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RESEARCH ARTICLE

MIND TRAINING TECHNIQUES AND SPORTS PSYCHOLOGY: AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO MENTAL SKILLS FOR ACHIEVING OPTIMUM PERFORMANCE.

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SITA KUMARI.**Abstract**

"I always felt that my greatest asset was not my physical ability, it was my mental ability."

- Bruce Jenner (Track and Field Athlete, Motivational Speaker)

Mind Training Technique is the segment of sports psychology that concentrates specifically on helping athletes break through the mental barriers that are keeping them from performing up to their peak potential. By focusing on the mental skills needed to be successful in any sporting competition, mind training technique seeks to achieve the overall goal of performance improvement.

Some athletes find themselves fully prepared physically to get back into competition and practice, but mentally some scars remain. Injury can hurt confidence, generate doubt during competition, and cause a lack of focus. Mind Training Technique is to identify and enter the "mental zone" of a sportsperson. The overall aim of these techniques is to help athletes by developing foundational mental skills that can help to achieve optimum sport performance.

All great coaches employ game plans, race strategies, and course management skills to help athletes mentally prepare for individual and team sports competition. This is an area beyond developing basic mental skills in which a mental coach helps athletes and teams.

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Sports psychology:-

"So little is required to be successful in sport. It's certainly mostly a matter of psychology and in the end it's that psychological difference that decides whether you win or lose."

-Sven Goran-Eriksson, England Football Manager

Sports psychology is essentially the study of how the mind affects physical activity and athletic performance. According to the American Psychological Association, "sports psychology addresses the interactions between psychology and sport performance, including the psychological aspects of optimal athletic performance, the

psychological care and well-being of athletes, coaches, and sport organizations, and the connection between physical and psychological functioning.”

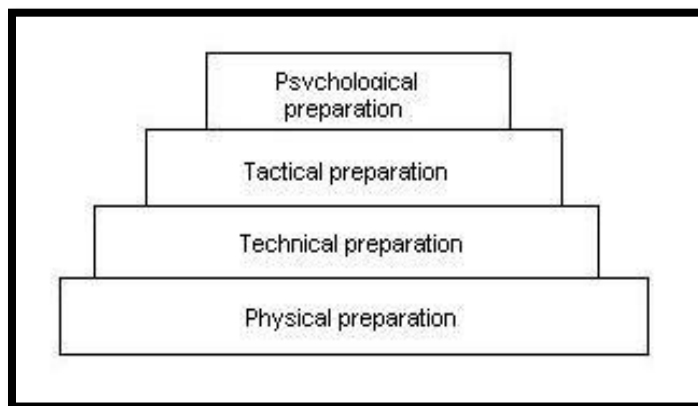


Fig.1- SPORTS PSYCHOLOGY PYRAMID

Sports psychology is the sport science that seeks to understand psychological and mental factors that affect performance in sports, physical activity and exercise, and apply these to enhance individual and team performance. Sports psychology is now so important to performance at the top level of sport that most elite sporting clubs and individuals employ sports Psychologists to work with them.

There are four major performance skills for all elite sportsmen and women, these being technical, physical, tactical and mental. The latter skill is one that can make the crucial difference for athletes performing consistently to their abilities. Sport psychology has played a significant role in the understanding, training and ultimately the use of mental skills for peak performance.

- *John Buchanan, former coach of the Australian cricket team*

Sport psychology gives me an advantage over myself that no physical training can ever provide. Sport psychology allows the athlete to use all of their mental strengths. This gives them a huge advantage over their opponents, as usually their biggest opponent is themselves.

- *Ian Thorpe, former world and Olympic swimming champion*

The IAAF (International Association of Athletics Federations) states:

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.

Sports psychology and mental toughness:-

The increased stress of competitions can cause athletes to react both physically and mentally in a manner that can negatively affect their performance abilities. They may become tense, their heart rates race, they break into a cold sweat, they worry about the outcome of the competition, they find it hard to concentrate on the task in hand.

This has led coaches to take an increasing interest in the field of sport psychology and in particular in the area of competitive anxiety. That interest has focused on techniques that athletes can use in the competitive situation to maintain control and optimise their performance. Once learned, these techniques allow the athlete to relax and to focus his/her attention in a positive manner on the task of preparing for and participating in competition. Psychology is another weapon in the athlete's armoury in gaining the winning edge.

