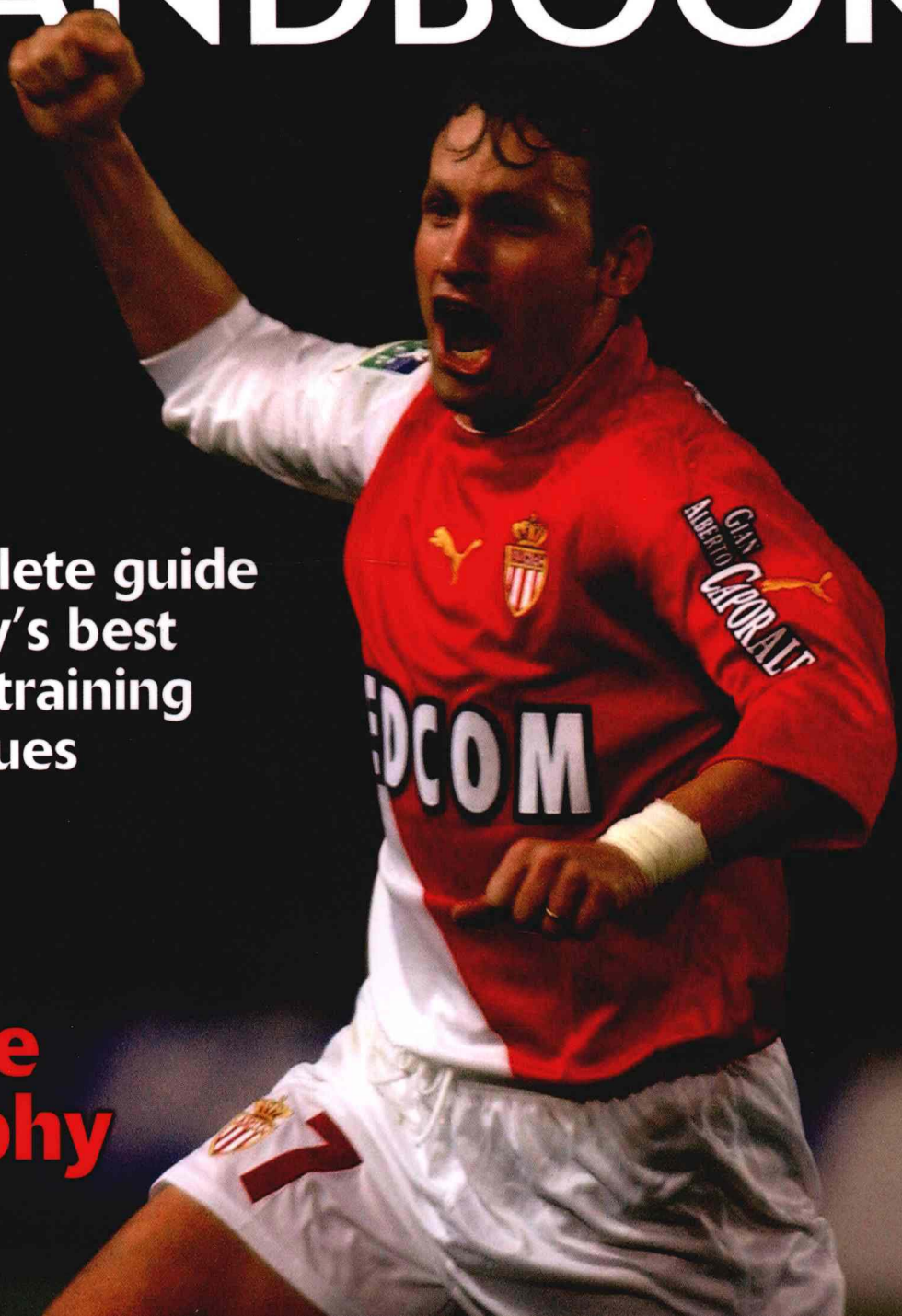


# THE SPORT PSYCH HANDBOOK

A complete guide  
to today's best  
mental training  
techniques

**Shane  
Murphy**  
Editor



# The Sport Psych Handbook

Shane Murphy, Editor



Human Kinetics

# Preface

We are not on earth to live up to someone else's expectations. To make our unique contributions to the world, we each need to prize our individual worth and pursue our dreams.

