

Sport Psychology an Analysis of Athlete Behavior

Third Edition



Edited by
KEITH P. HENSCHEN
WILLIAM F. STRAUB



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Mouvement Publications



MOUVEMENT PUBLICATIONS

109 Forest Glen
Longmeadow, MA 01106
Telephone 607-272-2157

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Production by: David H. Hamrick, Terri Taylor-Hamrick

Printed in the United States of America by Malloy Lithographing, Ann Arbor,
Michigan

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ISBN 0-932392-10-2

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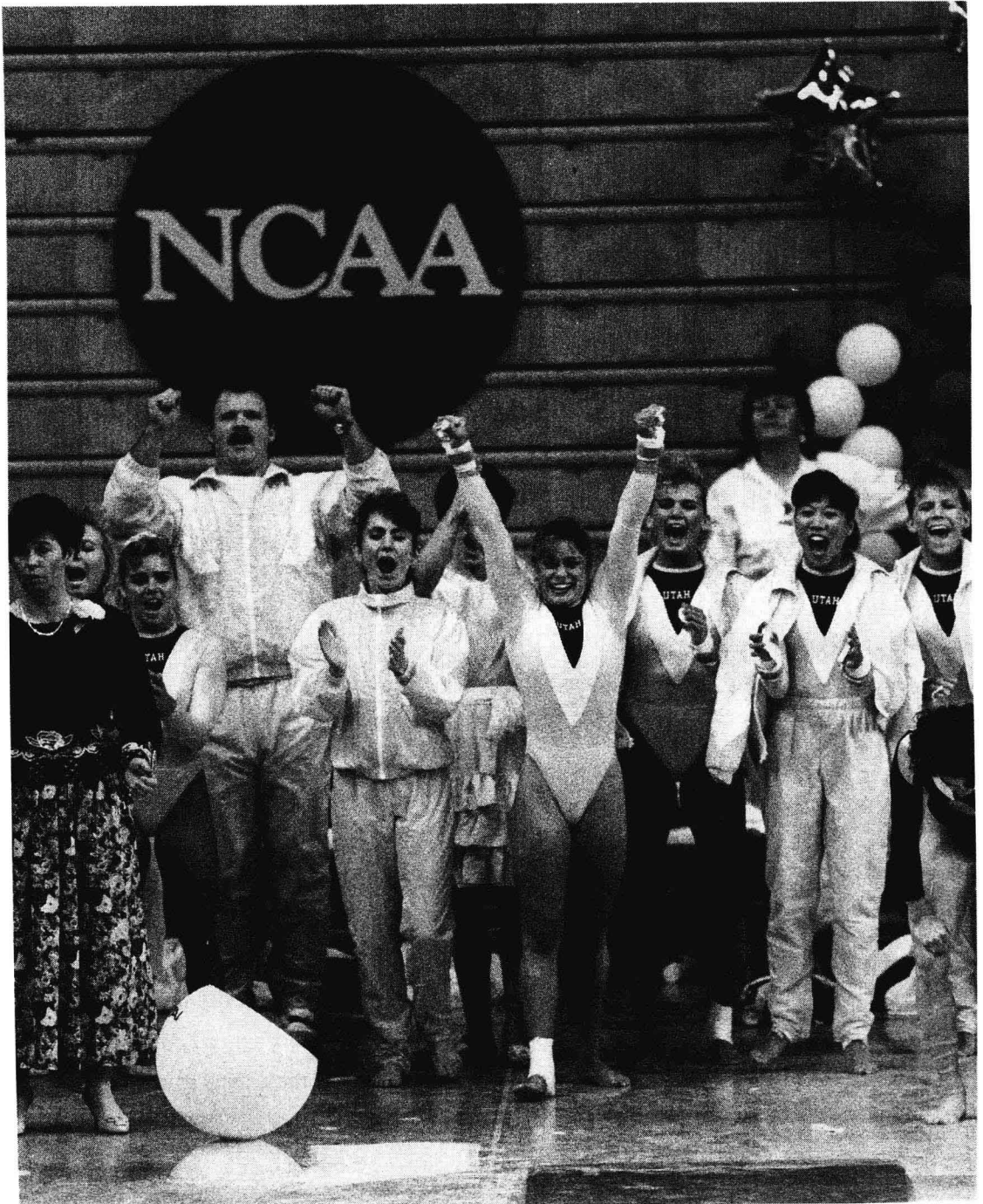
PART I

SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

QUOTES: Remember: you are the only person who thinks in your mind! You are the power and authority in your world.
Louise Hay

To the possession of the self the way is inward.
Plotinus



SPORT PSYCHOLOGY: AN OVERVIEW

Robert N. Singer

INTRODUCTION

Greg Louganis recording the perfect dive he had to have to win the gold medal in diving in the 1988 Olympics held in Korea may be one of the greatest athletic feats ever. It was a wonderful example of psychology applied to sport. You see, he had crashed on the diving board and fallen in the water on the previous dive. People wondered if he was so injured that he could not continue. Yet, he did. He needed the highest score, a 10, on his next chance, which was his last one.

