Journal of Excellence

The Journal of Excellence is devoted to nurturing excellence in all human endeavors and all worthy pursuits.

Issue No. 4

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Mission of the Journal of Excellence

Terry Orlick - University of Ottawa

My mission in initiating the birth of The Journal of Excellence was to fill some important gaps in our literature and in our lives that are essential to the pursuit of excellence. The Journal of Excellence is devoted to nurturing excellence in all human endeavors and all worthy pursuits. It is centered on the pursuit of excellence in the working or performing parts of our lives, as well as the non-working parts of our lives. Our aim is to inspire excellence, to present a forum to discuss the positive pursuit of excellence and to provide practical strategies and perspectives for pursuing high-level goals.

The Journal of Excellence is the communication vehicle for the International Society for Mental Training and Excellence (ISMTE), a not for profit organization with the vision of education and training for better people, better performers and a better world.

There is much discussion about the quest for, and value of excellence, for example in education, sport, health, the performing arts, parenting, teaching, coaching, leadership, health care, business and the workplace. There is also much talk about the importance of quality living, quality relationships and the development of a higher level of humanity. This is the first journal, which has **EXCELLENCE** as its sole focus. Providing people with the insights and strategies to be successful in their pursuit of performance excellence and excellence in living is the ultimate mission of the Journal of Excellence.

My vision is a journal that is applied in orientation, relevant in content and wide ranging in application. We are committed to:

1) Learning from and sharing the experiences of great performers and great people.
2) Developing a more thorough understanding of the mental links to excellence.
3) Promoting excellence in performance and excellence in living.
4) Initiating positive real world change.

If you have applied research or meaningful insights that are relevant to the pursuit of excellence in any worthy human endeavor, for any age group, we encourage you to submit your material to the Journal of Excellence to be considered for publication.

Introduction to Issue No. 4

This issue focuses on elite level athletes and psychological skills training for high level performance. Athletes' perspectives on recovery from injury, and a very interesting case study on mental training with children at risk are also included.

Colleen Hacker presents a comprehensive mental skills training program that she has implemented with the United States Womens' Olympic Soccer Team. Ulf Schmidt and Eric Schlieffmann discuss an intervention implemented with the German Womens' National Volleyball Team which reflects a different orientation from Colleen Hacker's program.

Dan Gould, Christy Greenleaf and colleagues discuss important lessons learned from the Olympic experiences of hundreds of American athletes who competed in recent summer and winter Olympic Games. Stiliani Chroni, through interviews with elite level polo players, seeks to understand the nature of a term commonly used in the sport world, but which has not been well defined – competitiveness and how it relates to elite performance.
Off the field, Karen MacNeill and Cal Botterill share some views on the psychological and support needs of injured athletes.

To conclude the articles in this issue…Freida Hjartarson steps outside the bounds of sport in a discussion of her work with a unique and challenging population – young offenders and children at risk. Dr. Hjartarson emphasizes a theme that Dr. Hacker mentions in the opening article of this issue - that the trainer, teacher and consultant are also performers. As performers we must look reflectively at ongoing lessons learned to continue to improve our skills as a consultants, and grow as people. This perspective is supported in the final contribution in this issue - a reflective look at lessons learned: In Pursuit of Excellence by Kelly Doell and a group of graduate students in Sport Psychology.

Louise Zitzelsberger, Ph.D
Editor

The Quest for Gold: Applied Psychological Skills Training in the 1996 Olympic Games

Colleen M. **Hacker**, Pacific Lutheran University, USA

Dr. Colleen M. Hacker is a Professor in Sport Psychology, at Pacific Lutheran University and Sport Psychology Consultant for the United States Women's National Soccer Team. She can be contacted at Pacific Lutheran University, Tacoma WA 98447, Email: hackercm@plu.edu

Abstract

In this article, Colleen Hacker shares some principles, techniques, and a brief history of the psychological skills training program she used consistently and successfully with the United States women's national soccer team. The content is adapted from a keynote presentation she delivered to the Canadian Soccer Coaches' symposium. At the time of this presentation the team she was working with had won a Gold Medal in the 1996 Olympic Games and was preparing for the 1999 World Cup which they ultimately won.

Introduction

While many of my comments are specifically related to what has been designed and implemented with the most elite players in the world today, every one of these principles could be utilized in a variety of sport settings whether you're a coach of youth players, a club coach or an intercollegiate coach. And, certainly, these techniques have application to sports other than soccer. The point is that the same principles utilized for psychological skills training that we use with the national team can be implemented across ages, in most sport settings, and for both genders.

Let me set the stage for what I'm doing, how I got here, and what my role with the team is. I have been a member of the national coaching staff in the United States since 1994, and through my association with the national coaching staff, met and began working with then head coach, Tony DiCicco who was the World Cup and Olympic coach for the United States. He asked me to join the team in the spring of '95 and I have been working with the team ever since. To understand the situation that I came into - those of you who know your soccer history - at least on the women's side of the game - know that the team won the first women's World Cup in 1991, and then were defeated in the semi finals in the 95 World Championships by Norway. That moment was a crystallizing event in the lives of the players and staff and in the national team program in terms of focus, and perspective, and issues to be addressed in the future.

To understand the psychological skills training program (PST) that we implemented, what was done and why, I think it's helpful to understand a little bit of the history of this team (through a team highlight video that included the following script).

Video

I have a dream.
I have a dream.
I have a dream.
I have a dream.
I have a dream.
A dream of playing soccer.

For me personally it's my life. It's my life to be part of this team, I don't want to be doing anything else. I want soccer to become something that's just rooted in America.
Mia Hamm

The dream begins

What stood out for me was first of all Michelle scoring the winning goal, obviously her second goal. I mean it seemed like it took forever for the ball to get into the net. It was such a great feeling, I'm getting goose bumps right now thinking about.
Carla Overbeck

The wake-up call

We played Norway in the semi finals and lost. Stepping off that field we didn't feel we gave everything that we had. We didn't prepare as well as we could of.
Mia Hamm

That's when the whole team changed and turned around. It was like every day after that either we talked about that game, or you remembered that game, it was something that was in the back of your mind. It was like someone had etched it in your brain. And that was the feeling we wanted, "Let's never let this happen again.
Julie Foudy

We're going to remember this day and we're going to come out after people.
Carla Overbeck

The gold

To win the gold medal in just the way we did it, and in front of all these people, I just didn't know what to do with myself. I mean all the energy of all my lifetime in sport just came to a head, and I just ran. I had all this energy. And I would have ran all night if I could.
Brianna Scurry

Sixteen of us standing on the podium together, singing the national anthem. And I can remember we all started off kind of slowly saying it, halfway through we were kind of screaming, and by the end we were like shouting the national anthem together.
Julie Foudy

The dream

To win the first World Cup in 1991 and then to be dethroned in 1995 and comeback, to find the resources to train as hard as they did to win the first gold medal is just a testament to their legacy in women's soccer and women's athletics.
Coach Tony DiCicco

The future of women's soccer looks great. In 1999 the women's World Cup will come to the United States and we expect the World Cup tournament to do for women what the World Cup did for men in 1994. It's an international event with pageantry and color and anyone that comes will see the best women's soccer players from all over the world.
Donna deVarona

We are going to set the standard for what women's sporting events will look like in the future. We're going to play in major stadiums, in major markets, were going to have major corporate sponsors and licensees.
Marla Messing

The United States has made the biggest commitment of any country in the world to this event.

Tony DiCicco

I hope it'll be similar to the Olympics. That was just an experience that I never thought I would ever feel again and now I have a chance.

Tisha Venturina

I have a dream. I have a dream. A dream. A dream of playing soccer. A dream of playing for my country. My country. A dream of winning the 1999 women's World Cup. Be a part of my dream.

(end of video)

You can see that nothing great is accomplished without first having a dream. At the moment, we are less than two months away from moving into a residency program in Orlando, Florida which is where we trained prior to the summer Games in Atlanta. This team now has the challenge of shaping their own dreams into reality. Let me tell you about the demographic differences among our players because I think this is something that most people don't understand. The current team is comprised of athletes who range in age range from 16 to 17 years old to 31 or 32. Obviously there are maturational and developmental changes in that 15 year age span that occur for individuals. There are two mothers on the team, a third of the players are married, some have graduated from college a decade ago and others are intercollegiate performers at present. It's a diverse group in every respect. That being said, our challenge remains steadfast; to develop a cohesive unit and to maintain the integrity and authenticity of each athlete and the team as a whole.

The Psychological Skills Training Program

Just like physical skills, psychological skills can be identified; they can be trained and they can be improved with practice. We are, in fact, able to make a difference. There is no question that to be able to achieve what this team has done, virtually every single area of their training protocol has been carefully cultivated and analyzed. From the nutritionist and strength and conditioning coach to tactical coaches and scouts - every possible part of the game is addressed. Psychological skills training is one important piece of the performance puzzle.

Winning the gold medal in 1996 certainly was a peak experience for all of us, and I credit much of that to the coaching staff: assistant coaches - Lauren Gregg and April Heinrichs, and head coach - Tony DiCicco. The support that they have given me, and the support that they have given to the psychological training of athletes is probably without parallel. They have been 100 percent supportive.

We have talked for years in the soccer community about the **Four Pillars of Soccer:**
1) technical
2) tactical
3) physical
4) psychological.

But if you look at what teams do, and you look at the training techniques that teams follow, it's almost as if it were a three-legged stool. There's a tremendous amount of tactical analysis, a tremendous amount of technical improvement and expertise, and a firm commitment to physiological preparation. And, almost like an afterthought, there's brief discussion concerning the psychological dimension of sport. Often, mental skills are treated with this after-the-fact attitude. We want to make sure that for any

player, regardless of the level, you realize that there are four pillars to successful soccer. Certainly the psychological dimension is one. Sport psychology or mental skills training might even be **the** critical advantage.

When I first addressed the team, and coaching staff, I said to them, "From a coaching standpoint you'd probably like to think that what you're doing has 90 to 99 percent of the total effect on your teams' performance, especially if they're winning". Certainly the coaching staff takes the lions' share of the responsibility and makes a critical contribution in the competitive cauldron. But I then said, "If I was able to offer, in concert with your hard work, a 3-5 percent boost in performance, or even a 5 percent improvement with just one player, might not this be the margin of victory? And if it happened with two players…?" So even if we use the smallest possible contribution, you can see how important psychological skills become to performance and ultimately to game outcome. And the more important the games, and the more critical the mission of the team, the more the psychological dimension can make the essential difference. I have always enjoyed the Yogi Bera quote in response to being asked about the importance of the mental side of baseball. Not a mathematician, Yogi Bera said, "Sport is 90 percent mental and 50 percent physical". You may question his mathematical acumen but not his assessment on the importance of sport psychology. It is tremendously important, even if we can make only the smallest of differences.

Peak Performance

- Athletic ability and technical skills account for approximately 65%.
- Coaches increase that capability to 85%.
- Strength training, nutrition, trainers and physicians add another 10%.
- Sport psychology and mental skills account for a critical 5% of Peak Performance.

The Coach as an Educational Sport Psychologist

What are psychological skills? Why are they important? What are we trying to accomplish with the kinds of things that we are doing with the athletes? I want to preface any further comments that I have by complimenting a colleague that I have sadly never met, but someone that you will be hearing from during the course of this symposium, and that's Dr. Terry Orlick. When I was first asked to serve as the sport psychology consultant with the soccer team, the first thing I did, (which is what I do in any important undertaking) is scour the professional literature. I read everything I could get my hands on that dealt with psychological skills training for Olympic athletes, for world champions, and limited my analysis to what I considered the best quality sources. I will tell you proudly that Terry Orlick's work has proved to be the most helpful, the most practical and the most applicable of any that I have found. You will see much of his influence throughout my work.

When Olympic athletes were asked what are the most critical elements to success, it was interesting to note that 'psychological issues' rated as the top five or six of the top 10 reasons given. The two primary goals of PST that I shared with our team, and what I would challenge each of you to adopt is - to increase or maintain an athletes intrinsic motivation (that they want to train, that they want the challenge, that they want to come back from failure, that they want to achieve success) and to increase or maintain an athlete's self-control and individual responsibility. So intrinsic motivation, (a 'want-to' rather than a 'have-to') and an ability to set goals, to establish game plans, to commit to

the kinds of things that they can control. **Those two attributes, intrinsic motivation and self-control are our keys.**

People talk about the apparent dichotomy between physical skills and psychological skills. What I want to say to you is: let's look at this as a marriage, one compliments the other and, at the core, are inseparable. Physical skills and psychological skills are improved by the same techniques; practice, repetition, and attention to detail. It's not a dichotomy, it's a holistic approach. Athletes are people first and we need to address and cultivate the variables that impact on them as human beings not just as gifted performers.

Why is so little time spent on psychological skills training? The number one reason that coaches give is: Time. "Time! I don't have enough time". Well, that may be true, but most of the work that I do is with the athletes on the field, in their training environment. It's not separate from or an add-on kind of endeavor. I encourage coaches to make PST part of the regular training and competitive atmosphere. Rather than conduct a meeting on psychological skills at the beginning of the season, do it throughout the year - in training, after training, before training. Make it part of what you're doing. The second reason why people say they don't implement a PST program is that they don't know how. Part of what you're doing today is aimed at increasing your own knowledge and your own awareness. You, as coaches, can learn these skills and improve your own confidence and expertise in this area.

What are some specific techniques important to a PST program? What performance areas can you impact? The answer includes a wide range of concepts and skills but basically, I would characterize an essential list including the following aspects:

Arousal control. We implemented various forms of progressive relaxation and breathing techniques as well as energizing strategies.

Goal setting. We developed a goal setting program for individual players, for small groups (for example, what are the goals for the midfielders? For the goal keepers?) and for the team as a whole.

Imagery. was a centerpiece for us. It was something that the athletes were committed to utilizing and improving. We developed imagery audio tapes. These cassette tapes were each individually designed. They weren't mass produced but specifically designed for each of the players on particular topics.

Attention control. In the course of a 90 minute game, attention can and does waiver. You know when you're really tuned in and you've got that vision that is both wide to take in everything, but is also a razor sharp, tunnel vision. A player's attention needs to be appropriate for the task at hand and flexible throughout the match.

Sleep issues. We developed audio tapes for athletes to be able to go to sleep. Can you imagine the tension and the excitement that accompanies the first Olympic Games?

Self-confidence. If there's one area that coaches talked to me about the most, it's individual and team confidence. They say 'Gee, I've got this great player but she's just not confident'. Or 'Wow, one game he's on fire, and the next game he's timid'. Coaches realize that self-confidence is vital to peak performance.

Self-talk patterns. Very few athletes, and coaches for that matter, understand how negative their own self talk is. What they're often focusing on is what they can't do, or

on errors or mistakes that they've made. We teach athletes to note their internal dialogue and bring it under productive and volitional control.

Interpersonal relationship and communication issues are omnipresent especially if you're dealing with a residency situation. We're together 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Each person has a different style, a different pattern of communication and different individual needs. Conflict resolution, communication skills, and diversity issues of all kinds are key areas of focus for our team.

Performance routine and analysis. Each and every athlete and coach is going to experience a pregame time period. With that fact, there's going to be pregame thoughts. There's going to be pregame images. There's going to be pregame behaviors. The question is - are you going to control them or are they going to control you?

Dealing with injuries and illness (chronic and acute*).* A well known example of chronic illness on our team is that of Michelle Akers - her story is known around the world - she's battling chronic fatigue syndrome along with the cumulative effects of over a dozen surgeries to her knee and shoulder. And her battles are real battles. We also had an acute situation in the Olympics with Mia Hamm arguably one of the best players, if not the best player in the world. She sustained a very severe ankle sprain in the middle of the Olympic Games. So we are concerned with not only the initial trauma but also recovery. We also have concerns about the effects on players who aren't injured. How are they dealing with the potential loss of a star player?

Preparing for major competitions – how do we prepare for major competitions?

Orlick's Elements of Success

- Total commitment
- Quality practice rather than quantity of practice
- Clearly defined goals
- Positive imagery on a daily basis
- Focusing totally on one play, one shift, one move at a time
- Recognizing, expecting and preparing to cope with pressure situations
- Practice and competition plans
- Distraction control strategies
- Postgame evaluation – Drawing out the lessons and acting on them
- A clear understanding of what helps you play well vs. play poorly

Terry Orlick and Jean Williams at the University of Arizona, among others, have specifically outlined qualities that they have found characterize successful athletes. Whether you're dealing with a ten-year-old, or a 50-year-old, these qualities are critical for success, regardless of the level, gender, or type of competition.

Also there's no question that daily rigors play a significant role in athletic performance. Day after day, after day, athletes are, in essence, following the same routine. They get up, they go to the training room, get their medical needs taken care of, they train, they eat, they come back and they train again. They have dinner and now it's fitness time or a scheduled team meeting. There's a great deal of repetition. What is your attitude? How do you handle that? Do you make excuses? Do you settle for good enough? One of the ways in which we challenge our athletes is to ask, 'Is good enough to get by, good enough?'. How hard are you willing to push yourself? Much of their training has to take place away from the coaching environment. Can you find another performer, another athlete or a

teammate, to work with you and constantly push the standards of excellence?

Overview of the program

We try to emphasize that psychological skills are just like physical skills. You need to identify what your strengths are and build on those. No one is more aware than athletes themselves where deficiencies might be, or where they might get tripped up. The familiar adage, "Know thyself", is the starting place.

Another point to emphasize is that PST for our team is completely voluntary. There is no time where athletes are required or forced to meet with me, or attend individual meetings. In fact, the very first meeting that I offered as the sport psychologist prior to the Olympics was completely voluntary. I announced that, "I'm going to be talking about imagery today. Any athletes that want to come, show up at such and such a time". Eleven of 16 athletes came. I thought it was revealing that nine of those 11 were starters. It was another case of the rich getting richer. They understood the importance of PST, the narrow margin of victory that mental skills training can provide, and they're milking it for everything possible.

Another area of focus is on self-awareness and self-control. We practice these techniques daily, not as add-ons and not separate from practice and competitive environments.

When I'm traveling with the team or on-site at a training camp, time-wise a majority of my time is spent in individual meetings. There's not a canned program. It's not like this is the Colleen Hacker method. For each athlete I'm working on different issues and I use different techniques. It is unique, specialized and tailored to that athlete. At least once or twice a week I will have team meetings on a particular issue. It might be self-confidence, it might be on concentration, or on developing a pregame routine, or it might be on composure under pressure, or on healing, rehabilitation and coming back from injury. In these topical meetings the whole team is in attendance. I am a great believer in the adage, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it". There are no 'have to's'. We don't want to tamper with success. But, we do want athletes to feel comfortable to come and talk, and deal with issues, when the need arises.

A lot of times people say, "Gee, why do athletes need this? Is there something wrong with them? Are they "head cases"? Or is PST for problem athletes?" I'd say it's analogous to their coaching staff in that they have three full-time coaches. Do they not know how to play the game? Of course they do. **So it's not a matter of what they don't know how to do. It's taking what they have and making it even better.**

At the Olympic training center I created a communication vehicle called "Colleen's Corner" (a bulletin board of sorts) and everyday I would put up something new. It might be quotes, or techniques we're working on, or feedback to the athletes. They would walk in that training center and they'd go to this corner right away to see what's there and what I might be doing in the weeks ahead.

There are not many environments that are like the Olympics. I'm going to quickly take you through some of the issues that we faced at the Games, but you can apply many of these situations to the state, provincial, or whatever level you're dealing with. There are some unique moments where the pressure is on and athletes know it. We had to deal with an unbelievable amount of security and safety. This is just one example. We had 20 motorcycle police officers assigned to the team. When we were on the bus there

were two helicopters over top, there were FBI agents with weapons on their legs or in the waist bands of their trousers. The security was omnipresent. How do you handle that? Our approach was, if you can't beat them, join them. We enjoyed it, including chartered flights and media presence. We were committed to the mission at hand, but also to enjoying the experience. There wasn't a time when we didn't pay attention. I remember vividly the first moment that we walked out onto the Olympic soccer field. Carla Overbeck, veteran captain and world champion, and I were walking out. We just kept saying, "Can you believe this?" Isn't this great!" That was true excitement. From the Opening ceremonies to each Olympic moment, I can assure you that there's nothing like it. Incredible, exhausting, time-consuming. But you grew up hearing about these events since you were a kid. You're meeting new people for the first time, famous people, people that were your idols and role models. It's an indescribable time.

