

# SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

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## Introduction

SPORTS PSYCHOLOGY, When used in conjunction with all physical training techniques, might be the extra edge to help your team reach the championship level. This article, with slight changes, is being reprinted due to the request of many coaches nationwide.

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### The Missing Ingredient in Your Program?

You can condition your athletes; closely supervise their diets, strengthen their muscles through weight training, teach them proper techniques and strategies, provide the most modern equipment and facilities; yet they seem to be sporadic in their performances - Why? Exploding upon the scene during the last few years is possibly the answer to the previous question and also the final piece of the puzzle for attaining consistent athletic excellence - the area of SPORT PSYCHOLOGY.

In the United States, this relatively new area labeled sport psychology got off to a slow start but is now beginning to gain momentum. What actually is sport psychology? It is the application of psychological principles in the sport setting at all levels of skill development. The quest for excellence in performance has, up until the present time, been treated as a solely physical endeavor. This is wrong! The human species operates best when the mind and body are functioning in correlation; but one of the greatest omissions in sports skills training has been that of recognizing this mental / physical integration necessary for optimum performance. The mental aspects of performance cannot be separated from the physical; training must be holistic. But this has not been the case in the traditional training of the athlete. A sad tribute to the traditional training of our athletes is the negative stereotype held by the general public. Many athletes are viewed as:

### "Body by Fischer, Brain by Mattel"

This concept of course is absurd. The modern day athlete is an intellectual as well as a physical being. Athletes are performers, therefore they must learn skills (psychological) that will enhance performance. Here is where sport psychology enters. Once an athlete has mastered a strong base of physical skills, then, and only then, can this individual progress improve by means of his/her psychological development. The major role of sport psychology is teaching mental skills and strategies to sports participants. It has little to do with providing therapy or treating social misbehaviors.



*We Must Teach Athletes to be INTENSE but not TENSE!*

How many times have you coached athletes who possess all the physical skills to attain greatness, but who always seem to make mental errors or "choke" during crucial moments? Nothing you can do physically will help these athletes perform. The only solution will be in the psychological realm.

### "Performances Don't Happen, They Are Caused"

As stated earlier, sport psychology applied correctly will help athletes gain **control skills** which transfer to game situations. Skills such as learning to relax, being able to concentrate, and generally being poised under any circumstances are available to all athletes today. The point is that physical development is only half of what is needed to be a high level performer. The other half is psychological. Because of traditional practices in sports, many athletes learn to be good practicers, but fail to achieve during the actual game or contest.

Sport psychology is more than just motivating an athlete or "psyching" them up. It is the training of an athlete to control the environment they are in rather than having the environment control them. We don't lose skills, rather we lose psychological control. Wouldn't it be wonderful if your athletes would perform the the best of their abilities no matter what the circumstances? It is not impossible you know? In fact, it is very feasible. Methods are not readily available to achieve this very end. We must learn how to teach excellence.

Excellence involves two components:

1. Commitment
2. Self Control

Almost all athletes have the commitment to do well, but self control is another matter. This is where the offerings

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of sport psychology become valuable.

It is time that we as coaches provide training in the psychological aspects of sports. For far too long we have concentrated only on the physical and hoped that the psychological skills would develop on their own. This just does not happen with any regularity. If we are to really do justice to our athletes, we must address the psychological side of competing. All coaches and athletes should realize that mental processes regulate both bodily action and emotional states. Emotional states affect thinking and physical performance affects thoughts and feelings.

In future articles, we will discuss such issues as how to break the losing tradition, what about after the game?, pre-competition preparation, and preparation of different types of teams, etc. In this article we will cover motivation and psyching-up as well as psychological profiling. Remember the psychological controls the physiological.

## MOTIVATION AND PSYCHING-UP

So much of athletics has directly to do with motivation. Coaches need to understand motivation both for individuals and teams. Athletes also should shoulder some of the responsibility for their own and their teammates motivation. It has been estimated that 50-90% of what a coach does is some type of motivation. The problem is that a coach can try extremely hard to motivate his players, but be very unsuccessful. On the other hand, a coach can be exceptionally stimulating at times without even trying. The point is that proper motivation is difficult to achieve most of the time.

