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Is the key to happy and confident athletes already within them? How positive psychology can be a game-changer

Jack Blake

Mind.Set.Action Sport Psychology, UK

The dream of becoming a professional is a goal many athletes will have but with the media spotlight and pressure to succeed intensifying the psychological aspect of being a sports person is becoming more prominent. Over half of collegiate athletes have reported that factors such as the pressure to win, anxiety and fear have significantly affected their emotional health and sporting performances. This pattern is mirrored in the professional leagues where studies have shown that 25% of professional soccer players suffer from depression or anxiety during their careers, compared to an 18% rate found in the US army. Organisations understand that an athlete's physical health is important as they hire the best medics and physiotherapists, but often neglect the psychological well-being of athletes. To an athlete it can seem as if there is no way to escape the stress. But what if the solution to their problems is already within them? Positive-psychology is a new approach that helps individuals identify their personality strengths and uses these to boost well-being and confidence. Research shows positive-psychology interventions are effective at significantly improving happiness levels and decreasing depression, leading psychologists to begin implementing these ideas into the sporting world. Studies have also suggested that positive-psychology can help athletes to reduce the effects of anxiety arising from training and competitions, allowing athletes to perform to their full potential. These techniques are particularly important because they have the potential to boost mood and overall well-being at the individual athlete, team and organisational level.

jack.blake1@googlemail.com

Psychological challenges of sports injury

Jim Taylor

University of San Francisco, USA

This workshop, based on the author two books on sports injury, offers sports medicine professionals, including orthopedists, physical therapists, and athletic trainers, useful information and practical techniques to help their patients overcome the psychological obstacles of sports injuries. He has found in his work with injured athletes that surgical procedures and rehabilitative protocols have become so sophisticated and effective that full physical recovery can be expected for injuries that would have been career ending a few decades ago. Yet, athletic performance doesn't always return to its pre-injury level. The author believes that the mind becomes "injured" when a physical injury occurs and that, without proper "rehabilitation," those mental injuries may not heal fully. As a result, despite all positive indicators of full physical recovery, pre-injury sports performance never returns. The author describes some of the most relevant issues related to the psychology of sports injury including motivation, confidence, anxiety, concentration, and emotions. He then explores essential strategies that injured and recovering athletes can use, including goal setting, mental imagery, relaxation, and focusing, to help them rehabilitate their mind as fully as they do their body.

jim@drjimtaylor.com

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