We had 16 players on the Olympic team and four alternates. What about the alternates? We had a talented and diverse group of alternates. On your team it might be the starters and the reserves or players that aren't on the official roster. How do you handle the people that aren't in the limelight? We specifically attended to these issues and concerns.

There was incredible media pressure and notoriety associated with the Olympic Games. We were constantly signing autographs on balls, posters, programs, whatever it might be. How do you handle it if the weight of the world is on your shoulders? If you've never seen the hype around this team, it is an absolute frenzy. For example, take Mia Hamms' situation. People are screaming her name and everybody wants an interview. Everybody, or so it seems, wants "something" from her. How do you handle that pressure? You don't even get one step off the bus and there's this crush, and mass of people screaming at you.

Another reality that people don't usually think about for elite athletes is the tremendous amount of downtime and waiting that's involved. Is that the time where nerves take over? Is that the time where your thoughts wreak havoc with potential issues and concerns that could go wrong with your performance? What do you do in the waiting hours? How do you handle that?

What about family? There's all kinds of family pressures, and without question, they're exerting an influence, "I hope you can do this for me" or, "How do feel today?" Well meaning intentions can overwhelm athletes at this critical time. And other life events don't just stop because you're competing in the Olympic Games. Julie Foudy celebrated her first wedding anniversary in the middle of the Olympics. How do spouses and significant others cope with long absences and then intense time together?

As a sport psychologist I don't feel anything is more valuable to me (and to my learning and effectiveness) than just watching and listening. You just have to get your head up, look around and be attentive. Crucial professional assets for me are my listening and observation skills.

Developing the psychological skills triad

I have said that what we do with our team is something that any coach could apply. If coaches asked me, "What things could I do, no matter what age, or level I'm coaching?" I'd say, "Use the psychological skills triad: goal setting, affirmations and imagery". I absolutely recommend these three skills as the centerpiece of any program.

Goal setting - Looking at short, mid and long-range goals, written in specific terms and a specific time to completion noted. They should be written in behavioral, observable terms. They should be difficult, but realistic.

Affirmations - Really examining, controlling and improving self talk. Although we utilized many techniques, there is one we used with great success. A number of players have longer hair and wear scrunchies to hold it back. I have them wear a scrunchie on their wrist and if they say something negative or if they had negative self talk, they'd have to snap that scrunchie. That was their cue to say, "Hey, smarten up!" Note the negative, replace it with a positive, and move on.

Imagery - This is something that athletes can do any place, anywhere, any time. Some of our athletes preferred to image when they woke up in the morning, or before they went to sleep at night. Athletes can image, in split seconds before taking a free kick. Athletes can image how they wanted to feel, and how they wanted to be when the match started or finished. To facilitate imagery, we created imagery video tapes. These were not highlight tapes but imagery tapes. We also created audio cassette tapes to guide athletes through issues ranging from team to personal performance issues and always focusing on those aspects of their game over which they have control.

Many of these techniques are based on self-consistency theory that simply posits that human beings act in ways that are consistent with how they see themselves. So, if you change how athletes feel about themselves, you're going to change how they behave, and how they appear to the outside world. Athletes and coaches need to understand how powerful their expectations can be.

Self-fulfilling prophecy cycle

Your expectations as a coach do affect how you treat athletes and, as athletes, expectations influence how you perform. We treat athletes that we expect a great deal of, much differently. We praise them more. We interact with them more. We might give them more high-fives, or pats on the back. That treatment affects athletes' behavior, their performance and their learning rate. If those expectations are rigid and occur over a long enough period of time, eventually athletes behavior conforms to those expectations. This same self-fulfilling prophecy could be applied for athletes' own expectations of themselves.

In the goal setting program, we want to give athletes optimal challenges. I'll give you one quick example on how specific this can be. We have a starting midfielder who, when a ball was played into her, set a goal to stop the ball rather than keep it moving all the time. There are times in a game where a ball was played into her and she needed to stop it dead, take a look and maybe spin out of pressure. She wasn't doing this at an acceptable level. Together we set a goal that at least 30 % of the time a ball was played into her, she would stop it rather than keep going. Since I'm at practice every day and able to check on her progress, I'd count every ball that was played into her and what she did with it. At the end of the day I'd be able to say, "Well, you did that 20 % of the time or you did that 70 % of the time". I'd be able to provide very specific, accurate, behavioral and contingent feedback on how athletes were doing in their goal-set areas.

Again, it's important to emphasize that we want athletes focusing their energy on what they can control. They can control effort, they can control process but they cannot completely control outcome. One of the things, I love in Terry Orlick's work with athletes was the refocusing concept of 'park

it'. When an error occurs, you park it. You leave it there. You don't forget about it, you just park it. And you go on. Because you know when you're most likely to make a mistake again? It's after the first one. It has a way of repeating itself. So **we literally taught athletes: a mistake occurs, note it, park it, move on**. Then, at an appropriate time, possibly at the end of practice or in the evening, we go back to what we parked and have a look. We see what we could have done better. We want athletes to win within. We want to imagine the possibility of unlimited possibilities. We want to dare to achieve. And hopefully, this is what you want for your athletes as well.

A hallmark of our success is certainly team unity and an unwavering commitment to each other. We are constantly asking athletes, 'What are you doing to contribute to team chemistry? What are you doing to contribute to the success of this team?"

Mental plans

" Positive thinking may not always help but negative thinking almost always hurts." Terry Orlick

We devote a great deal of time to our mental plans. Athletes are encouraged to develop mental plans about pre-competition, imagery thoughts and knowing that they trained well enough and are good enough to expect victory. The literature doesn't show that positive thinking helps performance; what the literature shows is that negative thinking hurts performance. In essence, you can't do two things at the same time. So, if negative thinking hurts, then if we're thinking positive, it rules out the possibility of those negative images and negative talk. We want to give athletes positive things to think, to see, and to do.

One of the tangible contributions that both the coaching staff and the athletes felt was most helpful in our program was the creation of the imagery tapes. Each athlete's tape was about five to six minutes long, and we included athlete-selected music. Music players picked was dubbed over top of these visual images. The images were designed to take athletes through virtually every aspect that they would face in the contest, from marching out onto the field, to the opening kickoff, to tactical challenges, to how they were going to handle the physical demands of the game, to how they were going to respond to fatigue.

We had athletes and the coaching staff develop performance profiles. By position (goalkeepers, forwards, midfielders, and defenders) profiles were collectively constructed and adopted as a unit. We posted samples of those performance profiles sometimes including how athletes were feeling, and where they rated themselves on a continuum. I could do an entire talk just on the development and implementation of performance profiles.

Pre-Competition Phase

1. Psychological Warm-up Self - Suggestions – combines a series of self-suggestions about how well you've prepared, your capacity to push yourself, the fact that you've performed extremely well before, to create the ideal feeling and mental state (preparation, readiness, ability, adaptability, commitment to give everything)

   (I am strong, I am good, I am ready, I am the best, play my game, I am prepared, in control, capable, I can achieve it, draw from the well, extend yourself, follow your plan, you are ready, Do It!)

2. Prestart Focus - brief self-reminders of event focus, focus on first few seconds

before the start of the match and at other critical junctures
3. Imagery - activating images, calming images, organized and detailed vs. loose and unstructured, feel, see and believe in a good performance

A major focus for our team, and certainly an important one for your team, is developing a precompetition plan. Most of these details we asked athletes to commit to paper. When you write it, there's a level of ownership that you just don't see otherwise. We want athletes focusing on their psychological warm-up. Athletes literally write-down what they want to say, how they want to feel and what they are doing physically at any given moment. These plans can occur from the second they wake-up in the morning until that final whistle blows at the end of the game. Some athletes like these plans to be very detailed while others prefer them to be loose and flexible. Some examples of their self-talk reminders or focusing comments include, "I'm strong. I'm good. I'm ready. I'm in control". What we want these athletes focusing on, over and over again, is what they can control.

" Train well enough to be good enough to win, then focus solely on your own performance" Terry Orlick

Getting psyched for games is usually not a problem when you're playing an arch rival, or you're in the Olympics, or you're in the World Cup. But getting athletes fired up at an appropriate level and maintaining that intensity so they are game ready when that whistle blows for all games is critically important. Athletes do worry. Any time your name, your reputation, or something that's important to you is on the line, those doubts and those nightmares can creep in. We don't want athletes to ignore them. We want to note them. We want to be able to replace them, and, we want them to be able to move on.

Even small gestures can take on significant symbolism. Something as seemingly trivial as how athletes hang their jerseys in the locker room and what that means to them ('that's my name, that's my number, and this is my country') takes on significance. There's a tremendous amount of pride and ritual in pre-game routines. Prior to the semi final against Norway, you can see athletes listening to their pre game tapes. They're going into themselves or they're talking to other people. The key is that each individual needs to know what are the strategies and behaviors that she needs to engage in for a best performance. We've had athletes analyze their best performance. We want to repeat the successful elements of that routine. Kristine Lilly, the most capped player in the world, listens to an audio-tape that we've developed as part of her pre-game routine.

Refocusing at the event

- In less than ideal situations, look for reasons why you should still be confident and optimistic
- After distractions, negative self-talk, worries, etc., "Stop, park it", refocusing cue word ("dance, play, attack, enjoy, flow")
- Do what you can do, draw the positive lesson, shift focus, think of successes, positive images and capabilities
- Anyone who does not believe in miracles is not a realist
- Let the coaches deal with it, not my department
- Use relaxation tape, listen to music, quick relaxation techniques

- Confident performers focus on what they want to happen, others focus on what they fear might happen

- Performance is rooted in expectations and beliefs

- Choose how you want to think, feel and focus, You are in control

In a ninety minute match a lot happens; momentum switches, you're up a goal, you're down a goal, you're up a man, you're down a man, there is a bad call by the official, a key player is injured and is carried off. Refocusing at the event is critical, and we developed what Terry Orlick calls "what if" strategies. We asked athletes to consider, "What would you do if? What would you say if? What would you think if?" We tried to create as many different realistic scenarios as we could so that athletes never faced them for the first time in actual competition. It's a buffered kind of learning where athletes get to practice coping, recovering, and achieving without having to face the actual event.

We don't want athletes to panic and yet it sometimes happens. You can see it in our sport almost any day of the year. In order to lessen the likelihood of the choking process, athletes are taught mind to muscle techniques and also muscle to mind techniques. In other words, sometimes thoughts trigger tenseness in our bodies, and other times physical fatigue and tiredness triggers negative thinking in our minds. We want to develop strategies for both mind to muscle and muscle to mind interventions. For example, when you feel yourself getting tense, then refocus on healthy, productive, calming breathing or perhaps you need to check your self-talk patterns. Are you saying the things that will make you a stronger, better, and improved player? Those moments when you're walking out onto the field, that's a critical time for you to revisit your pre-game plan. Revisit the feeling, the intensity, the emotion and the tactical challenges you're going to face. The point is, take control of these moments and of these events or they may very well take control of you.

In the locker room prior to the gold medal match, every athlete was fully absorbed in her pre-game focus. Literally, many had their pre-game tapes playing until the final minutes prior to the start of the match. When they saw a photograph of this time period in the locker room, they said, "You know everyone of us is listening to you right now". In other words, they wanted to take control. They wanted to know what they were planning, what they were hearing, and what they were seeing. Each individual needs to cultivate a pre-game routine that best suits their own peak performance needs and something over which they have control.

Team building

- Problem solving
- Communication skills
- Leadership development
- Cooperative efforts and evolution
- Risk taking
- Frustration tolerance
- Creative adjustments
- Interpersonal understanding
- Fun

Team building is an invaluable part of any team's success. But team building isn't just playing games, or having fun, or having a break from training. We take team building very seriously, even though we're laughing often times during the team building sessions. We can work on problem solving, communication, developing leadership, handling adversity, dealing with frustration, co-

operating with one another, increasing interpersonal understanding and risk taking. It's amazing when we're doing trust dives, or trust falls, you see elite athletes suddenly get tense and worried. Without question, there's a lot of growth that occurs. There's a tremendous amount of literature in the area of team building from groups such as Project Adventure, the NOLS program etc. to the cooperative games literature. Terry Orlick has written extensively about the use of cooperative games in developing both competitive and cooperative kinds of skills. We want athletes certainly to contribute to the team, to be one of the group, but we also want them to be themselves. We want to find a place where they can be who they are.

Enjoyment, I think is one of the most critical underlying factors for success. You work harder when you're enjoying what you're doing. You train more, and longer, and you train in the presence of adversity when you're enjoying what you're doing. We want athletes literally to enjoy the trip, and not just focus on the final destination. Less than three weeks before the Olympics we went out as a group and just focused on team building. The day before the Gold Medal match, again, our focus was on team building rather than on tactics or additional physical practice.

A crystallizing moment for each of us occurred the night before the very first Olympic Game. We had a meeting and looked at these athletes with all their worries and concerns, and all of their hopes and dreams coming together. We very, very clearly let them know that "this is the team and now is the time". It was that mentality that carried us. Yes, it worked out well and it was an incredible experience but we didn't have to finish first to be winners. Seventy seven thousand fans packed the Olympic stadium and got to participate in our gold medal match. But, all of the work that went into that performance behind the scenes is something that I don't think anybody will ever know or fully appreciate unless you've been in that specific situation.

There are these moments, when you've kept your eyes on the prize, when you know what you're working for and you know what's at stake and what you have accomplished together. Seeing each and every athlete in that wonderfully intimate, personal relationship with their gold medal was one of those moments. Tiffeny Milbrett, Briana Scurry, Brandi Chastain, Mia Hamm and others gave unbelievable, heroic and selfless performances. Julie Foudy and Carla Overbeck, our co-captains of the team, were truly thrilled and excited. What a moment! I took probably 800 photographs during the course of the Olympics and only a few of the ones I took on the medal stand weren't blurry. I think everybody who was there was crying in some way or another. It was a moment for a lifetime.

We've come a long way. Both as a soccer community in the United States and in Canada, but certainly we looked at 1996 as the year of the woman in sport. It's not just for her, that elite, gold medal, potential world champion athlete. It's for all players who love the game, who want to be strong and vibrant, and want this beautiful game of soccer to positively impact their lives. There's a tremendous give and take that occurs in athletics, where sport changes the person, and the person changes the sporting experience. This gold medal was a victory for many people and causes both in and out of the sport environment.

In summary, I do believe that psychological skills training has a place in all levels of sport. Ideally and realistically it's best if the coach gets the necessary training, and the

coach functions, if you will, as a sport psychologist with his or her team. You don't necessarily need to bring in an outside expert. You don't need to pay for somebody's services if you do your reading and you attend workshops and you continue to grow as an individual. One of the best places to start is with yourself. Don't just teach about imagery, learn it and do it yourself. Don't just tell athletes about goal-setting, set goals, adhere to them and follow through yourself. Don't just talk to athletes about thinking positive and not getting down on themselves. Model that for them. Model that for yourself. It starts within. That's why after you develop your base of knowledge and you learn more, begin to implement these techniques personally. I think the Women's National Soccer Team knows that these aren't things that I just talk about, these are things that I do and I do them on a consistent and daily basis. I live the very techniques and the principles that I try to teach athletes. That's a great place for you to start as well.

I want to encourage you to infuse psychological skills training as part of the daily training environment. It should be done in the weight room, on the practice field, and on the game field. Certainly you may have some meetings or outside discussions about PST, but **the centerpiece of psychological skills training should occur in the environment in which it occurs.**

It's not just for problem athletes. It's for athletes who want to maximize their potential. If you had an athlete who was marvelously talented but they weren't physically strong enough, what would you do? Most people would say, "I'd get them in the weight room. I'd have them practice. I'd have them training, I'd have a whole weight training program for them". You wouldn't just say, "Oh wow, that's so disappointing, they could be great if only they were stronger". Yet coaches sometimes approach psychological skills training as though either athletes have it or they don't. You're mentally tough or you're not. You're really committed and dedicated or not. Not so...these are skills and they can be trained and improved with practice. There are people with more or less innate abilities, but all of us can get better, all of us can get stronger, all of us can learn to exert more and greater control.

Questions

The first question that comes up is, "At what age can I start psychological skills training?" "Is there a time that it is too young, or inappropriate?" There have been variations of psychological skills training used with children as young as five and six years of age. The level of sophistication, the kinds of things that you might do with kids, is obviously very different than what you would do with teenagers or adults. Some of the things that you can do with children are things like monitoring their self-talk. When you hear kids say, "I'm just not any good", or, "I've never been able to do this" or, "This is just too difficult for me". That's a time for you to step in and talk to them about their own self-talk, and their belief in themselves. So starting very young listen to the language that kids are using about their skills, and about their abilities.

Goal setting - whether a child might come into a practice at six years of age, or 14 years of age, or 32 years of age, you specifically say, "What are we going to work on today? Are we going to try to get off five shots on goal during the scrimmage time? Are we going to try to pass to three different teammates today?" You can increase or decrease the level of difficulty in terms of goal setting that you might use with a child vs. a national team player.

Attribution, which is simply the reasons that kids give, or any human beings give for that matter, for success or failure. Listen to the reasons why a child thinks that they won or lost a game. As the coach and as a parent you want to encourage children to put stock in their hard work, in their effort, in their ability. Rather than issues like, "Well, I was lucky that's why I won". Or "I won because I'm better than someone else". Because next week, or next month, or next year they may be playing an opponent that they feel is too difficult. So basically we want to encourage children to assume responsibility for their success and to believe that after failure, hard work is something that they can really attack and have control over.

What types of training are appropriate? At any age self-talk and affirmations, and affirmations are simply positive, present tense, self statements that reveal what you can do, what you believe, what you intend to do. "We have prepared well". "I am a strong and confident player". "I have trained hard for this competition". "We are ready to play today". All of those are examples of affirmations that increase the likelihood of positive outcomes. Certainly as coaches you all know the negative types of self-statements and affirmations. "I'm not any good". "Man we just got thrashed by this team". "He's always been better than me". Really listen to what athletes are saying and try to help them turn these negatives to positives. We do this with Olympic athletes and its appropriate for you to do with five and six-year-olds.

There something called a self-fulfilling prophecy where eventually a child, or any athlete's behavior, starts to conform to their expectations. You've heard the adage, **"Be careful of what you hope for, you just may get it**". A lot of times because of beliefs, those tapes that athletes are running in their minds, their beliefs set themselves up for failure. After an error athletes tend to dwell on the error, on their imperfections, on their problems. All that that does is increase the likelihood of future errors to occur. So we want athletes to focus on what they do well, on their strengths, especially after errors, we want them to note the error, replace what the problem was with what should have been done, and then move on. So the area of self-confidence and trying to alter negative self-fulfilling prophecies is another important area to work on.

I'm a real believer that goal setting can and should be used at all ages. Goal setting is more effective if the behaviors are specific, if they're observable, if you write your goals down, if the athlete participates in the goal setting process, rather than just the coach giving the athletes their goals. Let's talk about what you want to accomplish today. Focus on goals that you have control over - process oriented goals rather than outcome. In other words, as a soccer player I can control the technique that I use in shooting. I can control whether I shoot or not. But I can't control whether the goal goes in, or whether the goalkeeper makes a brilliant save. So we want goal setting to focus on what we can control, observable behaviors, really being able to quantify what you want from that athlete. A quality first touch that's within a yard of my plant foot. Getting off five shots. Being able to execute three crosses into the 18, would be an example of goal setting.

