

Sports Psychology for Adolescents

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Abstract

Sports psychology is an effective tool for improving athletic performance. However, many coaches in adolescent sports practices often do not implement these recommendations. Sports psychology is the study of how psychological factors influence motor performance. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors can be influenced by an athlete's anxiety management and their ability to implement tools such as routines, to calm their unease. Additionally, an athlete's social and familial culture may play a big role in their success. Research suggests that coaches should be sensitive to a player's motivational foundation and cultural framework. This paper emphasizes the importance of sports psychology by exploring its impact on various areas of an athlete's life. It will provide suggestions for incorporating impactful practices in sports psychology to foster a supportive environment for athletes. The thesis of this paper is that integrating sports psychology into athletic training programs can lead to improved performance. By focusing on motivation, anxiety management, pre-performance routines, and cultural sensitivity, sports psychologists can create a development framework for athletes. Moving forward, raising awareness about the benefits of sports psychology and developing programs that incorporate these principles into youth sports is essential. This approach will not only enhance athletic performance but also contribute to the overall personal growth and mental well-being of athletes.

Introduction

Sports Psychology is a crucial yet often overlooked aspect of athletic performance, especially at the adolescent and high school levels. Coaches, parents, and young athletes frequently focus solely on physical training and technique, missing out on the significant benefits that mental preparation and support can provide (Lochbaum et al., 2022). This paper aims to represent the importance of sports psychology and demonstrate how it can enhance a young athlete's performance both on and off the field.

Sports psychology studies how psychological factors influence sports, athletic performance, exercise, and physical activity (Horn & Therma, 2008). By exploring key concepts such as motivation, anxiety management, pre-performance routines, and the cultural context of sports, researchers can identify how a better understanding of sports psychology can lead to improved athletic outcomes, reduced stress, and stronger coach-athlete relationships. Motivation is the foundation of why athletes play the sport and can be affected intrinsically and extrinsically. Anxiety management is important because it helps athletes learn how to cope during motor performance. Routines can have a big impact as they can help find ways for athletes to deal with anxiety. Culture and anthropology are something that should also be

considered as they can help develop routines for the athlete overall impacting the athlete's performance.

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how sports psychology can benefit an athlete's performance and give suggestions on how to improve their mentality. Ultimately, the goal is to spread awareness of the value of sports psychology and provide positive suggestions for incorporating these principles into youth sports programs. By better understanding the mental aspects of sports, people can create more positive and effective athletic experiences for adolescents.

Motivation

Motivation, the psychological force energizing and sustaining behavior, is essential for driving behavior and achieving goals. Psychologists have measured it through self-reports and behavioral observation. Using motivation is an important factor in athletics and has a big impact. In sports, intrinsic and extrinsic factors play a big role in athlete engagement and performance, and higher self-determined motivation is linked to better outcomes (Vlachopoulos et al., 2000). More motivated athletes often have better academic structure, supportive parents, and an understanding of the sport which leads to intrinsic motivation (Toktas & Bas, 2019). Students are more likely to learn and succeed in sports or school if they are intrinsically motivated by their need for their own desire to reach a high level of performance than when they are extrinsically motivated by teachers, parents, or a status system (Ackerman, 2018). Ultimately, fostering athletes' inner drive to succeed can boost their performance and enjoyment in sports.

Self Determination Theory (SDT) seeks to identify the difference between intrinsic motivation, derived from factors like enjoyment or personal growth, and extrinsic motivation, driven by external rewards or pressures within the context of the sport. Research indicates that high school students with intrinsic motivation or those who are able to internalize extrinsic motivation have enhanced engagement, persistence, and well-being across various domains, including sports (Morris et al., 2022). Motivation can be categorized on a continuum from amotivation to intrinsic motivation with four types of extrinsic motivation: external regulation, introjection, identification, and integration, reflecting internalization. Higher internalization leads to more self-determined action (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

SDT hypothesizes that all humans have three basic needs: autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Standage & Ryan, 2020). Autonomy is the perception of our ability to control the course of our lives. If athletes have a high amount of autonomy they will feel as if they have more of a say in their practice plan and have more ownership of development in their sport. Relatedness is the affectionate relationship between others and how they connect with a group. Athletes with high relatedness will most likely have a positive impact on their play when they are surrounded by people they know because they are in a more comfortable environment. Competence is the need to be effective in the environment and the individual perception of what

athletes can master and achieve to do something. If athletes have high competence they feel as though they can achieve a high level of skill in the sport.