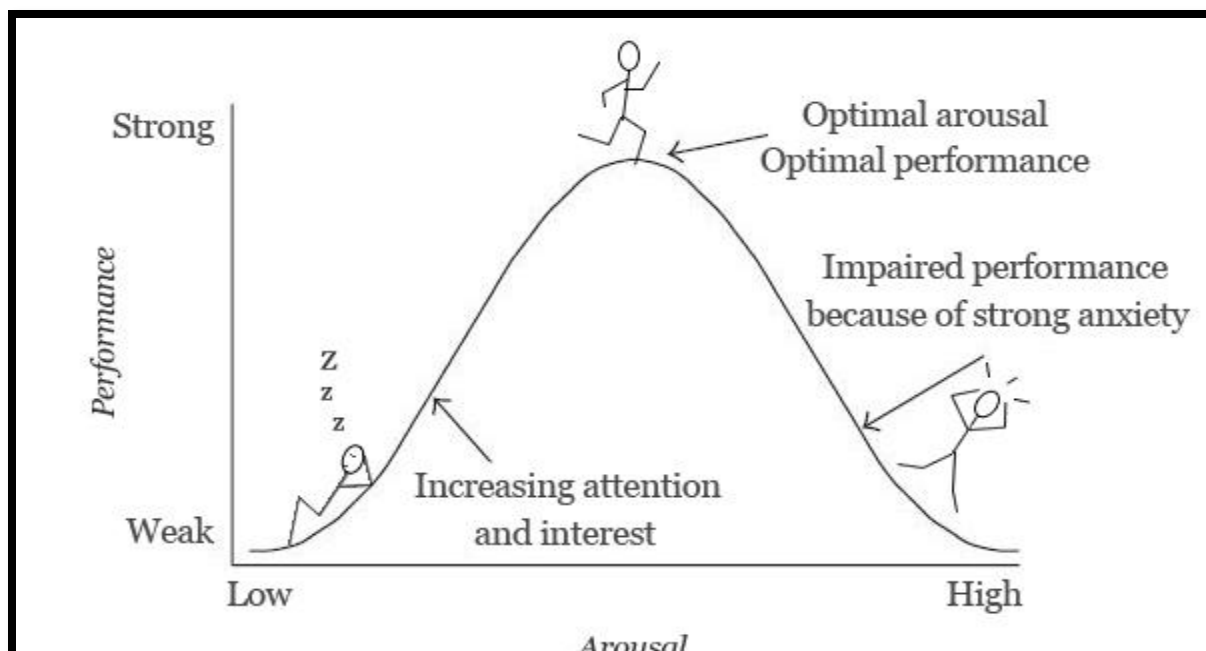


Fig.2-MENTAL TOUGHNESS AND SPORT PERFORMANCE

Most top athletes and coaches believe that psychological factors play as crucial a role as physical attributes and learned skills in the make-up of champions. When physical skills are evenly matched – as they tend to be in competitive sport – the competitor with greater *control* over his or her mind will usually emerge as the victor. Mental strength is not going to compensate for lack of skill, but in close contests it can make the difference between winning and losing.

A key question for sport and exercise psychologists is whether champions have simply inherited the dominant psychological traits necessary for success or whether mental toughness can be acquired through training and experience. Recent research has attempted to explore the concept of mental toughness in sport more thoroughly, and it appears that, while some people are naturally more tough-minded than others, people can be ‘toughened-up’ with the correct approach to training.

In the scientific and sport community, mental toughness is viewed as one of the most important attributes that will lead to a successful athletic performance. At the highest level it is often the mental game which separates the elite performers from the good performers. In sport there has been very little scientific attention focusing around mental toughness and this is seen as very surprising considering that the term has been widely used over the last twenty years.

Mental toughness is having the natural or developed psychological edge that enables you to:

- Generally, cope better than your opponents with the many demands (competition, training, lifestyle) that sport places on the performer.
- Specifically, be more consistent and better than your opponents in remaining determined, focused, confident, and in control under pressure”

Mentally tough athlete is likely to:

- Achieve relatively consistent performances regardless of situational factors;
- Retain a confident, positive, optimistic outlook, even when things are not going well, and not ‘choke’ under pressure;
- Deal with distractions without letting them interfere with optimal focus;

- Tolerate pain and discomfort;
- Remain persistent when the 'going gets tough';
- Have the resilience to bounce back from disappointments.

THE '4cs' Model of Mental Toughness:-

Hull team (a team of researchers at Hull University) proposed that confidence (as well as control, commitment and challenge) was a key element of mental toughness. This has given rise to the '4Cs' model of mental toughness.