It is so vitally important that we highlight and encourage athletes to attribute their successes to factors over which they have control, internal and controllable types of factors. For failures we want the athletes to be able to feel as though the reasons for the failure can be changed, so they're unstable, meaning I can change it. "I can exert higher

effort next week. "I can practice between Saturday and the next game". So after error or after failure I want to believe that I have the requisite skills and motivation to make the changes that I need to.

Another question that came up is what are the differences between girls and boys or men and women in terms of psychological skills training? While it could be a long complicated answer the simplest thing that I would say is the ball is round. We're dealing with athletes first rather than gender. The kinds of techniques that are effective for women are effective for men. The kinds of techniques that you want to implement within the practice setting, you are infinitely better off considering the gender similar rather than trying to pinpoint where these differences might be. Some of you are coaching males only, some of you are coaching females only, the point that I'm making is that psychological skills training simply works. Regardless of the gender you want to reach that individual athlete.

The final point is, How do I handle a slump, or an expected slump? "We had this big win last week and then we worry about this let down the next week" or "We played great on Friday, how do we continue that on Saturday?". Well very simply, one of the factors of slumps is focusing on external kinds of things: the quality of the opponent, how important the contest is. We want to frame athletes' motivations from an intrinsic perspective. Their opponent is themselves. Their challenges are within. Their opponents aren't someone else or someone else's record. So you want to focus on specific goals that the individual and the team can collectively accomplish. We want them to be competing against our own best self. Not against the opponent. If you can focus on the task at hand, rather than the ego involved, if you can focus on the goals that individuals can control, these are the things that can make the biggest difference. Slumps are common but I would honestly say to you they don't need to occur with the frequency that they do, and they certainly don't need to last for an entire game, or for a part of the season. You really can take some steps to intervene, in what we call "slump busting" kinds of behaviors.

Pursuing Performance Excellence: Lessons Learned from Olympic Athletes and Coaches

Dan **Gould**, Christy **Greenleaf**, Diane **Guinan**, Kristen **Dieffenbach** and Sean **McCann**, USA

Dan Gould and Christy Greenleaf are with the Department of Exercise and Sport Science, University of North Carolina Greensboro, Greensboro NC 27402-6169, drgould@uncg.edu
Diane Guinan is an exercise physiologist in private practice in Rockford, Illinois. Kristen Dieffenbach is a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina Greensboro. Sean McCann is the Director of Sport Psychology at the United States Olympic Committee, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Abstract
This manuscript reports lessons regarding performance excellence identified by U.S. Olympic athletes and coaches who took part in the 1996 Summer and 1998 Winter Olympic Games. These lessons were derived from in-depth interviews with 8 Atlanta and 7 Nagano athletes and from focus group interviews with 2 to 4 athletes from 8 Atlanta teams and 10 coaches from these teams. Surveys of 296 Atlanta Games athletes (46% of all U.S. competitors), 83 Nagano athletes (46%), 46 Atlanta Games coaches (46%) and 18 Nagano coaches (45%) were also conducted. The open-ended survey responses were combined with themes derived from transcripts of all interviews and content analyzed via a three person consensual validation procedure. Results revealed that 900 Olympic performance-related lessons were reported by Atlanta athletes and 335 lessons by Nagano athletes and were organized into 26 and 24 general categories respectively. Some of the larger categories included: mental preparation/training; achieving optimal physical conditioning while not overtraining; distraction preparation and awareness; plans and adhering to plans; and coaching. Relative to coaching lessons, 285 were identified by Atlanta coaches and 48 by Nagano coaches. Moreover, these individual lesson themes coalesced into 24 and 8 respective more general topical categories such as team cohesion/harmony; family/friend involvement; dealing with the media; and team selection; fun/enjoyment and trials. Results are discussed relative to peak performance research and an example of how to use these lessons in consulting is provided.

Pursuing Performance Excellence: Lessons Learned from Olympic Athletes and Coaches

When most individuals think of the Olympic Games, visions of the memorable performances of great athletes come to mind. In the United States, for example, most Americans remember the unbelievable consistency of speed skater Bonnie Blair, the artistry of diver Greg Luganis, the "miracle on ice" Lake Placid U.S. ice hockey team, or magnificent golden shoed sprinter Michael Johnson. It is ironic, then, that while sport psychology researchers

have extensively studied the psychological characteristics of successful athletes (Hardy, Jones, & Gould, 1996; Williams & Krane, 1998 for reviews), only a few efforts (e.g. Orlick & Partington, 1988; Gould, Eklund, and Jackson, 1992a, 1992b) have been made to study Olympic competitors.

Most notable is the work of Orlick and Partington (1988) who examined the mental readiness and skills of 1984 Canadian Olympic athletes. Both interview and survey methods were used in the study. Results revealed that mental readiness was a significant factor influencing final Olympic ranking. Attentional focus and the use of performance imagery were associated with successful performance. Total commitment to the pursuit of excellence, quality training including goal setting, competition simulation and imagery, mental preparation for competition including a detailed competition plan and a plan for dealing with distractions were common factors found with the successful athletes. Those Olympians that did not perform up to their potential reported not being prepared to deal with the distractions that they faced. Factors that interfered with performance included changing things that previously worked, late team selection, and the inability to focus after distractions. It was concluded that the mental aspect of performance is essential for high achievement in important events such as the Olympic Games.

Following up on the Orlick and Partington (1988) study, Gould and colleagues (Gould, Eklund, & Jackson, 1992a; 1992b) conducted a series of studies examining the mental factors and preparation techniques associated with Olympic wrestling excellence. All 20 members of the 1988 U.S. Olympic team were interviewed and reported that prior to their all-time best performance they experienced positive expectancies, optimal arousal states, and heightened effort and commitment. The use of systematic mental preparation strategies, including preparation routines, tactical strategies focus, and motivational strategies aided in the achievement of those optimal thought and emotional patterns. In contrast, the wrestlers described their all-time worst Olympic performance as having negative feeling states, negative, irrelevant, or irregular patterns of thought, and a nonadherence to preparation routines. These results are consistent with the research of Orlick and Partington (1988) and suggest that mental skills play a crucial role in Olympic athletic performance.

Although examining the psychological skills and characteristics of Olympians is important and has added to the sport psychology knowledge base, there may be utility to looking beyond psychological characteristics and attributes and focusing more broadly on recording the lessons these competitors have learned from their Olympic experience. In essence, debriefing athletes relative to the lessons they learned from their Olympic experience.

Experience is defined by Webster (1989) as "the knowledge or feeling obtained through direct impressions" or "the skill or judgement gained by practice." What knowledge and mental skill lessons are gained from preparing for and competing in the Olympic Games? This is the focus of the present study. Our purpose was to record the lessons learned from Olympic athletes and coaches in their quest for athletic excellence.

Interestingly, the development of a lessons learned system is not without precedent in the United States. The armed forces of the

United States have developed lessons learned systems for its various branches (McCarthy, 1994; Santala, 1994). These systems grew out of concern that U.S. service men and women would repeatedly make the same wartime mistakes. Such mistakes resulted because there was no system in place to record what went right and wrong on the battlefield, organize those lessons, and disseminate them to other service men and women in the same positions. A computer-based communication system was developed where raw observations are collected and integrated into meaningful lessons that are communicated throughout the military system to all those working at the same rank. Hence, the U.S. military has developed a system of organizational memory. Sport psychology specialists may do well to consider such a "lessons learned" approach to record, organize and document mental lessons athletes and coaches learn about achieving performance excellence through their Olympic experiences. Interestingly, such an approach is consistent with one of the major functions of the field outlined by the father of North American sport psychology, Coleman Griffith (1925). Griffith said sport psychologists should study the best athletes and coaches in the field, record the psychological principles they employ, and disseminate those principles to less experienced and less successful athletes and coaches.

This article presents lessons learned from U.S. Olympic athletes and coaches. These lessons were assessed in two U.S. Olympic Committee sponsored studies designed to identify and examine factors that positively and/or negatively affected the preparation and performance of U.S. Olympic athletes and coaches prior to and during the 1996 Atlanta Summer and the 1998 Nagano Winter Olympic Games.

Method

Both studies used a two-phase questionnaire and interview data collection procedure and these are summarized below.

Atlanta Study

In the questionnaire phase, surveys were developed and administered to all U.S. athletes (N = 643) and coaches (N = 100) with known addresses who participated at the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games. The survey items were based on: (1) interviews conducted with nine USOC staff members who had attended numerous previous Games (e.g., sport psychologists, an athletic trainer, games preparation administrators, etc.), (2) National Sport Governing Body high performance plan evaluations, and (3) USOC Atlanta Games coaches summit debriefing notes. Topical areas included in the survey were: participant background; Olympic expectations and readiness; the importance of mental skills in Olympic performance; factors influencing performance in the year leading up to the Games and at the Games (e.g., athlete preparation, media, team influences, coaching, family, sponsors, staffing, and environmental). Two hundred ninety-six athletes (46%) and 46 coach (46%) surveys were completed and returned.

In addition to the surveys, the interview phase of the project involved interviews with individual athletes, coaches, and teams. Specifically, in-person focus group interviews (involving 2 to 4 athletes) were conducted with 4 highly successful teams that equaled or exceeded NGB performance expectations at the Games and 4 teams that performed below NGB expectations. The 10 coaches of these teams were also interviewed individually. Phone interviews with 8 athletes (4 that met or exceeded expectations and 4 that did not meet expectations) were also conducted.

Participants for all interviews, whether teams or individual athletes were selected based on two criteria. First, based on previous performances at World championships they were projected to be potential medal contenders at the Games. Second, USOC staff felt these individuals would be good sources of information for the study. The interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and focused on the same types of questions asked in the surveys. The goal of the interviews, however, was to try to obtain a feel for each team or athlete's individual Olympic experience and detailed explanations of the factors that affected performance.

Nagano Study

The Nagano study was a follow-up to the Atlanta investigation and with a few minor exceptions (e.g., examined factors such as jet lag, snow/ice conditions not applicable to the summer Games) used identical measures and procedures. Specifically, all 1998 U.S. Nagano Olympians (N = 180) and coaches (N = 42) with known addresses were mailed surveys in the year after the Nagano Games. Eighty-three athletes (46%) and 19 coaches (45%) returned completed questionnaires. Individual phone interviews were also conducted with 7 athletes (4 that met or exceeded expectations and 3 that did not meet expectations), and focused on the same types of questions asked in the surveys. Unlike the Atlanta study, no team focus-group interviews were conducted.

Data Analysis

In both the survey and interview portions of the studies the athletes and coaches were asked what advice they would give to future Olympic coaches and athletes to enhance their chances of peak performance during Olympic competition. Within each area (advice for athletes and advice for coaches), written open-ended responses from the surveys and themes identified from the transcripts of all interviews were combined and content analyzed. Procedures recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994), and used in previous qualitative studies (e.g., Gould, Eklund, and Jackson, 1993) were followed for the data analysis. Specifically, each of three investigators studied written transcripts and organized "like" responses into more general categories. The three investigators then met as a group and consensus was reached on each category and a summary label for the category was determined. The responses regarding lessons learned are the focus of this manuscript.

Results

Lessons learned reported by the Atlanta and Nagano participants focused on suggestions for future Olympians and suggestions for future Olympic coaches. First, lessons suggested by Olympic athletes are presented. Second, lessons learned from Olympic coaches are forwarded.

Athlete Lessons

Based on the athlete surveys, focus group team interviews, and individual athlete interviews, Atlanta participants reported 900 Olympic performance-related lessons and Nagano participants reported 335 lessons. The content analysis of these 900 individual lessons from Atlanta participants resulted in 26 more general categories. The content analysis of responses from Nagano participants resulted in 22 categories of lessons. Both Atlanta and Nagano participants reported many of the same categories of lessons learned (see Table 1). While space limitations prevent a detailed description of all categories, some of the more frequently reported and psychologically significant lessons will be discussed in more detail below.

Most Frequently Reported Lessons

Mental preparation and training. One of the categories of advice most frequently cited by both Atlanta and Nagano participants was "mental preparation/training." Atlanta participants provided 173 specific lessons (19.2% of total lessons) and Nagano participants provided 73 specific lessons (21.8% of total lessons) related to mental preparation and training. Specific lessons contained in this category ranged from numerous suggestions to work with sport psychology consultants to the importance of engaging in long-term psychological preparation to the need to be mentally ready, confident, and focused. In addition, other more specific suggestions were offered. These included such things as balancing the need to focus on one's performance with enjoying the Olympic experience (suggesting that focusing only on performance or being so caught up in the Olympic excitement that one's focus waned was destructive); talking to others and learning what to expect at the Games; concentrating on oneself and finding time to focus; staying confident and positive; having and implementing mental plans; using stress management strategies; relaxing; and not putting extra pressure on oneself. Several quotes from the athletes reflect the importance of these lessons. For example, one Atlanta athlete said, *"just as physical training is a process, so is mental training, and you can't expect to have an expert come in and do a quick fix."* Another athlete suggested, *"work on mental and psychological skills so that they don't get caught up in the hype."*

Optimal physical training while avoiding overtraining. The second most frequently cited category of lessons learned across both Atlanta and Nagano participants was "optimal physical training while avoiding overtraining." Atlanta participants reported 165 individual lessons (18.3% of total) and Nagano participants reported 37 specific suggestions (11.0% of total). In essence, this category reflected the need to train hard and be very well prepared for the Olympics while not overtraining. As one participant indicated: *"Sometimes you go a little overboard on [training]…I think the last weeks that we did. What I needed was a mental break."* Furthermore, another athlete advised: *"Be careful in trying to 'get the edge' that you don't overdo it and 'lose the edge'."* Thus, such specific advice as training smart, taking breaks, resting as the competition approaches, individualizing training and recognizing overtraining signs were often mentioned.

The story of one unsuccessful team reflects this category of lessons well. Favored for a medal going into the Games (as a result of their World champion status), the team focused so much on training hard and gaining an edge over their opponents, that they physically overtrained. This also resulted from the inability of the athletes and coaches to recognize signs of overtraining, and their failure to communicate. The result was a mediocre Olympic campaign and the failure to earn any medal.

Coaching. As one might expect, an important category of lessons focused on "coaching" issues. Atlanta participants cited 84 specific lessons (9.3% of total) and Nagano participants cited 37 specific lessons (11.0% of total) related to coaching issues. A variety of specific issues fell within this category, including such things as coaching credibility and trust, suggestions for athletes to deal with their coach (e.g., don't be pressured), and the importance of achieving good communication by avoiding sarcasm, emphasizing honesty

and being very clear in one's remarks to athletes. Especially salient lessons focused on the need to incorporate personal coaches by getting them access to venues and coordinating their presence and interactions with official team coaches. Lastly, it was also suggested that coaches not become distracted by the hoopla of the Games.

Distraction preparation and awareness. "Distraction preparation and awareness" was an important category of lessons reported by the Atlanta participants (44 lessons, 4.9% of total) and Nagano participants (20 lessons, 6.0% of total). As one athlete indicated: *"So I think all of us didn't really realize the extent of those outside distractions and the pressure that continued to mount."* This category of lessons included such specific advice as being ready to deal with all the distractions and hoopla that come from the Olympics, an event the athletes repeatedly reported as very different from other major competitions. It was also emphasized that athletes need to minimize nonessential meetings and simplify their lives, learn to say no and be selfish, not focus on small nonessential things, focus on what they can personally control, and be ready to balance the Olympic "hoopla" with one's performance mission and focus.

Several interesting ways athletes and teams dealt with distractions were given as examples of implementing this category of advice. One gold medal winning team, for instance, reported having a psychological "in" and "out" box in the month leading up to their performance. The entire team agreed that issues that directly effected performance went into the "in" box and were immediately addressed, while non-performance issues (e.g., shoe contracts) went into the out box, and were not addressed until after the Games. In contrast, a team with high performance expectations going into Atlanta reported that they did not meet their expectations because many of their athletes and coaches got so caught up in the Olympic village atmosphere that they failed to achieve the focus needed for optimal performance. For example, one athlete from a less successful team said, *"they're (other athletes) playing laser tag two hours before the game, they have no clue who we'll play, what the line-up is or what's going on."*

Other Lessons of Interest

Olympic village. A number of lessons were identified relative to the "Olympic village" and related matters. Atlanta participants reported 43 specific lessons (4.8% of total) related to the Olympic village. For example, athletes and coaches both made comments related to the decision to stay in or out of the village and the advantages of each approach (i.e., draw energy from the village excitement versus losing focus due to all the Village distractions). One athlete expressed that she wished she had stayed outside of the village, *"You do all these things that you work so hard at and then you get into a situation where there's just too many people around all the time."* Spending too much time in the village, taking advantage of the many village amenities and difficulty finding privacy were also discussed in numerous comments.

Team cohesion and harmony. "Team cohesion and harmony" was an important category of responses compiled from athletes and coaches comments espousing the need of team support, unity, and bonding. Atlanta participants reported 33 specific lessons (3.7% of total). As one athlete said, *"We had respect for one another and we made each other live up to a higher standard."* Similarly one

individual sport athlete indicated that: *"It was a team that came together like I've never seen before and we just all bonded and it didn't seem like anyone had…but this team did it and I mean the best feeling that I had was when I was up on the blocks or I was on the award podium and I saw my teammates there that are just going crazy. I mean that was definitely, that definitely helped… just to know that I wasn't out there by myself. I had them and they were there with me too."* Interestingly, a number of participants also suggested that teams engage in numerous team building exercises. Finally, increased team cohesion and harmony advice was gleaned from both coaches and athletes of team, as well as individual sports.

International competition. Atlanta participants cited 32 specific lessons (3.6% of total) related to international competition. Specific lessons ranged from numerous suggestions to gain as much international experience as possible prior to the Games to suggestions to limit international competition the year prior to the Olympics. One athlete summed up the advice, saying "*international tournaments are great and it's great practice, but don't overdo it*."

Family and friend involvement. Atlanta participants cited 31 lessons (3.4% of total) and Nagano participants reported 9 lessons (2.7% of total) related to family and friend involvement. Lessons in the 'family and friend' category varied and included suggests such as setting up a system for getting family and friends tickets, having a plan to deal with family and friend communication during the Games, and educating family and friends about the demands on athletes in preparation for and during the Olympics. Other advice included not having family or friends at the Games and limiting contact with them during the Games.

Plans and adhering to plans. Related to the category of distraction preparation and awareness was "plans and adhering to plans." Atlanta participants reported 29 specific lessons (3.0% of total) and Nagano participants reported 9 lessons (2.7% of total) related to plans and adhering to plans. Interviews emphasized that athletes and coaches should have psychological and physical preparation and competition routines developed (based on past successful performances). In addition, participants noted that coaches and athletes must adhere to those routines and avoid making last minute changes—no easy task in the unique Olympic environment that offers a host of distractions and changes from one's normal practice and competitive schedules. Illustrating this point, one athlete said, *"more than anything athletes need to have already a routine established and they need to stick with that routine and take refuge in that routine because at the Games, everything changes."*

Support personnel. Relative to "support personnel" (24 lessons, 2.7%; 16 lessons, 4.8%), it was recommended that athletes get support personnel (e.g., hairstylist for skaters, cook if living out of the village, sport psychology consultant) organized for the Games. It was also emphasized that athletes surround themselves with support people they know and trust. One gold medallist said *"you need to make sure you surround yourself with people you trust, people that are really good at what they do and what you need them to do …so on your end you can be kind of carefree and relax."*

Team selection and trials. The "team selection and trials" category focused on the

timing of the trials with most respondents recommending that they be held earlier. Atlanta participants cited 18 specific lessons (2.0% of total) and Nagano participants reported 11 lessons (3.3% of total) related to team selection and trials. One athlete from a less successful team expressed that her team's trials were too close to the Olympics and said, *"we never had a chance to celebrate…we had one night…and then it was back to Atlanta and we were in the grind."* Other recommendations focused on how teams were selected and included such suggestions as utilizing more athlete input and not basing selections on one single performance.