*California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility Toward a State of Esteem, 1990*

All of us who worked on *The Sport Psych Handbook* are excited to bring this resource to you. Sport psychology is a vibrant and stimulating field to work in, and tremendous progress has been made in research and application during the past 25 years. But for too many coaches and athletes, sport psychology is a mystery, and the relationship between the mind and athletic performance is not well understood. A big problem for sport psychology is that research has not been widely disseminated. Original research is hard to read and new theories are often difficult to understand. What has been needed is a resource for coaches and athletes that takes sport psychology research and makes it easy to understand and apply to real-life competition. Now that resource is here! Every chapter in *The Sport Psych Handbook* was written by experts in the field. All the latest research is summarized in a simple but comprehensive manner, and each chapter focuses on applying the knowledge gained from years of research to the world of modern sport. For the first time, athletes and coaches have a fun, easy-to-read resource that brings them up to date with the latest findings in sport psychology. No wonder we're excited to bring this book to you!

After 20 years as a sport psychologist, I'm still surprised at how little most people know about the field. At a conference last year in a lovely resort town in the Hudson River Valley in New York State, I had just finished a presentation on how sport psychology interventions can be used in many areas of life when one of the conference attendees approached me. He was kind and generous in his praise of my presentation, but then he said something I have heard often: "You must enjoy working in such a brand-new field as sport psychology." Actually, the roots of sport psychology go back to research carried out at the end of the 19th century, and one of the forefathers of our field, Coleman Roberts Griffith, carried out most of his work in the 1920s and 1930s, publishing *Psychology of Coaching* in 1926 and *Psychology and Athletics* in 1928. He was even hired away from academia by the Wrigley family to help and do research with the Chicago Cubs baseball team (which, as we sport psychologists like to say, no doubt explains the enormous success of the Cubs ever since!). Although I always chuckle when people tell me that I work in a brand-new area of psychology, the reality is that

we need to do a much better job of making our knowledge widely available so that sport psychology is no longer one of the best-kept secrets in sport.

The organization of *The Sport Psych Handbook* is straightforward. There are five sections in the book, each of which contains several chapters covering that topic. Part I is “Inner Drive,” which focuses on the motivational issues that are essential for athletic success. Why do athletes work so hard for so long to achieve goals that are often far off? What happens when an athlete hits a slump or seems burned out? What can coaches do to keep workouts interesting and motivating? Is competition among teammates a good thing, and if so, how much should be encouraged? What happens to an athlete who trains harder and harder but whose performances keep getting worse and worse? All these questions, and many more, are answered in part I.

Part II deals with the fundamental psychological processes that determine success and failure in competition. One of the great contributions of sport psychology in the past 20 years has been the increased understanding of how thoughts and emotions govern sport behaviors. Emotions, such as anxiety and anger, and cognitive processes, such as concentration and imagery, are vital parts of the competitive experience for every athlete. The role these issues play in sports competition is explored thoroughly in part II, “Emotional and Mental Control.”

All athletes know that success in sports is not a solo undertaking. Good coaching, inspiring leadership, and sound teamwork are essential for victory in all sports. These social aspects of sport are covered in part III, “Interactive Skills.” Coaches and team leaders will find a wealth of useful suggestions in these chapters, but all athletes will find the information on communication and leadership helpful.

One of the fundamental themes of *The Sport Psych Handbook* is that athletic success comes only when individuals balance all aspects of their lives, not just their sport participation. Anyone who has been involved in high-level sports competition knows that a variety of problems complicate the lives of many athletes and can make success difficult to obtain. These life problems are the focus of part IV, “Potential Pitfalls.”

The book’s final section is immensely practical; it helps coaches, athletes, and parents wishing to work with a sport psychologist know how to find one and how to work with them when they do. Part V, “The Educated Consumer,” takes the mystery out of sport psychology consulting and shows what it is, how it’s done, and what one should know in order to make it work.

