



Psychological Criteria and its Influence on Coaching

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Abstract:

Coaches of today must effectively perform many different roles; surrogate parent, expert strategist, technician of coaching knowledge, sport scientist, nutritional expert, and sports psychologist to name a few. Complicating the entire picture is the fact that today's athletes are vastly different in their knowledge levels, demands, attitudes, and personalities from athletes of previous generations. The coaching role is now multifaceted and extremely complicated. It is rare individual who performs all of these duties effectively and sustain their sanity. It would be ludicrous to attempt to discuss all of these roles a coach must perform in one short chapter (it would take an entire book), so we will address only one issue - the role of the coach in the area of sports psychology.

Key words: Sport Psychology, Coach, Attitude.

Introduction:

Over the last couple of decades the profession of athletic coaching has witnessed considerable changes. The day and age when the coach was the ultimate authority has long since passed us by. It is no longer acceptable for contemporary coaches to coach as they were coached by the

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previous generation of coaches. Not only have techniques of coaching experienced a drastic revolution, but so have many other factors associated with the coaching profession.

Autogenic Training: This technique was first introduced in Germany by Johannes Schultz in 1932. Based on his personal association with medial hypnosis, Schultz observed that a great number of subjects, when in trance, reported psychological reactions such as warmth and heaviness in conjunction with changes in heart-beat and respiration (Krenz, 1983).

Procedure - This method of relaxation involves repeating a series of ‘formulas’, or statements, to oneself while controlling one’s diaphragm breathing. The autogenic formulas include the concept of feeling:

Comfortably heavy, comfortably warm, heart beat calm and regular breathing, it breathes me; solar plexus comfortably warm; forehead pleasantly cool

Each of these formulas is practiced for duration of one week. Every formula is repeated silently in your mind to each appendage seven times during each session. Specifically, you should have three sessions per day and repeat each formula three times per session. Also, each instruction should be repeated with an exhalation. The following is a sample exercise.

Repetition	Formula
1	Right arm comfortably warm
2	Right arm comfortably warm
3	Right arm comfortably warm
4	Right arm comfortably warm
5	Right arm comfortably warm
6	Right arm comfortably warm
7	Right arm comfortably warm
8-14	Left arm comfortably warm
15-21	Both arm comfortably warm
22-28	Right leg comfortably warm
29-35	Left leg comfortably warm

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36-42	Both legs comfortably warm
43-49	Arms and legs comfortably warm

Relaxation skills are important because they train the body to respond to the desires of the mind. If you can control yourself, then you have the opportunity to control the situation rather than the situation controlling you. It is important that coaches present more than one relaxation technique because each person is unique and will respond differently to various techniques. Also, coaches should never administer a relaxation method immediately before a competition. Relaxation is an excellent warm down after practice or competition, but not good immediately prior to competition.

Concentration Training:

Concentration is the ability of the performer to focus on the appropriate cues in a given situation and control their responses to these cues in a given situation and control their responses to these cues for the execution of a particular skill by itself or within a complex situation. It should be noted that this control, as in many of the skills discussed already, is a passive control. Intensifying efforts to consciously control the situation may actually result in a loss of concentration. A performer must be able to intensify their concentration when the skill requires and to lower their intensify when it does not require such a level. The result is a performer who has control of the situation and consistency in their performance.

In developing concentration skills for competition you increase awareness of the stimuli for correct performing responses. In order to increase your concentration skills you will first have to identify the cues needed for you to respond with the correct skill execution (task relevant cues). Once you have identified these cues, you can identify the cues that result in inappropriate responses and eliminate them.

The following are some exercises for practicing different concentration and attention skills. If particular attention weakness can be identified, these exercises may be very helpful:

- 1 Listening to Sounds – Lay in a relaxed position, close your eyes and listen to all the sounds occurring in your environment. (Helps develop Broad-External focus)

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- 2 Allow Thoughts to Flow – In a relaxed position, permit the mind to feed through thoughts. Do not judge or dwell on any of these thoughts. Passively allow the thoughts to enter and leave the mind. (Help develop Broad-Internal focus)
- 3 Pick a problem – Put yourself in a relaxed position and close your eyes. Think of a problem you are having. For two minutes think of all the possible solutions to this problem. For the next one minutes blank your mind completely of any thoughts. Then for seven minutes just allow your mind to feed you solutions to the problems. (Help develop Broad-Internal focus)
- 4 Bubbled Thoughts – In a relaxed position, imagine yourself at the bottom of a swimming pool and you are looking up. As you mind feeds thoughts, place them in a bubble and watch them slowly ascend to the surface. (Help develop Broad-Internal focus)
- 5 Blank Mind – Get into a relaxed position. Blank your mind totally of any thoughts. (Help develop Broad-Internal focus)
- 6 Study Object – Pick any small object (ring, coin etc) and concentrate solely on this object. Do not permit the mind to interfere with your concentration. (Help develop Broad-External focus)
- 7 Doing Two or Three Things at Once - For one week an interesting book of 10 consecutive minutes. For the next week, read a book and listen to a radio at the same time for 10 minutes. During a third week, read a book, listen to the radio and watch TV all at the same time for 10 minutes. (Help develop Transition focus)
- 8 Listening to Your Heartbeat – Once you are in a relaxed state with eyes closed, listen to your own heartbeat. You can also do this by listening to you breathing. (Helps Narrow-Internal focus)

Coaches should organise practices so that at least one concentration skill is worked on everyday.

Goal setting:

Goal setting has been a traditional intervention in sport psychology for the last 20 years. Many researchers have highly touted the benefits of goal setting (Burton, 1992; Gould, 1992a, 1992b; Locke & Latham, 1990; Martens, 1987; Orlick, 1990) but goal setting must be employed with

cautions by coaches. Goals are elusive and will be detrimental if not fashioned correctly. The following principles need to be adhered to when setting goals:

1. Goals should be very specific and not vague or general.
2. Have short term goals instead of only long terms ones.
3. Always reward yourself with a tangible object after achieving a goal (i.e. milkshake, candy bar, treat yourself to a movie, etc.)
4. Have challenging but realistic goals. Set goals so they are difficult, but attainable.
5. Establish performance goals (mastery) instead of outcome goals.
6. Make flexible goals.
7. Goals should be very individualised.
8. Make achieving a goal just as emotional (by rewarding its attainment) as when not reaching a goal (Gould, 1992b).

There are two basic problems with goal setting that coaches need to be aware of:

1. Most people make not reaching a goal more emotional than they do achieving one. In other words, they treat reaching a goal with casual emotion, but really dwell on negative emotions when a goal is not reached; and
2. Goals can force people to think during performance which in turn in can interfere with performance. Goal setting can be effective tool when used properly, but when thoughts of achieving the goal interfere with the necessary and required thought processes of an activity, goal setting can have a negative impact on performance.

Conclusion:

This intervention is one that coaches should not employ because only qualified professionals should use this technique. This is a powerful tool, but one of the least understood areas in sports psychology. Coaches need to be aware of this technique but refrain from using it personally with their athletes (Gordin, 1995).

In particular attention weakness can be identified, by the exercises done very carefully. Coaches should organise practices so that at least one concentration skill is worked on everyday.

Relaxation skills are important because they train the body to respond to the desires of the mind. If you can control yourself, then you have the opportunity to control the situation rather than the situation controlling you. It is important that coaches present more than one relaxation technique because each person is unique and will respond differently to various techniques. Also, coaches should never administer a relaxation method immediately before a competition. Relaxation is an excellent warm down after practice or competition, but not good immediately prior to competition.

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