Somehow, Greg returned to the board, and was able to block out thoughts about his terrible mishap, refocus, and put himself in the optimal zone to reach perfection. He showed incredible heart, poise, and what the mind can do in overcoming what would have been a tragedy for most competitors in any sport.

There are many examples of athletes who seem to be able to reach the heights of performance necessary to do what it takes to demonstrate excellence. Some, the best, do it more often. Sport psychologists are attempting to unravel the mysteries surrounding "peak performance," and ways in which personal resources can be trained so that more athletes can realize their potential. How athletes can be emotionally, maturationally, and mentally prepared for competitive events, and to have internal processes work positively during performance, are among the many challenges for athletes and sport psychologists.

Sport psychology is rapidly emerging as an exciting academic specialization of study and a challenging area in which to undertake research. Furthermore, it is becoming associated with and recognized for valuable support services provided to sport and exercise enthusiasts.

What is sport psychology? How did it develop? Who is a sport psychologist? What is the primary focus of professional services and research activities in contemporary times? What might we project for the future of sport psychology? These are the kinds of questions we will attempt to address in this chapter in order to provide an overview and introduction to the field.

What is Sport Psychology

Sport psychology encompasses:

- research,
- counseling,
- educational, and
- practical/programmatic activities associated with understanding,
- explaining,
- predicting, and
- influencing selected behaviors of individuals and groups involved in high-level sport, recreational sport, exercise, and other vigorous physical activities.

Obviously, this represents a very broad interpretation of the field. Dimensions of sport psychology are conveniently categorized in Figure 1 in order to appreciate many of the varied

directions. There is, of course, overlap among the themes identified. Also, a number of areas have not been indicated, as it would be extremely difficult to do justice to all of the possibilities. Nevertheless, they serve to illustrate and emphasize the diversity of focus and orientations. It might be mentioned that it is becoming more popular to describe the field as sport and exercise psychology, rather than only as sport psychology. The former Journal of Sport Psychology is now called the Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology. Division 47 of the American Psychological Association is titled Exercise and Sport Psychology.

Figure 1 provides a fairly broad overview of the ways in which sport psychology is currently branching out. They seem to indicate parallelisms with medicine. Whereas many years ago a physician was a general practitioner ready to provide treatment for a wide assortment of ailments, the incredible scientific refinement of emerging specializations has led to the creation of a vast array of precise roles of physicians. Expertise has become somewhat function-specific. The same trend is becoming a reality in sport psychology. It is virtually improbable for one person to possess all the knowledge in the different areas associated with sport psychology. However, it is possible to be competent in more than one area, as many sport psychologists have shown.

Sport psychologists concerned with Learning & Expertise focus on how learning processes work and how practice conditions might be most favorable for the beginner to the highly skilled. An interest in Youth Sport participants and programs encompasses understanding kids, capabilities, motives, and the types of support systems that promote beneficial psychological and performance outcomes. Performance Enhancement sport psychologists study and apply procedures that can best improve personal resources that contribute to excellence in performance.

Counseling typically applies to those who are trained in clinical or counseling psychology, or psychiatry, and are professionally prepared to help athletes with maladaptive behaviors and disorders that can undermine coping with the demands of athletic competition as well as life in general. Since athletes typically compete in some form of team structure, sport psychologists prepared in understanding Group Dynamics conduct research about organizational structures and provide guidelines as to how groups or teams can best function to attain ideal goals.

Those sport psychologists who develop sport-specific psychological tests for purposes of assessment, advisement, and perhaps talent detection represent the specialization termed Psychometrics. Finally, exercise/health sport psychologists are concerned with the Well-Being of everyone, and the antecedents and consequences of involvement in physical activity.

In many countries, the primary applications of sport psychology have been with top-level athletes; how to help make the best even better. This was the case in the former USSR and the former East Germany, and is the situation now in Cuba. However, it represents but one thrust in the U.S.A. In addition, sport psychologists deal with all age groups, varying in skill level and motives for engagement in all kinds of formal and informal movement activity programs. Also of interest are group (team) dynamics, leaders (coaches), and observers (spectators).

Sport psychologists in today's world are tending to focus more on particular themes. Among them are:

- °exercise contributions to personal well-being
- °counseling approaches to help athletes in overcoming personal problems
- °internal processing mechanisms and practice conditions leading to the acquisition and maintenance of skill
- °performance enhancement techniques contributing to achievement potential
- °group situations leading to productivity
- °psychometrics for developing psychological tests for sport settings
- °youth sport programs and enriching experiences