Coaches who want their athletes to perform at a high level should support the three needs included in SDT (Spence & Oades, 2011). Consider a coach working with high-level tennis athletes, they may support high levels of relatedness by creating a group with similar skill levels so that they can bond and create a community together. They could increase perceptions of autonomy by letting the athlete decide what they want to work on after previous struggles of a tournament. In addition, the coach can increase the athlete's competence by setting realistic goals of what the athlete wants and encouraging them frequently. In summary, by fostering a supportive environment that meets the psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence, coaches can significantly enhance their athletes' motivation, performance, and overall well-being.

Anxiety Management for High School Athletes

Anxiety can be a major obstacle to trying to perform at the athlete's best. To manage anxiety, high school, and collegiate athletes should practice mindfulness techniques like deep breathing meditation, visualization, and staying present in the moment rather than worrying about the past and future. Mindfulness helps athletes maintain focus and composure under pressure (Muthya & Narvane, 2019). Working with a sports psychologist can also be extremely beneficial for high school athletes struggling with anxiety. A sports psychologist can teach mental skills like positive self-talk, visualization, and routines to help the athlete control their anxiety. (Fadare et al., 2022) There was an investigation into collegiate tennis players and researchers used a psychological intervention in which they made athletes practice skills such as goal setting, imagery, and arousal regulation. When compared to the control group, the athletes who practiced these psychological techniques had higher self-confidence and fewer double faults during matches (Daw & Burton, 1994).

Sports Psychologists provide tools to give anxious thoughts a more positive perspective. Using guidance from them, athletes can learn to embrace anxiety as a normal experience in competition and use it to increase focus and motivation rather than letting it have a negative impact on them. Coaches need to get additional help from a sports psychologist in order to support the athlete's mental health. Coaches are more likely to provide support to athletes if they know the mental health plan at the school and can identify symptoms of mental health disorders. By doing this, they could apply it and prioritize it when coaching their athletes. (Kroshus et al., 2019). Another study showed how sports psychology techniques of relaxation and self-talk had a positive effect on ice hockey goaltenders (Rogerson & Hrycaiko, 2001). Following the intervention athletes' save percentage increased, and they were very satisfied

with the results. When coaches saw the athletes enjoying the implementation of these techniques, they noticed the value of providing this certain training to the goaltenders.

In addition to focusing on imagery and relaxation, sports psychology interventions that focus on an athlete's motivations for success also lead to positive sports performance outcomes. In a study on young tennis players, researchers focused on goal-setting techniques to help athletes shift away from approaching matches with ego-oriented goals towards using task-oriented goals (Harwood & Swain, 2002). The results ended up having positive effects on the participant but not the control patient. The effects enabled players to manage their emotions under high pressure in competitive tournaments. Another investigation studied self-talk, imagery, and routines that can help the athlete increase focus and emotional control. It was a 15-month mental skill training program where 11 British youth tennis players were evaluated establishing the meaningfulness of the content. Overall the results showed that the implementation of focus and emotions has greatly improved enhancing their ability with psychological skills such as serving routine and positive self-talk. This supports how all youth athletes should be able to get an education to regulate their psychological characteristics and reduce anxiety. (Dohme et al., 2020)

Sport Psych Routines

Pre-performance routines (PPRs) are individualized routines that athletes use prior to competition. A study showed that using both cognitive (self-talk, visualization, etc.) and motor (practicing diving motion, listening to broadcasts, etc.) aspects in a PPR makes an effective plan and technique for athletes (Yao et al., 2020). Experts suggest that PPRs are important for high-level athletes as they can help them avoid external stress during their performance. A recent meta-analysis by Rupprecht et al. (2024) analyzed the impact of a PPR across different pressurized motor performance scenarios. Across the board, researchers found that using PPRs benefited both athletes under pressure and in general.

Multiple experiments have shown the importance of PPRs. 240 high-school athletes underwent an intervention on pre-game routines which evaluated the impact of cognitive and motor routines on the accuracy of sport performance (Perry & Katz, 2015). Pre. The participants of the MMPPR group focused on cognitive and motor routines immediately before the execution of the motor skill. These participants were compared to a group called MPPR, which only focused on motor routines, and a control group, which only focused on the technique of the skill but did not have a full routine. When performance in volleyball, basketball, golf, and tennis were analyzed, athletes in the MMPPR group performed the best. Results suggest that integrating cognitive and motor routines prior to skill execution can increase sports performance accuracy. Coaches should prioritize training athletes to develop a routine based on the research that was found. Another study looked at the effects of routine on both players and coaches involving 21 expert coaches and 4 teams. Before the competition, the coaches and athletes prepared

mentally and made a game plan. After the competition, the coaches found the importance of how the athletes controlled their emotions which resulted in a positive performance (Bloom et al., 1997).

