

Newsletter: January 2001

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1 Team Performance

I've often been asked to speak to sports teams and clubs on mental preparation, and I think it's useful to recognise that, in many ways, the performance of a team is the combined result of the performance of each individual member of that team - so my approach has always been directed at the individual : improve each individual's performance and you will improve the performance of the whole team.

In regards to mental preparation, the first thing to ask is : What mental skills and emotional qualities characterise top teams and champion individuals? Consider your answers to this question now

My suggested list is as follows :

Motivated & Enthusiastic : self starting, goal oriented, hungry to win.

Positive & Persistent : happy, looking for solutions, never give up attitude.

Confident & Focused : high self esteem, master of their own emotional state.

Organised & Adaptable : effective time manager, copes with challenges.

Coachable : love of learning, wanting to improve, open to new ideas.

If the members of your team have the above attributes, then success is a frequent outcome. The important key to understand is that all of the above are

learnable and teachable skills - you can teach people how to be more self motivated, positive and persistent. You can train them to be more confident, adaptable and organised.

The next question then is obviously how do you develop and maintain each of those skills of the sports mind in your players?

Where do any of us learn those skills? From role models - from parents, teachers, coaches, friends, and colleagues. So if you want to foster those skills in your team, ask yourself how much you have been role modelling those skills personally?

I invite you to take a couple of minutes to reflect and give yourself an objective rating on those skills of the sports mind.

How is your motivation level at present? Do you have a big dream, and know how to set and work with goals and action plans? Are you coachable - what education have you planned for yourself this year? Do you look for solutions when faced with obstacles? Are you organised? Do you come across with confidence and positivity?

If you as a coach or leader have difficulty in any of those areas, it's probably reflected in the people you coach.

Let's consider each of the sportsmind skills, and discuss how to develop them - both individually and as a team.

MOTIVATION & ENTHUSIASM

All motivation comes from either wanting a desired outcome or pleasure of some kind - positive motivation; or from avoiding an undesired outcome or pain of some kind - negative motivation

Positive motivation comes from having strongly desired dreams and setting goals; negative motivation results from imagining disasters or failures and how to avoid them.

In my work with elite athletes, I've found the most successful are motivated more by desire and goals than by fear and avoidance.

So goals and goal setting - individually and collectively as a team is absolutely essential. Too many people simply avoid the effort and this neglect leads to under performance.

Use it, or lose it. Maintain your direction by making the efforts to set goals, and review them every month. Of course, you want to know how to do this properly -

too many people simply daydream great things, believing this is goal setting. Learn how to do it properly, and make it a regular part of your routine. [Motivation, goal setting and action plans are covered in detail in the Sportsmind High Achievement workshop]

POSITIVE & PERSISTENT

Being positive is a mental process - it's a way of thinking that can be learned. Your performance is profoundly influenced by your thoughts - by the things you imagine and say to yourself. Everyone knows they're supposed to 'be positive' - to think positively, and to discourage negativity. Yet for so many people thoughts just seem to 'happen' before they know about it! People tell me all the time, "I can't help it. I just automatically do it!"

At which point I tell them that's a cop out, and a load of rubbish. Thoughts don't 'just happen' to you - you think them! There can be no escaping the fact that you choose your thoughts - how else do they get there?

Part of the problem is, of course, that negative thinking has become a habit - not only for individuals, but for the society in general. Like any habit, it takes effort and willingness to change. So the issue for many people is to be personally convinced of the detriment of negative thinking on their performance and in their lives, and of the enormous advantages of being positive.

Consider the example set by Karrie Webb when she won the 1998 Australian Ladies Masters tournament :

She began the final round with a lead of five shots, but sports commentators were at pains to point out that in the same event just the year before, she 'squandered' an identical lead and lost by a stroke. All through the morning, the question was: would she falter again? It certainly looked ominous when her nearest rival cut her lead down to three, and then to only two shots.

Then a wonderful second shot and a superb 18 meter putt saw her capture an eagle on the 15th hole, reclaiming a four shot lead, and eventual victory by five shots.

