

ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGY IN SPORTS

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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 way – at that moment when it matters most. Every top sportsperson knows that their best performances come from their mind as much as their body. Emphasizes on the importance of 'positive state of mind' which is crucial for a sports person at any level, top-notch golfers lose their game for years on end, and swimmers lose those critical tenths of seconds due to the ever-looming threat of sports performance anxiety. It is extremely important for a sportsperson to be in a positive environment which helps them feel positive.

Over the years, it's been proven that while spending long hours' training a top sportsperson's body, spending a little on their brain is a must. Though India is still conservative about the concept of psychology, sports psychology is getting popular among youngsters as a career option and sports associations are opening doors for professional sports psychologists to enhance performance. 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. Fortunately, like the other three

factors, the mind can be improved through training. The more the mental skills are learned and practiced, the better and the more consistent the performances become. There is little doubt that in future, proper mental preparation will become as routinely integrated into training and competition as the other factors already are.

Mental Game Coaching is that the segment of sports psychology that concentrates specifically on helping athletes break through the mental barriers that are keeping them from performing up to their peak potential. By focusing on the mental skills needed to be successful in any sporting competition, mental game coaching seeks to achieve the overall goal of performance improvement.

Sports Psychology is about improving your attitude and mental game skills to help you perform your best by identifying limiting beliefs and embracing a healthier philosophy about your sport.

Below is a list of the top ten ways that you can benefit from sports psychology:

1. Improve focus and deal with distractions. Many athletes have the ability to concentrate, but often their focus is displaced on the wrong areas. Much of my instruction on focus deals with helping athlete to stay focused on the present moment and let go of results.
2. Grow confidence in athletes who have doubts. Doubt is the opposite of confidence. If you maintain many doubts prior to or during your performance, this indicates low self-confidence or at least you are sabotaging what confidence you had at the start of the competition. Confidence is what I call a core mental game skill because of its importance and relationship to other mental skills.
3. Develop coping skills to deal with setbacks and errors. Emotional control is a prerequisite to getting into the zone. Athletes with very high and strict expectations, have trouble dealing with minor errors that are a natural part of sports. It's important to address these expectations and also help athletes stay composed under pressure and when they commit errors or become frustrated.
4. Find the right zone of intensity for your sport. I use intensity in a broad sense to identify the level of arousal or mental activation that is necessary for each person to perform his or her best. This will vary from person to person and from sport to sport. Feeling “up” and positively charged is critical, but not getting overly excited is also important. You have to tread a fine line between being excited to complete, but not

getting over-excited.

5. Help teams develop communication skills and cohesion. A major part of sports psychology and mental training is helping teams improve cohesion and communication. The more a team works as a unit, the better the results for all involved.
6. To instill a healthy belief system and identify irrational thoughts. One of the areas I pride myself on is helping athlete identify ineffective beliefs and attitudes such as comfort zones and negative self-labels that hold them back from performing well. These core unhealthy beliefs must be identified and replaced with a new way of thinking. Unhealthy or irrational beliefs will keep you stuck no matter how much you practice or hard you try.
7. Improve or balance motivation for optimal performance. It's important to look at your level of motivation and just why you are motivated to play your sport. Some motivators are better in the long-term than others. Athletes who are extrinsically motivated often play for the wrong reasons, such as the athlete who only participates in sports because of a parent. I work with athlete to help them adopt a healthy level of motivation and be motivated for the right reasons.
8. Develop confidence post-injury. Some athletes find themselves fully prepared physically to get back into competition and practice, but mentally some scars remain. Injury can hurt confidence, generate doubt during competition, and cause a lack of focus. I help athletes mentally heal from injuries and deal with the fear of re-injury.
9. To develop game-specific strategies and game plans. All great coaches employ game plans, race strategies, and course management skills to help athletes mentally prepare for competition. This is an area beyond developing basic mental skills in which a mental coach helps athletes and teams. This is very important in sports such as golf, racing, and many team sports.
10. To identify and enter the "zone" more often. This incorporates everything I do in the mental side of sports. The overall aim is to help athletes enter the zone by developing foundational mental skills that can help athletes enter the zone more frequently. It's impossible to play in the zone everyday, but you can set the conditions for it to happen more often.

I will add that sport psychology may not be appropriate for every athlete. Not every person who plays a sport wants to "improve performance." Sport psychology is probably not for recreation athletes who participate for the social component of a sport or do not spend time working on technique or fitness to improve performance. Young athletes whose parents want them to see a sports psychologist are not good candidate either. It's very important that the athlete desires to improve his or her mental game without having the motive to satisfy a parent. Similarly, an athlete who sees a mental game expert only to satisfy a coach is not going to fully benefit from mental training.

Sports Psychology does apply to a wide variety of serious athletes. They understand the importance of a positive attitude and mental toughness. These athletes want every possible advantage they can get including the mental edge over the competition.

According to John Luther, "Sports psychology is an area which attempts to apply psychological facts and principles to learning performance and associated human behavior in whole field of sports."

According to K.M. Burns, "Sports psychology for physical education is that branch of psychology which deals with the physically fitness of an individual through his participation in games and sports." According to Singer, "Sports psychology explores one's behavior in athletics.

The following points the importance of sports psychology:

1. **Enhancement of Physiological Capacities:** Sports psychology plays a very unique role in the enhancement of physiological capacities such as strength, speed and flexibility etc., Motivation plays a major role in the enhancement of physical capacity of sports persons. It is well-known as well as an established fact that psychological capacities or powers can increase physiological capacities of individuals.
2. **Learning the Motor Skills:** Sports psychology plays its major role in the learning of motor skills. Motor skills learning depend on the individual's level of readiness, i.e., physiological readiness and psychological readiness. Physiological readiness in children is development of the necessary strength, flexibility and endurance as well as the development of various organ systems so that they may perform motor skills required in the activity. Psychological readiness is related to the learner's state of mind. It means the desire and willingness to learn the particular skill. In psychological readiness, sports

psychology plays an important role. Sports psychology is also helpful in the cognitive stage, the a social-active stage and the autonomous stage of motor skill learning.

3. **In understanding the behavior:** Sports psychology helps in understanding the behavior of athletes or sportspersons engaged in competitive sports. Coaches also come to know the interest, attitude towards physical activity, instincts, drives and personality of sportspersons. It does not play its role only in understanding of behavior but it also plays its role in medication of behavior in various sports situations.
4. **In controlling the emotions:** Sports psychology plays a very important role in controlling the emotions of sportspersons during practice as well as competition. Generally, these emotions may bring spontaneous changes in the behavior of sportspersons. These are anger, disgust, gear, negative self thinking and feeling of ownership, etc. If these emotions are not controlled well in time, the performance may be decreased. Sports psychology plays a vital role at such juncture. It helps in balancing the arousal of emotions which further improves the performance.
5. **In preparation of athletes psycho-logically for competitions:** Sports psychology also plays its role in preparation of athletes psychologically for competitions. Intact, it has become a trend to give psychological tips to athletes or team players before and after the competitions. That is why sports psychologists' services are required with a national level and international level terms. They create the will 'to win' in the players.
6. **Role in the emotional problems of sportspersons:** Stress, tension and anxiety are natural during practice period and competitions or tournaments. There may be some other emotional problems such as depression, frustration. Anorexia and panic etc. The knowledge of sports psychology may be helpful in such situations. Techniques of relaxation and concentration for stress management can be applied on sportspersons who are under such problems. Conclusively, it can be said that sports psychology plays a very vital role in enhancing the performance of sportspersons. It deals with the various mental qualities such as concentration, confidence, emotional control and commitment etc., which are important for successful

performance in sports

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