

PSYCHOLOGICAL PREPARATION OF AN ATHLETE FOR SPORTS COMPETITIONS

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ABSTRACT

Psychological stress is one of our biggest enemy in top sport. It takes a lot of our mental and biological energy, which is especially important when it comes to top competitions. It gives us the feelings of insecure which lead us to the lack of self-confidence. Sport psychologists invented few principles and methods to reduce and coping stress on the competitions.

Keywords: Sport, Competition, Principle, Athlete, Method.

Introduction

Self-regulatory skills are considered to be one of the basic skills of socialized person. There are not inherited, but learned through the process of socialization. They influence our self-confidence, stress management, process of self-motivating and reaching personal maturity. Developing self-regulatory skills should be one of the important issue of school and educational system. Because this is the level of control under children's thoughts, feelings, emotions and behavior. Self-regulatory skills affect our attitudes toward life and world. They control our depressiveness, anxiety and fears and also affects the process of communication. The development of self-regulatory skills includes basic theoretical framework and also mental training and rehearsal, which lead to getting control under thoughts, emotions, attitudes and behavior. Reaching control needs a lot of self-introspection, constant mental training, high level of self-motivation and special focus on specific problems.

Through the practice we follow next steps:

- Learning of relaxation skills and how to "cut off" stress and distractors,
- Learning of breathing techniques,
- Learning of focusing periods of concentration and relaxation,
- Learning how to reduce negative thoughts and images,
- Learning how to focus on positive images and thoughts,
- Learning how to affect through suggestion and hypnosis,
- Learning and training through visualization.

According to individual approach sport psychologist tries to make interventions on next main areas according to specific big competition:

- Analysis of pre-competitive states and psychological preparation for the performance
- Process of motivating athlete and goal setting
- The process of changing personal traits and habits – enhancing more self-control by troubles and unexpected events, more emotional stability, less anxiety etc.
- Help to specific psychological troubles that can appear (concentration, anxiety, self-confidence...)

Leading up to a competition, it is important to provide athletes with the mental tools so that they can learn to manage their own performance and create their optimal level of mental readiness. Strategies such as goal setting, imagery, thought management, and emotional control can be learned through practical exercises that incorporate these elements into the athlete's practice

and daily routines. Athletes can then use these tools to develop their personal routines and plans for achieving mental readiness for competition. These plans can be refined and adjusted during the pre-competition phase as athletes engage in practices, and other tournaments and competitions leading up to the "big event".

Athletes and coaches should also learn to apply the tools to develop refocusing strategies for challenging and unexpected events arising during their performance. Coaches will often facilitate the athletes' use of refocusing strategies by structuring challenges within the practice environment or by simulating competition conditions. Athletes' personal routines and their process for achieving optimal mental state are foundational elements of the mental training process. It is from this foundation that athletes can begin to explore focusing and refocusing beyond the context of the performance and apply their plans to deal with elements within the competition experience itself.

An additional part of the preparation for competition involves anticipating potential distractions and impediments to performance and focus. There is significant power in having anticipated an issue before it happens. If something occurs that has already been identified, then the energy and impact of the issue is lessened and an awareness of alternative responses to the situation heightened. Plans need to be established ahead of time for how to deal with the major distractions. Moreover, athletes need to have a general strategy for identifying and coping with the unexpected.

One suggestion might be to develop a chart to analyze and prepare for difficult conditions. Athletes and coaches can brainstorm a list of competitive and/or event-related conditions and for each consider the following:

The most challenging possibility (e.g., not playing as much; family and friends having unrealistic expectations of the athlete's performance);

The best way of preparing for it (e.g., clarify team roles and expectations; outline the athletes goals and expectations ahead of time);

How the condition might serve as an advantage (e.g., chance to watch other teams weaknesses; opportunity to communicate specific goals to family and friends).

Teams can then examine the probability of the event occurring and the possible impact the event might have on performance. Elements that have a high probability and high impact should be explored further and specific plans devised.

