



Performance Excellence

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CENTER FOR SPORT PSYCHOLOGY NEWSLETTER

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Why Do I NEED SPORT PSYCHOLOGY?

TRENT A. PETRIE, PH.D.
DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

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,

(continued on back page)

Editor's Note

Courtney Heniff, M.A.
Editor, Newsletter

I am excited to welcome you to the first newsletter of the University of North Texas Center for Sport Psychology and Performance Excellence. The Center, which recently opened this year, is a multidisciplinary center devoted to offering sport psychology interventions, research, and training. The Center combines knowledge, skill, and expertise from psychology and exercise science to produce the most comprehensive and state-of-the-art sport psychology services available. We are excited to be a sport and exercise psychology resource for the North Texas Region as well as the State of Texas, and would like to encourage your active involvement by becoming a Center member. In addition to other benefits, Center members will continue to receive future issues of our newsletter, an important source of sport psychology information. I think you will enjoy this and our upcoming issues, finding them to contain a wealth of knowledge to enhance both your sport performance and your organizational effectiveness. ■



Center For Sports Psychology Faculty
Back Row: Peggy Richardson, Ph.D.,
Trent Petrie, Ph.D. & Scott Martin, Ph.D.
Front Row: Karen Cogan, Ph.D.

Inside This Issue

- Persistence - It Keeps Going and Going and Going
- Interview With Coach Tina Slinker • Membership Form

PERSISTENCE - IT KEEPS ON GOING AND GOING AND GOING

Scott B. Martin, Ph.D. and Peggy A. Richardson, Ph.D.

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; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.

~ Calvin Coolidge ~

Generations have discussed what makes the difference between 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 occasion them." John Wooden was quoted as saying, "It's not so important who starts the game but who finishes it," thus attesting to the importance of persistence. Although persistence does not guarantee that you will achieve your ultimate goal(s), it does guarantee that you will grow along the way. For people to persevere in the face of failure and achieve success, they must take ultimate responsibility for their behaviors. Thus an essential task of a coach is to help athletes learn how to persist despite obstacles and to take responsibility for the effort they put forth. To help you accomplish this goal, we encourage you to follow the CHAMPS guidelines.

CAPITALIZE ON STRENGTHS.

Observe each athlete carefully to learn his/her individual strengths and competencies. Then match your coaching style and practice activities to how the athlete learns. For example, does the athlete learn best through hands-on experience? Does this person learn through verbal instruction? Should a combination of styles be used? Once you have determined the athlete's strengths and major styles of learning, you can come up with goals and techniques to help him/her achieve success.

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 team goals early in the season so athletes that have different experiences or abilities gain a sense of the time and effort involved in accomplishing each goal through to completion. Take it step by step, day by day, moment by moment, and be persistent.

APPLY APPROPRIATE MOTIVATION.

Look for motivational techniques that relate to the athlete's style of learning, experiences, interests, and abilities. For example, some athletes need more verbal praise than do others. Make sure your feedback/praise is specific and concrete, and your verbal messages and body language are consistent.

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 song 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 challenging tasks in practice and discuss the most effective and efficient way to accomplish the tasks. That is, help them focus their thoughts by devising simple, obvious steps for tackling a task or goal. Athletes need to understand the importance of using their mistakes as learning opportunities. Help them analyze the difficult aspects of performance and brainstorm ideas for renewed efforts. In a nonjudgmental and supportive manner, let them know it is all right to take risks or try something new in an effort to improve.

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, until finally they reach their goal(s). In short, help your athletes become CHAMPS (Capitalize on your athletes' strengths, Help them set effective 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 a blackboard are a dime a dozen. The ones who win get inside their players and motivate."

Other Reading Sources

Orlick, T. (1990). In pursuit of excellence. (2nd Ed.). Champaign, IL: Leisure Press.

Walton, G.M. (1992). Beyond winning: The timeless wisdom of great philosopher coaches. Champaign, IL: Leisure Press.

If you have questions or comments about the information contained in this newsletter or would like to know more about sport and exercise psychology services available at UNT please contact us. ■

COACHES CORNER:

an interview with

UNT BASKETBALL COACH TINA SLINKER

By: Karen D. Cogan, Ph.D.

As a coach, you are asked to wear several different hats – teacher, administrator, travel agent and the one who takes care of all the miscellaneous stuff that makes 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.

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 motivation." Winning coaches and athletes know that setting both short- and long-term goals that are measurable and realistic, positively affects performance. Goals provide something concrete to work toward and a means of monitoring progress. If properly set, they also serve to motivate athletes to achieve their potential.

In her years at UNT, Coach Slinker has been able to identify characteristics of **MENTALLY TOUGH** athletes. She says, "The number one is 'How does a kid respond in adverse situations, when things aren't going well?' Those

who do well have confidence, intelligence and an 'I'm-going-to-make-it-through-this attitude.'" And personality plays a role. Athletes have to be calm in pressure situations, notes Coach Slinker. She also believes that, "mental skills become more important at this [collegiate] level – how you approach and prepare for the game, how you handle the travel mentally." Coaches can help athletes develop these needed characteristics by setting attainable goals, supporting them to work through challenging situations, having them practice in situations that simulate competitions, and having them mentally prepare (through visualization and positive self-talk) for the rigors of competition and travel.

Not only do coaches assist athletes in 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 and/or unexpected situations. Recently, Coach Slinker was faced with injuries to several of her key players. To cope, she said, "Immediately you need a response of finding a solution. You can stay there in adversity if you don't respond immediately. With injuries, we had to come back as a staff and decide what to do. Even in the

time-outs I'm thinking, 'What's the solution?'" A good coach keeps his or her head in a difficult situation and can respond to the emotional needs of the players, while at the same time, thinking quickly to find a workable solution. For instance, in the case of an injury, coaches must be ready to make immediate substitutions and understand which players will be able to respond at that moment to help the team succeed.

As you build your winning program, keep in mind some of Coach Slinker's points. Setting goals early and consistently throughout the season will give athletes something to work toward. By setting up practice situations that give you and your athletes the opportunity to handle stressful or adverse situations, you can help them to develop a higher level of confidence, more perseverance, and a mentally tougher approach to their sport. By simulating what you might experience in competitions, you can practice thinking ahead, solving problems, and dealing with the 'what ifs' before they actually happen. Throughout it all, though, maintaining your perspective may be the biggest challenge. As Coach Slinker notes, keeping a perspective on winning and losing can be a key to coaching success.

MEMBERSHIP IN THE UNT CENTER FOR SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

Join the Winning Team!

As a member, you will receive a UNT CSPPE 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 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.**

Name: _____ Sport: _____ School/Club/Professional Affiliation: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____ E-mail: _____

T-Shirt Size: ___ M ___ L ___ XL Comments: _____

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), to:

UNT Center for Sport Psychology • P.O. Box 311280 • University of North Texas • Denton, TX 76203

If you have any questions, please feel free to call us at: (940) 369-SPORT

Why Do I **NEED** **SPORT PSYCHOLOGY?**

(continued from front page)

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.aaasponline.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 two 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. ■

University of North Texas
Center for Sport Psychology and
Performance Excellence
P.O. Box 311280
Denton, TX 76203

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