Why Do I NEED SPORT PSYCHOLOGY?

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though, is that many elite level athletes work with sport psychologists, either individually or as part of a team. In fact, every U.S. Olympic team and many major college athletic departments, such as Ohio State University, Washington State University, Notre Dame, and UCLA, have sport psychologists available to work with their athletes and teams. These high level athletes and sport programs recognize the very real benefits of mental training and know that working with a sport psychologist is no different than working with a strength coach – each professional has expertise that can help them perform better and reach their potential.

A third factor that may influence athletes’ and coaches’ use of sport psychology services is access, or I should say, lack of access to qualified professionals. There are many popular resources, such as books and videos, on the mental side of sport performance. But as many coaches and athletes have realized, these resources can only go so far. For many, working with a real, live human being is essential for improvement and change. So where do athletes and coaches find qualified professionals? Two professional organizations, the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology (AAASP) and the United States Olympic Committee (USOC), have identified professional sport psychologists who meet their standards for certification.

For more information, you can find the list of AAASP Certified Consultants at http://www.aasaponline.org (under AAASP Community) or you can contact Dr. Kirsten Peterson at the USOC (719-578-4722) for the list of professionals who comprise their sport psychology registry. You also may contact us at the Center for Sport Psychology. Our faculty hold both AAASP and USOC credentials and are licensed psychologists in the state of Texas. In most cases, we will be able to provide you with the mental training, team building, or personal counseling services you need. If not, we know most of the sport psychology professionals in the U.S. and will be happy to facilitate a referral.

As you move into your summer and fall sports, think about how you can formally integrate mental skills into your training regimens. Please feel free to contact us so we can develop a mental training program to fit your individual or your team’s needs.

To begin, let me ask you three questions:

1. On average, what percentage of athletic performance successes are due to mental factors, such as being able to focus, think positively, and handle competitive pressures?

2. On average, what percentage of your or your team’s athletic performance mistakes, errors or mishaps are due to mental factors, such as not being focused, not being able to handle competitive pressure, or not communicating well as a team?

3. On average, what percentage of your or your team’s training time is devoted specifically to improving the mental side of your game/performance?

Athletes and coaches with whom we have worked tell us that mental factors play an influential role in performance successes (50 to 80%), and performance errors (90-100%).

Finally, when it comes to how much time athletes and coaches spend in “mental training,” the percentages drop considerably (0-20%).

So mental factors play an important role in success and are the cause of most errors, yet athletes and coaches spend very little to no time training in this area. Why might that be?

Three factors appear important: lack of time, stigma of seeing a sport psychologist, and availability of services. First, let’s consider time. With tight training schedules, many athletes and coaches believe that they do not have the luxury of devoting time to mental training and that time spent on mental training takes away from their physical conditioning. Perhaps that is the case, but the reality is that mental training does not need to take away from physical training, at least not much. Certainly, some time must initially be devoted to learning the mental skill, such as mental visualization or goal setting, but after that point, the mental training can actually be integrated into the athlete’s physical training regimen, both in practices and on the athlete’s own time. From this perspective, and considering the benefits in terms of improved performance and increased satisfaction, mental training can be very time- and cost-effective.

A second factor that may interfere with athletes’ and coaches’ use of mental training is the stigma associated with seeing a sport psychologist. To be successful, most athletes have developed an “I can do it myself” or “push through it” attitude that often precludes seeking help, particularly from a “psychologist.” The reality,
Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men (or women) with talent. Genius will not; unschooled genius is almost a propery. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and deter- mination alone are omnipotent.

~ Calvin Coolidge ~

Generations have discussed what makes the difference in success and failure. Oftentimes the word “persistence” is used synonymously with achieving success. Vince Lombardi called it “mental toughness.” He believed that every fiber in your body should be used in an effort to seek excellence. As Lombardi put it, “The will to excel and the will to win, they endure. They are more important than any events that sometimes occur.” John Wooden was famous for saying, “It’s not who starts but who finishes it,” thus attesting to the importance of persistence. Although persistence may not guarantee that you will achieve your ultimate goal(s), it does guarantee that you will achieve your smaller goals and that you will learn from your experiences.

Mental toughness is a key element to the game of basketball. To reach your potential, a basketball player has to see past the bad game and continue to work on the things needed to improve. Similarly, a coach has to help athletes learn how to persist despite obstacles and to take ultimate responsibility for their effort and their results.

“Performance” means doing something not just once, but doing it again and again. A successful basketball team is one that has the ability to overcome obstacles and reach a goal. Consider the last 10 years, Tina Slinker, UNT Head Women’s Basketball Coach, has coached hundreds of athletes in her efforts toward their current standing as Big West Champions, Eastern Division. Through this time, she has come to recognize the importance of mental skills in athletic success and has developed strategies for developing a winning program.

Each season, Coach Slinker helps her athletes identify individual and team GOALS they want to attain. She comments, “We are strong at goal setting and developing goals, and strong at motivating our athletes to go after goals and to see that they are achievable (short- and long-term goals that are measurable and realistic) no matter what the outcome. Goals provide something concrete to work toward and a measure of someone’s progress. If properly set, they also serve to moti- vate athletes to achieve their potential.”