In her interview after the match, in response to questions about whether she was worried about repeating last year's stumble, she said: "I didn't think about being only one shot or two shots ahead, I thought about wanting to score 2 under or 3 under par. I kept focusing on my game". In contrast to the previous year, (where she had focused on her lead), when she focused on her desired performance, the results were achieved.

Every performance starts in your mind. The best performances occur when you take control of your performance by taking control of your thinking. All control

begins by taking control of the thoughts you think. However, holding a positive mental attitude is more than just being optimistic - it's about looking for solutions and using visualisation

The best example I've seen of this was demonstrated by a basketball coach helping a young girl who was having difficulty with free throws. He asked her what was the problem, and she explained how she had her elbow out, and didn't follow through, etc. etc. He then said "What would it be like if you didn't have the problem?"

She explained how she would have her hands in the right position, follow through, etc, etc. He then had her close her eyes and simply imagine doing it correctly for a few minutes. She then scored 80% on attempted free throws, where previously she was scoring less than 50%.

Anyone can be successful, provided they're willing to pay the price - it's just that most people don't recognise that this 'price' to be paid is not just financial, or in terms of physical effort, but rather it's a price that you pay in the currency of thoughts.

You have three options: negative thinking, neutral thinking, or positive thinking. The outcome of negative thinking is depression, pessimism, unhappiness, and failure. The outcome of neutral thinking is apathy, inaction, boredom, and under-achievement. The outcome of positive thinking is enthusiasm, happiness, self directed achievement, and success. [Positive attitude and Visualisation are covered in detail in the Sportsmind Peak Performance workshop]

CONFIDENT & FOCUSED

How you feel affects how well you perform.

But feelings don't 'just happen' to you - feelings are choices. Champions recognise this and choose their feelings. Feelings that empower them, and allow them to fully utilise their physical prowess and skills.

There's a lot of garbage spouted by the psychological fraternity that encourages the 'expression' of negative emotions in order to 'release' them. However the expression of a negative emotion, actually reinforces it, rather than 'releases' it. The more you feel a feeling, the easier it is to do it again - you actually 'groove in' the emotion, neurologically; it becomes a habit.

There is also a body of opinion which suggests that one has to know the negative in order to fully appreciate and experience the positive. That one has to 'accept' negative emotions as part of being human. What a load of rubbish! Of course we all experience negative emotions and feelings from time to time, but our challenge is to learn to reframe them, and transform them - not 'accept' them. We

want to learn to respond differently to whatever it was that triggered the negative response in future - not reinforce the negative states by 'accepting them', or justifying them.

I think the confusion for psychologists and others has grown out of not distinguishing one's feelings from one's self. Because of the importance of encouraging self acceptance, (a worthwhile and desirable goal), there has been a tendency for this self acceptance to spill over into accepting behaviours, attitudes, thoughts and feelings far below our potential - negative thoughts, mediocre behaviours, destructive attitudes, and disempowering feelings and emotions.

Accepting such mediocrity has no place in someone aiming for excellence and champion status in their life. Certainly accept and like yourself, this is in fact essential, but reject mediocrity. Reject negative, disempowering or destructive feelings in yourself!

WE WOULDN'T WORRY SO
MUCH ABOUT WHAT
PEOPLE SAY IF WE KNEW
HOW LITTLE THEY DID IT

Probably the most important key in developing confidence and other positive emotions in yourself and others, is how you deal with the setbacks, poor performances, and rejections in your life. You're not going to win every match; there will be times when you just mess up; sometimes the umpire's calls will go against you; not everyone is going to like you; and so on.

So the strategies you have for dealing with these negatives that happen to us all from time to time make the difference between feeling confident and capable, or unconfident and clumsy.

The way to take charge of your emotional responses is to understand the building blocks that generate emotions within us, and to train positive responses using rehearsal and triggers. I'll talk more on this in the next issue, and full details on emotional management are covered in the Sportsmind Peak Performance workshop.

ORGANISED & ADAPTABLE

It's been said that the most valuable commodity we have is time. You can always earn more money, or get a new job, or a new partner, or replace a smashed car, or a lost wallet - but you can never get one more second of time. We all have all the time there is - 24 hours every day - and knowing how to manage time is essential to elite sports performance.