Dealing with media. Nagano participants recommended 14 specific lessons (4.2% of total) related to media. Specifically, teams and athletes should have a media plan in place prior to the Games and a competent media liaison in place. It was also emphasized that to ensure good performance athletes must not schedule too many media obligations, as one athlete said, *"you know sometimes you need to be selfish and say I can't do something because it's not gonna be the best preparation for me."*

Travel. One condition that differed between the Atlanta and Nagano participants was travel. Nagano participants reported 10 specific lessons (3.0% of total) related to travel. Advice relating to traveling to Japan included such issues as making sure transportation issues were addressed before practice and competition begins. A number of lessons also focused on the optimal arrival time and the importance of not arriving too early or too late at the Olympic venue and host country.

Opening ceremonies. A less frequently cited category of advice was related to Opening Ceremonies. Atlanta participants reported 11 suggestions (1.2% of total) and Nagano participants reported 3 suggestions (0.9% of total) related to this category. Advice in this category was varied. On one hand, it was recommended that athletes and coaches attend Opening Ceremonies because of the personal satisfaction evoked, the feelings of U.S. team unity (beyond one's sport) derived, and their emotional/uplifting nature. In contrast, other recommendations focused on the physically and psychologically draining nature of the experience (e.g., being on one's feet for so long, lack of sleep from late completion – 3:00 am return to housing at Atlanta Games). These varied responses might best be explained by a lesson conveyed by the following coach. "*It was wonderfully exhilarating for the athletes, and I think it really brought home the Olympic experience and kind of launched them a bit. But, when we went to our third game…and had to travel again, then I saw some of the fatigue from that travel from the Opening Ceremonies kind of set in.*" Another coach had very specific recommendations for future coaches: (a) do not go if Opening Ceremonies are one day away from your performance; (b) go to Opening Ceremonies if your competition is three days away; and (c) if your competition is two days away from Opening Ceremonies – you have a tough decision and will need to gain as much information as possible about the pros and cons of attending and make a decision early.

Coaching Lessons

Based on the findings of the individual coach surveys and the coach interviews associated with the focus groups, Atlanta participants cited 285 specific coaching lessons and Nagano participants cited 48 lessons. The coaching lessons from the

Atlanta participants coalesced into 24 more general categories and the Nagano coaching lessons grouped into 8 general categories. Table 2 contains the frequencies and percentages of lesson categories for both Atlanta and Nagano participants.

Most Frequently Reported Lessons

Coaching. The "coaching" category consisted of 41 specific lessons (14.4% of total) from Atlanta participants and one lesson (2.1% of total) from a Nagano participant. This category focused on such recommendations as the importance of clarifying one's coaching role with the National Sport Governing Body (NGB) and being as committed as one's athletes, being sure to make fair coaching decisions, not over-coaching, and being aware that like their athletes, coaches are susceptible to fatigue. Reflecting the importance of commitment, one coach said, *"believe in what you are doing, you have to spend the hours training, studying, and competing – know you can and believe in yourself, team, and staff."*

General preparation. The "general preparation" category consisted of 33 specific suggestions (11.6% of total) from Atlanta participants and 6 lessons (12.5%) from Nagano participants. Lessons in this category emphasized the importance of long-term planning, having a clear vision for one's athletes, and being realistic in one's plans. Relative to the need for, and difficulty of, planning, one coach said *"To organize this amount of effort in one year, taking into consideration the availability of the athletes of their time in the context of their social integration, school, job, family, etc., it's a challenge."* The importance of anticipating potential distractions, and taking them into consideration when forming a plan was also recommended. Lastly, respondents repeatedly emphasized the importance of "detailed" planning as reflected in the following coach comment. "*Planning is vital! You must plan the entire approach. Consider: athlete selection, a long-term performance prognosis, program objectives, a systematic, controlled training environment, anticipate changes in food, housing, social factors, know competition, travel/jet lag, daily plans (especially recovery), at-games factors (climate, weather, transportation, media, pressure), number of competitions, and how you will filter communication from home via team leader*."

Optimal physical training and avoiding over training. Relative to the "optimal physical preparation/avoid over training" lessons category, Atlanta participants reported 31 lessons (10.9% of total) and Nagano participants cited 3 lessons (6.3% of total). The importance of coaches having athletes and teams well prepared, both physically and psychologically, was emphasized. It was further recommended that while coaches must help teams to be in top physical condition it is vital that they prevent over training by using appropriate tapering strategies and taking breaks. An especially interesting lesson featured with the "fragility" of athletes when they were in top physical condition and the importance of coaches being alter to signs of this to prevent over training and illness.

Mental preparation. Atlanta participants cited 28 specific lessons (9.8% of total) and Nagano participants reported 7 lessons (14.6% of total) related to "mental preparation/training." This category included suggestions to prepare athletes and teams for the physical and psychological stress encountered at an Olympic Games, and implementation of a mental training program. Numerous recommendations urged the utilization of sport psychology/mental

training consultants. As one coach of a team that under-performed said, *"we need a strong base of sport psychology for our elite athletes, to help them perform and deal with coping issues."*

Other Lessons of Interest

Support personnel. Atlanta participants reported 12 lessons (4.2% of total) and Nagano participants reported 2 lessons (4.2% of total) that were related to support personnel. The "support personnel" category emphasized the need to create a support staff and include various specialists (e.g., sport psychology specialist, skilled team manager). One coach aptly reflected this need when he said: *"Preparing for the Olympics is not just a responsibility of the athlete and his coach. … I believe we need to enrich this with a team of specialists who are preparing our athletes for the Olympics. … We need a team. And that team is extending more and more from the coaching, medical persons, scientists, athletes, family, community support, sponsors, NGB membership. They all have a contribution in that athlete's preparation."* Securing highly qualified support staff was recommended, as well as holding them accountable by releasing them when they do not perform.

Dealing with media. Atlanta participants reported 10 specific lessons (3.5% of total) related to dealing with the media. In terms of the "dealing with the media" category it was suggested that coaches set specific rules related to working with the media, to be ready to respond to both positive and negative events that could occur, and realize that television (up close and personal type human interest type coverage) often takes longer than usually planned for. Relative to the lesson pertaining to being ready to respond to both positive and negative events one coach said: *"It was negative and we could never get out of that negative spin with the media, so consequently it was just always going downhill… most of what I was reading in the media was very negative … that could have all been avoided or at least a good portion of it, or diffused. And the fact that it wasn't diffused, it affected our performance… you've got to be prepared for the media and not just, for the media to be good. You've got to be prepared for when it's <u>not</u> good."* Participants also emphasized the importance of having a media or sports information person to act as a buffer between the coach/team and media.

International competitions. Concerning "international competitions," Atlanta participants provided 9 specific lessons (3.2% of total) that fit into two dominant themes. First, it was suggested that coaches should schedule high levels of international competition the year before the Games. Second, it was recommended that these competitions occur frequently. One coach said, *"it is very important for the coach and the athlete to experience high level (international) competition before the Games – the level of expectation will be more realistic."*

Team cohesion and harmony. Atlanta participants cited 9 specific lessons (3.2% of total) and Nagano participants reported 1 lesson (2.1% of total) related to team cohesion and harmony. The "team harmony/cohesion" category emphasized the importance of coaches recognizing the importance of team dynamics. Establishing trust between staff and players was seen as essential in this regard, as was the utilization of team building exercises. As one coach said, *"develop a high level of trust and respect with your athletes. This should go both ways. Team is inclusive of*

all staff and athletes. Team unity is number one."

Family and friend involvement. Eight specific lessons (2.8% of total) related to family and friend involvement were reported by Atlanta participants. The "family/friend involvement" category emphasized the importance of having a plan for interacting with athlete and staff families and friends at the Games. Critical to this objective was the need to educate family and friends regarding the demands of an Olympic Games environment. As one coach indicated: *"... Family and friends need to be very well educated because we had a couple of instances where families wanted, obviously wanted to be with their athletes and we would have a schedule change and things that we had no control over ...disappointments on the part of the athletes, disappointments on the part of the families, and I think we need to do a real good job of educating the families about just why the athletes are there and how they as families can give support."* Additionally, assigning someone on the staff to serve as a staff liaison for family/friend interactions was suggested several times.

An excellent example of an effective family and friend education program was the one implemented by a gold medal winning team. Specifically, the coach met with the families and explained how they could be great resources for the athletes. For example, the coaches explained that there would be times at the Games when their athlete will need "space" and will not be able to be with loved ones, and that negative comments from significant others can influence player confidence. A system was also initiated in an effort to keep families informed at the Games, and to address any concerns they may have. Specifically, the first layer of the system involved the selection of two mothers that acted as communication liaisons in case of problems or questions. That is, only these mothers would bring concerns to the coaching staff. The second layer involved two NGB administrators who knew the families and would answer their questions without involving the coaches or would pass important issues on to the coaches themselves. This system helped athletes enjoy being with their families without having to worry about meeting their needs (i.e., getting them tickets, answering questions). It also allowed the families to provide optimal support to their athletes.

Distraction preparation. Atlanta participants provided 8 lessons (2.8% of total) and Nagano participants reported 3 lessons (6.3% of total) related to distraction preparation. Specific lessons included not allowing athletes to have beepers, being prepared for the enormous amount of paper work required of coaches, and being ready to deal with unexpected events.

Plans and adherence to plans. Nagano participants reported 8 specific lessons (16.7% of total) related to plans and adherence to plans. Lessons in this category focused on developing a coaching plan for achieving success and then sticking with the plan. One coach said "*make a plan and follow it*."

Closure. Although not frequently reported (2 lessons from Atlanta participants, 0.7% of total), the importance of closure was suggested by several coaches. As one coach indicated *"I think one of the problems at the end is for individuals and teams who succeed or exceed the elation, it must be unbelievable. And they just want to go let it all out. Where the teams that may not achieve, the disappointment*

is so huge because everyone sees you, that I'm not sure athletes or coaches are really prepared to close the situation in an appropriate fashion so that you can always deal with the disappointment of defeat. But the disappointment of defeat at the Olympics I think is such a different animal. And how do you deal with it? I mean I'm not prepared." Hence, providing support for coaches and athletes after the Olympics, conducting debriefing sessions, and having some form of closure experience were recommended.

Coach mental preparation. A much less frequently cited category (6 lessons from Atlanta participants, 2.1% of total) was "coach mental preparation' which emphasized the importance of, for example, the coach staying relaxed while coaching at the Games. Keeping the Olympic experience in perspective and believing in oneself as a coach were also urged. As one athlete said, *"the coaches could do with some psychological counseling as well…the coaches need to take advantage of the sport psychologist and the resources that we have available themselves to deal with the stress, because there's a lot of stress placed on them…their jobs are on the line…the coaches need to learn to deal with those added pressures of the Games and they need to keep things in perspective as well."*

Discussion and Conclusions

The large number of diverse categories of Olympic lessons identified in this article reflects the complexity of preparation and performance considerations. Similar factors were found to be important in the larger studies from which the results were taken (See Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, Medbery, Strickland, Lauer, Chung, & Peterson, K., 1998; Gould, Greenleaf, Dieffenbach, Chung, & Peterson, 1999). That is, based on the multiple sources of information collected, it is evident that successful Olympic performances in Atlanta and Nagano were complex, multifaceted, delicate, and long-term processes that required extensive planning and painstaking implementation of plans. Success seldom happened by chance and was easily disrupted by numerous distractions. While close attention to details and plans is critical, flexibility to adjust to the many unexpected events is also important. Hence, the specific lessons identified in this manuscript, while important, only form part of a complex matrix of factors that influence peak performance. The whole, then, may be more than the sum of its parts and simple solutions for achieving peak performance were not derived.

The lessons identified are also consistent with much of the sport psychology literature. For example, numerous lessons were identified about the importance of mental training, achieving optimal physical conditioning while not overtraining, enhancing team cohesion, and adhering to performance plans and routines. Sport psychologists have also advocated importance of these topics: mental training (Orlick & Partington, 1988); prevention of overtraining (Murphy, Fleck, Dudley & Claister, 1990); team cohesion (Carron, Spink, & Prapavessis, 1997); and performance routines (Boutcher, 1990; Gould, Eklund and Jackson, 1992a; Orlick & Partington, 1988).

Although not designed to test it, the findings also lend support to Orlick's (1992) wheel model of human excellence. In particular, based on his extensive research and consulting experience, Orlick has found that performance excellence results from seven basic elements. These elements include commitment, belief, full

focus, positive images, mental readiness, distraction control, and constructive evaluation. Lessons in this investigation addressed these critical elements.

Lastly, the lessons reflect several performance considerations that have not received much attention in the sport psychology literature (e.g., elite athlete family support versus distractions, support personnel integration into a high performance team). Greater efforts ought to be made to understand these issues.

The ultimate value in the lessons gleamed here from previous Olympians and Olympic coaches is to disseminate the information to future Olympic athletes and coaches. An illustration of how this may be achieved was a presentation by Gould (1998) who summarized many of the lessons and presented them to U.S. freestyle mogul skiing hopefuls 160 days prior to the Nagano Games. Selected lessons were presented to the skiers in a presentation and accompanying handout. In a 90 minute session the lessons were overviewed and the athletes and coaches discussed their relevance (a discussion which was enhanced by having two previous Olympic medallists present and a two time Olympic coach). In addition, to gain a better appreciation of the demands of the Olympic Games, individual athletes then considered those lessons most appropriate to their personal situation and developed strategies accordingly. For instance, one high profile team member developed a plan for effectively dealing with family and friend expectations in the Olympic season, while another religiously practiced thought stopping/restructuring to maintain focus in the face of potential Olympic distractions. By being aware of the lessons of previous Olympians these Olympians were better prepared in their own pursuit of Olympic excellence.

Recognizing the value of disseminating lessons learned from previous Olympians to future Olympic athletes and coaches, the USOC has produced a videotape titled "Achieving the dream: Performing your best at the Olympic Games." This 35 minute video is hosted by legendary Olympic medal winning speed skater Bonnie Blair and swimmer Jon Naber. In it, Olympic athletes discuss the results of this investigation with special emphasis placed on conveying the lessons learned. The videotape is also supplemented by an Olympic performance preparation checklist that can be completed by athletes and coaches. Lastly, an administrators checklist for planning Olympic success, a family and friend support brochure (that identifies ways family and friends can support but not distract athletes), and a brochure that explains how volunteers can assist but not interfere with athletes have been published.

In conclusion, it is important to recognize that, as someone once said, "Great corporations don't do one thing right, they do 1000 little things right every day." This quote reflects what was learned from the athletes and coaches in this study. Successful Olympic performance does not require that an athlete, coach or team do a single thing right. The key is to do many things right, on a consistent basis, and in an integrated fashion. Hence, a central recommendation based on these results is to develop a plan that integrates and incorporates these lessons into an effective program, that when implemented does not necessarily guarantee Olympic success, but provides the greatest probability of Olympic success.

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Table 1
Olympic Lessons: Categories of Advice from Olympic Athletes

Category	Example Lessons	Atlanta frequency (%)	Nagano frequency (%)
Mental preparation/training*	• Be mentally prepared and confidence • Have a sole performance focus • Start mental preparation early	173 (19.2%)	73 (21.8%)
Optimal physical training/avoid overtraining*	• Don't overtrain • Train smart • Work on technical skills	165 (18.3%)	37 (11.0%)
Coaching*	• Be honest and straightforward with coach • Have contact with your personal coach during Games • Develop coach-athlete communication	84 (9.3%)	37 (11.0%)
Distraction/Preparation awareness*	• Try to block out meaningless distractions • Don't stress if things are not perfect • Focus on what you can control	44 (4.9%)	20 (6.0%)
Olympic village*	• Stay outside the village • Move out of village a few days before competition • Don't try to do/see everything in village	43 (4.8%)	5 (1.5%)
Team cohesion/harmony*	• Work on maintaining team cohesiveness • Do team building exercises • Deal with team issues before Games start	33 (3.7%)	4 (1.2%)

Table 1 cont.

Category	Example Lessons	Atlanta frequency (%)	Nagano frequency (%)
International competition*	• International tournaments are great and it's great practice, but don't over do it • Get as much international experience as possible • Do more international competitions in the two years prior to the Games	32 (3.6%)	6 (1.8%)
Family/friend involvement*	• Hold an athlete-family meeting prior to Games • Have family plans taken care of ahead of time • Take time for family	31 (3.4%)	9 (2.7%)
Plans/adherence to plans*	• Have a plan and stick to it • Stick with what has worked in the past • Insist on staying with the normal pre-tournament routine	29 (3.0%)	9 (2.7%)
Support personnel*	• Explain support staff roles to team • Support staff needs to be familiar with athletes • Assemble your own personal 'support crew'	24 (2.7%)	16 (4.8%)
Team selection and trials*	• Have trials earlier • Use Olympic trials as setting stone to real thing • Have a less stressful trials and have sufficient time off before Olympics	8 (2.0%)	11 (3.3%)

Table 1 cont.

Category	Example Lessons	Atlanta frequency (%)	Nagano frequency (%)
Dealing with media*	• Hold media training earlier • Block out the media • Have someone take care of media responsibilities for you	14 (1.6%)	14 (4.2%)
Travel*	• Have better transportation to and from venues • Have personal transportation • Don't travel too much prior to Games	13 (1.4%)	10 (3.0%)
Opening Ceremonies	• Expect chaos • Go to Opening Ceremonies • Don't go to Opening Ceremonies	11 (1.2%)	3 (0.9%)
General Preparation	• Do your homework • Attention to preparation is critical • Be prepared and ready	27 (3.0%)	20 (6.0%)
USOC/NGB Relations	• Don't blindly let NGB take control • NGB needs to take care of details so athletes can focus • Have a level playing field – enforce drug testing	23 (2.6%)	7 (2.1%)
Funding/sponsorship	• Try to get more funding so that you can train more • Don't worry too much about work and paying bills • Don't rely on USOC or NGB for financial support	18 (2.0%)	3 (0.9%)

Table 1 cont.

Category	Example Lessons	Atlanta frequency (%)	Nagano frequency (%)
Fun/Enjoyment	• Enjoy the experience • Relax, enjoy the people and the events • Set some time aside for fun	17 (1.9%)	5 (1.5%)
Food/nutrition	• Eat more healthy food • Properly time your pre-competition meal • Take control over food intake	16 (1.8%)	6 (1.5%)
Equipment	• Make a commitment to equipment early and don't change • Wear the shoes you want to, not what your NGB wants • Have ski and wax testing at site prior to competition	6 (0.7%)	9 (2.7%)
Simulation	• Practice performing under pressure • Practice in Olympic uniform	5 (0.6%)	--
Visit/practice at Olympic venue	• Practice at venue ahead of time • Visit venue prior to Olympics	5 (0.6%)	--
Leadership	• Take on leadership • Have a positive team leader • Strong team leadership is important	4 (0.4%)	2 (0.6%)
Closure	• Have team closure • Debrief athletes and coaches	4 (0.4%)	--
Team training/Residency programs	• Live together as a team the last few months before competition	2 (0.2%)	--
Miscellaneous		59 (6.5%)	29 (8.6%)
Total		900	335

*** Discussed in text. 1**

Table 2
Olympic Lessons: Categories of Advice from Olympic Coaches

Category	Example Lessons	Atlanta frequency (%)	Nagano frequency (%)
Coaching*	• Don't over coach, keep it simple • Take advantage of all the high performance summits and opportunities to meet and talk with other coaches	41 (14.4%)	1 (2.1%)
General preparation*	• Don't dream – prepare • Preparation is truly the best way to be successful	33 (11.6%)	6 (12.5%)
Optimal physical training/avoid overtraining*	• Give athletes more time off closer to Games • Athletes are fragile when in top shape	31 (10.9%)	3 (6.3%)
Mental preparation/training*	• Mental training needs to be consistent • It is important to have a sport psychology consultant	28 (9.8%)	7 (14.6%)
Support Personnel*	• Get rid of unproductive staff • Need a team of sport scientists	12 (4.2%)	2 (4.2%)
Dealing with the media*	• Need a good media person • Set rules about media interviews and coordinate through one person	10 (3.5%)	--
International competition*	• Important for coach and athlete to experience high level international competition before the Games • Put athletes in 'pressure' international settings	9 (3.2%)	--

Table 2 cont.