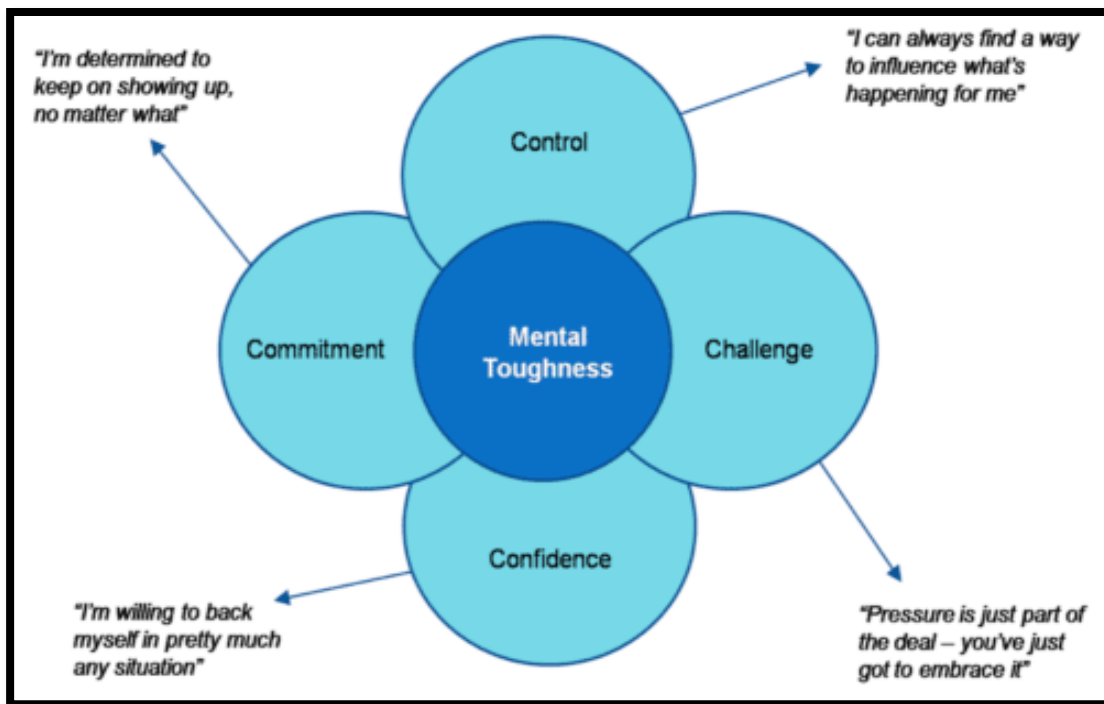


Fig.3- '4Cs' MODEL OF MENTAL TOUGHNESS

Concentration, confidence, control and commitment (the 4C's) are generally considered the main mental qualities that are important for successful performance in most sports.

- Concentration - ability to maintain focus
- Confidence - believe in one's abilities
- Control - ability to maintain emotional control regardless of distraction
- Commitment - ability to continue working to agreed goals

The techniques of relaxation, centering and mental imagery can assist an athlete to achieve the 4C's.

Concentration:-

This is the mental quality to focus on the task in hand. If the athlete lacks concentration then their athletic abilities will not be effectively or efficiently applied to the task. Research has identified the following types of attention focus:

- Broad Narrow continuum - the athlete focuses on a large or small number of stimuli
- Internal External continuum - the athlete focuses on internal stimuli (feelings) or external stimuli (ball)

The demand for concentration varies with the sport:

- Sustained concentration - distance running, cycling, tennis, squash
- Short bursts of concentration - cricket, golf, shooting, athletic field events
- Intense concentration - sprinting events, bobsleigh, skiing

Common distractions are: anxiety, mistakes, fatigue, weather, public announcements, coach, manager, opponent, negative thoughts etc.

Strategies to improve concentration are very personal. One way to maintain focus is to set process goals for each session or competition. The athlete will have an overall goal for which the athlete will identify a number of process goals that help focus on specific aspects of the task. For each of these goals the athlete can use a trigger word (a word which instantly refocuses the athlete's concentration to the goal) e.g. sprinting technique requires the athlete to focus on being tall, relaxed, smooth and to drive with the elbows - trigger word could be "technique"

Athletes will develop a routine for competition that may include the night before, the morning, pre competition, competition and post competition routines. If these routines are appropriately structured then they can prove a useful aid to concentration.

Confidence:-

Confidence results from the comparison an athlete makes between the goal and their ability. The athlete will have self-confidence if they believe they can achieve their goal.

When an athlete has self confidence they will tend to: persevere even when things are not going to plan, show enthusiasm, be positive in their approach and take their share of the responsibility in success and fail.

To improve their self confidence, an athlete can use mental imagery to:

- Visualize previous good performance to remind them of the look and feel
- Imagine various scenarios and how they will cope with them

Good goal setting (challenging yet realistic) can bring feelings of success. If athletes can see that they are achieving their short term goals and moving towards their long term goals then confidence grows.

Confidence is a positive state of mind and a belief that you can meet the challenge ahead - a feeling of being in control. It is not the situation that directly affects confidence; thoughts, assumptions and expectations can build or destroy confidence.

