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Importance of Sports Psychology in Physical Education and Sports

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Abstract :

The popularity of sport psychology, both as an academic discipline and an applied practice, has grown substantially over the past two decades. Few within the realm of competitive athletics would argue with the importance of being mentally prepared prior to an athletic competition as well as the need to maintain that particular mindset during a competitive contest. Nevertheless, recent research has shown that many athletes, coaches, and sporting administrators are still quite reluctant to seek out the services of a qualified sport psychologist, even if they believe it could help. One of the primary reasons for this hesitation appears to be a lack of understanding about the process and the mechanisms by which these mental skills affect performance. Unlike the "harder sciences" of sport physiology and biochemistry where athletes can see the tangible results in themselves or other athletes (e.g., he or she lifted weights, developed larger muscles, and is now stronger/faster as a result), the unfamiliar and often esoteric nature of sport psychology appears to be impeding a large number of athletes from soliciting these important services. As such, the purpose of this article is to provide the reader with a simple framework depicting how mental skills training translates into improved within competition performance.

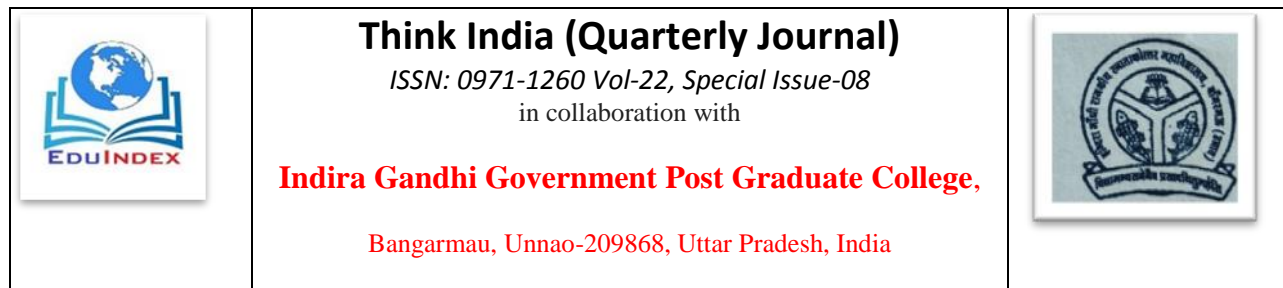
Keywords: Sport psychology, Physical education, Sports.

Introduction:

According to John Luther, "Sports psychology is an area which attempts to apply psychological facts and principles to learning performance and associated human behavior in whole field of sports." According to K.M. Burns, "Sports psychology for physical education is that branch of psychology which deals with the physically fitness of an individual through his participation in games and sports.

Sports psychology explores one's behavior in athletics." Sport psychology is an interdisciplinary science that draws on knowledge from the fields of Kinesiology and Psychology. It involves the study of how psychological factors affect performance and how participation in sport and exercise affect psychological and physical factors. In addition to instruction and training of psychological skills for performance improvement, applied sport psychology may include work with athletes, coaches, and parents regarding injury, rehabilitation, communication, team building, and career transitions. Sport psychology is commonly referred to as "sport and exercise psychology," as it is used for team sports as well as individual fitness endeavors.

Sports psychology is the study of how psychology influences sports, athletic performance, exercise and physical activity. Some sports psychologists work with professional athletes and coaches to improve performance and increase motivation. Other professionals utilize exercise and sports to enhance people's lives and well-being throughout the entire lifespan. Sports psychology is a relatively young



discipline within psychology. In 1920, Carl Diem founded the world's first sports psychology laboratory at the Deutsche Sport hoch schule in Berlin, Germany. In 1925, two more sports psychology labs were established – one by A.Z. Puni at the Institute of Physical Culture in Leningrad and the other by Coleman Griffith at the University of Illinois.

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 optimize 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 armory in gaining the winning edge.

Role of Sports Psychology:

The specialized 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 recognized. 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 to help the parties' air and resolve differences.