One of the reasons for motivation being so difficult to achieve is that there are two types of motivation, and we spend most of our time on the wrong type. There is external motivation and internal motivation. External motivation is that motivation which is caused by external rewards or situations. Examples of external motivators are letter awards, scholarships, trophies, any financial reward, and gifts of any type. Other external motivators include pre-game pep talks, posting newspaper articles in the locker-room, or any type of gimmick a coach decides to use.

The sad truth concerning external motivation or motivators are that they are successful only so long as they hold the interest of the athlete. External motivation is very temporary and contains little lasting benefits; but this is the type of motivation used most of the time. External motivators are almost like bribes. Athletes seem to improve or get better only so long as the bribe gets larger. In athletics you can motivate young players with trophies or possibly even pep talks; but as the athlete gets older, the price goes up. Instead of trophies, it now takes cars, scholarships and eventually just hard, cold cash to motivate. It is illogical to continue this type of



*If An Athlete can DREAM of Victory and Imagine Success, Then He CAN MOTIVATE Himself!*

motivational program when another type is available which offers less expense and greater lasting benefits - Internal Motivation.

### External Motivation Inhibits Internal Motivation

Internal motivators are those things which come from within and cause an athlete to try harder. Internal motivators are non-monetary and also non-materialistic. Examples of internal motivators are prestige, recognition, pride and even fear to an extent. These are all perceptions which are normally associated with pleasant feelings and emotions. Good performances do not need to be recognized by materialistic rewards; rather the athlete himself needs to internalize his good or negative feelings.

### Money Does Not Buy Motivation

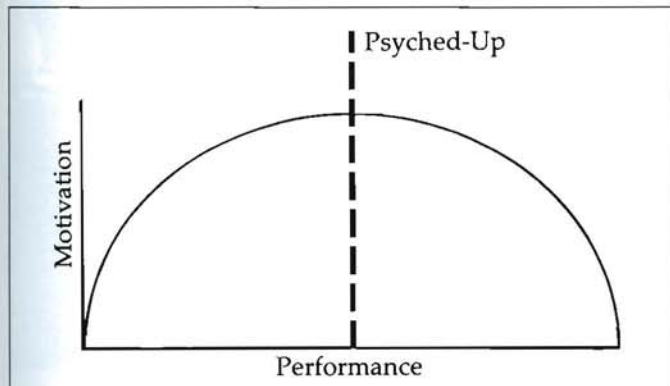
One of the problems in athletics has been that coaches have traditionally felt that to be motivated an athlete needed to be "psyched-up". We now, of course, realize that just the opposite is true. Psyching-up is synonymous with being psyched out and not being in control. For years coaches have tried almost anything to motivate their charges. Now we are saying that that type of emotionality is not ideal for optimal performance. Motivation has to do with wanting and trying to do well; while psyching-up is associated with raising an individuals' emotional level. Because these two phenomenon are similar, many coaches have confused the two concepts and also utilized inappropriate means for attaining them.

Actually, the more psyched-up a person becomes the less chance he has of performing well. As adrenaline starts pumping into an athletes' body, his ability to concentrate diminishes correspondingly. An athlete must be **intense but not tense**. Well, we can say the same thing in another way - an athlete must be motivated but not psyched-up. Far too many coaches seem to think that "the more the better" in terms of motivation. The overly motivated or psyched up athlete



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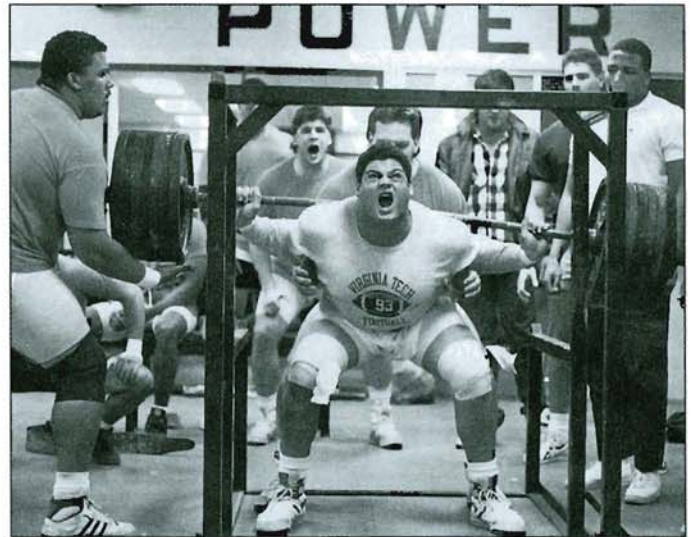
is doomed to fail. The following diagram illustrates very well the relationship between motivation, performance and being psyched-up.