High self confidence

- Thoughts - positive thoughts of success
- Feelings - excited, anticipation, calm, elation, prepared
- Focus - on self, on the task
- Behaviour - give maximum effort and commitment, willing to take chances, positive reaction to set backs, open to learning, take responsibility for outcomes

Low self confidence

- Thoughts - negative, defeat or failure, doubt
- Feelings - tense, dread, fear, not wanting to take part
- Focus - on others, on less relevant factors (coach, umpire, conditions)
- Behaviour - lack of effort, likely to give up, unwilling to take risks (rather play safe), blame others or conditions for outcome

Control:-

Identifying when an athlete feels a particular emotion and understanding the reason for the feelings is an important stage of helping an athlete gain emotional control. An athlete's ability to maintain control of their emotions in the face of adversity and remain positive is essential to successful performance. Two emotions that are often associated with poor performance are anxiety and anger.

Anxiety comes in two forms - Physical (butterflies, sweating, nausea, needing the toilet) and Mental (worry, negative thoughts, confusion, lack of concentration). Relaxation is a technique that can be used to reduce anxiety.

When an athlete becomes angry, the cause of the anger often becomes the focus of attention. This then leads to a lack of concentration on the task, performance deteriorates and confidence in ability is lost which fuels the anger - a slippery slope to failure.

Commitment:-

Sports performance depends on the athlete being fully committed to numerous goals over many years. In competition with these goals the athlete will have many aspects of daily life to manage. The many competing interests and commitments include work, studies, family/partner, friends, social life and other hobbies/sports

Within the athlete's sport, commitment can be undermined by:

- A perceived lack of progress or improvement
- Not being sufficiently involved in developing the training program
- Not understanding the objectives of the training program
- Injury
- Lack of enjoyment
- Anxiety about performance - competition
- Becoming bored
- Coach athlete not working as a team
- Lack of commitment by other athletes

Setting goals with the athlete will raise their feelings of value, give them joint ownership of the goals and therefore become more committed to achieving them. All goals should be SMARTER.

Many people (coach, medical support team, manager, friends, etc) can contribute to an athlete's levels of commitment with appropriate levels of support and positive feedback, especially during times of injury, illness and poor performance.

Overall mental toughness is an extremely important topic within sport; however much of the research which has been conducted is based on personal opinion rather than sound empirical research. Future researchers face the challenges of exploring mental toughness in a broader context and more attention is needed to look at how mentally tough individuals perform in all areas of their life.

Mind training techniques/skills:-

"When I step onto the court, I don't have to think about anything. If I have a problem off the court, I find that after I play, my mind is clearer and I can come up with a better solution. It's like therapy. It relaxes me and allows me to solve problems."

-Michael Jordan (Basketball Legend)

The field of sports psychology has contributed to the improvement of coaching and playing at all levels of the game. At higher levels of competition, when physical skills and tactics of players are more comparable, psychological skills take on even greater importance. However, despite widespread agreement regarding the importance of psychological factors such as intensity, confidence, and concentration to successful play, coaches often fail to make mental skills training part of the daily practice schedule. There are many reasons for this, including lack of sports psychology knowledge, misconceptions about mental skills, perceived lack of time, and personal coaching habits. However, mental skills should not be treated casually. Rather, just as technique, tactics, and physical skills are addressed on a daily basis, mental skills training needs to be integrated into the training schedule and practiced on a regular basis.

What are mental skills?

Mental skills are internal capabilities that help athletes control their minds efficiently and consistently as they execute sport-related goals. Mental skills training provides the methods and techniques to not only develop skills such as concentration and positive body language, but also to foster personal characteristics such as self-esteem and positive competitive skills and behaviors.

Mental skills are procedures that help athletes control their minds efficiently and consistently as they execute sport-related goals. This not only involves developing skills such as concentration and stress control, but it also includes efforts to influence personal characteristics such as self-esteem and sportsmanship.

Mental skills: demand of sports psychology:-

One way to identify times when mental skills are especially important is to examine the nature of the sport in question. Clearly there will be different demands for sports depending on whether sports are individual in nature, or team sports. One commonality among sports will be those times when there are breaks in having to perform. These could be due to injury or, breaks that are part of the nature of the game (time between playing periods such as half time), judicial breaks (umpires/referees consulting), or breaks between execution of skills (e.g., in golf, trap shooting etc.).

Sports that involve teams of individuals will require different mental skills for each individual due to the different demands of their specific roles within the team. For example, goalie needs will differ from those who take penalty corners, and roles that are responsible for re-starting a particular phase (e.g., hooker in rugby) will have separate needs. A coach should be able to identify these needs through observation and assessment. The assessment will usually take the form of some form of mental skills profiling. There are many ways this can be achieved, but a coach is usually required to help the individual become self aware of their perceptions of the mental demands placed upon him or her. Once these have been identified, the athlete should be encouraged to examine where he or she is in terms of his or her mental strengths and weaknesses and processes should be put in place to improve those areas that have been identified as needing improvement.