Preparing for Competition:

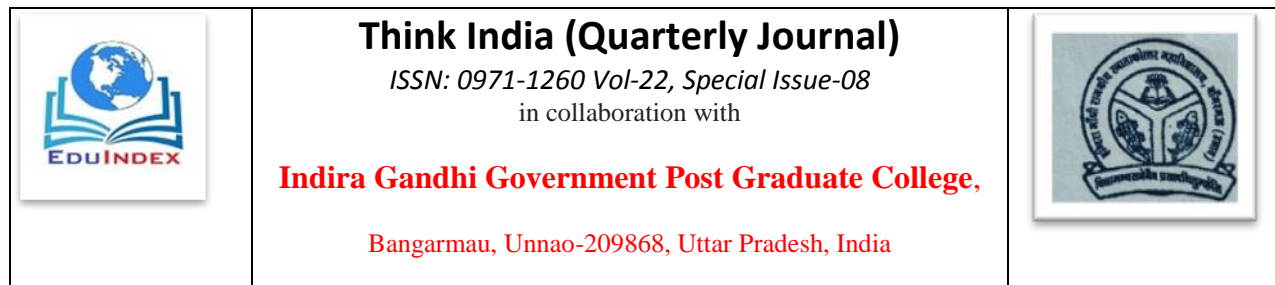
Simple psychological skills to help the athlete manage the competitive performance environment include:

- Learning relaxation skills (e.g. Progressive relaxation, slow, controlled, deep abdominal breathing or autogenic training).
- Mastering all of the attentional styles (types of concentration).
- Imagery (both visualization and kinesthetic)
- Self talk
- Developing a pre computations mental routine to be employed immediately prior to competition on game day.

The Injured Athlete

Injured athletes commonly experience at least three emotional responses: isolation, frustration and disturbances of mood. The Sports Psychologist in consultation with the medical team must make ready the injured athlete to participate in sports and games.

The following points the importance of sports psychology



1. Enhancement of Physiological Capacities: Sports psychology plays a very unique role in the enhancement of physiological capacities such as strength, speed and flexibility etc., Motivation plays a major role in the enhancement of physical capacity of sport persons. It is well known as well as an established fact that psychological capacities or powers can increase physiological capacities of individuals.

2. Learning the Motor Skills: Sports psychology plays its major role in the learning of motor skills. Motor skills learning depends on the individual's level of readiness, i.e., physiological readiness and psychological readiness. Physiological readiness in children is development of the necessary strength, flexibility and endurance as well as the development of various organ systems so that they may perform motor skills required in the activity. Psychological readiness is related to the learner's state of mind. It means the desire and willingness to learn the particular skill. In psychological readiness, sports psychology plays an important role.

3. Understanding the behavior: Sports psychology helps in understanding the behavior of athletes or sportspersons engaged in competitive sports. Coaches also come to know the interest, attitude towards physical activity, instincts, drives and personality of sportspersons. It does not play its role only in understanding of behavior but it also plays its role in medication of behavior in various sports situations.

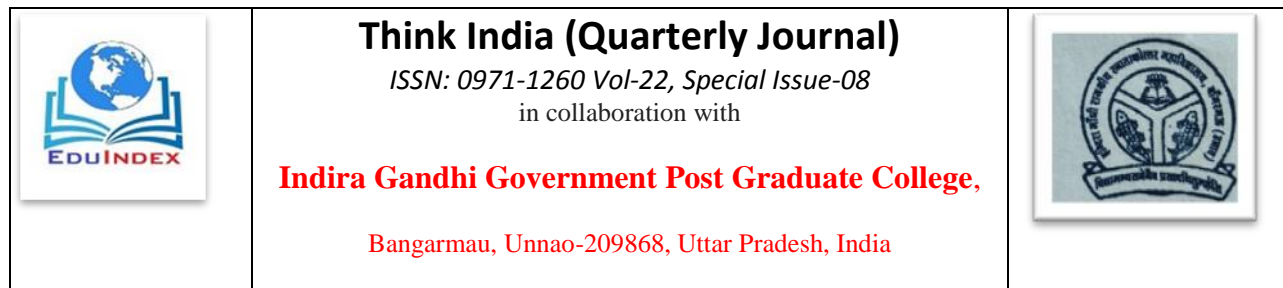
4. Controlling the emotions: Sports psychology plays a very important role in controlling the emotions of sportspersons during practice as well as competition. Generally, these emotions may bring spontaneous changes in the behavior of sportspersons. These are anger, disgust, gear, negative self-thinking and feeling of ownership, etc. If these emotions are not controlled well in time, the performance may be decreased. Sports psychology plays a vital role at such juncture. It helps in balancing the arousal of emotions which further improves the performance.

5. Preparation of athletes psycho-logically for competitions: Sports psychology also plays its role in preparation of athletes psychologically for competitions. Intact, it has become a trend to give psychological tips to athletes or team players before and after the competitions. That is why, sports psychologists' services are required with a national level and international level terms. They create the will 'to win' in the players.