A little motivation is fine and even desirable, but as an athlete becomes over motivated and more psyched-up; then psychological control is lost and performances decrease.

Coaches should know each of their athletes well enough to be able to use the proper motivational technique at the right time. Internal motivators are better than external motivators. One additional point needs to be made. The athlete needs to learn how to bring about this internal, personalized, individual motivation so necessary for athletic success. Where should he begin? Here are some suggestions:

1. **Set definite, realistic goals** with deadlines for their achievement. When one is reached, set another one. Make sure the goals are not beyond reach.
2. **Use positive imagination.** A person always acts, feels and performs according to what he imagines to be true about himself. Your mental picture of yourself may be the strongest force within you.
3. **Develop an indomitable craving, ambition, zeal and desire** to reach your goals.
4. **Maintain unshakeable faith in yourself** and your ability to achieve your goals.
5. **Develop an iron-willed determination** which will blast any roadblocks from your path.
6. **Avoid a negative mental attitude.** Don't even associate with negative people. It is easier to think negatively than positively. Don't succumb to this temptation.
7. **Develop a positive mental attitude.** Think only in positive terms.
8. **Pay strict attention to self-discipline.** Part of the price of success is hard work and clean living.
9. **Budget your time.** Time is a valuable commodity, especially in athletics. Don't waste it on worthless, superfluous or mundane projects.
10. **Learn from defeat or temporary failure.** Remember, anyone who is undefeated has never met strong opposition. Temporary setbacks can be valuable teachers.
11. **Be enthusiastic by developing your won**



*A complete Athletic Peak Performance Program concentrates on the mental as well as the physical aspects of training.*

**enthusiasm.** Human emotions are not immediately subject to reason, but they are immediately subject to action. Here is how to create your won enthusiasm.

To be enthusiastic, ACT enthusiastic. The secret is ACT.

12. **Develop personal self-motivators.** Here are a few. When it is difficult to complete a drill during practice, repeat this self-reinforcer 25 times: "I feel happy, I feel great, I feel terrific!" When it comes time to perform a task, repeat this self-starter 25 times: "Do-it - now, do-it-now, do-it-now," etc.

These may sound silly, but they WORK!

A great athlete is a rarity. In order to win, his toughest battle is always within himself. If an athlete can **dream** of victory and **imagine** success, then he can motivate himself. For an athlete who can motivate himself, athletic immortality may be just around the corner.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILING

This particular section is written to stimulate the coaches who read this journal. Are you, as a coach, doing everything possible to enhance the performance abilities of your athletes? Are you providing the newest and scientifically most accurate training theories, nutritional knowledge, strategies, etc.? Correspondingly, does your psychological program incorporate the newest procedures? If not, maybe this article can help you develop the proper psychological program for your team.

In order for any athlete to prepare mentally for competition, a planned program of all variables must be available. If an athlete is to attain his/her actual potential, the psychological portion of their training must begin early and continue throughout their careers. This is currently not the situation. Very few coaches or programs offer much of a psychological component. At

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best, the psychological offerings have been spontaneous and/or temporary in nature.

The following outline is proposed for your scrutinization. But do not be misled, this program is not the answer at all levels or situations. On the other hand, I must be candid and confess that the outlined program has been used by athletes and teams in the sports of basketball, softball, tennis, skiing, golf, track and field, and gymnastics. Bear in mind as you examine this program that it is not the sole answer; but possibly a step in the right direction. You should carefully examine the contents of the program and then consider adopting the applicable concepts and ideas for your own situation. A collegiate team is not the same as possibly a club sport team or a high school team; but nevertheless, **the psychological demands of performance are similar regardless of level.** So when examining the program of psychological profiling, it would be wise to attempt to creatively assimilate it's contents into your won circumstances. Remember - each program or athlete is unique as to psychological needs.

