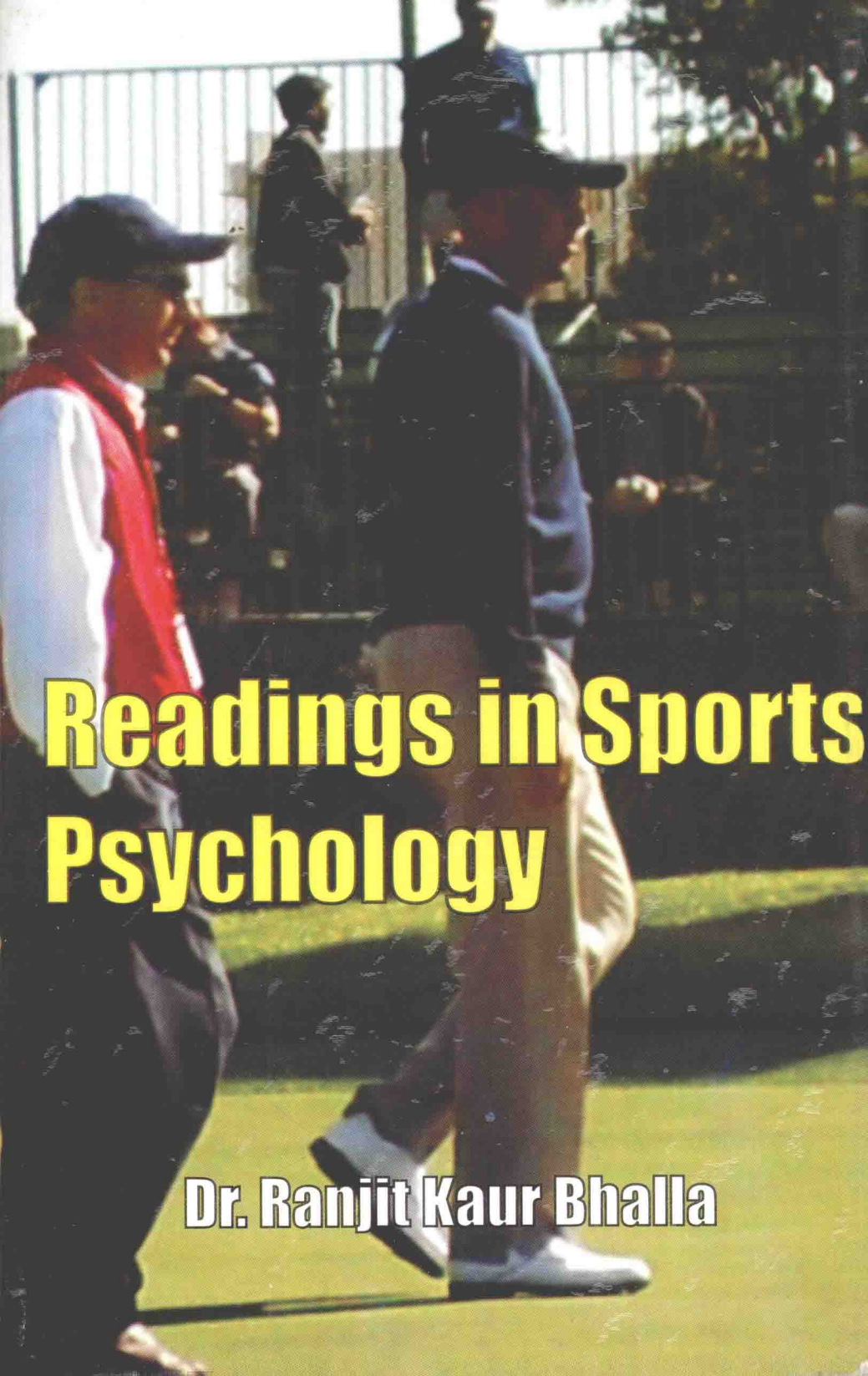

Readings in Sports Psychology

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Reading in Sports Psychology

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Sports Psychology: An Introduction

It has long been acknowledged that psychological skills are critical for athletes at the elite level. Athletes with the requisite "mental toughness" are more likely to be successful. In the past, it was assumed that these skills were genetically based, or acquired early in life. Now, it is commonly accepted that athletes and coaches are capable of learning a broad range of psychological skills that can play a critical role in learning and in performance.