In her years at UNT, Coach Slinker has been able to identify characteristics by setting attainable mental toughness and in coping with adversity but they can develop their own approach to being mentally tough while coaching. Coaches frequently find themselves in stressful and/or unexpected situations. Remember, you will grow through these challenges and learn from dealing with the “what ifs” before they actually happen. Throughout all, the most important thing you can do is grow from the challenges you may be the biggest challenge. As Coach Slinker notes, “Keeping a perspective on winning and losing can be a key to long-term success.”

As a coach, you are asked to wear several different hats – teacher, admin- istrator, travel agent and the one who takes care of all the miscellaneous stuff that make a program run. Also, you are responsible for motivating your athletes and helping your team overcome obstacles and adversity. Over the last 10 years, Tina Slinker, UNT Head Women’s Basketball Coach, has coached hundreds of athletes in her efforts toward their current standing as Big West Champions, Eastern Division. Through this time, she has come to recognize the importance of mental skills in athletic success and has developed strategies for developing a winning program.

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HELP SET EFFECTIVE GOALS. You may need to help athletes clarify and/or limit the number of personal goals they would like to achieve and to help them establish realistic strategies for meeting those goals. Also, personal goals must be balanced with team goals. As a unit, agree upon goals that are in the interest of your efforts, which have different experiences or abilities gain a sense of the time and effort invested in accomplishing each goal through to completion. Take it step by step, day by day, moment by moment, and be persistent.

SHOW PERSISTENCE. Be a good role model and “talk the talk and walk the walk.” Demonstrate how to complete tasks by breaking them into smaller segments, and how you work through obstacles to reach your end goal. Once you have made a commitment to excellence and taken responsibility for your efforts, it will be easier for your athletes to follow suit.

TRULY SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE are mentally tough WHEN THINGS SEEM TO BE going the worst or when obstacles seem INSURMOUNTABLE.

They are able to run just one more mile, lift just one more pound of weight, or make just one more attempt; ultimately, if they reach their goals. Of course, help your athletes become CHAMPS (Capitalize on your athletes’ strengths, Help them set appropriate goals, Apply appropriate motivation, Make it fun, Practice under adversity, and Show persistence). The most basic ingredients for success are having a dream, translating it into specific goals and objectives, and sticking with it over the long haul. Finally, as Lombardi said, “Coaches who can outline plays on the blackboard are a dime a dozen. The ability to practice under adversity and show persistence.” The most basic ingredients for success are having a dream, translating it into specific goals and objectives, and sticking with it over the long haul. Finally, as Lombardi said, “Coaches who can outline plays on the blackboard are a dime a dozen. The ability to practice under adversity and show persistence.”

MAKE IT FUN. Encourage active involvement, even from those who do not start or see much playing time. Have team members make up quotes or songs lyrics to displace the drudgery of the necessary physical workouts. Encourage players to yell words of support to teammates.

PRACTICE UNDER ADVERSITY. Ultimately, coaches want athletes to be self-directed learners who can anticipate and handle pressure situations. Place the athletes in situations that require them to face difficult and/or unexpected situations. To cope, she said, “Immediately you respond, not react. Ask yourself ‘What’s the problem?’ What’s going wrong? What’s going the worst or when things aren’t going well?’ Those situations that make a program run. Also, you may be the biggest challenge. As Coach Slinker notes, ‘Having a perspective on winning and losing can be a key to developing mental toughness and in coping with adversity, but they can develop their own approach to being mentally tough while coaching. Coaches frequently find themselves in stressful or unexpected situations. Remember, you will grow along with your athletes, and some will grow faster than others. The athlete’s role model and “talk the talk and walk the walk.”

CAPITALIZE ON STRENGTHS. Observe each athlete carefully to learn his/her individual strengths and weaknesses. This will help you determine your coaching style and practice activities to how the athletes learn. For example, does the athlete learn best through hands-on experiences or observation? Does he/she learn best when listening to a coach lecture or when working with interesting and informative articles concerning the mental side of sport performance. Finally, you will be invited to the Center’s open house, which will be held twice per year, generally in the spring and fall. The open house provides a wonderful opportunity for you to meet and interact with the Center’s staff to discuss issues related to your own or your team’s performance. Annual membership fee is $50.00.

MEMBERSHIP IN THE UNT CENTER FOR SPORT PSYCHOLOGY
Join the Winning Team!

As a member, you will receive a UNT CSPP t-shirt. These stylishly designed t-shirts have the Center’s logo on the front and our slogan “A Commitment to Performance Excellence” on the back. In addition, you will receive issues of the Center’s newsletter (spring and fall), which like the current issue, will be filled with information about the Center and its services available at UNT please contact us.

Mailing Address:
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School/Club/Professional Affiliation:
T-Shirt Size: M L XL
E-mail:
Fax:
Phone:

Please complete this membership application form and send it with your check or money order for $50.00 (payable to UNT Center for Sport Psychology), or:
UNT Center for Sport Psychology • P.O. Box 311268 • University of North Texas • Denton, TX 76203

If you have any questions, please feel free to call us: (940) 565-SPORT
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