6. Role in the emotional problems of sports persons: Stress, tension and anxiety are natural during practice period and competitions or tournaments. There may be some other emotional problems such as depression, frustration, anorexia and panic etc. The knowledge of sports psychology may be helpful in such situations. Techniques of relaxation and concentration for stress management can be applied on sportspersons who are under such problems. Conclusively, it can be said that sports psychology plays a very vital role in enhancing the performance of sportspersons. It deals with the various mental qualities such as concentration, confidence, emotional control and commitment etc., which are important for successful performance in sports and games.

Motivational techniques for coaches and athletes

1. Goal setting: Goal setting is the process of systematically planning ways to achieve specific accomplishments within a certain amount of time. Research suggests that goals should be specific, measurable, difficult but attainable, time-based, written down, and a combination of short-term and long-



term goals. A meta analysis of goal setting in sport suggests that when compared to setting no goals or "do your best" goals, setting the above types of goals is an effective method for improving performance.

2. Imagery: Imagery (or motor imagery) can be defined as using multiple senses to create or recreate experiences in one's mind additionally, the more vivid images are, the more likely they are to be interpreted by the brain as identical to the actual event, which increases the effectiveness of mental practice with imagery. Good imagery, therefore, attempts to create as lifelike an image as possible through the use of multiple senses (e.g., sight, smell), proper timing, perspective, and accurate portrayal of the task.

3. Pre-performance routines: Pre-performance routines refer to the actions and behaviors athletes use to prepare for a game or performance. This includes pregame routines, warm up routines, and actions an athlete will regularly do, mentally and physically, before they execute the performance. Frequently, these will incorporate other commonly used techniques, such as imagery or self-talk. Examples would be visualizations done by skiers, dribbling by basketball players at the foul line, and pre shot routines golfers or baseball players use prior to a shot or pitch. These routines help to develop consistency and predictability for the player. This allows the muscles and mind to develop better motor control.

4. Self-talk: Self-talk refers to the thoughts and words athletes and performers say to themselves, usually in their minds. Self-talk phrases are used to direct attention towards a particular thing in order to improve focus or are used alongside other techniques to facilitate their effectiveness. For example, a softball player may think "release point" when at bat to direct her attention to the point where the pitcher releases the ball, while a golfer may say "smooth stroke" before putting to stay relaxed. Research suggests either positive or negative self-talk may improve performance, suggesting the effectiveness of self-talk phrases depends on how the phrase is interpreted by the individual.

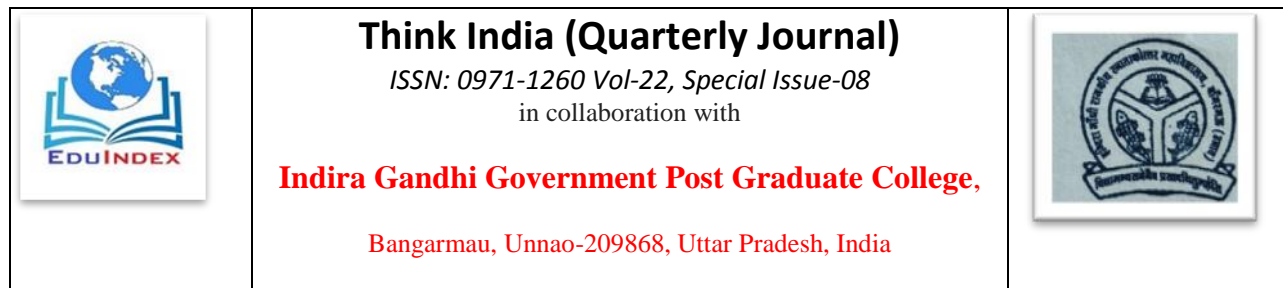
5. Using extrinsic rewards: The key aspect in using extrinsic rewards effectively is that they reinforce an athlete's sense of competence and self worth. Thus, a reward should be informational in nature rather than controlling. If a reward comes to be controlling, it can significantly undermine intrinsic motivation. For a reward to be informational, it is advisable that it has relatively little monetary worth (i.e. it is a token reward), such as a 'woman of the match' or 'athlete of the tour' title. Also, the reward should be presented to an athlete in front of all potential recipients with some emphasis placed on the prestige associated with it.

6. Motivational music: A particularly good way to motivate athletes in training and prior to competition is through the use of music they perceive to be inspirational.

Let's take a look at the field of sport psychology and discover how it can help you as an athlete, parent of an athlete, or as a coach.