In the final stages of preparation for competition, it is important to adhere to the "less is more" attitude. The tendency is to want to over-prepare for the event by squeezing in a number of competitions and practices as the "big event" approaches. Athletes need to be well rested and mentally relaxed in order to perform optimally. Moreover, major changes or adjustments to training, performance or personal routines should be minimized at this point. Small refinements may be necessary but the key is to stick with the elements that have been working. Often this minimalization is achieved with a simple tapering plan, but it is important that both coaches and athletes are aware of the concept and mindful of its implementation.

There is a significant difference between having a competition "Performance" and a competition "Experience". A competition "Performance" implies a clear focus on the task at hand and a commitment to choices that will give the best possible chance for optimal performance to occur. Conversely, a competition "Experience" implies taking in the sights and sounds of the competition without a clear goal or focus. Ultimately, it will be important to find a balance between the two and allow opportunity

to absorb the event atmosphere. But to succeed on a performance level, teams will need to direct their focus completely on the task.

Athletes and coaches should also take steps to familiarize themselves with the surroundings and with everything that is important to them specifically: Find the cafeteria or nearest food outlet, identify a meeting place, and, if you have to travel to the competition, explore the distance from the accommodation to the competition venue. Personalizing particular areas can also help. Bringing things from home, placing posters or team slogans in sleeping areas or dressing rooms can help create feelings of comfort, familiarity and a sense of control. Visiting the competition venue prior to the event can also be beneficial. It helps athletes and coaches get used to the surroundings and any nuances surrounding the facility. If there is opportunity, it can also be beneficial to access the venue when there is no one else around. This opportunity can provide athletes with a chance to walk through or think about their pre-competition plans and preparation strategies within the physical setting. They can also imagine themselves performing while in the venue thus creating feelings of familiarity and comfort before competition even starts.

Competition is connected to his image. A physically strong, athletic competitor who works hard may look great in training; but in his event he may fade at the first sign of trouble. His fighting spirit diminishes, and he looks helpless. He loses confidence. The composed and rational side of his personality suddenly vanishes. It is replaced by rage, aggression, whining, or helplessness. His best friends may fail to recognize him in a match.

How well you control your mind determines why some choke or go crazy and others remain calm and focused. Overcoming emotional weakness is the toughest hole to dig out of, especially if your defects overwhelm you. Turn your deficiencies into functional outcomes. Start by cataloging your weaknesses. Do you get too nervous? Do you get angry? Establish a code of behavior so your anxiety or fury cannot surface. Then change your anxiety into energy and your anger into competitive zeal. Finally, look at a "raw deal" as a challenge.

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 centered. 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.

To be optimally prepared mentally, the key is to have a clear goal for the event, adhere to personal plans and preparation strategies, stay in the moment, and minimize the impact of distractions. Remaining positive and optimistic, even in the face of adversity, and managing emotions daily are addition strategies that can make a big difference once competition arrives. For the teams who are prepared for the experience, competitions provide exciting opportunities to showcase abilities and are important learning opportunities for young athletes.

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PSYCHOLOGICAL PREPARATION FOR BIG COMPETITIONS IN TOP SPORT, Matej Tušak Psychological stress is one of our biggest enemy in top sport. It takes a lot of our mental and biological energy, which is esspecially important when it comes to top competitions. It gives us the feelings of insecure which lead us to the lack of self confidence. Sport psychologists invented few principles and methods to reduce and coping stress on the competitions. With the mental preparation against stress on the top competitions we try to gain self control and to maximize our skills and potencials when we need them. We call it 100 % phenomena. Preparation can be trained under the psychologists's control or on our own.

The program and practice of self-regulatory skills for big competitions Self-regulatory skills are considered to be one of the basic skills of socialised person. There are not inherited, but learned through the proces of socialization. They influence our self-confidence, stres management, proces of self-motivating and reaching personal maturity. Developing self-regulatory skills should be one of the important issue of schoolc and educational system. Because this is the level of control under children's thoughts, feelings, emotions and behavior. Self-regulatory skills affect our attitudes toward life and world. They control our depressiveness, anxiety and fears and also affects

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