The performance pyramid:-

Although each of the skills is important, its primary importance will occur during one of three phases: long-term development, immediate preparation for performance, and during performance itself.

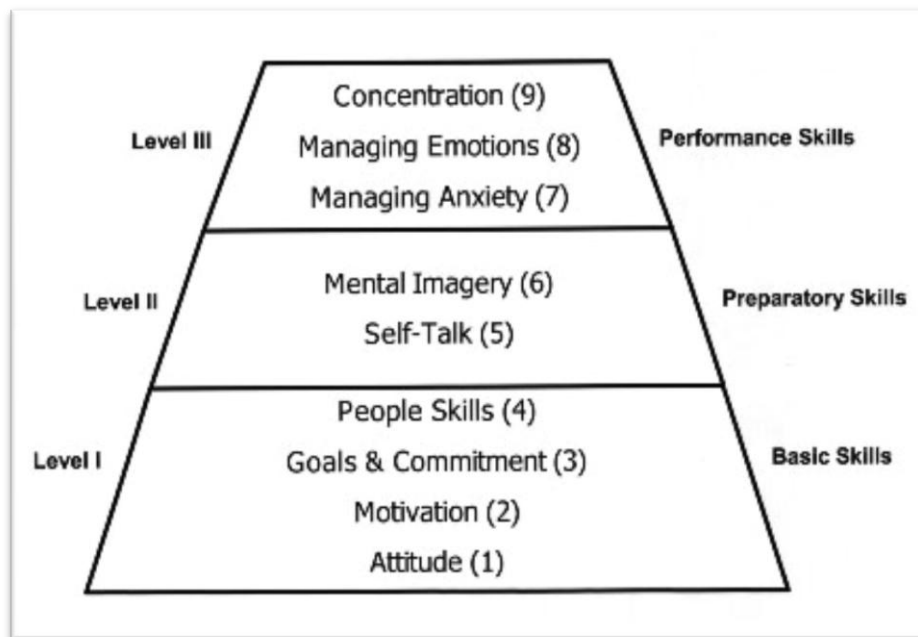


Fig. 4- THE PERFORMANCE PYRAMID

The pyramid represents the relationship of the nine skills to one another. Each of the higher levels incorporates and is based upon the skills of the preceding levels.

Level I –

These mental skills constitute a broad base for attaining long-term goals, learning, and sustaining daily practice. They are needed on a day-by-day basis for long periods of time, often months and years.

Level II –

These skills are used immediately before performance to prepare for performance. They maybe used just before competition begins, or immediately before a specific performance action, such as golf shot or a free throws in basketball.

Level III –

These skills are used during actual performance behavior.

Mind training techniques/skills:-**Goal setting**

The best way to go about improving a skill is to set goals and monitor these goals. Goals provide you with a ‘map’ to reach your final destination (long term goal) with pit stops (short term goals) along the way. That is, you have your ultimate (or dream) goal but to reach it you must break it down into smaller steps. This serves several purposes. Firstly, it allows you to monitor your progress and thus tell you whether you need to increase your effort or training. Secondly, achieving these short term goals provides you with a reward for your effort and hard work, which in turn increases your confidence that you, can achieve the next short term goal and retain your motivation.