Sport psychology is a fascinating and important topic to study and understand. I have always believed that our knowledge should be shared and disseminated as widely as possible in an effort to get the information to those who can most benefit from it. My thanks to all the wonderful individuals who have helped put the information in this book together—I hope you enjoy and benefit from our hard work.

# Acknowledgments

Just as a sports team requires a great supporting cast to be successful, an edited book requires many people working together to make the vision a reality. For making our shared vision come true, I wish to thank:

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All the athletes and coaches I have ever had the pleasure to work with—your ideas and experiences, and those of your colleagues who worked with the other authors, formed the basis for the accumulated wisdom collected on these pages.

Jennifer Walker—I am surely the only one who knows just how hard you worked to make this book successful.

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There are three people to whom I owe everything. They know how much I love them. Perhaps they don't know how much I appreciate them putting up with me and all the interruptions, deadlines, phone calls, faxes, trips, and the hassles that go along with writing and editing. Annemarie, my wife; Bryan, my son; and Theresa, my daughter. Thanks.

# Introduction

The mind is the athlete; the body is simply the means it uses to run faster or longer, jump higher, shoot straighter, kick better, swim harder, hit further, or box better.

*Bryce Courtney, The Power of One, 1992*

Over the past 80 years, sport psychology has evolved from a research discipline that studies the effects of mental factors on performance to a broad field that incorporates such diverse disciplines as psychology, counseling, kinesiology, and sport and exercise science. Today sport psychology encompasses professional and active research communities that are committed to enhancing the performance and well-being of athletes through a variety of psychological interventions.

Coaches and athletes have always understood the importance of the mental aspects of sport; writings about this topic can be found as far back as the days of ancient Greece, when sports celebrations were pivotal parts of community experience. A scientific approach to the study of performance psychology began to emerge during the 20th century with the work of such sport psychologists as Coleman Roberts Griffith, but sport psychology began to flourish as a separate discipline during the 1970s and 1980s. By the mid-1980s, the field was cohesive enough to support the emergence of such organizing bodies as the International Society of Sport Psychology (ISSP), the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology (AAASP), and the Division of Exercise and Sport Psychology of the American Psychological Association (Division 47). These professional organizations served as focal points for the many people interested in the science of sport psychology, and they are all active in promoting the field today.

Vigorous debate within the sport psychology community, as in any emerging field, surrounds its goals, scope, and background. However, a broad consensus has emerged on a variety of issues. In *The Sport Psych Handbook*, we have tried to emphasize these areas of consensus while alerting the reader to those areas that remain controversial. Several themes define sport psychology today, and they are central to the approach taken by the authors. These themes include the following.

## New Insights and Applications in Sport Psych

The central theme of sport psychology over the past 80 years has been the search for the truth about how the mind and body interact to produce a skilled sport performance. This search has been undertaken via the application of the scientific method, which emphasizes that we should pose sound questions and carefully collect evidence before we begin to address how emotions and thoughts influence sport performance. Sport today is a big business throughout the world, as evidenced by the tremendous popularity of events such as the FIFA World Cup and the Olympic Games, but unfortunately some people try to take advantage of coaches and athletes by selling gimmicks and shortcuts to success. Some try to “sell” athletes unsubstantiated “mental success” programs; in this book, we emphasize that serious athletes and coaches should always seek out the evidence behind intervention techniques and never rely on testimonials, gurus, or guarantees of success. There are no guarantees in sport, but the systematic application of scientific approaches such as exercise physiology and sport psychology does give athletes the best opportunity to succeed.

The guiding force in sport psychology is a theoretical approach called “cognitive-behavioral psychology.” The term comes from a focus on both the thinking you cannot see (cognition) and the actions you can see (behavior). The cognitive-behavioral approach theorizes that by changing people’s thinking, you can change their behaviors. As a straightforward example, take the concept of goal setting. Evidence is overwhelming that setting specific goals for a behavior greatly increases the likelihood that the behavior will occur (see chapter 2). If you have ever found that making a “to-do” list on a Saturday at home resulted in getting a lot of errands or projects finished, then you understand the value of goal setting. Goal setting is an example of cognitive behaviorism. Simply by changing your thinking (through the organization process of creating a list, then by the visual reminder it provides throughout the day), your behavior also changes (more tasks get done).