Category	Example Lessons	Atlanta frequency (%)	Nagano frequency (%)
Team cohesion/harmony*	• Get team on the same page • Team building is important	9 (3.2%)	1 (2.1%)
Family/friend involvement*	• Assign someone to deal with family and friend ticket issues • Educate family and friends	8 (2.8%)	--
Distraction preparation*	• Develop a plan of action to deal with spouses and personal coaches who get on an ego trip • Be prepared for the long paper trail and the media circus	8 (2.8%)	3 (6.3%)
Plans and adherence to plans*	• Stick with what has worked for you • Stick with the plan	3 (1.0%)	8 (16.7%)
Coach mental preparation*	• Stay relaxed, don't stress (at least not in front of your athletes) • Believe in what you are doing	6 (2.1%)	--
Closure*	• Provide closure • Athletes close to retirement may need help	2 (0.7%)	--
USOC/NGB relations	• Education NGB on athlete and coach needs • Take advantage of high performance facilities	13 (4.6%)	--

Table 2 cont.

Category	Example Lessons	Atlanta frequency (%)	Nagano frequency (%)
Funding/sponsors	• Increase athlete support • Don't discuss money with athletes	10 (3.5%)	--
Team selection and trials	• Make final cuts early • Have a system where best athletes can still make team even if they falter during trials	9 (3.2%)	--
Olympic village	• Get away from village to focus • Stay out of village night before competition	6 (2.1%)	--
Simulation	• Hold mock trials • Use simulation trips to actual venue, housing, etc.	4 (1.4%)	--
Leadership	• Develop a team leader • Make sure you choose a strong team leader	4 (1.4%)	--
Team training / Residency Programs	• Go into residency program 4 to 5 months in advance • Schedule to get together at least 2 years prior to Games	4 (1.4%)	--
Fun/enjoyment	• Have fun – enjoy the Olympics as a coach • Enjoy the total Olympic experience as long as it doesn't interfere with your team's preparation	4 (1.4%)	3 (6.3%)

Table 2 cont.

Category	Example Lessons	Atlanta frequency (%)	Nagano frequency (%)
Communication	• Be honest and open with athletes • Develop a good communication system	3 (1.0%)	1 (2.1%)
Opening ceremonies	• Be prepared for Opening ceremonies to be a zoo • Opening ceremonies worth it if competed more than 2 days later	3 (1.0%)	--
Visit / Practice at venue	• Practice at venue • Scout competition site before Games	3 (1.0%)	--
Rules / Decisions	• Make rules very specific • Confront issues directly	2 (0.7%)	--
Miscellaneous	• Make rules very specific • Make rules very specific	20 (7.0%)	13 (20.1%)
Total		285	48

* Discussed in text.

A Look into the Needs of Injured Athletes: Implications and Recommendations

Karen **MacNeill**, University of Calgary and Cal **Botterill**, University of Winnipeg

Karen MacNeill is with the University of Calgary and can be reached at karen_mac11@hotmail.com. and Cal Botterill is a Professor the University of Winnipeg and can be contacted at botterill-c@s-h.uwinnipeg.ca.

Abstract

Athletes are dependent on the optimal functioning of their physical skill, therefore sport injury can have a profound effect on the athlete. Throughout the healing process the athlete has a wide range of needs. Eighteen athletes ranging from provincial to national team level filled out questionnaires, and shared information about the needs of injured athletes, at an injury support group meeting. Unstructured in-depth interviews were then conducted with eight athletes to obtain a more in-depth view. Based on these sources of information (questionnaires, interviews and support group meetings) eight categories were created that summarized the needs of these injured athletes. Recommendations on how to support athletes more fully through injury, and address their needs, are discussed along with implications for future research.

Introduction

Think of an athlete who has spent many years and countless hours training in the hope that one day he/she would be able to represent his/her country in the Olympic games. Imagine the feelings of pride and accomplishment associated with making it through the many competitions and qualifiers that is necessary to earn a berth on the Olympic team. Now picture that same athlete sustaining an injury a month before the Olympics that literally shatters his or her dreams.

As in the example presented above, sport injury can be a very difficult experience for an athlete. In the pursuit for excellence athletes are very dependent upon the optimal functioning of their physical skill, thus injury can end an athletes career at any time. This can prove to be very difficult since some athletes totally immerse their identity into sport (Heil, 1993). In general, sport injury can have a profound effect on the physical, mental and emotional state of the athlete.

Research has shown that athletes often react to injury with a grief response similar to Kubler-Ross's (1969) stages of death and dying (Grove, Hanrahan, and Stewart, 1990; Lynch, 1988; Rose, Baudin, and Dunlop, 1990; Botterill, Flint and Ievleva, 1996). The first stage of denial
is used as a defense mechanism. The athlete will play through the pain or ignore the fact that it is not going away. When denial cannot be maintained any longer, it is replaced by feelings of anger. Athletes often ask themselves "why me" or "why now". After this stage comes bargaining, which is an attempt to postpone the inevitable. The ath-

lete usually offers something, such as rest, in return for recovery. Once the athlete realizes that nothing can be done they may go into a state of depression. In this stage the athlete may become withdrawn and focus on self-pity (Lynch, 1988). With the last stage comes acceptance of the injury. The athlete finally realizes their fate and is now ready to start the healing process.

Throughout this healing process the athlete has a wide range of needs, depending on the scenario and the severity of injury. There are also a variety of coping mechanisms and strategies that athletes use to fulfill various needs, and deal with the trials and tribulations of injury. This exploratory study was conducted to gather data on psychological effects, needs and recommendations from injured athlete subjects.

Methods

Participants

Participants in the study were 18 athletes who ranged in level from provincial to national team. The sample consisted of 8 males and 10 females representing 9 different sports. These sports included, basketball, cycling, field hockey, ice hockey, Nordic combined, track and field, speed skating, water polo, and wrestling. All participants had at some point been involved with a peer support group for injured athletes, where permission to participate in the study was obtained.

Data Collection and Analysis

Information was collected through a variety of mediums. To begin, a short questionnaire was completed by each athlete. Its purpose was to provide information about their present physical condition, determine the needs of these injured athletes and the type of support that felt would help with their recovery.

To obtain a more in-depth view and additional insights, unstructured qualitative interviews were conducted with the eight participants who volunteered to be a part of this process. In this interview, athletes were asked to discuss the challenges that they faced as a result of the injury. They were also asked about any specific needs they had, and about any thoughts they had on how recovery could be enhanced.

With the groups' permission, information was also gathered from the dialogue and exchange at peer group support meetings. These meetings were conducted once every 6 weeks. The purpose of these meetings was to provide support and education for injured athletes through a group of peers who could relate with what they were going through. Some of these meetings simply provided an open medium in which the athletes could share whatever the wished to share. Other meetings revolved around certain themes based on feedback from the athletes (i.e. mental skills for injured athletes).

The information that was collected from these sources was first organized according to individual response or case. It was then compiled and compared to assess the commonalties that existed among the individual responses. Based on this information eight categories were created that summarize the needs of these injured athletes.

Results and Discussion

Needs of Injured Athletes

In looking at the basic human needs identified by Glasser (1984) (acceptance, success, sensation, and control) one could anticipate some needs that an injured athlete may have. Botterill et al (1996) pointed out that during rehabilitation these fundamental individual needs are likely to be heightened. An athlete may feel the need to be accepted and

successful at an even higher level when injured; they may search for stimulation and feeling of enjoyment; and their need of control will probably be greater when going through rehabilitation.

Awareness of the basic needs is important in supporting an athlete through injury. It will provide health care professionals, family, teammates and friends with a better understanding of the feelings the athletes are experiencing. This in-turn will allow them to supply the athlete with the appropriate type of support and guidance. From the data that was collected the needs perceived by the athletes have been grouped into 8 categories. The following section will describe the categories, as well as, provides specific examples of each.

1. **Support:** Almost all the athletes stated that they needed support in one form or another. This included assistance and feeling encouragement from family, friends, coaches and teammates. One athlete stated that 'I needed the support of my friends and teammates. Knowing that they supported me made it easier to train, it kept my motivation up.'

   Various types of support were suggested by the athletes, which include some of the following: a) Mental and emotional support to help get through the ups and downs of rehabilitation; b) Material or financial support so that the athletes can seek the appropriate medical and physical treatments; c) Personal support, which involves assistance with the hassles of daily living, such as going shopping for groceries or getting around to physiotherapy appointments; d) Peer support from those who have gone through injury or are currently going through the same thing; e) Listening support, which involves being able to vent to people about problems.

2. **Need for expression:** Many athletes stated that they needed to be able to vent their frustrations. For example, one athlete stated that 'I need people to talk to about how I am doing, what sucks, and things that are going well.' They also thought it would be helpful to talk with people who could really relate to what they were going through. This form of catharsis helps the athletes to clear their minds and focus on important aspects of their recovery.

3. **Education and Knowledge:** The athletes expressed a need for information. They wanted specific details about their injury. They want to know what is involved in rehabilitation, including rehab techniques and exercises. They wanted details on medical treatments. For example one athlete stated that 'I would like to know about upcoming surgery and how I will feel'. Other athletes wanted to learn about others experience. One athlete mentioned that 'I wanted to talk to others about problems, fears and concerns and how they handled each situations that came up'. Knowledge is a way for athletes to gain more control of their situation.

4. **Medical Care:** The athletes not only wanted medical attention, but also a physician and physiotherapist that they could trust. They want to get back to their sport as quick as possible, so they want the best possible care. One athlete mentioned that 'I am having challenge with doctor searching and knowing which ones to trust. I have been getting different messages from everyone.' They want information on good doctors

and physiotherapists from which they can solicit help.

5. **Prompt medical attention:** Since most athletes want to get back to their sports as quick as possible they need easy access to medical services. One athlete who stated 'I need to get an appointment for surgery as soon as possible so I can get on with my rehabilitation' illustrated this. They also wanted priority access to things like physiotherapy, chiropractors and massage. This also pertains to the issue of how much time the athlete has to recover before the next major competition.

6. **Mental strategies and professional help:** the athletes discussed the need for mental skills. One athlete commented that 'I need mental strategies for returning to sport and staying confident.' Others mentioned that they needed some help mentally to work through the rehab process itself. The need for professional assistance was also suggested. One athlete stated that 'a psychologist would be very useful in order to discuss the emotional side of being injured'.

7. **Rehabilitation partners:** For some athletes' rehabilitation can take a long time. One athlete mentioned that the biggest challenge was going through the grind of rehab since it was a long process. The athletes expressed a need for rehab partners to help motivate themselves through this process.

8. **Distractions:** Some athletes felt like they needed something to take them away from dwelling on their injury. One athlete mentioned that she needed support from others to help take their mind off their injury. Another athlete suggested that they needed to be occupied. He needed other activities in his life to keep him busy besides his injury rehabilitation.

The information presented above has implications for coaches, support staff, family, friends and medical practitioners. Helping an athlete deal with injury goes beyond rehabilitating their physical ailment. It is important to be aware of the impact that injury may have on the athletes thoughts, feelings and behavior. To increase effectiveness when providing assistance it is also valuable to be aware of the specific needs the athletes may have.

Recommendations

At the National Sport Centre in Calgary (NSCC) a few measures have been taken to support athletes through injury. The idea to provide support was initially brought forth by a NSCC athlete. It was further developed by the Athletes Advisory council and Sport Psychology Alberta. Collectively a model was created and was used as a guideline in the organization and development of programs to help athletes and coaches cope with injury. The following are examples of some of the action that has taken place.

Workshops

Workshops are used as a vehicle to provide the athlete with information regarding the psychology of injury. They are also used to provide tools that will help athletes cope with injury, and as a way to link athletes' with other athletes who can relate with their experience. Examples of themes for workshops include: presentation of a model on the psychosocial process associated with injury; athlete testimonials and sharing circles; how to support an athlete through injury; and mental skills that can be utilized during injury rehabilitation.

Resource Library

In the NSCC's 'room with a view' an area was created where athletes, coaches and other service providers could access resources regarding injury rehabilitation. There are an abundance of articles that deal with injury, the rehabilitation process and how to enhance recovery. There is also a list of medical resources (such as doctors, physiotherapist, chiropractors, message therapists etc.) that athletes can access within the surrounding area. Lastly, the resource library includes a database of athletes with specific reference to their injury (with athlete's permission). The purpose of the database was to provide a resource where athletes can link up with other athletes as rehab partners. They can get together to do workouts, or just share their experiences with injury.

Coach Education

Since coaches play an important role in the life of the athlete it was suggested that they were educated on the injury process. To facilitate this a presentation on the coaches' role in injury rehabilitation was given to a group of coaches. The purpose was to provide information on the psychology of injury, and to discuss and share ideas on how coaches can support athletes through injury. The content of such presentations may include things such as; model on psychology of injury, athlete and coach testimonials, and recommendations on how coaches can facilitate social support for injured athletes.

Peer Support Group: 'Rapping about Rehab'

Rapping about Rehab was a support group made up of injured and recovered athletes. The purpose of this group was to provide a vehicle for athletes to get together to discuss thoughts and feelings revolving around injury, rehabilitation and things affected by the two. It provided an opportunity for athletes to share experiences and obtain information from others who really understood what they were going through. It was also a place where athletes could link up with other athletes to do work outs and rehab sessions. Rapping about rehab also provided a venue where various themes could be addressed such as; coping with loss and dealing with identity, mental skills that can be used for injury rehab, injury prevention, and emotional management.

In regards to the structure, the meetings usually had two parts to them. The first would involve the 'rapping' portion. This allowed time for the athletes to share experiences and challenges as a result of being injured. In the second portion of the meeting various themes would be addressed. The topics for each meeting were based on the suggestion and needs of the athletes. It should be mentioned that not all meetings contained the second portion. At times, the dialogue of the athletes facilitated the most valuable sessions.

The four areas mentioned above are recommended as ways to support athletes through injury. It is also important to be aware of the psychological impact and the specific needs of each athlete when helping them cope through the rehabilitation process (Brewer, Raalte, Linder, 1991; Ermler and Thomas, 1990; Rose, 1992). Measures such as these could potentially help to enhance the healing, and the general well being of injured athletes.

Recommendations for further research include testing the information gathered on the needs of injured athlete's against a larger sample size, with a more diverse sporting population. Other areas of interest would be to investigate the emotional dynamics involved in injury and the effects this has on recovery and general well-being.

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Counselling Excellence – A Sport Psychologist's Experiences with the German Women's National Volleyball Team

Ulf **Schmidt** and Erik **Schleiffenbaum,** Germany

Ulf Schmidt and Eric Schleiffenbaum are sport psychologists. Ulf works with the German Women's National Volleyball Team and can be contacted at TUV Akademie GmbH, Group TVU Suddeutschland, Westendstrasse 199, D-80686 Munich, Germany, Ulf.Schmidt@tuevs.de.

Abstract

This paper gives an overview of the psychological interventions used with the German women's National Volleyball team – from the first contact at the initial training sessions of the newly formed team (end of 1996) to the last hours of training before the European championship in the fall of 1997. During the intensive preparation phase from July through October 1997 the team stayed together for a number of training camps. The sport psychologist was present at these camps as a full time member of the staff. Details of the psychological skills training program are presented in this article.

Introduction

After a poor performance at the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta – the team did not win a medal or place in the top four which everyone in Germany had expected - Siegfried Köhler, then coach of the German women's National Volleyball team, blamed psychological problems within the team for the failure. To ensure better preparation for upcoming major competitions – the 1997 European Championships in Czech Republic, and most importantly, the Summer Olympics in Sidney 2000 – long-term cooperation with a sport psychologist was initiated for the newly formed team. Only three players from the old team became part of the new team. Six of the new players were high-class players who had been expected to replace the older players in the national team for some time. Another nine new players were less experienced but were to be trained during the following months to become part of the elite team.

Initial Phase

The initial phase of co-operation between the sport psychologist and the team began at the first training sessions in mid-December 1996 and ended on the last day of the traditional Four Nations' Tournament in early January 1997. During the initial phase the sport psychologist was available to be with the team virtually all day long. This meant he could be with the players from the first warm-up exercises in the morning to the last team' and coaches' conversations in the evening.

The initial phase began with close participant observation of the team during as well as off training hours. It was apparent that there was a considerable amount of rivalry

among the three key players who had played together on the old team which turned out to be one of the issues to address in the following months. Despite this, these players, especially the team captain, took responsibility for the new players during as well as outside of training hours.

The contact between the sport psychologist and the team was intensified by individual conversations with most of the team members. Some of these conversations were structured interviews referring to special themes (e.g. handling critical game situations), others were unstructured, which were not prepared for in any way but which were guided by present-day problems of the players (e.g. missing a boy-friend). As this mix of casual and structured interviews were highly informative, they were continued until the European championship.

Aside from observation and interview, the sport psychologist gave an introductory lesson to the team comprising possible starting points for sport psychological counselling in top-performance sports.

These actions, undertaken during the initial phase, ensured an ongoing growth in the sport psychologist/team relationship during the preparation for the European Championship.

Psychological Counselling

The phase of actual preparation for the European championship covered the period from early July to the first games of the tournament in late September. The following sport psychological interventions and measures formed the core of the co-operation between the Institute for Sport Science and Sports of the University of the Federal Armed Forces Munich and the Womens' National Volleyball team during this phase:

(1) Short-term, medium-term and long-term training of goalsetting
(2) Enhancement of psycho-physical regeneration
(3) Optimisation of psychic stability during competition
(4) Regular monitoring of performance-related psychological functions and correlates
(5) Socio-psychological interventions

The first three of these interventions were chosen as they were proven to be effective in work with previous national teams (different sports) in dealing with psychological problems related to competition and preparation for competition. These interventions can be looked upon as a general 'psychic tonic'.

Regular monitoring of psychic functions on one hand ensured control of effectiveness of interventions and helped the coach to tune his steps to the psychic state of the team, and on the other hand, demonstrated to the team that their mental condition was regarded as a critical factor, thus, functioning as an incentive for the players to work on their personal mental preparation.

Socio-psychological interventions were directed at the core problems of the team, especially the rivalry among the three original players and the lack of cohesion within the rest of the team.

Goal setting

Goal setting was chosen as the first intervention as after an introductory phase it could be continued by the members of the team even in the absence of the sport psychologist.

Goal setting: A brief introduction

The aim of goal setting was to structure the long and demanding phase until the Olympic

Games in 2000 and help the team to meet all requirements for this period of time. Another objective of goal setting was to encourage personal initiative especially during hours of training in order to influence higher intrinsic motivation. Personally formed, realistic goals are conceived as improving the individual's performance.

In goal setting, participants were to set personal goals, formulate plans to reach these goals and eventually judge the extent to which these goals have been accomplished after the allotted time. Goals and plans were written into the participant's personal goalbook; results were added when the time set for accomplishing the goal has passed. Goals were to be set for training as well as competition, for oneself and the co-operation with the team, from short-term to long-term planning, and they are to address all aspects that are important in high-performance sports: technique (e.g. attack), tactics (e.g. offensive, defensive) athletics (power, speed, endurance, psycho-motor co-ordination) and general psychic stability in competition (concentration, resistance to stress) (for an example of a goalsetting page see appendix).

Goal setting: Three fundamental steps

Basically, goal setting for the team consisted of three steps:

(1) Goal-formulation
What is my goal?
(2) Goal-planning
How do I reach my goal?
(3) Goal-judgement
Have I reached my goal?