One of the most empowering ideas I've ever come across, (borrowed from the books of Carlos Castaneda), is to continually hold an awareness of your impending death, as a mechanism for bringing power and focus into what you do in your life. Nothing motivates you, I believe, more than the recognition of your own mortality, and the uncertainty of when Death will take you!

Unfortunately, in our society death is something that is rarely seen; there is little opportunity to establish an understanding of and a 'relationship' with the idea of your own death. Such a relationship lends you and your actions a sense of immediacy, clarity, and power than cannot be attained in any other way.

Someone acting in their life with a full awareness of their imminent demise can act without fear or favour - for what do they have to lose? Far from being morbid, as some people have suggested, I find this practice enlightening and empowering, and provides a means for cutting through all the unimportant 'dross' of merely existing, to design a life of worth.

If you find yourself hesitating, or doubting yourself, or feeling stuck or bored : take a moment to stop, glance over your left shoulder, and catch a fleeting glimpse of the dark shadow that will one day claim you. Use this glimpse to empower you and spur you to live and do what is in your heart.

Time management also means organising yourself, so you have not only the passion and desire to succeed, but also the wherewithal. What this means in practice is simply two things: condensing your life to three or four key areas; and the ability to keep your 'attention' clear.

Many people fail to succeed simply because they attempt too many things. If you want to succeed at a high level in anything, it requires a significant commitment of time and effort - but if you're spread too thin, you'll be unable to achieve this. So I suggest that you 'condense' your life to three or four key areas, and let the rest go. So what are the key areas in your life? Take ten minutes now to identify these, and condense your life to those most important.

Keeping your attention clear means simply doing the jobs - not leaving 'unfinished business' around. It could be said that you have only a given number of 'units of attention' before you get overwhelmed.

Every bit of unfinished business takes up your attention and mental energy, and prevents you from doing something else. In order to fully focus your energies, it's important to have all your circuits clear.

This is vital, particularly to elite sportspeople. I heard Tom Lehman interviewed about his preparation for a golf tournament, and his need to have everything organised to allow him to feel prepared. Likewise, I've found the same need with

a lot of the elite athletes I've worked with - once you're organised, you can relax and focus on the task of putting in your best performance.

A good example of what can happen if you don't get organised was given by a small bore rifle shooter, who told me the story of being in the middle of a competition when she suddenly wondered, "Did I leave the iron on?" Needless to say, her concentration was completely 'shot' from then on!

The unfinished business I'm speaking of here is not just unanswered correspondence or outstanding work you've been putting off, but can take many forms. For example, it can be something broken that you've been 'meaning to get fixed'; old clothes or junk in the garage you've yet to throw away; a book or something else borrowed from a friend you've failed to return; or even an agreement with someone to do something that you haven't yet lived up to.

An excellent way to clear your attention so that you can fully focus on what's really important, is to have a thorough cleanup, at home and at your work, and to deal with these 'incompletes' in your life.

Think of it this way: if you have a glass, and it's currently full of water, you can't put any new water in - until you tip out the old water. While your attention is 'full' of unfinished business, you won't be able to 'fill up' with any more success, until you complete those tasks.

[Organisational and time management skills are covered in detail in the Sportsmind Coaching Excellence course]

COACHABLE

In order to become more successful, in any area, requires some kind of behavioural change. If you keep doing what you've always done, you'll continue to get what you've always got.

Being coachable means encouraging a learning culture in yourself, and in your team. Continued education is the key to success. In order to keep improving, you want to keep learning.

One of the most practical and useful areas of education for coaches and teachers is in the area of sports applications of Neuro-Linguistic Programming, or NLP. NLP provides specific skills and training in communication, rapport building, learning and skills transfer, motivation, emotion management, decision making, visualisation and behavioural change techniques. All of which are essential to modern coaching.

The Sportsmind Level 2 NLP Practitioner course provides internationally recognised training in all the NLP techniques and skills to certified practitioner standard.

MENTAL TRAINING PLAN

Do recognise that proper mental training and preparation is a result of a planned approach. You don't build physical fitness with a couple of gym workouts, nor can you build the skills of the sports mind with an ad hoc approach.