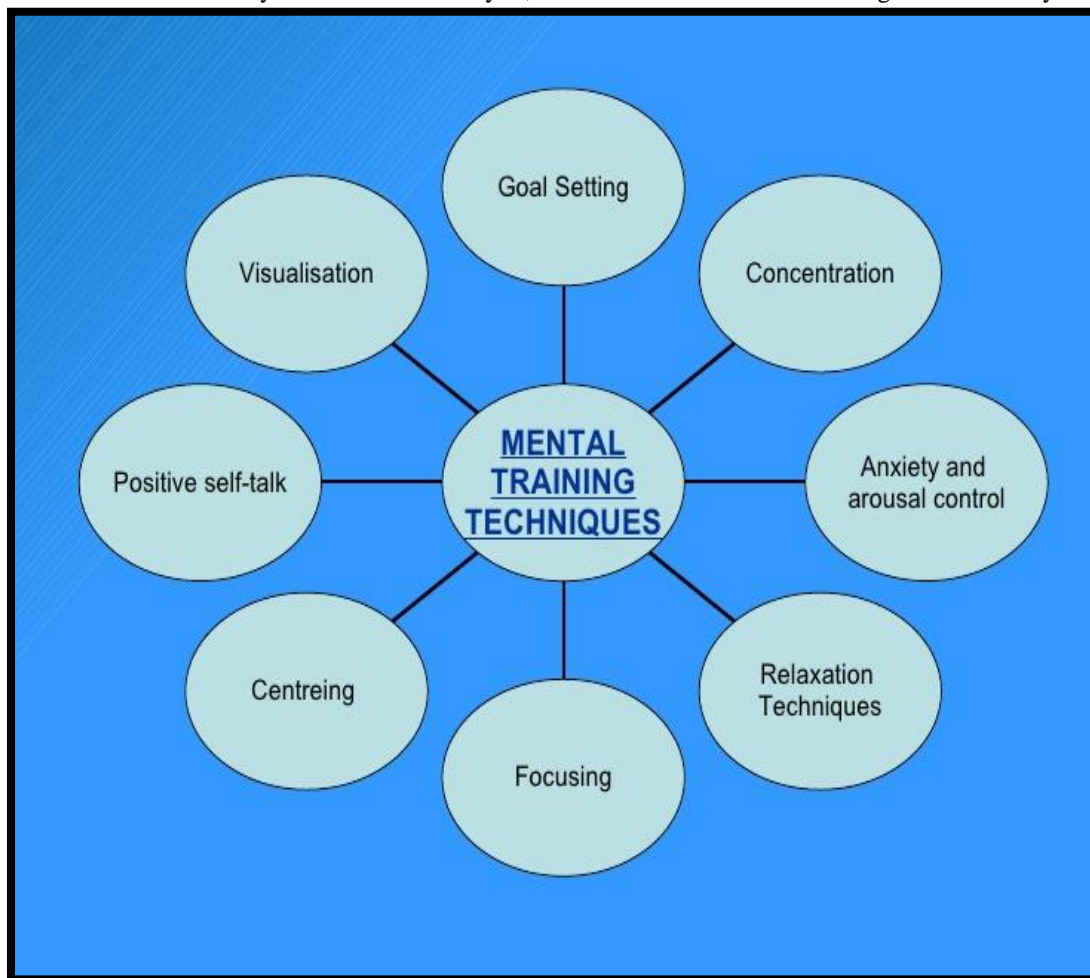


FIG. 5- MIND TRAINING TECHNIQUES/SKILLS

Performance, Process and Outcome Goals

People can set different types of goals; these can be based upon pure outcome such as “I want to win a particular race” or “beat a particular opponent” etc. However, outcome goals are usually not under your full control and can be a major source of pressure. Consequently it is usually better to set **process** and **performance** goals. Process goals are about mastering specific skills such as passing in rugby, turns in swimming or shooting in netball. If you succeed in doing these skills well you will more than likely increase the probability of achieving your desired outcome: winning. Examining the process required to achieve your goals allows you to break your goals down into components or actions and this should form part of your tactical and technical skill development. Combining process goals with performance goals allows you to monitor your progress against yourself, and allows you to honestly evaluate your progress. For example, there may be some technical process goals you set yourself to improve a particular skill (such as tackling in rugby). Combining this with a performance goal (to make 80% successful tackles in a game or training drill) allows you to monitor your progress.

Generally, process goals focus on how to do something while performance goals focus on objective success or failure at the task.

SMART goals

Being SMART about goal setting reminds you that your goals should be:

Specific:

Set difficult but realistic positive performance and/or process goals that are clearly stated

Measurable:

Set numeric goals so your progress can be easily measured

Adjustable:

Goals (and goal schedules) may need to be changed due to such things as injury or sickness. Or you may have set goals that were in hindsight to easy or too hard. Also you should review your training methods to see if they are effective and adjust your goals if needed.

Realistic:

Know your limitations, but set goals that are challenging. Setting goals that are too hard sets you up for failure, but they also need to stretch your abilities.

Time Referenced:

Set target dates for achieving your goals. Again these should be challenging but realistic.

Another key consideration to good goal setting is that the goals are **determined and accepted** by both the coach and the athlete. The most effective goals are those that the athlete feels they have ownership for. If you find that your athletes do not seem to be motivated towards achieving the goals that have been set, it may be a sign that they feel that the goals have been forced on them by somebody else, for example, parents, coaches, or team mates.

Monitor your commitment to your goals

Write them down:

Write down your long term and short term goals and your strategy for achieving them. This should include target dates for added incentive.

Remind yourself of your goals

Use a training log book to monitor your progress. Alternatively, use a wall planner as a visual reminder of your goals, target dates and training plan.

Self Analysis

Ask yourself periodically, “What have I done to make myself better?” Monitoring your performance is best done by you, as self evaluation is a critical component of success in all walks of life.

Goal Setting: Things to Avoid

- Setting goals that are not specific, realistic or measurable.
- Setting too many our progresses. Goals at once: keep it simple.
- Not monitoring

Concentration and attention control

Concentration and attention control are perhaps the most important mental skills to master in sports. As there are so many potential distractions during play (sights, sounds, feelings, thoughts), remaining optimally focused pays dividends. **Selective attention** is the ability to choose the most appropriate stimuli to focus on, while **concentration** is the ability to sustain attention over time.