Goal-formulation

Any goal formulated should meet the following requirements:

(1) The goal should be *tangible*: The goal should be described as detailed and precise as possible (not: "I want to play better" but: "I want to place at least one out of two services as near behind the net as possible").
(2) The goal should be reachable in a *fixed period of time*: All goals are formed together with clearly fixed intervals of time, in which they are to be accomplished. Without such a timetable the accomplishment of the goal is jeopardised by hesitation.
(3) The goals should be *weighted by importance*: To avoid conflicts of goals set for the same period of time, a hierarchy of goals is needed (this can be done by rating the importance on a scale of 1 to 10).
(4) The goals should be *realistic*: Goals should be set within a frame of the individual's abilities, capabilities and skills. (It is helpful to rate the probability that the goal can be reached on grounds of own abilities and skills on a scale of 1 to 10).
(5) The goals should be a *challenge*: Goals that can be reached with ease are worthless. Only if obstacles have to be removed a goal is challenging.
(6) There should be a feasible *proof of success*: This criterion is in close connection to the first one on this list: Goals should be as tangible as there is a possible proof of success ("I want 80% of my spikes in this game to be points").
(7) Goals should be fixed in *written form*: The written form stresses the binding character of goals and facilitates a proof of success.
(8) Goals should be worded *positively*, not negatively (e.g. not: "I do not want my spike to be a failure" but: "I want my spike to be a winner against a strong block").
(9) Goals should be formulated in *terms of action*, not of results: Not the re-

sult of a competition but the actions necessary should be the objective (e.g. not :"I want my service to be an ace" but: "I want to place the ball right behind the net").

(10) Goals should be *focus on tasks* rather than ego oriented psychic states ("I want to score with my good placed jump-serve" rather than "I want to humiliate the opponent with my jump-serve").

(11) Goals should be oriented to a *personal norm* rather than to a common norm: Individual standards of performance are to be met independently of the actual opponent.

(12) Goals should be *motivated intrinsically*: Goals should be independent of external rewards but should be a value by themselves.

(13) There should be an amount of *dedication* to reach the goal: Only a firm will to reach the goal ensures its accomplishment.

(14) Goals should be *binding*: Setting a goal should be equivalent to a contract with oneself. This contract obliges the sportsman to do all his best to reach the goal.

(15) Goals should be set *publicly*: Public observation ensures the inner obligation to strive for the goal.

(16) *Visualisation* of a goal alleviates its realistic formulation in words.

Goal-planning

Pivotal to an effective action plan to reach the goal was the formation of proper subgoals, and plans of action to reach these subgoals. It was important that goals and subgoals be brought into accordance with possible goals of the coach and the team. Without such accordance harmful conflicts are imminent.

The best way to prevent conflicts of this kind (e.g. the coach does not give the athlete the chance to play in an important match) is to take alternative goals into consideration right from the start, i.e. each time a new objective is being aimed at.

Goal-judgement

After the set time for the goals have passed or at least after every mayor competition, the aims were analysed in terms of their fulfilment. This analysis is mostly supported by the sport psychologist and should be as objective and comprehensive as possible.

Differences between the intended goals and the accomplished results gave hints on a tendency to over- or under-estimate possibilities. If the aim has been reached to full extent, positive feelings should result from setting new and higher goals. If the goal has been reached in part, it should be decided whether to let the result suffice or to continue with this goal. If the goal has not been reached at all, reasons should be found and a plan for new actions should be initiated.

Goal setting: From theory to practice

The team was introduced to the principal procedures of training of goal setting as described; every player received a copy of a brief summary. Longer conversations with each individual player followed. In co-operation with team members, goal setting training tuned to the needs of the team and short- and medium-term planning commenced. The following is a brief summary of the players' preferred short- and medium term goals referring to technique, tactics, athletics, team concerns and psychic functions / mind-related matters:

Technique

Attack:	Improve explosive arm stroke to gain a harder shot.

Block: Show more activity over the net; improve precision of sequence of steps.
Passes: Broaden scope of combinations; control variability in passes.
Defence: Perform the slide-defence sideways in perfection.

Tactics
Tactics was not a central problem in this early stage of preparation for the competition; the only point mentioned was an improvement of combinations between passers and attack.

Athletics
In three areas the emphasis lay on the following points:
Power: Increase takeoff power.
Speed: Increase speed of actions.
Endurance: Increase basic endurance.

Team
All players wished a better integration of self and of all players into the team in order to improve teamwork.

Psychic functions / Mind
Main themes chosen by athletes were: error handling/management, control of emotions and cognitions, coping with stress, self-presentation on the field, coping with own and others' expectancies.

All players had problems in setting tangible, concrete goals (e.g. players wanted to "increase height of jumps" rather than "increase height of jumps by 2 inches"). However, players devised careful plans for reaching set goals. Evaluation including re-formulation of goals showed that the players had preferably chosen aims that were rather easy to reach.

A conclusion to be drawn from this is that the players should be encouraged to set their goals higher and be advised to elaborate more precise plans at the same time to ensure that aims stay realistic.

Enhancement of psycho-physical regeneration

Beginning with preparations for the European Championship, ten to fifteen minutes of Progressive Muscle Relaxation (cf. Jacobson, 1993) became part of the cool-down phase of every training unit. The text was voiced by the sport psychologist and was accompanied by music. Five reasons led the sport psychologist to employ Progressive Muscle Relaxation:

(1) The state of psychic and physical relaxation caused by Progressive Muscle Relaxation accelerates all regenerative processes after the strains of training.
(2) The players are taught a technique that can be applied for stress reduction and improvement of concentration during competition.
(3) Acquaintance with Progressive Muscle Relaxation facilitates entering into Mental Training, which none of the players had encountered so far and which is planned as a further intervention for the future.
(4) Possible reservations against sport psychology are reduced as the players learn that there are very practice-oriented procedures to offer.
(5) Progressive Muscle Relaxation stands as an example for many other psychological interventions yet to be introduced as integrative parts of regular training. As a result sport psychology gains a status comparable to that of physiotherapy, which is highly rated by players.

After a short period of acclimatisation, players were quite fond of Progressive Muscle

Relaxation. Many players wished to do the exercises independently, so all members of the team received a copy of the audio-cassette.

Optimization of psychic stability during competition

In order to optimise competition performance which was the overall and most important goal of co-operation between sport psychologist and team, a number of psychological interventions were applied. These interventions were chosen because they had proven to be effective in work with other teams in dealing with psychological problems related to psychic stability during competition.

Interventions during training

The following interventions were special measures meant for application in training only.

(1) *One-Touch-Training* means that every player may touch the ball only once during each task or drill. Every ball is to be looked upon as the only chance to score, so that maximum concentration is needed.

(2) In *training with scheduled scoring* the player is restricted by a statement of the coach as to which ball contact he has to score.

(3) *Prognostic Training*: The player has to deliver a prognosis of the score reached with a limited number of actions (e.g. 80 % successful attacks).

(4) *Competitive Training*: Two competitors (e.g. two outside attackers) for a starting position are matched against each other either within one team or forming a one-on-one situation in a task or drill (e.g. to score against a double-block from position four. The player, who is the first to succeed in this task (e.g. first to score ten attacks) will get the starting position.

Interventions during competition

Rituals can be a great help in critical situations. By providing a familiar element that can be relied on, they alleviate the menace that is inherent in critical situations. Though meant for application in competition in the first run, encouraging the formation with rituals can stabilise performance in training as well. The sport psychologist proposed the following rituals for the team, which were applied by the team most of the time:

Team-related rituals

During training sessions:

Saying hello and good-bye with the battle cry "One – Two – Kangaroo" as a reminder of the great goal Olympia 2000 in Australia.

Before games:

Mutual “swearing in” in the locker room.

During games:

Preparation for the next game actions according to a Four-Phases-Model developed by Schmidt and Schmole (1997a) during the time before the next serve.

Individual rituals

To improve stress management (Schmidt, 1998) and to alleviate fear of failure in special situations of the game (service, series of failures) individual rituals (e.g. ultra short-time relaxation) were proposed or mutually elaborated in single player consultations.

Interventions outside training and competition

During off training hours, Video-Self-Commenting (VSC, cf. Hackfort & Schlattmann, 1994) was applied. VSC allows the players to watch themselves in times of training and competition and comment on their behavior, their thoughts and feelings.

By means of this method the players could be taught effective control of emotions and cognitions beneficial for competition (e.g. Positive Self-Talk, Reframing, Focussing). The first VSC-session was scheduled four weeks before the championships in order to make clear specific shortcomings. A second session of VSC was carried out three weeks later to check and inform about the success of this intervention. The main benefit of VSC turned out to be an improved self-presentation on the field ("positive arrogance").

In addition to this all players received a short introduction into Mental Training. For a number of interested players, an individually tuned program of Mental Training was elaborated in single player consultations following the general introduction into the technique. The stress of these individual programs lay on improving technical skills as well as on managing critical situations during competition.

Monitoring of performance-related psychological functions

Regular monitoring of psycho-motor functions and other psychic and psycho-social aspects related to performance was done by means of diagnostic software and a number of paper-and-pencil-questionnaires.

Psycho-motor performance

The following aspects of psycho-motor functioning were subject to regular testing:

(1) Reaction time to optic and acoustic stimuli
(2) Discrimination of optic and acoustic signals in terms of response time
(3) Speed of information processing
(4) Coordination and concentration (visual tracking and localisation of stimuli)

The diagnostic instrument used was Senso-Control®, a sport-specific adaptation of Wiener Testsystem®. Preliminary review of the data revealed slight differences between players' positions (attack, block passes defence) but not between level of performance (first six in the team and reserve).

The performance of the volleyball players turned out to be below average compared to other high-performance volleyball players as well as to a sample of athletes from other kinds of sports. Signal discrimination and speed of information processing especially bear potential for improvement among the national team members. This is significant namely because perceptual abilities are of great importance for volleyball (compared to track and field, for instance).

Mood

Emotions in volleyball players are not only associated with success and failure in competition (cf. Schmidt & Schmole, 1997b) but also of incidents and conditions of training. Negative effects on mood, as assessed by SB-Scales (Scales of Emotional Traits and States, Hackfort & Schlattmann, 1995), are to be attributed to change of training and competition locations (e.g. long travel hours, new hotel) and extraordinary hard training sessions. Also, at the end of longer periods of training (e.g. preparation phase with additionally endurance units) worsened mood within the team was regularly found. Positive changes of mood states, on the other hand, were to be noticed on the second or third day of training and after days of recreation.

The information about players' mood states helped the sport psychologist to estimate the success of the interventions. Moreover, it proved to be a valuable help for the coach in forming small sub-groups of the team and tuning the planned training to the actual physical and psychological state of the team.

Team cohesion
Team cohesion is an important factor in warding off poor performance. Team cohesion was assessed by a volleyball specific version of a cohesion questionnaire sport (CQS) developed by Schmidt, Henkies and Fischer (in press). The instrument differentiates cohesion into two fractions referring either to social or to task-related aspects – comparable to the concepts used by Carron, Widmeyer and Brawley (1985). This questionnaire (which considers individual and group perspectives) and regularly drawn sociograms were meant to make an optimal tuning of socio-psychological interventions possible.

In the course of the preparations for the European championship team cohesion improved. An example is better verbal support by reserve players during competitions. However, at times there were struggles for power and position in the team among dominating players. On the whole, development was rated as positive, especially with regard to the younger players - most are on their way to become team leaders.

Improved cohesion is also an indicator of the positive effect of the socio-psychological interventions. The rivalry among the three top players mentioned above almost vanished (in the impression on the coach and of the players) as cohesion among the team in whole grew.

Socio-psychological interventions

The socio-psychological interventions described as follows were designed to further team-building processes and cohesion within the team. Some of these measures affect training sessions; some are of more general nature.

Interventions during training
Little games designed to further support group cohesion were carried out during warming-up phases (e.g. playing soccer with two people tied together). Uniforms worn during training symbolised and demonstrated a close community influencing team cohesion.

Interventions outside training
Methods relying on group dynamics were applied outside the usual training situation. Examples of these methods include difficult and unusual tasks which the group had to solve by cooperating with one another (e.g. the group was blindfolded and had to cooperate finding an object). Games relying on projection were also presented to the players; the team had to discuss fictitious critical scenarios as well sport related ones. The idea was to relieve the strict routines of training and to provide a second access to team structures. The main objectives were an improvement of communication processes, a reduction of harmful hierarchies and players' awareness of unreflected attitudes and motives.

Conclusions

Over the course of this intervention an atmosphere of increased trust was developed – between the team and the sport-psychologist and even more strongly between the coach and the sport psychologist. The value of the psychological interventions and strategies designed to help the team improve became more evident to the coaching staff and team members. Even those players and members of the coaching staff who had been sceptical towards sport psychology in the beginning began to see some potential value the program. Thus, it was decided to continue with a revised program over the next twelve months. It was felt that the program should be revised based on the lessons learned from this intervention and include psychological training for the national junior teams.

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Appendix

Period of time
From: _____
To: _____

short-term goals
medium-term goals
long-term goals

Goal-formulation

Technique	*Tactics*	*Athletics*
1. _____	1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____	3. _____

Goal-planning

Team	*Mind*	*Private Life*
1. _____	1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____	3. _____

Goal-judgement

Technique	*Tactics*	*Athletics*
1. _____	1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____	3. _____

Goal-formulation

Team	*Mind*	*Private Life*
1. _____	1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____	3. _____

Goal-planning

Technique	*Tactics*	*Athletics*
1. _____	1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____	3. _____

Goal-judgement

Team	*Mind*	*Private Life*
1. _____	1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____	3. _____

The Process of Competitiveness in Professional Polo: A Way to Enhance Performance

Stiliani "Ani" **Chroni,** University of Thessaly, Greece

Stiliani "Ani" Chroni is a performance consultant, who teaches in the department of Physical Education and Sports Sciences at the University of Thessaly, Greece. She can be contacted at chroni@the.forthnet.gr or schroni@pe.uth.gr

Abstract

This naturalistic inquiry focused on providing further insight on competitiveness and its role in athletic performance. Although competitiveness is frequently discussed within the world of sports, athletes' perceptions of it have not been investigated in depth. A qualitative design enabled the collection of real-world experiences from six elite, professional (horse) polo players. Following Denzin's (1989) interpretive interactionism approach, themes were identified and categorized while a cross-case analysis procedure synthesized the categories across all interviews. The obtained information was interpreted and discussed as it relates to performance and the existing literature. For poloists, being competitive means having a point of reference which provides (a) a clear focus on what they need to do, and (b) energy and determination to work hard as they bring all of themselves and skills into one specific task. This process can help us understand more about where competitive energy comes from and how it can be present on a more consistent basis.

Introduction

Athletic performance is tested to its maximum within competition, and being competitive is a trait that can be found at the heart of competitors who strive for achievement (Gill, 1986). By definition, when one competes, s/he strives to obtain a goal (Fabian & Ross, 1984) or to compare favorably to another person (Martens, 1976a). The competitor who strives to achieve success expresses her/his need for competence. Athletes' desire to attain goals, to do something well, to win and to achieve distinction are issues often discussed within the sport environment. To date, the author knows of no studies that reviewed the athletes' perspectives on competitiveness. Moreover, the language used to describe this internal energy, competitive fire, spirit, edge, or desire to move to the next level of excellence is still unexplored.

The theoretical basis of competitiveness can be found in the psychology literature of achievement motivation and orientation, as well as social evaluation (Gill, 1992; 1993; Weinberg & Gould, 1995). According to Atkinson's (1983) model of motivation, when presented with an achievement situation a person's achievement motive interacts with his/her expectancies of goal attainment to produce the temporarily aroused-state of achievement motivation. Achievement situation was defined as a situation where the individual

will be evaluated by him/herself and/or others while comparing her/himself to a social or non-social standard (Atkinson, 1983). Hence, achievement motivation reflects one's tendency to strive for satisfaction of the achievement motive and emerges from previous successful comparisons with a standard (McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1953). Athletes have a sport-specific achievement motive that directs their behavior (Gill, 1992; 1993; Martens, 1976b; Weinberg & Gould, 1995). According to Weinberg and Gould (1995), this sport-specific achievement motivation "is popularly called competitiveness" (p. 74).

In terms of sport competitiveness, Martens (1976b) wrote that it is the trait that builds strength and persistence in athletes when pursuing excellence and helps them stay in the present. In other words, "competitiveness is a personality disposition or motive … that describes the intensity or the energy directed toward achieving satisfaction in competition" (Martens, 1976b, p. 325). Despite the fact that sport psychologists and coaches consider competitiveness as an important attribute of their athletes (Martens, 1976), little is known about what competitiveness means to the athlete. What exactly is competitiveness? Is it a trait? Is it an attitude or a behavior? How is it expressed and what is its role in athletic performance? What are the distinctive attitudes and behaviors of a competitive athlete (if any)? Is competitiveness a key factor for athletic success? When coaches look for that "competitive element" within their athletes, for what exactly are they looking? Is it a facial characteristic, a gesture, an attitude, a way of handling themselves in the game-practice, or a series of behaviors to be exhibited?

A number of sport-specific instruments have been developed to date in order to explore and quantify an athlete's sport-specific achievement motivation (Duda, 1989; Fabian & Ross, 1984; Gill & Deeter, 1988; Nishida, 1988; Pezer & Brown, 1980; Rushall & Fox, 1980; Vealey, 1986; Willis, 1982), yet, how athletes perceive competitiveness and how they define it has never been reported in published studies. Understanding competitiveness in sports can be valuable when educating and facilitating athletes in their journey toward their goals and dreams.

In this study, the researcher attempted to further explore and comprehend the horse-polo (hereafter referred to as polo) athlete's perspective and perceptions on competitiveness and its role for athletic performance. Polo was chosen as it is a sport where athletes all over the world try to excel and reach their maximum potential, while it is not very popular in terms of fan, media, and commercial support within the United States (Beal, 1993; Milburn, 1994; Price & Kauffman, 1989). According to Milburn (1994), polo brings together many sports on one field. It is like playing hockey, baseball, tennis, and soccer while riding a horse. Just like all other athletes, poloists practice and play games, aspire to become better, want to win, want to compete and be competitive.

Method

The challenge when conducting research is to gather the best possible information to be used by the people for whom it was gathered (Patton, 1990). To explore the concept of competitiveness in depth and its role in an athlete's performance, the qualitative paradigm was chosen. More specifically, Denzin's (1989) Interpretive Interactionism methodological approach was followed, which is described as an

attempt to make experiences of ordinary people available to the readers. The researcher's goal was to obtain information and understand competitiveness in polo using the best possible resources (i.e., elite polo players). According to Denzin (1989) by making these polo players' experiences available, an understanding can be created.

Sources of Information

Following Lincoln and Guba's (1985), Patton's (1990), and Denzin's (1989) suggestions, interviews with poloists were not the only source of information. Books on polo, articles on the participating poloists, and observations of the players within their polo world in practice and tournaments provided adequate information to overcome possible methodological limitations (see trustworthiness section).

A semi-structured interview mode was utilized, as it provided the necessary freedom and the opportunity to learn about competitiveness in depth (Donaghy, 1984; Lincoln &Guba, 1985). Some structure was apparent as the present inquiry focused on competitiveness, while questions were not formulated ahead of time to avoid forcing and guiding the players to answer in a manner determined by the researcher. Open-ended questions were followed by probing techniques to refine and elaborate on issues relative to the players' stories and experiences. No two interviews were exactly the same as no two athletes have had the same lives, perceptions, and experiences.

Polo Players as Participants

The participating poloists were selected based on the following three criteria: (1) each participant was employed as polo player at the time of the study, (2) each had a goal handicap of 7 or higher, and (3) each player was proficient in English. The decision to talk to only to high goal players was based on the assumption that years of experience and high levels of performance would appoint them as the most beneficial resources on competitiveness. Six poloists who met these criteria were asked to participate in the study: Julio (7-goals at the time of study, now rated at 8-goals), Adam (7-goals then, now rated at 9-goals), Hector (8-goals), Owen (9-goals, previously rated at 10-goals), Mike (10-goals), and Memo (10-goals). All poloists asked, consented to participate and to have their real names used. With the players' permission, the interviews were audiotaped and then transcribed verbatim (total of 110 single-spaced pages).

