at times, these differences may interfere with performance of the team. Better performance will result if each member of the team merges his personal feelings and abilities into a total team effort. Success of a team depends on adjustment within i.e. how closely the team seems to be working and feeling together. Psychological togetherness among the members of the team does reflect on the outcome of the performance. Group dynamics and performance are thus mutually influential, and are further influenced by the stability of the personnel concerned with the team. It has been found that better group cohesion, generally tends to produce better performance.

Mental Imagery- Mental ability and imagery help the athletes to empower their emotional state, and the way they approach the physical efforts. Such mental activity enables the athlete to improve the execution and precision of the given skill or task by thinking and imagining about it. Mental imagery of critical competitive situations is essential to boost the fighting spirit to help an athlete to organize himself in a better way. Mental rehearsal of competitive situations certainly helps in improving athlete's emotional state as well as his physical performance. It also helps in the smooth flow of energy as and when required.

Conclusion- There is no sport without physical education at the gross root level. The physical educator and the athletic coach face the same problems of human behaviour and grapple with them almost in a

similar fashion. The application of psychological concepts to understanding and conditioning behaviour in activity and sport is more a matter of degree than of kind. Psychological training, coping strategies, interventions, mental skills etc., have greater relevance in competitive sport than activity and recreational sport. Sport psychologists teach cognitive and behavioural strategies to athletes in order to improve their experience and performance in sports. In addition to instruction and training of psychological skills for performance improvement, applied sport psychology may include work with athletes, coaches, and parents regarding injury, rehabilitation, communication, team building, and career transitions.

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