Players need to be able to shift attention rapidly and accurately. For example, a player first broadly scans internal thoughts to find a winning strategy. He or she then shifts attention quickly to external elements such as the ball height, spin, or the position of the opponent, and finally narrows attention to the ball for the winning volley. This constant mental shifting from external to internal, broad to narrow and back is the essence of attention control. Proper attention control allows a player to choose what is important, stay focused upon it as long as necessary, and shift focus as needed.

Concentration and attention are often enhanced with strategies such as reciting key phrases to oneself, remaining centered in the present, sustaining attention during distractions, and using imagery and self-talk to refocus when distracted. Although novices often think proper focus requires strain and exertion, the most complete attention (sometimes called “flow” or “the zone”) is usually experienced as a joyful absorption in the moment rather than conscious struggle.

Centering and relaxation:-

Centering and relaxation assists an athlete shift his or her thoughts away from anxious negative thinking towards a relaxed, positive, focused mind-set. A simple way of achieving this is through breathing exercises. One breathing exercise is centering, which is breathing that commences from your centre of gravity (behind your navel). This process reduces tension and assists control under pressure through remaining relaxed. The process deserves further reading but in simple terms it requires:

- An at ease standing position or lying with legs uncrossed
- Placing hands on top of each other on the abdomen below the navel
- Focusing on point behind the navel – the power and control centre
- Breathing in through nose, using the stomach and sensing it expand
- Breathing out through the mouth, with the exhalation equal in time to inhalation
- Focusing attention on breathing and a single meaningful word on exhaling
- Progressing from practicing 10-minutes per day to practicing in a time and place that is relevant to the athlete’s sport.

Relaxation can also be achieved through other activities such as stretching, listening to music, using positive self-talk or imagery, or having specific routines. Different methods suit different people and at times are used in combination.

Self- talk:-

Self-talk is designed to strengthen self-confidence through focusing on the positive and eliminating the limitations of negative thinking. It only requires a limited number of key words to get an athlete focusing on what needs to be done to ensure success. Self-talk for *concentration* or *focus* is assisted by words in the present tense. For example in hitting a tennis ball one might say “bounce” as it bounces and “hit” as the racket makes contact. Hodge, Sleivert and Mackenzie (1996) refer to *mood* words required as in “stroke” in batting and “fire” in a dynamic start. These words capture the mood of successful performance and are dependent upon the nature of the skill being performed. If an athlete requires *sustained effort* with control, key words such as “dig in” or “push through” can be use on a consistent basis to focus on the positive qualities of performance required at the time. It deserves to be restated that all self-talk must focus on positive words that draw the athlete’s attention towards that which needs to be done to bring about successful performance.

Visualization and imagery:-

Imagery is the process of simulating sensory experiences in the mind in the absence of external stimuli. Whenever a player daydreams of or imagines hitting an ace, the player is using imagery. While visualization typically describes simulation of visual stimuli, imagery may involve the simulation of many factors: sound, touch, body awareness, psychological states such as confidence, and numerous other mental and physical experiences. However, many coaches and sport psychologists use imagery and visualization as synonymous terms.

Imagery is popular in sports, and much research evidence suggests that it positively improves performance. Factors believed to improve an individual's ability to benefit from imagery include the ability to form vivid images, control the images, and relax before producing images.

Imagery is used to help players anticipate and solve problems, prepare for tournaments, rehearse particular strokes and sequences, cope with adversity, and reinforce positive performance. Imagery may be performed individually or in a group, and it may be guided by a sport psychologist or a coach. Like all mental skills, imagery and visualization must be practiced by athletes consistently and correctly to produce positive effects.

Stress management:-

Stress occurs, "when there is a substantial imbalance between what you *perceive* is being demanded of you from the environment and what you perceive your capabilities are, when you perceive the outcome to be important". This means that stress has three elements: the environment, the individual's perceptions, and the individual's responses to these in the form of arousal (the activation of the mind and body).

As a coach, you can use sport psychology to help players work on each of these three elements. You and your players can find ways to alter the environment to make situations less uncertain or to reduce the importance of outcomes. For example, you can talk to parents to make sure they don't pressure players too hard to win.

A number of psychological techniques have been developed to assist players in controlling their perceptions of events. These are called cognitive techniques, and these techniques focus on creating awareness of negative thoughts and changing such thought patterns by stopping them and replacing them with more productive ways of thinking. Psychological techniques also have been developed that players can learn to help reduce their arousal levels. These techniques, known as somatic techniques, are generally related to relaxation. Some of these are imagery relaxation, self-directed relaxation, progressive relaxation training, and biofeedback relaxation.