Procedures

To make this project feasible and to be able to use multiple information sources, data were gathered in West Palm Beach, FL, at the onset of "Florida High-goal Season". Obtaining the information in FL allowed the researcher to observe the players and interact with them within their competitive environment.

The interviews were conducted at a location chosen by the participant, where he felt comfortable and relaxed in order to disclose personal stories, thoughts, and experiences (Donaghy, 1984; Douglas, 1985; Gorden, 1969). Four of the interviews took place at the players' barns and two at the players' condominiums. All interviews were conducted by the researcher and ranged from one hour to two and-a-half hours (total of nine hours). Variable time with each poloist was spent (met twice with three of the players and once with the other three), to ensure that his perception of competitiveness was explored in depth and comprehended by the interviewer. The researcher perceived that saturation of information was reached after completing six interviews. Therefore, she

did not invite other players to participate in the study.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a big concern for the reader (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher can only do her/his best to reconstruct the interviewee's world and present it to the reader. In this inquiry, trustworthiness was established through prolonged engagement, member checking, triangulation, peer debriefing, and thick description. To serve the prolonged engagement method, prior to the study, the researcher had been around polo for two-and-a-half years through performance education work. Member checking was initially performed during the interview by means of paraphrasing, summarizing, and asking for clarifications. In addition, the poloists were asked to review their transcribed interviews, where they could add, delete, or revise information to ensure that the information in the final draft accurately represented their thoughts and beliefs (no modifications were made by the players).

Triangulation of sources was completed with information obtained by (a) the interviews, (b) the interviewer's personal observations during practices and games, and (c) information from published books, magazine articles, and daily newspapers on the participants. A peer debriefer, challenged and supported the process and the product of this inquiry (inquiry design, interview themes and categories), while a second peer debriefer worked with the researcher mainly on the product (themes and categories). The product of this inquiry (themes and categories, cross-case analysis) was extensively discussed during multiple sessions with the peer debriefers until consensus was reached. The researcher and both debriefers had previously conducted qualitative research and completed graduate courses on qualitative methodology. Finally, a thick description of the inquiry's methodology, procedures, and analyses is presented in this manuscript.

Analyzing the Information

Following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) suggestion, the analysis method was determined after conducting the interviews, to accommodate the uniqueness of the acquired information. Denzin's (1989) phases of bracketing and construction were ensued as part of the qualitative data analysis. In the bracketing phase, essential themes on competitiveness were identified from the poloists' stories. Key phrases that associated with competitiveness were taken apart. Words and expressions perceived by the researcher as relevant to competitiveness aided in identifying sentences, phrases, and/or paragraphs as themes (e.g., winning, playing well, becoming the best, being a champion, playing hard, keep going, intensity, persistence, etc.). In the construction phase, the experiences that were taken apart during bracketing were gathered together, classified, and reassembled. The generation of a category system allowed the researcher to classify and bring each poloist's thoughts and perceptions together. The bracketed elements were listed into categories which were mutually exclusive, exhaustive, ensured independence, and were based on a single classification principle. The meaning and contents (i.e., quotes) of each category were extensively discussed with the peer debriefers until agreement was secured.

A cross-case analysis procedure was utilized to synthesize the categories of competitiveness that emerged in all six interviews. Denzin (1989) described this as a form of analysis that "pays more attention to the process being studied than the persons whose lives are embedded in

those processes" (p. 39). Hence, the analysis concentrated on the process of competitiveness. Categories were deemed of equal importance in describing and explaining competitiveness from the athletes' point of view. Emergent categories are presented with direct quotes taken from the interviews.

Results

Emotional benefits associated with competition

Benefits from playing polo were linked with the players' desire for being great in polo.

> *...It's like the ultimate challenge to yourself, to risk going out there and it's knowing that you can fail that makes success that much sweeter. It is a rush and it's something that I've had for most of my life in various sports and there's almost like a chemical aspect to it of the feeling that I get from competing hard in an event that I care a lot about (Adam).*

> *You feel intense and you feel the adrenaline, you feel a bit of pressure, but you don't feel it, it's a different type of pressure. ...The fun of being out there and having that competitive competition that I go for all the time. I go out there to be on the top so I'm in demand all the time (Mike).*

> *You're going into another dimension of speed, quickness and anticipation. The mental, the strategy, the horse power, playing ability, everything, just kind of excels into a super shot of adrenaline, and just everything happens so quickly and rapidly and aggressively that it's very-very exciting. You cannot have enough of them (Memo).*

As Memo said, "High goal polo is 'the fantasy of polo'." In high-goal polo, players get to live their dreams and fantasies. They get the adrenaline rush and high level of competition that they desire. They feel the speed, the intensity, and the pressure. They receive money and awards. And more than anything else, they get an opportunity to be great on the field and become one of the best in a "cool" sport. Without competition, they don't have a chance to become the best and becoming the best was integral to their thoughts about competitiveness.

Thoughts about competitiveness

Success in polo is commonly measured by winning tournaments and how many handicap goals each player earns. All six players believed that being competitive was an asset to their performance as it helped them strive for success. In describing competitiveness, the poloists offered the following thoughts:

> *Definitely the ultimate is to win. But then at the second step you look at 'OK, did I play well?' ...You start getting more down to a personal level and I think all that can be considered competitiveness. ...I've never finished a game where I didn't get beat on a certain play or whatever, but that's what I'm striving for. ...To want to strive to be better than the next person, to want to better yourself, to want to win...(Julio).*

> *...[It is] kind of a gritty will to win on the field. When you're really in the thick of it, [you are] just like willing to get the ball through the posts to win the game in the last*

second. I think of going to a ride-off and both horses staying 50/50 and just somehow finding a way to get a little extra push to win the ride-off. I have this image of it. It's sort of a grit staying in the top of your stomach and you got to release that. …Performing releases it. But also, performing is what causes it too, because thinking about performing is what causes this, but it's also what makes me alive--the process (Adam).

…I feel like I want to get the edge on a person, one way or another I can (Hector).

I want to play with these great players and I want to have a good time and I want the best horses, but I want to win also. Obviously everybody can't win, but that's competitiveness. You want to be the best (Mike).

…Some people, they lose one game or they feel the pressure and they want to kind of get inside their shell, and some others they want to excel and get the courage and the class out, that's what you call competitiveness, it's the same with the horses (Memo).

When players thought about competitiveness, they thought about the gritty will to win, the desire to excel, outperform the opponent, play great and win, absorb the pressure, and overcome difficulties. These challenges encompassed the poloists' sense of what it means to be competitive. These thoughts and feelings energized them to strive for their goals and justified competitiveness as an important attribute for athletes.

Behaviors showing competitiveness

The interviewed players perceived themselves as competitive. Learning how they recognized competitiveness in their performances provided valuable information for the researcher to understand competitiveness from the athletes' point of view. The players talked about things they do on and off the field, which they believed were related to their competitiveness.

If they knew me, and they knew how I prepared and my training schedule and all the things that I do off the field in order to make things happen on the field, I think they would know that I'm competitive (Julio).

I think on the field they know I go hard, I play hard, I'm very aggressive… determined to go hard and win and I get very intense on what I'm doing (Hector).

…Finding ways to score, never quitting, maintaining steadiness, winning, having the best horses, being prepared, being organized would be things that show my competitiveness (Mike).

My work ethic on the field, I think that hustling, just pushing to the last minute, every single play pushing it to the limit. …A huge work ethic off the field (Owen).

I think it's the dedication. I'm very fully dedicated to what I'm doing. I'm very focused on what I'm doing. I'm very intense on what I'm doing (Memo).

The outward, visible expressions of the poloists' competitiveness are demonstrated by the above quotes. The players believed

that if you are competitive you prepare well before the game, you play intensively during the game, and you learn after the game, which made competitiveness an on-going process of becoming better.

The role of competitiveness in performance

Discovering the role of competitiveness in the poloists' performance was an aspect of the purpose of this inquiry. The participants thought that competitiveness had a very significant role in their performances.

> *Makes you have to play and prepare 100, 110%. It makes me enjoy the sport but it makes me strive every step to better myself (Julio).*

> *It's because of the desire to win that I perform well. That can be broken down into an individual play as two people go to the ball, and I think about beating that other player. ...I think the desire, which is involved in competitiveness is very important for us to end up winning. Having the will to win gets you a lot of the way (Adam).*

> *I think, probably the competitiveness is what got me here. Wanting to do better, wanting to get better, and wanting to win has pushed me to this level and hopefully to get higher at one point. ...I think competitiveness gives you an edge on a person ... (Hector).*

> *...I think when you're competitive you can have your fears, you have your thoughts, your doubts, your dreams, but when you're on the field, you're competing. You don't think you're going to lose until it's over. It's like you always think you're going to win. You always think that some things are going to happen and you're going to make it happen (Memo).*

Competitiveness took the game of polo to the next level. Without competitiveness they believed that they would not get better. It provided the goal of wanting to achieve while playing and supported the players' growth and development in the game. It provided the goal for winning and then a way to discover how to achieve the victory. The players offered multiple examples of things that competitiveness does for them, like, giving them the extra push, a way to win a ride-off or to score a goal, keeping them playing hard until the end, etc.. The ultimate goal is to win according to Julio, but successful completion of small tasks is the way to approach winning. Thus, the researcher rationalized the role of competitiveness as providing the players with a specific task, with a focus on what they needed to do at each moment (prior to, during, or after a game) and the energy to pursue it.

Being 'too competitive'

In the poloists' stories, players suggested that overdoing something was not always beneficial to one's performance. The quotes show that what a player considers as 'too competitive' is an individual definition. The concept of 'being too competitive' triggered the following interesting thoughts:

> *If you get too nervous it can affect your effort, even if you want you go overboard, and like when you try to overdo something sometimes you do worse than better (Hector).*

> *I think that if you take the winning and losing competitive part of it too serious, it will mess up your thought game (Mike).*

> *If you overdo it, I think the same time that you're trying to achieve, you create a block. You create a frustration and I would say you go from competitiveness to a fear of losing. Kind of anxiety, kind of getting worried about not happening. I think you have to keep a balance in performance, execution, and then obtaining the result. You have to be ready to take challenges, you have to be ready to regulate or to defend your territory. Part of being competitive and part of being a winner is the control that you have… I also think you have to have certain aggressiveness. If I decide to go to the ball and run with the ball to goal, I'm aggressive enough to defend, everybody knows that I'm one with a determination. I think you have to change it from aggressiveness to determination. They're two different things. Aggressiveness is wrong, but determination I think is right (Memo).*

> *Are you too competitive if you get out on the field and end up getting in fights or saying things rudely to other players in order to prove a point or in order to think that you're going to win the next play because of that. Are you being too competitive or is your real personality coming out? (Julio).*

The concept of 'being too competitive' is seen differently by the poloists. How much of competitiveness was a personal decision or one's personality? Overreacting and being verbally or physically aggressive may portray personal characteristics instead of competitiveness. As a behaviour it may come out in other ways, e.g., becoming over-committed and over-focused on what the player is trying to achieve can result in tension and worries, which then impact one's performance in a negative way. The poloists' varying views on being 'too competitive' offered a wealth of information on what is and what may not be optimal competitiveness.

Motivation within their competitive performances

Each person's journey starts with the first step. Motivation has been an essential aspect of sport participation. Thus, learning from the participants what motivates them and how that affects their performance in addition to their sense of being competitive was perceived as a corner piece in the puzzle of competitiveness. The poloists shared the following thoughts:

> *If you have a higher motivation for whatever reason it may be, then I think you're more competitive in the sense that you'll try harder, you know you want it more badly, and if you want it more badly then you are more competitive. …If you have the motivation, which drives competitiveness for me, that's how you derive the level of performance (Julio).*

> *I think that I am motivated by a love for competing and during the competition, I am determined to do well. The determination to do well is the competitiveness and the love for the competition is the motivation (Adam).*

> *Motivation is desire. I am motivated by money, I'm motivated by trying to do well for my family and myself. …I know how you learn to be motivated: if you want something that creates motivation. Mo-*

> *tivation is created by me, competitiveness is created by somebody else in me. ...I think [the desire to win] has to come from competitiveness (Owen).*
>
> *I think the motivation is the beginning. You have to be motivated first and then from there, you find the competitiveness, and the level of the determination that you want to dedicate to the sport or the practice or anything you want to do. I think [motivation] comes before being competitive. ...You can put somebody that doesn't know anything and is not motivated he's never going to be competitive. He's not there, he's not attracted to it. It's not so important for him (Memo).*

Being motivated was very important to the players. Competitiveness may play an important role in their performances, but without motivation nothing was going to happen. Having the motivation to get involved into polo was essential. Sustaining that "stimulation" in order to keep playing and trying to become one of the best players was even more important. Competitiveness did not stand-alone. According to Hector and Memo, it's not one thing, but many things which when chained together can support the player's journey for success.

Overall, the researcher perceived that as the players complemented each other with their stories, so did the six categories. Each player described multiple aspects of competitiveness and helped the researcher view a different and more complete picture of competitiveness. Beginning with their 'benefits from competing', and proceeding through the cross-case analysis categories, a more colorful picture may now be drawn to enhance our understanding of competitiveness. All these thoughts bring distinct aspects of competitiveness to our attention and offer different perspectives and perceptions which are valuable when consulting, researching, or teaching as performance educators. In the discussion section, the researcher took the polo-ists' stories one step further by interpreting their thoughts, while attempting to understand competitiveness a little better and make it more explicit in a way that can be meaningful to those who are interested in it.

Discussion

Julio, Adam, Hector, Mike, Owen, and Memo described themselves as competitive, very competitive, or even super competitive. Being competitive for the interviewed poloists is an internal feeling about doing well, being better than others, becoming better than themselves, and ultimately about winning plays, chukkers, games, and tournaments. There is no single form of competitiveness nor one constant level of competitiveness, it is a personal feeling, a unique state of mind that pushes them to do more and better, to play high-goal polo games, and perform at a high level regardless of how the game is going. Being competitive energizes them to prepare harder for what they want to achieve, pushes them to learn as much as they can in order to become the best, and gives them the extra edge of strength and endurance while on the polo field. As Owen discussed, competitiveness gives him the goal and the energy to reach for that goal.

Competitiveness as a Process

The polo players' stories described competitiveness as an on-going process; it's not only about being competitive on the field during a game. They are also competitive before and after the game, in order

to make things happen. The best way to describe competitiveness based on these interviews and observing the poloists play is as 'having a point of reference'. This point of reference pertains to an awareness of where the athlete is and where he wants to go, like "I am this good and I want to become this much better" or "I am here with the ball and I want to get through the goal-posts." For example, in a ride-off situation, the poloist becomes aware of the competition between himself and an opponent and wants to win the ride-off. Winning the ride-off is the point of reference for the task-at-hand. This precise point of reference gives the poloist a specific task to focus on and strive for (i.e., outdo the player next to him), which makes his playing job relatively easier as he is aware of what he needs to do at that particular moment in the game.

What led the researcher to viewing competitiveness as a point of reference were the poloists' ideas of wanting to become the best (which entailed some kind of comparison) and their way of thinking in parts (plays, as they referred to them); performing well in each play, and building intensity and momentum based on each play. Julio, Adam, and Memo were very particular in taking care of a play, concentrating on each play, and not the whole game. They built their performances on striving to win play-by-play, chukker-by-chukker, and game-by-game. Owen helped the researcher verbalize this idea by saying that "if you don't have competitiveness then you don't have the goal that you want to achieve" with playing, whereas Memo also talked about knowing how much self-improvement you need.

The role competitiveness played was to create focus, and to trigger the necessary behaviors. Riding hard, becoming "brick-walls" to defend their positions, finding even risky ways to score, persisting, never letting go or quitting are behaviors that help them acquire their points of reference. These behaviors have been described by sport psychology researchers as distinctive of highly competitive athletes (Gill, 1993; Scanlan, 1974; Weinberg & Gould, 1995). These researchers also argued that highly competitive athletes seek challenges. Memo and Mike shared with the researcher that they love challenges and new job opportunities as well as playing in demanding and difficult games. Adam talked about his love-hate attraction to game situations. Owen mentioned his need for competition, and Mike also admitted going after the "competitive competition" all the time. From the poloists' stories, it was apparent that challenges capture their attention.

The interviewed poloists believed that less competitive players perform with less excitement and often exhibit weaker playing behaviors, than challenges may demand. Challenges do not capture their attention. For example, Julio perceived differences in players who are not very competitive with regard to "what extent will they go to try to win the game, how hard will they push, will they go the extra inch or that mile to win the a game?"

Competitiveness, is triggered by performance (i.e., mental and physical; performance as creation and expression of one's ideas prior to, during, and following competition). For Adam "Performance releases [competitiveness.] Also performing is what causes it, but …it's also what makes [him] alive." Performing in polo, whether it is playing in tournaments, practicing, or revisiting and learning from past games gives the players the opportunity to be competitive.

In conclusion, competitiveness as a point of reference provides a clear focus as to what the athlete needs to do. Awareness of this point of reference also triggers the energy, strength, intensity, and determination to improve and work hard (e.g., toward getting the ball through the posts), as the player brings all of himself and skills into one specific task. In other words, it appears to simplify things for the athlete. When the athlete has clear means of comparison (e.g., scoring another goal, marking closely an opponent) it is relatively easier to push to the limits and exhibit strong achievement behaviors.

Poloists' Competitiveness and the Literature

The literature defines competitiveness as a sport-specific achievement motive. A contribution of this study is in expanding the definition of competitiveness and explaining what it can do for one's performance. Being competitive, as having a point of reference and a focus on what the athlete needs to do, may appear to overlap with the goal setting performance enhancement technique, yet the researcher recognized a few differences. In goal setting, the athlete gets direction from the goals as s/he goes after them, whereas in being competitive, the athlete gets direction and energy from the distance that s/he has to travel between where s/he is and where s/he wants to go. Competitive athletes use their goals plus the gap between their present position and their goals to direct and energize their performances. Competitive athletes become aware of the distance they want to travel and lock into it, while non-competitive athletes respond to the goal but the distance to be traveled is not a source of energy.

Being competitive also differs from one's competitive orientation. Based on Gill (1986) and Vealey's (1986) work, win- and outcome-orientations direct the athlete's approach to competition, influence their choices and focuses but not their energy and intensity. Both win-and outcome-oriented athletes can be very competitive when they become aware of what they need to do. Similarly, sport-specific achievement motivation reflects the athlete's tendency to approach or avoid achievement situations and strive for success when engaged in one. Competitiveness as presented in this study is a process, not a tendency or personal disposition. The athlete's achievement motivation can influence her/his decision to approach or avoid competition, while competitiveness will provide the athlete with the specific focus and energy for performing in the competition or practice session.

Gill (1986) argued that being competitive is a trait that can be found in the heart of competitors who strive for achievement, and competitiveness was described in this study as an integral part of the poloists' experiences. Martens (1976b) discussed competitiveness as an attribute that motivates an athlete to persist and be strong. Similarly, the polo players talked about trying hard, never quitting, and enduring through pressure as a result of being competitive. At this point, this inquiry supports that being competitive makes a difference in one's performance. Competitiveness does not guarantee success, but based on the poloists' stories and the achievement motivation literature (McClelland, 1976), it can enhance one's chances for success as it can make her/him more effective as a player by being focused, stronger, and persistent.

According to the players' stories, being competitive was about being single-minded, determined, and dedicated. In order to reach the point of reference (e.g., win a ride-off, score a goal, and mark an

opponent closely) certain behaviors were necessary. These behaviors were described by the poloists as riding hard, being persistent, determined and strong, and were similar to the achievement motivation behaviors that the literature offers. Nonetheless, based on the researcher's interpretation of the poloists' competitiveness, there are a few differences between what sport psychology literature (Gill, 1992; 1993; Martens, 1976b; Scanlan, 1974; 1978a; Weinberg & Gould, 1995) and the poloists describe as competitiveness.