A. Role of Sports Psychology

The specialised field of sports psychology has developed rapidly in recent years. The importance of a sports psychologist as an integral member of the coaching and health care teams is widely recognised. Sports psychologists can teach skills to help athletes enhance their learning process and motor skills, cope with competitive pressures, fine-tune the level of awareness needed for optimal performance, and stay focused amid the many distractions of team travel and in the competitive environment. Psychological training should be an integral part of an athlete's holistic training process, carried out in conjunction with other training elements. This is best accomplished by a collaborative effort among the coach, the sport psychologist, and the athlete; however, a knowledgeable and interested coach can learn *basic* psychological skills and impart them to the athlete, especially during actual practice.

B. The Medical Staff and Psychosomatic Disorders

The health professional often plays a major role in supporting the emotional health of athletes. An athlete's psychological stresses may be manifested as somatic complaints, such as sleep disturbances, irritability, fatigue, gastrointestinal disturbances, muscle tension, or even injury. Athletes often turn to a therapist or physician for relief, either because they do not recognise the psychological basis of the physical complaint, or because they fear the services of a mental health practitioner due to the perceived stigma, or because no psychologist is available.

Therapists must be aware of the possibility of an underlying psychological basis for a complaint and inquire into the emotional status of the athlete as part of the medical history. Careful, non-judgmental questioning may reveal inter-personal problems with a coach, teammate, family member, or other individuals, or anxiety concerning an upcoming competition. In these situations, a sports psychologist is invaluable. If none is available, the physician or therapist may need to assume the role of sounding board, intermediary, or stress-management advisor. At times, being a patient listener and confidant may be all that is required. If mediation between parties is required, a neutral, non-judgmental stance must be maintained to help the parties air and resolve differences.

C. Preparing for Competition

Simple psychological skills to help the athlete manage the competitive performance environment include: (1) learning relaxation skills (e.g. progressive relaxation; slow, controlled, deep abdominal breathing; or autogenic training; (2) mastering all of the attentional styles (types of concentration); (3) imagery (both visualisation and kinesthetics); (4) appropriate self-talk; and 5) developing a precompetition mental routine to be employed immediately prior to competition on game day (these routines are short and use all of the mental skills just presented).

D. The Injured Athlete

Athletes have a strong sense of body awareness, and take

great pride in the capabilities of their bodies. Thus, injuries can be psychologically as well as physically devastating. The ability to train and compete well involves enormous ego. Athletes often identify themselves by who they are as an athlete. Thus, an injury places considerable stress on this self-identification. The more severe the injury, and the longer the recovery-rehabilitation period, the more prolonged and profound the mood disturbance may be.

Injured athletes commonly experience at least three emotional responses: isolation, frustration, and disturbances of mood:

1. The injury forces the athlete to become separated from teammates and coaches. Other team members may provide little support, and in fact they may shun their injured teammate to avoid reminders of their own potential frailty.

2. The athlete becomes frustrated because he or she perceives the loss of months of training and skills mastery, although there are many instances where athletes have used the recovery period to master mental and other physical skills to return successfully to competition.

3. Mood disturbances are common. The athlete may be temporarily depressed, or become upset by minor annoyances.

An injury can provide the athlete with an opportunity to work with a caring professional to re-assess his or her reasons for being in sport, and for redefining goals in sports participation.

