



Mind power in Sport

The idea that sport is much more than physical strength, conditioning and technical skill is not new. It is generally accepted by coaches and athletes alike, at all levels, that psychological factors do play a major role in sports performance.

It is not uncommon for athletes to report that they train well and feel physically fit, yet when it comes to competition 'something happens' and they perform below their expectations and abilities. All the physical training seems to be done, but when it counts things just don't seem to come together. They are let down by psychological factors such as excessive anxiety, low motivation, low confidence, poor planning or self-doubt. This can be very frustrating and can set up a cycle of self-defeating behaviours and thought patterns that affect future performances. The athlete can then become their own toughest opponent.

Psychologists can help athletes in a number of ways. They can help athletes deal with problems of excessive anxiety, self confidence, and teach control through goal setting. Some of the mental skills used by athletes include:

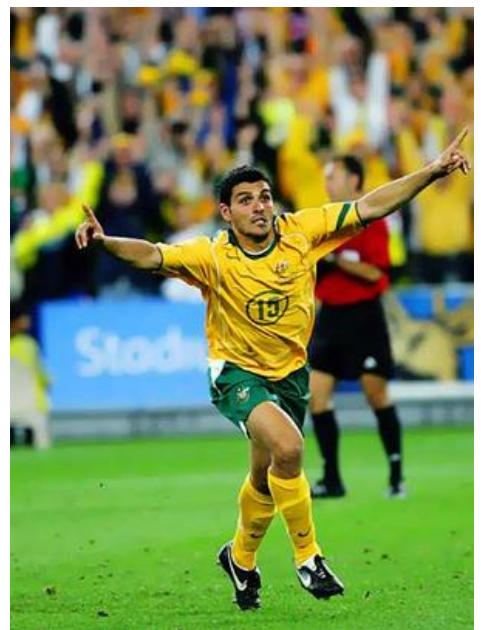
- Goal setting and motivation
- Stress management/relaxation
- Mental rehearsal/visualization
- Concentration

Goal setting and Motivation

Goal setting is important in the overall planning of training and preparation for competition. It helps direct attention and energy in a way that makes effective use of time and resources and can help protect against the frustration of unrealistic outcomes and performances. Setting realistic and challenging goals provides clear objectives and increases the likelihood of success while keeping you motivated and interested.

Stress management and relaxation

Athletes often get 'too tense', 'too nervous', 'too anxious', which affects their performance. Relaxation techniques are useful not only to control nervousness before and during competition, but can help with reducing



general anxiety, improving rest and sleep and dealing with the pressures of daily living.

Mental rehearsal and visualization

Mental rehearsal means to 'practice' the skill or performance in your mind. It can be used to practice and improve aspects of a performance, recall a good performance to enhance self confidence, to correct errors and assist injury rehabilitation.

Concentration

Lapses in concentration or focus is one of the main reasons mistakes are made. Thinking about too many things at once, concentrating on the wrong aspects of the game can have a negative impact on performance. Concentration is an important skill that can be learned and refined. The athlete needs to be able to attend to the relevant cues of the game and maintain their focus and learn how to deal with distractions.

These are just some of the skills psychologists can help athletes with. Other areas include self-confidence building, use of positive suggestion and positive self talk, competition strategies and recovery from injury. The aim is not only to work with the athlete to realize their physical potential but to develop a positive self image and skills that can be used 'off the field' and applied to everyday life.

The Wakefield Sports Clinic has two Sports Psychologists available for consultation – Ilona Treijs and Matti Clements. Call 8232 5833 for more information or to make a booking.

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