In sport, an example of the cognitive-behavioral approach is using imagery exercises to train the thought processes during difficult times in competition. For instance, if a rugby player who responds to his own mistakes by trying too hard, getting angry, and subsequently earning stupid penalties practices a relaxed, problem-solving approach to game mistakes in his *imagination*, his *actual* game behavior is more likely to be relaxed and solution oriented (see chapter 8). Changing the athlete’s pregame thinking changes his game behavior.

Thus, although sport psychology began by emphasizing the relationship between mental processes and physical performance, it has expanded over the years to include many important areas. Today’s sport psychologists help athletes lead well-balanced, productive lives and assist those who have serious clinical problems such as drug abuse or depression. They study motivation in order to understand how people become active exercisers and athletes, and examine how the organization and processes of sports teams and clubs influence the behavior of athletes, coaches, and fans.

One of my greatest challenges as editor of *The Sport Psych Handbook* was to capture the field's diversity and illustrate its holistic approach in a single volume. I challenged the contributing authors to present the most widely applicable information they could find, and I believe the results are outstanding. Never before has one book captured the whole range of sport psychology and made the information so accessible for everyone.

## Be an Educated Sport Psych Consumer

One of my chief goals for this book is that it will help readers become informed and educated consumers of sport psychology. Each chapter will help you apply the knowledge of experts to your own sporting situation. In addition, should you ever choose to work with a sport psychologist, this book will help you understand the key aspects of the consulting process and identify the type of consultant you wish to work with.

One extensively discussed area within the field of sport psychology concerns the training and experience needed to ensure that consultants are competent and effective. Although discussion continues, sport psychologists and organizations around the world have arrived at several conclusions, which are illustrated by the variations among the certification, or registration, processes in countries such as Australia, Great Britain, New Zealand, and the United States (see chapter 16). These processes establish the minimum training and experiences needed for competent practice. If coaches and athletes know about the certification requirements in their countries, then they will be able to identify qualified consultants. However, certification does not guarantee that a consultant will be helpful.

The issues of certification and effectiveness are explored thoroughly, and for the first time, in part V of this book. Let me point out briefly that because of the wide variety of issues within sport psychology, consultants often have diverse backgrounds and training and can provide excellent assistance to coaches and athletes. But to be an educated consumer, you need to know which type of help you want (Sean McCann provides many useful suggestions in chapter 15), which types of training and qualifications consultants are likely to have (Bradley Hack makes them clear in chapter 16), and which qualities you seek in a consultant (David Tod and Mark Andersen describe the main characteristics of effective consultants in chapter 17).

I suggest that you look for someone who endorses the scientific and holistic approach to sport psychology. The scientific approach means that your consultant should be able to provide a sound rationale for the approaches or interventions suggested. Even when current research offers no firm answers to your questions, the consultant should proceed using an empirical, client-centered approach. And you should expect to see progress in a reasonable amount of time. The sport psychology consultant should be able to suggest a system to monitor progress, whether for tracking competitive performance, behavior modification, or changes in mood and emotion. The chapters that follow offer many examples of sport psychology assessment.



The holistic approach means that your consultant should be comfortable looking at the big picture of your life. As all athletes and coaches know, what happens off the court can affect what happens on the court, and vice versa. No matter what your concerns, issues, or problems are, a sport psychology consultant should be comfortable listening to you and working with you to find possible solutions. Sometimes the recommended course of action will be beyond that person's expertise; in that case, you should expect a referral to others who might be better qualified to deal with your particular needs. In general, a professional known as a "psychologist" has a doctorate in psychology and is licensed by the state they practice in. Many other consultants in sport psychology have different backgrounds in exercise science, sport psychology, kinesiology, etc., and have different sets of skills. These issues are clarified in chapter 16.