The health care team must be aware and include psychological support as an integral part of the treatment and rehabilitation processes. At the outset, the athlete must be fully informed about the nature and severity of the injury, the prognosis for recovery, recommended course of therapy and rehabilitation, and an estimate of the time needed before training can be resumed. The athlete must be made a full partner in the treatment and recovery process, and given responsibility for therapeutic activities that can be carried out at home. The medical team must discuss openly

the psychological changes that accompany an injury, and reassure the athlete that this is to be expected. Reassurance and supportive measures are generally adequate, but a visit from an athlete who has recovered from a similar injury may be of great value. This entire process can be facilitated by a supportive and understanding medical staff. The formula:

Genuine Caring + Skills + Courage = Positive Outcome for the Injured Athlete must be kept in mind by the staff and the athlete, even though progress may be slow and uneven throughout the treatment and recovery process. Referral to a sports psychologist may be necessary if the athlete is deeply disturbed, or if the injury is severe and a prolonged recovery is anticipated. All injuries involve a certain degree of fear and uncertainty, and the sports psychologist may be great value in helping to deal with this emotion.

Consider referring to a trained, experienced sport psychology consultant if injured athlete:

- Lacks confidence in his her ability to recover, or to engage in the rehabilitation process.
- Lacks belief in the rehabilitation process.
- Has difficulty filtering out environmental distractions during rehab or training sessions.
- Is withholding effort out of fear of re-injury, of failure, etc..
- Loses focus easily when pain intensifies or when discouragement sets in.
- Is engaging in excessive cognitive thinking over simple tasks.
- Is unsure of how to set and attain meaningful goals.
- Has trouble controlling thoughts about the injury, or worries about re-injury.
- Is unable to control negative self-talk.
- Desires to maximise the utility of the rehab and wishes to work more intensely on developing hisher mental game.

Athlete's Competition Day Preparation

Many athletes use special psychological procedures to prepare themselves on competition day. The following exercises will help you develop your own competition-day routine and achieve that hard-to-define sense of "readiness" it may be a sense of "tingling" or the simple subjective feeling that "this is my day."

Too high a level of activation is experienced as "stress" or anxiety and leads to muscle tightness, poor efficiency, poor attention or concentration (chaotic thinking or too narrow a focus), and loss of smooth and responsive muscle coordination.

Too low a level of activation is seen as low energy, a "flat" performance, little or no motivation, and wandering attention. Both profiles lead to performance errors. How one achieves that sense of readiness that precedes optimum performance varies with each person, so carefully review your best competition days and try to identify the cues inside of you and in your environment that seemed to help you prepare to compete well.

A. Identify Your Stress Profile

The next time you experience some type of stress competition, tests, talking with someone you feel uncomfortable with, etc., notice how stress affects your body and your mind. Be very specific.

1. Muscles that tighten: Jaw clenches, shoulders tighten, fists clench, stomach tightens, other:
2. Breathing pattern: Shorter and faster, rapid speech, other:
3. Gastro-intestinal responses: nausea or unsettled sensations in the stomach; more frequent bowel movements, other:
4. Other physical signs: Dry throat, upset stomach, cold hands and or feet, rapid, pounding heart, sweaty palms, frequent urination, other:
5. Interpersonal responses: Rapidity of speech with different

people, need to be around certain people coach, teammate, family, friends, etc., need to be alone, need to "show them" during warm-up, watching other athletes, other:

6. Personal cues: Mind goes blank when?, forgetfulness, unable to focus attention well easily distracted or too narrow a focus, things you say to yourself I've got to do better this time, what am I doing here? I hope my coach parents don't get mad if ,I hope I don't goof , other:

7. Environmental cues: Air temperature, humidity, rain, crowd noises, officials, poor fit of clothes or shoes, equipment problems, other distractions:

Use this information to identify the early signs of stress

Individuals experience stress in consistent ways, and you need to find your own stress profile. Log your responses to stress as well as the cues that were present on your *best* competition days so that you can compare the two profiles.

B. Planning for Competition Day

By now you will have some idea of what your stress profile is: when too much or too little stress is activated, WHAT or WHO triggers the stress, and HOW it affects you both physically and mentally. Once you know the cues that interfere with your performance, you can plan a programme of psychological and physical techniques to help reach a better performance level. Table 5-3 lists activities that may help you reduce tension, or help you "activate" yourself if you are feeling flat, unresponsive, or "down."

Be sure to use psychological techniques in your daily training programme. Like any skill, these techniques require practice before you can use them effectively under pressure. Also, be sure to keep a log of techniques and routines that help you on competition days.

