Sport Psychology

Dr. Steve Portenga
University of Denver

1. Introduction
2. Psychology of Performance
3. Psychology of Coaching
"You can’t make the grass grow faster by pulling on the blades"

African Proverb

Introduction
The Mental Side of Sports

Sports are NOT 90% mental!

But the head is the gatekeeper to the body

There are no shortcuts, quick fixes, or pixie dust

SUCCEESS

Confidence
Commitment
Concentration
Composure
Success

= Ability x Preparation x Effort x Will

Olympic & World Championship Teams
Healthy, Fit, & Focused!

Youth, Junior, & Transitional National Teams
Bring your best Focus to international competition

Junior Youth Clinics & Development Camps
Build your best Focus
WHAT IS FOCUS?

It's WAY MORE than just CONCENTRATION!

This is the wellspring of FLOW!

*It is*
- Confidence
- Concentration
- Composure
- Poised
- Courage
- Commitment
- Resilient
- Totally in the moment
- Ready
- Engaged
- Control
- Choice…

*And it's COOL!!!*

Psychology of Performance
Competitiveness

• Competitiveness is having the natural or *developed* psychological *edge* that enables you to:

  - Generally, cope better than your opponents with the *many demands* (competition, training, lifestyle) that sport places on a performer.

  - Specifically, be *more consistent* and better than your opponents in remaining determined, confident, and in control under pressure. (Jones, Hanton, & Connaughton, 2002)

Competitive Process
Commit to a Cause

Developing Achievement Motivation

Four key questions

1. Can I succeed?

2. Do I want to succeed?
   Do I even care about this?

3. Why do I want to succeed?
   What defines "success?"

4. What do I have to do to succeed?
Can I succeed?

• Self-Efficacy
  • A person’s confidence in their ability to organize or execute a given course of action to solve a problem or accomplish a task.
  • Develops from: Previous experience, vicarious learning, verbal encouragement from others, physiological reactions

• Attribution Theory
  • 3 categories: Stability, Locus of control, controllability (under one’s volition)
  • Stability is key for effort: Is ability changeable or “God-given?”

### Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Internal</th>
<th>External</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unstable</td>
<td>Effort</td>
<td>Luck Officials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stable</td>
<td>Ability</td>
<td>Task Difficulty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

```markdown
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stability</th>
<th>Effort</th>
<th>Luck Officials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unstable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stable</td>
<td>Ability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

Attribution Training

Athletes can Cognitively Restructure how they think about causation.
Select Internal, *Stable*, and Controllable Attributions for *Success* (e.g. high ability).
Select Internal, *Unstable*, and Controllable Attributions for *Failure* (e.g. insufficient or misdirected effort).

Do I want to succeed? Do I even care about this?

“Skill does not automatically create will”

• Task Values
  • Attainment value: the personal importance of doing the task well
  • Interest value: the enjoyment from doing the task
  • Utility value: how well the task relates to current and future goals
  • Cost: the negative aspects of the task (e.g., anxiety, effort, lost opportunities)

• Developmental changes in task values
  • Elementary school: interest, utility
  • Grade 5-12: interest, utility, and now some attainment value
  • Jr. High: Increase in competence beliefs leads to increase of interest

• Interest increases as children get feedback they are competent, accepted by others, and agentic
Why do I want to succeed?

- **Self-Determination Theory**: 3 basic human needs
  - The need for autonomy
  - The need for competence
  - The need for relatedness

- **Autonomous motivation**: goals that connect to personal interests and values
- **Controlled motivation**: goals that are based on external or internal pressures

- Motivation is a process of **internalizing** external regulation
- Extrinsic rewards can **undermine** autonomous motivation.
- Autonomous motivation for academic subjects stays **relatively stable** after 13yo.

---

Why do I want to succeed?

**Goal Orientation Theory**

- **Performance Orientation (Fixed Mindset)**
  - Will I look smart? Can I out perform others?
  - Related to beliefs that ability is stable

- **Mastery Orientation (Growth Mindset)**
  - How can I do this task? What will I learn?
  - Related to beliefs that ability can be improved

- Elementary kids (& teachers) have a mastery view of school
- Middle school kids (& teachers) have a more performance view
- Adolescents report more performance than mastery goals.
Development: Commit to a Cause

- Self Definition:
  - Who are you? How do you describe yourself?
  - Who do you want to be? What needs to change?
  - What is important to you? What do you like vs. what do you really value?

(Balague, 1999)

Continual Forward Focus
Continual Forward Focus

Out-of-Competition
• Competitors do not look around, they look ahead
• Competitors are innovative, adaptable, and find new ways to do things better
• Experts are self-critical in great detail, but also are creative in solving these problems

• U.S. & Canadian international level champions’ beliefs on the development and maintenance of success:
  • The number 1 attribute was a focus on performance and not outcome

The Self-Regulation Process

Once people have selected a goal, how do they stay on task to ensure its achievement?

• Definition: Refers to people’s ability to initiate and guide their actions toward the achievement of a desired goal and live up to standards
• Key self-regulation processes: are goal-related and include goal establishment, making an action plan, goals striving, and goal revision
• Related terms:
  • discipline
  • hard work
  • persistence in the face of obstacles
  • resisting short-term impulses
  • delayed gratification

The Marshmallow Test
Different Purposes of Self-Regulation

- Behavior regulation starts with an appraisal of our current situation:
  1. Current perceptions of the task and the context
  2. Domain specific knowledge and strategies
  3. Motivational beliefs

- The Mastery/Growth Pathway: Higher-order values, Goal-driven
  - Behavior is directed towards improving knowledge & strategy use, and striving for mastery goals
  - Focus is on task

- The Well-Being Pathway: Cue-driven, Threat-avoidance
  - Behavior is directed towards feeling safe, striving for security, & protecting psychological well-being
  - Focus is on self, not task
  - Some people can refocus on learning goals and switch to the mastery pathway

From Motivation to Goal Attaining

- Outcome-derived (Controlled) motivation may be necessary and sufficient to initiate an activity

- Process-oriented motivation is necessary to maintain engagement over time

- Youth will commit to goal attaining when:
  1. They value the activity
  2. They have a positive experience with the activity
     - i.e., interest, feeling competent, enjoyment, excitement
  3. The environment holds their interest long enough for the task to be completed
Mindset: Fixed vs. Growth Views of Ability

- Fixed mindset
  - Success = when it's easy, when no mistakes
  - Response to a failure = I am a failure = work less, cheat
  - Typical of people praised for ability
  - They avoid challenges

- Growth mindset
  - Success = when work really hard, when able to do something couldn’t do before
  - Response to a failure = I failed at this = work harder
  - Typical of people praised for effort
  - They accept challenges and find fun in them
Planning for self-regulation success

• Goal intentions: our desire to achieve a certain outcome

• Implementation intentions: define our plan of action by specifying the exact steps necessary to achieve the goal
  
  ○ Specifying implementation intentions is a key element in getting started and leads to better goal attainment
  
  ○ They are especially helpful for those with poor self-regulation skills

Why planning helps

• Makes self-regulation:
  
  ▪ more efficient
  
  ▪ more automatic
  
  ▪ less susceptible to distractions
  
  ▪ less susceptible to procrastination

• Automatic activation of goal behaviors

• Conserving self-control

(Gollwitzer, 1999)
The energy for self-regulation

- Negative states use up self-control resources (mental energy)
- People may compensate for depleted resources, if highly motivated, with internal or external incentives
- Engagement in autonomous actions increases energy

Autonomy-Supportive Environments

1. Leader should consider and acknowledge athletes’ perspectives
2. Provide as much choice as possible
3. Provide rationale where choice not provided
Maintain Positive Sense of Self

• Confidence: A sense of “pre-knowing” that you CAN deliver, that you WILL deliver, and that you will SUCCEED!

• Surely it is preferred over …

• Doubt…Worry…Anxiety…Fear

• There are two basic principles for experiencing confidence, and they each require the individual to make a personal choice.
Competence Builds Confidence

Focus confidence on the performance, not the outcome

Changes in Perceptions with Development

- Perceptions of success and failure can start as early as 2 y.o.