You can't 'swat up' the night before to catch up on mental work not done during the season - make it an integral part of your weekly training regimen.

Following is a summary of the kinds of activities you might consider:

1. Pre-season

Team and individual goal setting, focusing on both outcome and process goals.

2. Weekly Training

After the physical warmup, do a mental warmup by explaining the objective of today's training, giving precise, positive descriptions of your desired outcomes and having each person imagine themselves successfully achieving their tasks. Team synergy can be enhanced by having players mentally imagine a link to each other.

At the end of training, a short relaxation, including a review of the training (focusing on what went well), preview of playing well in the upcoming match, and positive self image or muscle cleansing visualisation.

3. Pre-Match

Remind the players of times they've performed well. Provide positive process descriptions for how they are going to play today and achieve the game plan.

4. During Match

Use routines and sensory triggers to get into a peak performance zone. Encourage unconscious play. Control over arousal or anxiety with controlled breathing methods. Use ARIA and ALIA techniques to release errors and reinforce good play.

5. Post Match Relaxation reviewing positive highlights and re-playing positively any errors. The focus wants to be primarily on what was done well, rather than identifying errors. More details on team and individual mental preparation techniques are covered in the Sportsmind Coaching Excellence course.

2 Sportsmind News

PGA TOUR

Following the very positive responses to my series of workshops for the PGA last year, I've again been invited to give workshops.

Dates are as follows : June 13 : Hobart July 24 : Adelaide July 25 : Perth August 2 : Melbourne August 3 : Sydney September 19 : Brisbane For more details and bookings, contact the PGA on 02 9439 8111

3 Sportsmind Scholarships

if you're serious about improving your sporting or coaching abilities, consider the Sportsmind Mental Mastery and Coaching Excellence courses. Courses are scheduled for July and December at the Sports Super Centre on the Gold Coast - providing an unequalled opportunity to learn and train at Australia's newest and best sports facility.

Scholarship places are also offered for Mental Mastery workshops. Applications are open to Australian citizens 15 years and over as at 1st July. Five full-tuition and ten half-tuition scholarships will be awarded to workshops in 2001. Scholarships are for tuition only - not travel or accommodation. Written applications are to be received no later than 30th April. Full details and an application form are available by calling the Sportsmind Institute on 07 5445 7994.

4 Sportsmind Network News

[A list of Level 2 licencees is available online.](#) These Sportsmind graduates are licensed to provide sports NLP performance consulting. If you have any queries about Sportsmind programs, or want a Sports-NLP coaching session, please contact them

Future Direction

Over the next ten years our goal is to make Sportsmind the leading performance coaching and personal development provider for athletes in the world - and to establish a network of 1,000 Sportsmind accredited performance consultants who can provide assistance for top athletes, sports clubs and corporations - worldwide. The people involved will have a practicing sports background, have an interest in coaching, and be superb facilitators able to create learning

environments which are challenging, enjoyable and directed at personal development.

How to Become Part of the Vision

To be part of this vision, you will complete a Sportsmind Coaching Excellence or NLP Practitioner course to attain Level 1 or 2 Sportsmind accreditation. You will then be granted a licence to practice in your area. If you're interested in establishing a career in sports performance coaching, please consider the opportunity involvement with Sportsmind provides.

THE SPORTSMIND MISSION STATEMENT

- To further the development of the Sportsmind Institute for Human Performance Research which will :
 - produce high quality Sports- NLP books and tapes;
 - promote Sportsmind training and Sports-NLP;
 - train and support Sports-NLP trainers;
 - research and disseminate new ideas and techniques;
 - maintain standards of a professional association.

- Sportsmind products and training courses will be widely sought after, acclaimed internationally, and have a positive effect on the lives of those they touch for their highest good. The Sportsmind training courses will generate an empowering atmosphere of learning, challenge and personal growth.
- The trainers involved with Sportsmind will have the utmost integrity and professionalism in their facilitation, and will continuously improve their own skills and knowledge through regular training, positive feedback and inspiration.
- Sportsmind will attract all the human and financial resources for manifesting the vision, and will be prosperous - providing financial and inspirational support for those involved, and for other healing projects of worth in the wider community. Sportsmind will continue to evolve and grow.

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