1. Plan for the night before competition:

You may wish to use mental rehearsal techniques, but don't use them just before sleep this is an activation activity, not a relaxation for sleep.

2. Day of competition:

a. Know your competition schedule, and plan activities such as eating, reaching the competition site, and getting into the locker room so that there is no sense of rushing. Some athletes become more tense if they arrive too early find the balance that's right for you. List the time needed to reach the competition site and a schedule you plan to follow.

b. Every 45 minutes–1 hour check yourself for signs of stress from A, above and take a minute to do a body check and use stress management self-regulation techniques that work for you. List the signs of stress and the specific techniques you plan to use to reduce stress:

If tension is too great for self-control or self-regulation, who teammate or coach can help you? How?

Example: Help you check breathing; muscle check; quietly repeat relaxation phrases; place hands gently on your shoulders to help lower them to a more relaxed level; help move away from distracting noises or scenes to a quieter place, etc.

3. Psychological Strategies to Use Before Competition

Internal Muscle Check: Review each muscle group (standing, sitting, or lying down). Hands, arms and fists, forehead, eyes; cheeks and jaw; shoulders and upper back; stomach; hips and lower back, thighs; lower legs and feet.

Breathing Check: Inhale and feel slight tension; exhale and relax from top of head to knees and toes. Feel the relaxation roll down the body. Periodically inhale deeply, hold your breath and feel the tension throughout your body, then relax

Visual-Motor Behaviour Rehearsal: Relax as much as possible. Now, as clearly and vividly as possible, imagine yourself in an

ideal performance.If you see yourself "in the distance," add the *feeling of actually experiencing yourself doing the activity.* The difference is feeling alertly relaxed with a very slight sense of muscle activity tension vs. feeling heavily relaxed. This technique can be used to: (1) rehearse an entire performance; (2) review and correct a specific performance problem so that doing it correctly becomes second nature; (3) practice approaching the crowd or competition with confidence.

4. Four or five hours before the event:

a. List your objective, e.g. you want to emphasise a fast start, confidence, aggressiveness, a particular strategic approach to the other competitors;

b. Determine how to achieve the objective, e.g. plan to take a moment to visualise a fast start to the gun immediately before getting into the blocks.

5. Immediately prior to the event before stepping to the line, blocks, or into the ring:

a. For a second or so, visualise your complete event as you would actually perform; see it happen, make this vivid visualising include the way the body is to feel as it performs;

b. Use an inner frame of reference—you are doing it IN the scene, not watching yourself do it;

c. Clear your mind after you have programmed your body by visualisation.

2

The Social Psychology of the Creation of a Sports Fan Identity

A gap exists in the current literature on identity formation with regards to sports fans, as the current literature base does not adequately address the creation of fan identity. Instead, social scientific research focuses largely on the effects of fandom, for example, the violence and aggression associated with being a fan. A fan identity, as with any group identity, is beneficial to the individual in that it may provide a sense of community. Following the symbolic interactionism traditions, identity theory aims to understand why people do what they do, or why they make the choices that they do. Therefore, sports fandom is an appropriate venue for identity theory. Identity creation is discussed in terms of socialization and relational factors.

Introduction

A gap exists in the current literature on identity formation with regard to sports. The current sociology of sport literature does not adequately address the creation of fan identity. Social science research on sport fans focuses largely on the effects of fandom, for example, the violence and aggression, which may result from being a fan. Little is known, however, about the process of becoming a fan. This therefore raises a compelling question, how do individuals form sport fan identities? More

specifically, this review examines the issues and theoretical concepts surrounding the ways in which individuals develop and maintain fan identities. An examination of identity formation among sport fans is beneficial in that it unites two previously unrelated literature bases, namely identity formation and sport sociology. Furthermore, this application will stretch the bounds of identity theory by testing its limits, which should account for a more comprehensive theory.