The next study shows cultural awareness and diversity in sports. There are many different variations of pre-game routines and using sport psychology consultation could incorporate cultural practices into their routines (Hagan & Schack, 2017). Different cultures have unique practices that can influence these routines. The benefits are that it reduces anxiety, improves focus by blocking distractions, builds confidence, and forces a sense of competence. Not only should the athlete learn from a sports psychologist, but the psychologist should also consider the athlete's cultural background and create a personal routine for them. Some recommendations shown in the study are to educate athletes on the benefits of these practices and review and adjust the routines regularly.

Sports anthropology and culture

Sport anthropology refers to the “application of the perspectives, theories, and methodologies of the discipline to the study of sport” (Blanchard, 2000). Sports anthropologists are interested in how individual sports came to be and how sports influence and are influenced by social, political, and cultural factors. Sport psychologists can take direction from sport anthropology findings to be culturally sensitive. This might include social differences, power issues, and cultural theories and writings that have shown people using different ways to approach the sport. Sports psychologists work with athletes from a variety of different backgrounds so they need to adopt a culturally sensitive approach to their work. Sports anthropology is important because our sociocultural and political issues have a big relationship with our sports performance (Ryba & Wright, 2005).

Practitioners of sports psychology have to be aware of their limitations, self-interests, prejudices, and frustrations to better mentor their athletes (Schnike & Moore, 2011). Practitioners can develop cultural sensitivity to the athlete's background by gaining knowledge of the differences between cultures, using the knowledge for techniques and strategies, and maintaining an ongoing growth of learning and reflection (Quartiroli et al., 2021). Cultural competence is important to athletes because it represents our behavior reflecting how culture shapes our point of view in the world (Schnike & Moore, 2011). Sports anthropology can identify how an athlete's sense of identity influences how they perceive each other.

One example of the influence of sport on society is football in Brazil, with its cultural flare vibrant colors, and powerful spirit. Using three aspects of anthropology, cultural, social influence, and national identity, football has been a big part of Brazilian national identity. The cultural factor represents Brazil's aggressive type of play and energeticness on the field (Tenga & Larsen,

2003). Social influence is the difference in access to gender, race, background, etc. Social influences are a big factor as well as lots of football players come from poor areas and eventually persevere into well-known athletes (Uehara et al., 2021). National identity is how the country is shown to be for example Brazil is flamboyant (in-text citation). Researchers studying sports psychology in Brazil have emphasized the importance of tailoring the way how sports psychologists can influence athletes with their culture (Quartiroli et al., 2021).

Recommendations for Coaches and athletes

Coaches can be supportive of high school athletes by promoting autonomy, competence, and relatedness, also known as the self-determination theory explained in the previous paragraph. The athlete will be able to foster a sense of motivation and healthy goal setting by involving the athlete in making decisions and providing constructive feedback focused on effort and improvement which can lead to a positive culture (Spence & Oades, 2011). Coaches should be able to give specific behavior rather than personality traits when offering criticism and advice. Instead, the coach should provide suggestions for improvement and keep a confident encouraging tone (Felton & Jowett, 2013).

A study researched the impact of coach behavior and coach-athlete relationships on the athlete's satisfaction of well-being. It found that the athlete's perspective of how coaches coach and how they are is important to their psychological needs. They tested coaches using environments that enhance athletes' intrinsic motivation to increase the athletes' autonomy. In the end, researchers found that coaches behavior found that creating a supportive team culture where the athletes feel valued can enhance their psychological satisfaction and overall well-being. For example, when coaches foster positive relationships and show genuine interest in their athlete's life which can impact the athletes' performance.

There are still lots of areas for further exploration. Long-term impacts which incorporated more different coaching styles for athlete development. Implementation across sports is also important because it explores the best way to include SDTs throughout various ages and sports. This includes making these techniques more accessible. Mental health support investigates helpful strategies for supporting athletes within the environment of competitions in athletics. Finally training for coaches developing and testing coaches in these motivational strategies to ensure that they are effectively supporting their athletes. By focusing on these certain areas, research in the future can provide more insights into how coaches can best support their athletes' overall development (Felton & Jowett, 2013).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has highlighted the essential role of sports psychology in enhancing youth athletic performance. By focusing on motivation, anxiety management, pre-performance routines, and the cultural context of sports, this paper have shown how these



factors can improve performance, reduce stress, and strengthen coach-athlete relationships. Despite the benefits, further research is needed, particularly on children and adolescents, to provide age-appropriate support. Emphasizing sports psychology can create safe environments that foster both athletic excellence and personal growth. Moving forward, raising awareness and developing programs will be crucial in maximizing the potential of youth athletes.

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