## Expanding Horizons for Sport Psych

Sport psychologists have worked with athletes in every professional and Olympic sport. Sport psychology training is included in the majority of grassroots and elite coach-education workshops and conferences. Athletes' public comments about their work with various sport psychologists are regular occurrences at news conferences and in newspaper and magazine articles. With increasing awareness of the work that sport psychologists do, athletes and coaches are becoming more sophisticated consumers of their services. Frequently, sport psychologists who work with elite athletes or their coaches discover that the athlete has worked with multiple sport psychologists over the years.

Over the past 25 years, sport psychology has moved from an "outside of the box" concept to a standard part of the high-performance sports team. In modern sport programs, sport psychology has become well integrated into athletic preparation as has strength and conditioning, sports medicine, and sports nutrition. Today, a number of college campuses have sport psychologists in their counseling centers and athletic departments. High schools around the country now include sport psychology training in team-building, communication, and crisis management as part of their mandatory coaching education programs. Many professional sports teams have sport psychologists on staff. And at the 2002 Olympic Games in Salt Lake City, 12 sport psychologists were given coaching credentials so that they could work with U.S. Olympic teams. More and more, sport psychology is regarded as a "normal" resource for any team that takes performance seriously.

I expect this trend to continue for the foreseeable future. Gains in research in cognitive science and neuropsychology are helping us understand the workings of the brain at a deeper level than ever before. These breakthroughs help us better understand important processes such as concentration, motivation, stress, and imagery, and this increased knowledge can be passed along to coaches and athletes to help them manage their performances. I believe the work of

sport psychologists will become increasingly relevant to other important fields of human endeavor. Through most of its history, sport psychology imported applied techniques from other areas in psychology, but now its concepts are being exported to other areas such as executive coaching and the development of high-performance skills in business, the military, the performing arts, and other high-stress fields.

Sport psychology is about winning, because it focuses on understanding how athletes succeed and assisting athletes and coaches in achieving their best performance. But it is about much more than that. It is about learning how good you are and discovering how far you can go; it is about the joys of teamwork and striving for a team goal that is greater than any individual goal; it is about enjoying each moment because neither success nor failure is permanent, so if the journey isn't worthwhile, the destination isn't worth reaching. And it is about the wonders of self-discovery, learning to understand how you respond to pressure, and how you can make yourself better every day by learning from your experience. Let the voyage begin.

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# Inner Drive

The first of the most important lessons I've learned in 22 years of competition is that success will come if you work hard and believe. The second is that failure isn't fatal. All the setbacks I've had, although heartbreaking at the time, were only temporary. The important thing is to learn from adversity and walk away as a better man. The third lesson is that success isn't final. Past performance is forgotten in every new competition.

*Don Shula, coach of the Miami Dolphins NFL team*

A young soccer player wakes up in darkness as the alarm buzzes. It's 4:30 A.M. and he has 30 minutes to dress and eat before catching a bus for the hour-long drive to the regional club training facility where he will join other talented young players for a two-hour dawn training session. School begins at 8:30 A.M. and ends at 1:00 P.M. for this player and for others on the club's Under-17 team. The program is for only the most talented players, and a place on the team is highly coveted. His afternoon includes more training, strength and conditioning workouts, and a skills drill session with the club's professional team coach. After the long ride home, his mother helps him with homework in the evening. By 9:00 P.M., exhausted, he is ready for bed. In a few hours, the whole cycle will start anew. The young player is looking forward to several more years of this schedule and then for the opportunity to sign a long-term contract in the professional league.

This sort of dedication is not unique. In all sports, similar scenarios are repeated every day. Whether the goal is representing one's country, achieving a professional career in sports, or being able to play for a college team, athletes the world over display tremendous motivation as they strive to make their dreams come true. In part I of *The Sport Psych Handbook*, we explore how that motivation develops and what keeps athletes going in the face of such daunting requirements of commitment and persistence. What is motivation, how can it

be promoted and encouraged, and what role does setting goals play in developing this motivation? We also explore what happens when motivation fails and athletes burn out. Why do some athletes lose their natural love of the game and leave sports before they have had a chance to achieve their goals? What can be done to prevent such problems?