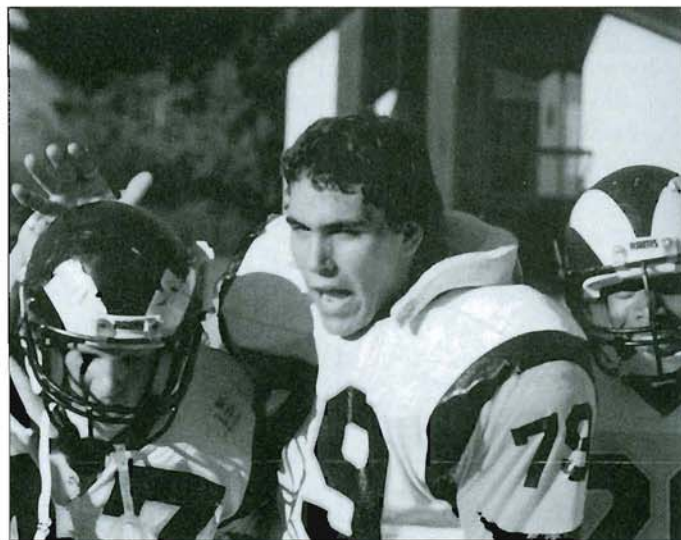
The psychological profiling program includes:

- Testing
- Counseling
- Interventions
- Group dynamics

The testing program should be decided upon between the coach and the sport psychologist. It is first necessary to decide which psychological variables are most crucial to the sport in question. Once the variables have been identified, then the problem becomes determining the best manner in which to assess these factors. Research has shown that the following psychological variables are necessary to be a high level athlete: a high self concept, a manageable level of anxiety, good concentration skills, and a high success orientation. My advice is to contact either a school counselor or a local sport psychologist to conduct this testing. Tests frequently used to assess the aforementioned traits are: self concept - Tennessee Self Concept Scale; anxiety - the Competition Anxiety Scale; concentration - Test of Attentional and Interpersonal Style; and achievement motivation - Scale for Sporting Environments.

The counseling program is based on the results of the previously mentioned tests. Each athlete should be individually counseled as to his/her psychological strengths and weaknesses. Then the interventions come into play.

Since each athlete is unique, a variety of interventions should be employed in order to develop the desired psychological skills. Interventions that can be used are: progressive relaxation, autogenic training, assertiveness training, meditation exercises for concentration, hypnosis, and imagery. It should be made perfectly clear to the athlete that any intervention



*The rewards of psychological profiling can result in the athlete competing with top proficiency on a consistent basis.*

requires dedication and work to develop just as dedication and work are part of learning and retaining physical skills. Regardless of the intervention utilized, this mental training is an ongoing process that does not start or stop with the parameters of one season. Ultimately this program works best if the coach uses a sport psychologist to conduct the interventions. The intervention phase of the program is a direct result of the testing. It is not good enough to just identify psychological needs; rather, ways should be found to meet these needs; Thus the use of the aforementioned interventions is recommended.

The final portion of the psychological program is the area of group dynamics. This topic is so extensive and important that an entire article will be devoted to it in the next issue of this journal.

In summary, the reward of this psychological profiling program are many: witnessing the athletes pulling together as a team; developing each individual athlete as a strong psychological entity; and developing a profile for each athlete which is the basis for future training. This program establishes a psychological profile for each athlete which aids both the coach and the athlete in the present and in the future. Good luck on the profiles of your athletes.

### **Editor's Note:**

After reading this section, I thought how could I use this information as a high school coach. First, it is important for me to realize that dealing with the athletes innerself is as important as their physical development. Second, recognizing that I am not an expert in this area, I would be on the lookout for someone who is an expert. Personally, I would not feel comfortable with testing and interventions. However, I would not hesitate in utilizing someone who has a knowledge and an interest in this area. This person might even be in your own school or at a nearby university. Since Sport Psychology is relatively new, I believe most people would be eager to help. You may be able to get valuable assistance with just a phone call. I also recommend to screen potential people carefully.