- Children’s perceptions of competency typically decline from elementary school years through high school years.
  1. Perceptions become more accurate with peer comparison
  2. School makes evaluation more salient
- Concept of ability starts to develop in early school years
  - most view it as changeable, but starting to see some they believe its fixed
- Children with a stable view of ability are more likely to give up after a failure
  - Note this is BEFORE puberty!
Gender & Racial Differences

• Gender Differences

  • Girls are more likely to take personal responsibility for their failure and attribute their failure to stable causes (lack of ability, especially in a stereotypical fashion).

• Racial & Ethnic Differences

  • Cultural beliefs and stereotypes inform kids (especially adolescents) about competency beliefs and task values.

Prepare Deliberately
Prepare Deliberately

- The major difference between experts and amateurs is the capability to deliberately practice

- “The practice, in itself, is nothing special; the care and consistency with which it is made is” (Chambliss, 1989)

- The difference between expert and amateurs’ practice has more to do with the quality of training, of the quantity

- Coaches and parents:
  - Need to help younger athletes learn how to practice effectively
  - Teach discipline; “If you’re going to do it, learn to do it right’
  - Challenge on a daily basis and celebrate small improvements

The Connection between Effort and Outcome

- Nicholls & Miller (1984)
- Level 1 (5-6yo): effort, ability, and performance are not clearly connected by cause and effect
- Level 2 (7-9): effort is seen as the primary cause of performance outcomes
- Level 3 (9-12): start to be able to distinguish between effort and ability, but do not always use this distinction
  - At 10-12, they can differentiate ability, effort, and performance and start to believe ability is a fixed capacity.
- Level 4 (13+): Adolescents understand the differences and can see ability as a capacity
Maintain Appropriate Focus: React Adaptively to Distractions

React Adaptively to Distractions

- Both *Emotional* and *Behavioral* Reactions
- Competitors push their limits
- They show a willingness to take risks

Distractions are the #1 reason for poor performance at the Olympics
Four Components of Concentration

• Focusing on relevant environment cues
  • Selective attention - selecting what cues to attend to and disregard

• Maintaining attentional focus

• Situation awareness:
  • The ability to understand what is going on around oneself (to size up a situation)

• Shifting attentional focus when necessary

Teaching the Right Focus

• Planning for obstacles and creating strategies to cope with them predicts intensity of effort

• Need to help them develop strategies for switching from thoughts of protecting self to engagement in the learning/performance process

• Pre-competition plans
  • After a good meet: What did you do to get ready before and at the track?
  • What’s your plan to do this again?

• Re-focusing plans
  • After a good job regaining focus: What do you do when you realize that you've lost the right focus?
  • What’s your plan to do this again?
Arousal vs. Anxiety

- **Arousal** is a blend of physiological and psychological activation, varying in intensity along a continuum.
  - Think of this as being more physical in nature

- **Anxiety** is a negative emotional state with feelings of worry, nervousness, and apprehension associated with activation or arousal of the body.
  - A perceived emotional threat

- It is natural to be nervous - if controlled these feelings will help the athlete perform well

- It’s OK to have butterflies, just get them to “fly in formation”

**The Inverted-U Curve**

Adapted from: Bliss, P. Praucner, 1979
The Stress Process

- Selye defined stress as the "nonspecific response of the body to any demand placed upon it."
  1. Environmental demand
  2. Perception of demand
  3. Psychological & Physical Response
  4. Behavioral Response

The Perceptual Appraisal Process

- Psychological stress is a result of a perceived threat.
- A "something" isn’t a stressor.

1. How important is it to me?
   - If it’s not a big deal, it should not be stressful.

2. What are the consequences of failure?
   - If the consequences are not terrible, then it should not be stressful.

3. What control do I have?
   - If you have control: Great! Use it!
   - If you don’t have control, don’t worry.
Adaptive Reactions to Distractions

- Turn stress into a problem to be solved: Do not cope by avoiding
  1. How could it be better or worse?
  2. Take action to make it better

- Youth:
  1. Give them lots of experiences to learn from
  2. Teach that achievement comes through effort, not inborn abilities
  3. Encourage them to believe that they can turn adversity into opportunity
  4. Highlight times when they do so

Hierarchy of psychological skill development

- Level 1: Requisite Characteristics
  - Self-awareness
  - Motivation
  - Commitment

- Level 2: Acquired Skills
  - Concentration
    - Goal setting
    - Cognitive control
    - Attentional endurance
    - Transitional flexibility
    - Attentional control
    - Refocusing attention
  - Composure
    - Relaxation
    - Centering
    - Breathing
    - Arousal management
    - Body awareness
    - Routine
  - Confidence
    - Coping imagery
    - Mastery imagery
    - Cognitive restructuring
    - Self-talk
    - Routine

- Level 3: Fundamental Abilities
  - Concentration
  - Composure
  - Confidence

- Level 4: Peak Performance State
  - Flow
  - Confidence
  - Composure
  - Concentration
Cook’s Model of Concentration

Observe

Confidence

Confidence

Strategy

Confidence

Visual/Feel

Confidence

Confidence

Trust

Confidence

Confidence

Performance

See it • Feel it • Do it

Confidence is a consequence of concentration

Psychology of Coaching
Why coach?

What are the goals and purposes of sport?

I have come to a frightening conclusion.

I am the decisive element at the track or on the field.

It is my personal approach that creates the climate.

It is my daily mood that makes the weather.

As a coach, I possess tremendous power to make an athlete’s life miserable or joyous.

I can be the tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration.

I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal.

In all situations it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and an athlete humanized or dehumanized.

-Author Unknown
The Olympic Creed

“The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part.

Just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle.

The essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well.”

—Pierre de Coubertin

The athlete meets sport at the coach!
Construction Model for Coaching

I intend to develop and nurture _____ with my athletes(s)/team.

What will I GENERALLY do in practice to develop and nurture _____?

What will I WEEKLY do in practice to develop and nurture _____?

Construction Model for Coaching

I intend to develop and nurture _____ with my athletes(s)/team.

What will I DAILY do in practice to develop and nurture _____?

What will I NEVER do in practice, because doing it will undermine or destroy the nurturing and development of _____?