

Role of psychological factors in games and sports

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Abstract

This paper is designed to understand the role and importance of psychology of sportspersons in achieving the sports excellence. Psychology of the sportsperson is very important for achieving the heights in sports. It includes various components physical, mental, spiritual and good emotional health of the sportsperson. Psychology includes the various components like personality; attitudes, anxiety, aggression and stress also play an important role in sports. This paper identifies all these factors and their importance for the sportsperson to become the elite and successful sportspersons in their life.

Keywords: sports, psychology, personality, attitude, anxiety, stress etc

1. Introduction

Sport psychology is the understanding of how the mind influences an athlete's performance in their chosen sport. Within the principles of sport psychology are various concepts such as how do athletes prefer to learn, what is their personality, how can they attain states of relaxation and concentration (narrow and broad focus), how does an athlete learn to visualize a successful performance, do they understand and overcome their limiting beliefs and how does an athlete develop high levels of self-awareness. The importance of a sports psychologist as an integral member of the coaching and health care teams is widely recognized. In the past, it was assumed that these skills were genetically based, or acquired early in life. Now, it is commonly accepted that athletes and coaches are capable of learning a broad range of psychological skills that can play a critical role in learning and in performance.

2. Role of Sports Psychology

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. There is a powerful force guiding athletes to these super performances. It is the subconscious mind. The athlete must allow their subconscious mind to become the dominant driving force when they perform. When the athlete is able to control their subconscious, they become better at tapping their mental power to perform more consistently at a high level. Only when tapping into your mind's power will your body be able to operate on pure instinct and more consistently under stress. The result is more opportunities to achieve peak performances. Elite athletes are constantly looking to

improve their performance to acquire an edge on their competitors. No matter how physically prepared an athlete is, it is their mental preparedness that makes the difference when competing against each other. Conditioning the mind is just as important as conditioning the body! Think of your mental attitude as the ultimate secret weapon that gives you an edge.

3. Psychological factors effecting physical performance

Physical performance or performance in sports is no longer dependent on physiological well-being of the athlete. It is well established by now that there are numerous psychological factors which effect and improve the physical performance. The point where physiological response potential reaches the dead end, the psychological process seems to make the athlete click, by providing the boost or energy to achieve the goal, which physiologically seemed impossible. That is why psychological training and conditioning are now-a-days a part and parcel of total sports training programmes.



Important psychological factors which effect the physical performance are:

3.1 Individual differences among the athletes

Each athlete is unique to oneself. Apart from physiological differences such as height, weight etc., they are bound to the psychological differences as well. Some athletes may be outgoing and extrovert whereas others 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 dispositions fail to accomplish their task. Thus individual differences in sports performance are an inevitable phenomenon, and the teacher/coach has to modify his approach according to the nature of each individual athlete.

3.2 Personality

The human personality is a marvelously intricate structure, delicately woven of motives, emotions, habits and thoughts, into a pattern that balances the pulls and pushes of the outside world. It is the totality of his being, that includes his physical, mental, emotional, and temperamental makeup. His experience, perception, memory, imagination, instincts, habits, thoughts, and sentiments constitute his personality. Therefore, 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.

3.3 Intelligence

Intelligence is the aggregate mental capacity or energy of an individual to act purposefully, to think rationally, and to deal effectively with one's environment, Intelligence involves awareness, is goal directed, and has value. It is an ability to undertake the activities that are difficult, complex, and which lead to the creation of something new and different. Intelligence of an individual plays an important role in effecting physical performance. The more complex and the more 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, relationship between sports performance and intelligence cannot be denied.

3.4 Stress

Stress is defined as a physical, mental or emotional, demand which trends to disturb the homeostasis of the body. It is an everyday part of life, if there were no stresses, we would probably "dread of boredom". Stress is inevitable in life and sport, and all performing actors, artists and athletes perform their tasks with varying stress levels. Used rather loosely, the term may relate to any kind of pressure, be it due to one's job, schoolwork, marriage, illness or death of a loved one. The common denominator in all of these is change. Loss of familiarity breeds this anxiety with any change being viewed as a "threat", Hans Selye developed a model for the possible effects of chronic stress on the body. His model is the general adaptation syndrome, Which occurs in three stages; alarm, resistance, and exhaustion.

- The alarm stage is triggered when the individual encounters a threatening stimulus or situation. The alarm

stage is a relatively short period of activation of the fight-or-flight response. If the threat is avoided, the stage ends and the body returns to a more relaxed state.

- If the threat does not end, and the initial reaction turns into a prolonged state of stress, the resistance stage begins. This is a chronic, moderate state of activation. It cannot be kept indefinitely.
- The exhaustion state starts when the individual's energy and strength are used up as a result of maintaining a prolonged state of resistance. Selye believed that vital resources were drained from the immune system, leaving the organism vulnerable to illness, fatigue and injury.

3.5 Attitude

Attitudes are about thoughts and feelings. Attitude is often thought to predict behaviour attitudinal responses are also evaluative in nature. They are significant in deciding the kind and extent of the learning that takes place and reflect the likes and dislikes concerning a specified object of action. For example, if a child says "I like running", it reflects his attitude towards running, and if a child says, "I don't like running" it shows this child's attitude towards running. Attitudes involve knowledge and beliefs. Attitudes are developed through direct experience and interpersonal communication. Positive beliefs and values concerning physical activity result in development of good and positive attitudes, enabling the athlete to strive hard for better performance.

3.6 Motivation

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. In the absence of motivation, either there will be no learning, or very little learning, and the learned activity or skill will be forgotten very soon. Motivation is the first requisite of efficient learning. 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 motivating athletes for better physical performance.

3.7 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 an anti-social behaviour. Aggression may help in the performance of an athlete because it arouses the 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, tend 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.

3.8 Arousal and Activation

The term arousal reflect the varying degrees of readiness to perform physically, intellectually, or perceptually. Activation is a short term change of energy mobilization, and implies raising of energy above an individual's arousal, baseline, for a brief period. Arousal and activation are the bodily states and feelings that indicate the degree to which an athlete is physically and emotionally ready to perform. With appropriate levels of activation and arousal athletes tend to see better, think more clearly, and concentrate longer regarding the impending situations. Over-excitement over-activation and Over-arousal of an athlete may result in reduction of performance, or even in an inability to perform at all, whereas, optimum levels of arousal and activation at the relevant time may definitely help in better performance. It is, therefore, necessary to know what are the real activating forces that push and pull an athlete to move or act for achieving the goal.

3.9 Anxiety

Anxiety means a disturbed state of mind; emotional reactivity; arousal; nervousness; and unrealistic and unpleasant state of mind. Anxiety is an essential ingredient of any competitive situation and without certain level of anxiety, there cannot be competitive performance. Neither too high, nor too low level of anxiety is conducive to sports performance. Adequate level of anxiety produces best results. Unless sports persons learn to cope up with stressful competitive situations by managing anxiety, they would fail to achieve their goal.

3.10 Attention and Concentration

Attention is the concentration of consciousness upon one object. 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 /task 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.

3.11 Mental Imagery

Mental ability and imagery help the athletes to mould 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 organise himself in a better way. Mental rehearsal of competitive situations certainly help in improving athlete's emotional state as well as his physical performance. It also help in the smooth flow of energy as and when required.

3.12 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 tend to produce better performance.



4. Conclusion

The importance of sports psychology has been realized for decades, however many coaches and athletes pay too little attention to how it can help them perform better. Many coaches and athletes still focus on the physical aspect of sporting performance but 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. 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. To conclude we can say that sports psychology plays a vital role in enhancing the performance of the players.

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