Benefits of mind training techniques/skills:-

Mind skills/techniques help athletes adjust their actions, thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations in order to improve their games. Mental skills techniques do this by helping the player to:

1. **Improve focus and deal with distractions.** Many athletes have the ability to concentrate, but often their focus is displaced on the wrong areas such as when a batter thinks "I need to get a hit" while in the batter's box, which is a result-oriented focus. Much of my instruction on focus deals with helping athlete to stay focused on the present moment and let go of results.
2. **Grow confidence in athletes who have doubts.** Doubt is the opposite of confidence. If you maintain many doubts prior to or during your performance, this indicates low self-confidence or at least you are sabotaging what confidence you had at the start of the competition. Confidence is what I call a core mental game skill because of its importance and relationship to other mental skills.
3. **Develop coping skills to deal with setbacks and errors.** Emotional control is a prerequisite to getting into the zone. Athletes with very high and strict expectations, have trouble dealing with minor errors that are a natural part of sports. It's important to address these expectations and also help athletes stay composed under pressure and when they commit errors or become frustrated.
4. **Find the right zone of intensity for your sport.** I use intensity in a broad sense to identify the level of arousal or mental activation that is necessary for each person to perform his or her best. This will vary from person to person and from sport to sport. Feeling "up" and positively charged is critical, but not getting overly excited is also important. You have to tread a fine line between being excited to complete, but not getting over-excited.

5. **Help teams develop communication skills and cohesion.** A major part of sports psychology and mental training is helping teams improve cohesion and communication. The more a team works as a unit, the better the results for all involved.
6. **To instill a healthy belief system and identify irrational thoughts.** One of the areas I pride myself on is helping athlete identify ineffective beliefs and attitudes such as comfort zones and negative self-labels that hold them back from performing well. These core unhealthy beliefs must be identified and replaced with a new way of thinking. Unhealthy or irrational beliefs will keep you stuck no matter how much you practice or hard you try.
7. **Improve or balance motivation for optimal performance.** It's important to look at your level of motivation and just why you are motivated to play your sport. Some motivators are better in the long-term than others. Athletes who are extrinsically motivated often play for the wrong reasons, such as the athlete who only participates in sports because of a parent. I work with athlete to help them adopt a healthy level of motivation and be motivated for the right reasons.
8. **Develop confidence post-injury.** Some athletes find themselves fully prepared physically to get back into competition and practice, but mentally some scars remain. Injury can hurt confidence, generate doubt during competition, and cause a lack of focus. I help athletes mentally heal from injuries and deal with the fear of re-injury.
9. **To develop game-specific strategies and game plans.** All great coaches employ game plans, race strategies, and course management skills to help athletes mentally prepare for competition. This is an area beyond developing basic mental skills in which a mental coach helps athletes and teams. This is very important in sports such as golf, racing, and many team sports.
10. **To identify and enter the "mental zone" more often.** This incorporates everything I do in the mental side of sports. The overall aim is to help athletes enter the zone by developing foundational mental skills that can help athletes enter the zone more frequently. It's impossible to play in the zone every day, but you can set the conditions for it to happen more often.

Evaluation of mind skills/techniques:-

Winning is one of the objectives in sports, and winning requires consistent performance at a high level. One way to better ensure consistent performance is to individualize the mental skills training program to the athlete. Individualizing a mental skills training program can be accomplished by evaluating an athlete's mental skills set within the framework developed.

This analysis and evaluation of a player's mental skills set can prove to be difficult due to the many variables that affect on-court performance. For example, Loehr states that it is important to note that emotional problems during match play can just as readily be caused by physical deficiencies as by emotional ones. Lack of physical recovery due to inadequate sleep, rest, nutrition, or hydration can completely derail a player's ability to summon the right emotions at the right time. This is particularly evident in player breakdowns. Just as poor fitness can lead to mental and emotional problems, excessive anger, frustration, or nerves can undermine both mental focus and biomechanical efficiency. Due to these many factors, coaches should take great care when identifying and evaluating a player's mental capacities and be aware of the integrated nature of performance.

Conclusion:-

The above represents a very brief overview of some of the techniques used by athletes to improve their mental skills. Like any skill these require practice and athletes should be encouraged to spend up to an hour on developing these skills. Some excellent examples of mental skills training techniques are provided in the additional reading and web sites listed below and in the Science in coaching module outline.

One useful aid to track mental skills development is to include a log of mental skills training in the athlete's general training diary. Also, when implementing mental skills training, careful consideration should be given to the individual. For example, some individuals may not be good imagers and thus will require more general imagery training. Trying to encourage stereotypical rugby players to learn and apply relaxation techniques may not be well received. For any mental skills training to be effective, it must be accepted by the athlete (and the coach) as a useful tool and it is this acceptance which is often the most difficult to achieve.

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