A fan identity, as with any group identity, is beneficial to the individual in that it may provide a sense of community. Zillmann, Bryant and Sapolsky highlight other benefits of fandom, including the development of diverse interests, the minimal skill level necessary for participation, and the low cost. They also note that fandom brings activities, such as football, to more sectors of society, including the very young, the very old, the ill, and those who simply lack the necessary athletic ability required for participation. Fandom allows individuals to be a part of the game without requiring any special skills. In addition, fandom offers such social benefits as feelings of camaraderie, community and solidarity, as well as enhanced social prestige and self-esteem. Sports fandom further affects individual personal development by helping people learn to cope with emotions and feelings of disappointment. "It appears that sports fanship can unite and provide feelings of belongingness that are beneficial to individuals and to the social setting in which they live". However, sport fans have not generally been portrayed positively, especially in social science research. This is especially true of males, who are often stigmatized because of their fandom. Fans are criticized for their apparent lack of physical fitness as well as for being passive or lazy, to the high levels of violence among fans, including, but not limited to hooliganism and riotous victory celebrations. Debates on the benefits of fandom are ongoing, however research has failed to completely address the questions as to why and how someone initially becomes a fan.

Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory

Within social psychology, there are two dominant theory of

identity identity theory and social identity theory. Identity theory is a direct derivation of McCall and Simmons role-identity theory, which suggests that individuals will base their actions on how they like to see themselves and how they like to be seen by others. Therefore, the role-identity requires two components, specifically, the role itself and the identity to be associated with that role. With this in mind, identity theory is rooted in the concept of roles and role-identities. Social identity theory, however, is based on Festinger's social comparison theory, which suggests that individuals will strive to attach themselves to other individuals who are similar or slightly better. Social identity theory, therefore, focuses on the ways in which individuals perceive and categorize themselves, based on their social and personal identities. Rather than emphasizing role and role behaviors, social identity theory emphasizes group processes and inter-group relations. Both of these theories posit that, theoretically, the self is multifaceted, dynamic, and is generally responsible for mediating the relationship between social structures and individuals behavior. However, the social identity theory has come to dominate the study of intergroup relations, while identity theory focuses on the concept of role identities.

Generally, according to identity theorists, social identity "refers to the ways in which individuals and collectives are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals or collectives". Social identity is our understanding of "who we are". One of the first things we do when we meet someone is "locate them on our social map" or identify them. Social identities can also be considered social selves. These social selves are socially constructed and categorized in ways that are accepted by individuals as descriptive of themselves or their peer group. On the other hand, personal identities are "self descriptions referring to unique or highly specific details of [an individual's] biography". Identity theory is derived from the symbolic interactionist perspective of role choice behavior. This theory seeks to understand why people do what they do, or why they make the choices that they do. Therefore, the most appropriate applications of this theory are ones in which alternative actions are available

to the subject, however he she may only choose one of the alternatives. Identity theory recognizes that social structure and social interaction are both equally constant in limiting, rather than determining, human action.

Identity is defined as "a set of meanings applied to the self in a social role or situation defining what it means to be who one is". Choices in roles are seen as a consequence of identity salience, which is a specification of the general category of self. Furthermore, identity salience is a consequence of commitment. Therefore, commitment impacts the identity salience, which impacts role choice. Identity is based on the categorizations that others have for an individual as well as the individual's acceptance of this categorization. Furthermore, identities exist only insofar as individuals are participants in structured social interaction. It can be suggested that identities are tied to roles, or positions, in organized social relationships. As individual identities are hierarchically organized, these identities will vary in terms of which is the most salient. Consequently, the self is organized based on this salience hierarchy. Therefore, choices are based on the salience of an identity, which is then positioned in the identity hierarchy.

One of the main components of identity theory is the ability of the self to take itself as an object, thereby classifying or categorizing itself in relation to other classifications or categorizations. In identity theory, this is referred to as identification, and "the core of an identity is the categorization of the self as an occupant of a role". It is through the process of identification that an identity is formed. Identification of people and things in the social world, and subsequent definitions of their meanings, is a key component of symbolic interactionism, and for human interactions. Identification then incorporates the meanings and expectations associated with roles and performances, which ultimately forms a set of guidelines for behavior.

Identification encompasses two types of identity. Social identity is identification in terms of broader social categories,