
WHAT ABOUT AFTER THE GAME?

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SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

Part Six in a Series

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The final gun sounds and one of the teams enters the locker room as the victor, on this particular night; but the other team enters as the loser. Psychologically, does the game actually end at the final buzzer? NO!

This psychological phenomenon is called post-competition tension. It is experienced by all athletes (starters and reserves, winners and losers), but is not handled very well by most contemporary coaches. Most coaches do not even seem to be aware that this psychological state exists. For years we have known that something has been lacking in the psychological handling of our athletes. Numerous post-game fights, drinking binges, sex orgies, etc., are indulged in by athletes whose pent-up emotions have gone unrelieved.

The fact remains that while the average coach will spend hours on the psychological preparation of the athlete for the contest, he will leave the athlete to find his own means of relieving the excess emotions carried over from the competition. The wise coach will prepare for the post-competition period as carefully as for the pre and actual competition periods.

The neglect of the athletes' post-competition tension is the probable cause for inconsistent performances — flat games, poor showings, overconfidence, etc.

After the game, athletes experience one of three emotional states, regardless of its outcome: (a) depression, (b) euphoria, or (c) aggression - intrapunitive or interpunitive.

Depression is a defense mechanism that usually surfaces after a loss, but can occur after a victory if a conscientious athlete has performed poorly. It is not easy emotion to control or relieve. The coach must recognize which of his players are prone to depression and deal with them individually.

Euphoria is a more desirable emotion after a game simply because it's slightly easier to counteract. In layman's terms, it is being "high" and normally is a response to a winning effort. The coach must guard against prolonged euphoria, as it can affect future performances.

The big-headed athlete is ripe for a shattering decline.

Aggression can take two forms: toward the athlete himself (intrapunitive) or toward others (interpunitive). The young man who constantly punishes himself requires gentle handling from his coaches and his teammates. Aggression toward others is a common and dangerous manifestation of post-competition tension. Athletes frequently fight after games and are also prone to increasing their sexual activities. This type of behavior constitutes aggressive acts towards others. Either form of aggression requires direct action by the coach.

Psychologically the Game Does Not End at the Final Buzzer!

Since this is a relatively new area of concern for coaches, the following suggestions are offered which can be utilized to alleviate some of the post-competition tension:

1. Hold a post-game team prayer. It often has a softening effect on the players.
2. After the prayer, give your athletes about a half-hour to cool down and shower.
3. Speak to each athlete while he dresses. Talk to both the starters and reserves as well as those who did not get to play. As a coach, offer your evaluation of each athletes contribution and provide encouragement or chastisement, as needed.
4. Conduct some type of post-game team activity, such as: (a) a post-game meal (replacing the pre-game meal), (b) team swimming or bowling party, (c) a movie, or (d) refreshments at someone's home. This type of activity can take the athlete's mind off the just completed contest and keep him away from his friends and parents for as long as possible after the event. Parents and peers can be especially critical or overly generous in praise, either of which can work to the athlete's detriment.
5. Get on with the program. Don't allow the players to gloat indefinitely over a win or sulk over a loss. Begin preparing for the upcoming opponent at the very next workout.

A final thought for coaches is to learn to analyze the game rationally - whether you've won or lost. The coach must provide the proper atmosphere after the contest. The players often need you most at this time - don't fail them.