1. Sport Psychology Helps You Understand Yourself As An Athlete: You need to have mental strategies for learning, practice and performance factors. Sport psychology gives you the methods and approaches to become aware of what you need so you and your coach can craft custom interventions.

2. Sport Psychology Helps You Work Better With Your Parents: Your parents should be part of your success team, at least at some level. It does not necessarily mean they should coach you, but it would be



nice to have a solid relationship with them, and excellent communication skills so they can assist you in your career.

3. Sport Psychology Helps You Work Better With Your Coaches: Your coach is perhaps the most important person on your team. You need a great working relationship with this person. Sport psychology can help you create this relationship, and nurture it.

4. Sport Psychology Helps You Navigate Your Sport Career: There are many blind alleys, pitfalls and false paths in a sport career. Sport psychology helps you create a vision for success, and goals and objectives, so you can execute that master plan.

5. Sport Psychology Helps You Prepare Your Mind: It is critical that you know how to prepare mentally and emotionally for lessons, practices and performances. Sport psychology helps you devise a customized mental readiness process that helps you transition from your normal work, school or social worlds into the special world of competition.

6. Sport Psychology Helps You Concentrate So You Can Enter the Zone: Attentional control is psychologist-speak for concentration or focus. Sport psychology helps you create strong control over where and how you place your attention so you can concentrate on the proper attentional cues, and you are able to block out unwanted, distracting cues.

7. Sport Psychology Helps You Bounce Back From Set Backs: It is critical that you become resilient to the inevitable problems and set-backs that competitive sport brings. You need solid mental toughness that helps you refocus, reset and re-energize for what is to come.

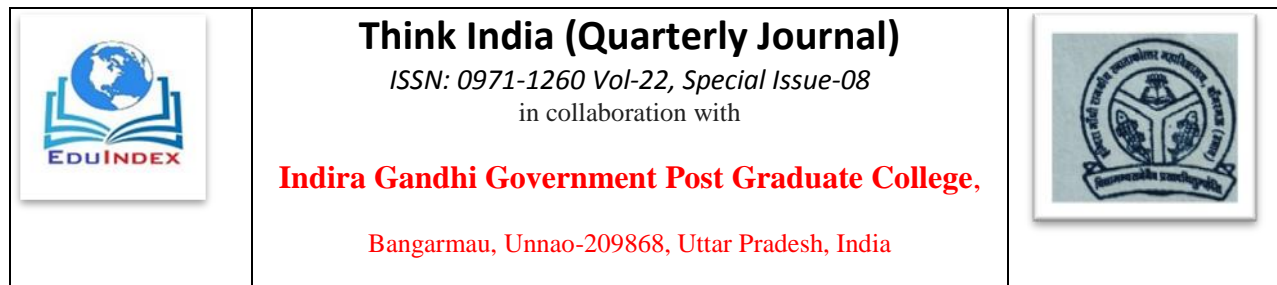
8. Sport Psychology Helps You Increase Motivation and Drive: Successful athletes who have long careers fuel them with exciting goals, a vision for the legacy they want to leave, and dreams of how they want to play. Sport psychology helps you craft engaging goals that create positive energy within you, so you have huge amounts of drive and determination to achieve your potential.

9. Sport Psychology Helps You Handle Stress and Pressure: One of the major ways sport psychology helps you is through stress reduction in learning and performance. While some stress is inevitable and natural, levels of stress that are excessive damage performance. Sport psychology helps you manage stress and turn it into success.

10. Sport Psychology Helps You Handle the Paradox of Success: An issue that every athlete faces at some time is the paradox of success. As you become more successful, there are more pressures and more distractions pulling at you. Sport psychology helps you address these, stay focused, and helps you continue to sustain your best performances.

Discussion:

Success or failure on the field often depends on mental factors as much as physical ones. Sport psychologists recognize the dramatic impact of the athlete's mindset, and focus on preparing the mind to overcome obstacles on the field while boosting confidence for optimal performance. Each and every one of us has an untapped energy source that can be drawn upon to bring about superior results. Enhancing motivation is fundamentally about a change of attitude, developing a positive 'can do' mindset and engaging in systematic behaviors – the short-term process goals – that facilitate improvement. If you have a leadership role in sport you will have considerable influence on how motivated your athletes or team



might feel. You can instill a good work ethic, recognize individual effort and instigate transparent reward structures that reinforce people's sense of competence. To work best, the techniques mentioned in this article need to be molded around specific circumstances and the needs of individual athletes.

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