After all the hard work and sacrifice, the final test for every athlete is competition. When an athlete accepts the challenge of competition, he or she seeks answers to the questions of “How good am I?” and “How well will I handle pressure?” In part I, we also take a fresh look at the topic of competition in sports and seek to understand how athletes and coaches can develop a healthy, effective attitude toward competition that helps them perform at their best without succumbing to the pressures of public scrutiny.

Four chapters make up part I, “Inner Drive.” The first two deal with the intertwined topics of motivation and goal setting. In chapter 1, “Motivation: The Need to Achieve,” John F. Eliot explores where motivation to excel comes from and how it can be nurtured. In chapter 2, “Goals: More Than Just the Score,” Chris Harwood looks at the goals that athletes set and how goals motivate or sometimes distract athletes. In chapter 3, “Competitive Drive: Embracing Positive Rivalries,” Cal Botterill takes a fresh look at the topic of competition and explores how positive rivalries in sport can lead all participants to excel. Finally, in chapter 4, “Overtraining: Balancing Practice and Performance,” Kirsten Peterson shows us some of the ways motivation can go bad and looks at modern approaches to preventing and overcoming overtraining.

# Motivation: The Need to Achieve

John F. Eliot

The subject of motivation is a complex one—in short, it’s an intangible variable that can ebb and flow widely in short periods of time. Athletes with seemingly unparalleled drive lose it. Loafers show up to practice one day with a fire lit inside them. From week to week, teams, athletes, and coaches fluctuate in their intensity and level of dedication. This chapter focuses on understanding how we create and sustain motivation, and, specifically, how we can win with it. Along the way, we’ll give you tips on how to apply motivation effectively in competition and answer some of the following tough questions.

Why are some of the biggest, most readily available motivators—money, fame, trophies, and other accolades—ineffective over the long haul? Why does motivation come and go? Why do people enter into sport or the quest for a particular goal in the first place? How do they persevere in the face of adversity? Why do they discontinue prematurely?

## The Mental Edge of Intensity and Drive

Norman Triplett is generally credited with the first formal experiment in sport motivation psychology. A psychologist at Indiana University, Triplett was a bicycle enthusiast who had noticed that racers seem to ride faster in pairs than alone. In 1889, he tested his hypothesis by asking children to reel in fishing line in a number of competitive conditions. As predicted, the children reeled in more line when they performed next to another child. The same held true when Triplett examined racing times—cyclists rode faster when paced or pitted against others than when they rode by themselves.



Triplett's motivation discovery—now referred to as social facilitation—was not fully utilized for roughly half a century. In the early 1900s, leading psychologists took a deterministic approach to human behavior. Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud argued that motivation was a product of the subconscious instincts of sex and aggression. Our behavior, he said, is largely shaped by our instincts. Similarly, C.L. Hull's drive theory posited all motivation to be a function of basic physiological needs, such as hunger, thirst, and fatigue. Behaviorist B.F. Skinner was on the other end of the nature–nurture continuum. He didn't believe in the subconscious. To explain motivation, Skinner put forth stimulus–response psychology, claiming that all behavior is controlled by external reinforcements. We are essentially a black box, Skinner said; what goes in determines what comes out.

Although their beliefs were radically different, these psychologists agreed on one thing: Motivation is not up to the individual. They professed humans to be, essentially, products of genetics or the environment. The argument at the time laid groundwork for the nature-versus-nurture debate that still continues today: Is our behavior dictated by our biological makeup or is it a product of what our experiences have taught us? The answer is both.

Drive theory, also called “instinct theory,” explains why a hockey player tends to strike back when hit—aggression is an innate human impulse. Recruiters and scouts tend to rely heavily on drive theory. In addition to physical genet-



Hockey players' aggression is explained by drive theory as an innate human impulse, inclining them to challenges of aggressiveness, high pain tolerance, and initiative.