Scanlan (1974) hypothesized that athletes high in competitiveness would choose an opponent/standard of equal or a little higher ability/level (50 - 50 chance of success). In contrast, to get better, become the best, and rise their playing levels even higher, Mike and Memo talked about always seeking high level competition and great athletes to play with and against. The poloists also talked about 75 - 25 game situations (i.e., achievement situations) where they would still do their best when playing as the underdogs. As Hector and Mike explained, being an underdog gives them even more to strive for when playing. Scanlan (1974) also hypothesized that highly competitive athletes sustain effort and expect success, where the interviewed players offered additional evidence with their stories. Adam, Owen, and Memo shared their thoughts about believing that they can win when they go out on the field. Mike described a game where his team was behind by seven goals, and the team stayed in the game, did not quit, and persisted until the end losing only by one goal.

Finally, the poloists talked about being competitive before, during, and after a game. Being competitive was presented as an on-going process, whereas Scanlan (1974) argued that competitiveness (a sport-specific type of achievement motivation) occurs prior to the competitive behavior stage of competition. This research offers evidence in describing competitiveness as an on-going process, where the points of reference help the players focus and energize on what they need to do throughout the preparation, playing, and learning phases of their sport. Expanding Martens' (1976b, p. 325) description of competitiveness 'it is a process of acquiring a point of reference which provides the specific focus, the determination, the intensity and the energy that the athlete will direct toward reaching her/his point of reference in all aspects of competition (game and preparation).'

Limitations and Practical Applications

This inquiry was about thoughts, life stories, and experiences. The poloists' stories and experiences may be similar to other athletes' experiences and their thoughts may be applicable to similar situations. The researcher's perception and interpretation of competitiveness may be transferable to other sports and achievement situations. However, the limitations of the study need to be examined before any practical applications are offered.

The poloists', the peer debriefers', and the researcher's perceptions and interpretations can be perceived as a limitation. The small number of participants; the variable amount of time spent with each participant; the different interview locations; as well as the semi-structured interview mode possibly effected the amount and quality of information that was obtained.

In addition, the researcher's previous experiences with competitive sports (as an athlete and coach), training in performance education and involvement in polo as a

performance educator may have also influenced her position. Nonetheless, all the aforementioned limitations were integral parts of the inquiry. They are discussed here so that the readers can determine the applicability of the findings knowing that these can be perceived as being limited by several factors.

Educating athletes about the process of competitiveness may be the greatest application of this study. Helping athletes understand that being competitive means having a reference between where they are and where they want to go, can be valuable. Observing practices where pressure is lower compared to games, or watching previous games and discussing the athlete's performance in parts can be helpful in learning to recognize those points of reference as these occurred. Communicating with the player about how to become aware and set points of reference, as well as how to move from one to the next during the performance can also be beneficial.

Educating athletes, coaches, and parents on competitiveness as locking into the distance to be traveled may aid in distancing their notion of competitiveness from exhibiting aggression on and off the field. Being aggressive (i.e., playing strong and hard, with the intent to harm, humiliate, or injure the opponent in order to win) did not mean that the athlete was competitive in this study. However, being determined, dedicated, and responsible to defend your position and playing strong and hard, with the intent to win, without causing harm, injuries, or humiliation to the opponent, was being competitive. The athlete's focus on a clear point of defending his play, ball, or territory and an awareness of what he needs to do to be effective and successful was being competitive. As Memo suggested, the word aggression in reference to competitiveness must be replaced with determination. This notion of being competitive may help athletes understand more about where their competitive energy comes from and how they can apply it on a more consistent basis.

To fully comprehend competitiveness additional research is needed. For here and now, this inquiry can only serve as a starting point for a different way of viewing competitiveness. More interviews should be conducted with athletes from different sports, based on how success is evaluated (outcome or performance), on team or individual type, on short and long duration performances. In addition, the athletes' coaches and parents may also offer valuable information. To grow as educators and facilitators for athletes in their journeys, there is still a distance to be covered with listening and learning from their experiences and with discovering ways to apply this knowledge. For a start, we could allow this distance to energize our endeavor for higher learning.

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Lessons Learned: Mental Training with Young Offenders and Children at Risk

Freida **Hjartarson,** Canada

Freida Hjartarson is a teacher, counselor and mental trainer who works with young offenders and children who are at high risk of offending the law. She can be contacted via email at freida.hjartar@nf.sympatico.ca

Abstract

In this article three case studies are presented that focus on mental training with young offenders and children who are at risk of continuing to break the law. These young offenders are often adolescents who have experienced closed custody, imprisonment, and are returning to a home environment. They are usually defiant, have little or no focus and have very little self-confidence. A flexible mental training model that incorporates sports and mental training was used with these children. Lessons learned from working with this unique population are shared.

Background

I work with young offenders and children who are at high risk of offending. The young offenders are adolescents who have experienced closed custody, imprisonment, and are returning to a home environment. They are on probation with the legal system and may be under house arrest. In school they are closely supervised and are usually considered by school staff as trouble. Often they are suspected to be at the heart of a school incident before any investigation.

The children who are at high risk of offending are usually very young people who have experienced abuse of some form in their formative years. When these young children begin school, their conduct is unacceptable. They distract the teacher and their fellow students using inappropriate behaviors such as hitting, biting, kicking, swearing, and arguing. They are defiant and have little or no focus. Such children have very little self-confidence. Usually they are very sexually aware and exhibit inappropriate behaviors in the classroom. Both the young offenders, and the young children at risk of offending, have fear as a constant companion.

I will present three case studies that focus on how I work as a mental trainer. Besides, I will share the lessons I am learning from working with the young offenders, and the children at risk of offending and, I will examine my commitment as a mental trainer. In my conclusion I make some general comments about lessons learned.

Case Study One: Alex

Alex was in grade nine when a third party referred him to me. He spent time in closed custody because of criminal activity. When he is not in school, he is under house arrest at home. He is the oldest of three boys. He moved with his mother, stepfather, and younger brothers to a rural community and a new school when he returned to his family from closed custody. His mother wants Alex to begin again, away from the low-income housing

neighborhood. Particularly she did not want her son 'hanging out' with the adolescents he had kept company with, prior to his entry into closed custody. She considered his friends to be negative influences that would possibly lead him back to closed custody.

When I began my work with Alex, I outlined my commitment and stated my goals. My goals were to help Alex become more focused, mentally stronger, gain self-control, remain in the public school system, honor his probation and live a better quality of life. A better quality of life would involve staying out of closed custody and successfully completing his probation, as well as public school. The opportunity for him to work with the Western Whale Swim coach was provided. By assisting Alex in the short term, it was anticipated that he would experience a better life, and his community would gain a better citizen.

Now, two and half years later, I can report that Alex is experiencing a better life, is presently passing grade eleven and is still honoring his probation. How did Alex progress to this point? As a psychologist and mental trainer I worked using many strategies that I will outline now.

Upon receiving Alex's referral I began by meeting together with Alex's parents, the principal, and the school counselor. When we met, the school principal was complaining that Alex was in trouble constantly at school for minor infractions of the school rules. In our meeting I listened to the concerns and watched. Quickly I realized that the school administration would need to be coached to stay optimistic and I intuited that the mother was a person who needed assistance herself with anger management. I would need to work with her informally as well as with her son. Furthermore I knew that I needed to convey that I cared about their son and to state confidently to his parents and teachers that it was possible for Alex to successfully settle in school and serve his house arrest.

After the formal meeting with the parents and the school personnel, I met with the school counselor on my own and told him I wanted to work with Alex and use some mental training techniques. He gave me the go signal. Informally I began to watch Alex move around the school and I talked to his different teachers. I offered to teach in his classroom, and subsequently presented a conflict resolution lesson in his class. A visiting policeman who presented a guest lecture to Alex's class left impressed with Alex's openness and willingness to talk about his custody and probation experiences. He shared his optimistic views with the school administration.

Alex is a strong, tall, individual with a solid frame, a pleasant smile and a twinkle in his eye. He is also a quick moving individual with strong emotional responses. As I watched him, I noticed that he appeared to want attention, and needed to prove something. There was an air of self-doubt about him. Alex was searching for attention. He seemed to want everyone to know he is a cool, tough, dude. To me, it seemed that he was tough and on the defensive to protect his disappointments. However, my strongest impression was and still is that he is a person who is potentially emotionally rich. I felt that his emotions were not blunted or numbed like other young offenders I have met. When I began to speak with Alex I found that although he appeared initially responsive, he had few words, and was unsure of himself, unfocused, lost, with a genuine 'I don't know' attitude.

After observing Alex, and talking with teachers I requested a meeting with Alex, and his parents in the principal's office at school. At the meeting, I stated that I thought that Alex had a lot of goodness in him and I asked everyone present to commit to having Alex participate in the swim program. This is a major commitment. To swim he needs to travel a half-hour each way to the pool once a week. The parents provide transport - financial problems exist. Alex is excused from school one half day every week. When his parents agreed, I felt at that moment that they understood that I was committed to helping their son. Perhaps, by redirecting the principal's complaints to establishing future school goals helped me gain parental support. During the meeting Alex did not display any enthusiasm for the swimming program. I reminded him that his house arrest order required that he participate in organized sports.

In the beginning at the pool, Alex was not enthusiastic, although he followed through with the requests of Chuck, the coach. Chuck has a quiet steady manner that youngsters do not question. What was immediately noticeable about Alex's swimming was his choking in the water. He could not breathe properly. His swimming lacked fluidness. He gave up quickly and quietly. It was like he was braking himself. He came to two sessions and then he stopped. The school was not following through on their commitment and the parents were complaining about transportation difficulties. At this point, I decided to ask for another meeting with Alex, his parents, and the school principal and counselor to review the commitment, and to request an update on his school progress. When I asked for a school progress report, I was told that Alex was involved in a conflict on the playground with a younger child and was suspended for two days. Teachers' reports indicated that he was having difficulty with mathematics and was easily distracted. Subsequently I held a meeting with the principal and the school counselor and I requested school personnel complete a formal academic achievement assessment. I decided to do a formal psychological assessment.

After the assessment was completed and before the school based meeting to discuss the results, I met with Alex in the counselor's office on two separate occasions. The purpose of the first meeting was to determine if he saw himself staying out of trouble, and not returning to closed custody. I found to my disappointment that he was unsure of himself and did not know. When I asked him to close his eyes, be strong and say he would not go back to prison, he could not. The strongest response at the end of the session was, "I suppose I won't." On the second meeting I asked him to go inside himself again and see if he wanted to go back to closed custody. He said, "No" quickly. If he did not want to go back, then I told him, he was not going to leave the office without saying he would not go back to prison. He said many times, "I can't say that." However, after saying many times, "I suppose I won't go back", he said that he would not go back in a weak and unconvincing way.

When the assessment reports were completed and reviewed, a meeting was held with the parents and school personnel along with Alex. I shared my findings. According to the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, Third Edition (WIAT III), his intelligent quotient results indicate that he is an individual of low average abilities. Overall the psychological assessment indicated that he has definite learning difficulties, particularly in arithmetic. As well, he has short-term memory

problems. Impulsiveness was noted as a behavior to target in any remediation program. At the meeting Alex's strengths were emphasized, a modified mathematics program was requested as well as a firm commitment to swimming.

During the assessment I had learned that Alex was concerned about his younger brothers and did not want them to follow in his footsteps. I was prepared when Alex voiced objections to swimming. I stated that he could bring his brothers swimming. The school staff and his parents agreed. Furthermore the school committed to developing an individualized mathematics program. Initially Alex was resentful. However, he was not permitted to make the final decision. I made contact with his court worker and told her of our decisions and asked for her support. After some discussion the court worker, offered encouragement and support. Funding for gasoline to and from the pool was given.

When his younger brothers began swimming, a new excitement was evident at the pool. A focus was placed on performance. Alex's breathing, and his stop and start performances in the pool were targeted. We had short breathing sessions. Slowly Alex's choking began to disappear. One day he swam four lengths in a relaxed and graceful manner. At the pool when I asked him if he was going back to closed custody, he firmly stated, "NO."

Alex was found in school quietly working with a calculator. His grades began to improve. His mother's face began to look softer, and generally she is appearing more relaxed.

Among my duties as a mental trainer/psychologist is to keep everyone informed about Alex so he does not get lost. As well, it is important to ask for informal progress reports. Always being on the spot at the pool to talk with the coach, Alex, his brothers, and his parents when they are present is important. I have noted in our conversations that he is often not aware of consequences and he does not seem to realize that to stay out of trouble he needs to choose his friends well. I have reminded him of the adage, "Birds of a feather stick together."

Alex can still be difficult in school. For example, he failed to take advantage of tutoring offered before a social studies test. When his results came in, and it was evident that he needed the extra tutoring, he was held accountable.

After almost two years without a charge, Alex was required to appear in front of the Provincial Judge. He was in the industrial arts workshop at his junior high school. Hot glue guns were being used. His partner was burned on the hand and taken to emergency. He faced charges. He was suspended from school for six days, and has faced his intensive intervention court worker and an unsympathetic school staff. My role as a mental trainer with Alex was to hold fast and not give up. I realized when I met him at the pediatrician's office he knew that I had not given up on him and for a short moment I experienced a flash of energy from him that told me he had found hope and he was not giving up either. Later he came to the pool where I was working with other children and swam his best. In the water he put forth an effort to excel. He swam with grace and confidence and he practiced his dive with the swim coach until it was perfect. Somehow, I knew that finding his best in the swimming pool was critical to refueling his commitment to try. As a result of the charges, he was facing an appearance in court and most likely, house arrest. However if he did not have the control he

exercised over himself in the pool yesterday, he could be placed in closed custody. Alex's achievement in the pool yesterday is the equivalent of another person winning a gold medal and just as important for our human community. His renewed commitment possibly was fostered by observing and feeling hope and realizing someone else had not given up on him. Persistence seems to be a quality that can be modeled.

Alex has not returned to closed custody and he is still attending high school in a modified grade eleven program. His physical education teacher has confronted him on his bullying behavior and he is seeing slow changes in Alex as a result. His high school principal went to court officials on his behalf to report Alex's school progress when his court date came up concerning the glue gun incident. His principal, a tall power lifter, also took Alex aside, and talked to him about commitment, appropriate behaviors and indicated that he would not be going back to court on his behalf. I appeared in court and when I was called to the stand I told the court officials that I believed that Alex could stay 'clean' but he would ultimately have to make the decision. His case was thrown out of court for insufficient evidence. Alex returned to school quickly saying he had a test to write. His story is of course not finished. However, he is still in school, not in closed custody, has improved his swimming skills and is trying hard to show his brothers a different path. His mother expresses appreciation.

I have learned a number of lessons from working with Alex. As I reflect now on what happened, I realize that my thoughts, feelings, actions and intuitions were critical to working with Alex. I worked in flow. (Flow refers to the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it, Csikszentmihalyi, 1191, p.4).

Meeting and communicating with school personnel, his parents, as well as with his court worker when necessary, was important. Continuing to meet and to problem solve was crucial. Observing and participating in the daily life of the school was necessary. Focusing on his potential and keeping others focused on potential was necessary. Furthermore, I learnt that my quiet talks after the swim session with the swim coach assisted me to evaluate and plan. I made some key decisions. For example, I decided to confidently predict success. Making the decisions centered me, and alerted me to be persistent. It signaled the school to carefully consider Alex's possibilities. It gave his mother hope. Focusing Alex to formulate a commitment to stay out of prison was also important. As well, providing Alex with the opportunity to bring his brothers swimming gave him a chance to be a positive role model, and to develop self-confidence. Swimming now is an outlet for the family to express themselves. When the mother and father have come to watch, it has been rewarding for me to observe them enjoying their sons' successes in the water. It has fueled my commitment as a mental trainer.

There were other lessons learned. The formal school achievement assessment and the psychological assessment provided information that helped to define possibilities and to set a realistic academic course. Assisting Alex set goals and coaching him to try, and encouraging him when he met failure or obstacles, has built confidence and perhaps even given him insight. Talking to him about the importance of choosing friends and also about how to

choose friends was necessary. Offering Alex continuous progress reports was crucial. A very important lesson was not giving up. Persistence.

Case Study Two: Gerry

Like Alex, Gerry, age fourteen has already lived in closed custody. However the difference is that Gerry became involved with the justice system earlier and has experienced horrific early childhood experiences that predispose him to a life 'behind bars'. He was kept out of school for a year because school officials felt he would be potential trouble in their local schools. He did not have the opportunity to attend grade eight. As a result of government insistence, he was registered in grade nine in a junior high school. School Board officials were expecting trouble and Gerry was terrified. Gerry wanted to be in school for his younger sister and brother. The desire to stay one year ahead of his younger sister in school was alive within him.

Assisting Gerry visualize a successful day in school every morning became our goal as the school bell rang. It was not easy for him. He knows what it is like not to be allowed to go to school. Each morning I arrived to see him as he enters the school. When he sees me, he knows why I am present. Our commitment is renewed daily. On days when he stays home I am on the telephone to his foster home. On the days that he has court appearances for probation violations for staying out too late or swearing at his foster mother I am sitting in court.

I want to know as much of his history as possible. I search out his early school records, his court documents from another province as well as his present sentencing order outlining his house arrest. Using a journal to record his day to day behaviors is important, and I encourage the school to maintain a journal as well.

From the very beginning it was critical to maintain a dialogue with all the people who work with Gerry: his intensive intervention court worker, school personnel, and his foster mother, the social workers, and the judges. It was important to inform others to offer him the best chance of survival in the school, and the community. I shared my findings: his fear, his motivation to do well, the fact that he was never a school behavior problem, as well as details such as his inability to deal with people who yell. Steering him away from loud teachers was an initial goal at school. As other teachers gained insight into Gerry, they become more involved. Soon school personnel begin to respond to him as someone they want to succeed. A transformation occurred. First he is a name with a history and a potential gangster in their school. Now he is a young adolescent who is well groomed, quiet, polite and a loner with a marked history.

For many reasons maintaining continuous communication is a necessity for a mental trainer working with an individual such as Gerry. For instance, once the legal system begin to see a person rather than a court file, they may begin to work with the person in a way that allows for growth and change. I suggested to the judges and lawyers who work with Gerry that they might choose to see Gerry as a person who needs positive father figures. I pointed out that until now he has only experienced father figures that beat him, and yell at him. To my delight two judges in juvenile court modified their approaches. Gerry is requested to report on a monthly basis in their chambers. He is asked to present his school reports as well as his general progress.

By keeping everyone informed, I build a support system around him that in different ways communicate their care and concern. Unfortunately Gerry was living with a single female foster parent who was having difficulties herself, so she is not well equipped to work directly with me in our mental training program. But she does offer him a bed when other people in the community will not, given his history. Fortunately for Gerry, his teacher assistant begins to assume a surrogate mother role, rewarding him for his academic accomplishments, commenting on his personal appearance and taking an interest in his day to day concerns. His female legal aid lawyer acknowledges the importance of his not returning to closed custody.

Very early into my work with Gerry it became important to understand how he solves problems, to know what his academic potential is, and to know about his academic skills in reading, spelling and arithmetic. This proved to be difficult because from the beginning Gerry told school officials that he did not want to be assessed. In his opinion he had been over assessed. Maybe he is frightened of being known. I did at one point tell him that if he wanted to get out of grade nine successfully we would need to know his strengths and weaknesses, to put in place an academic plan that he could master. I also assured him that it would be a way for him to gain full time access to school. Initially he was attending grade nine only on a part-time basis. With time and after many negatives he agreed. I expect he agreed after several months because he knew me better and he wanted to become more involved in school, to belong. At an early age he has learned that attending school is not something he can take for granted.

Assessment results indicated that he is a young person of strong average abilities and that he has strong reading skills well above his chronological age and grade level.

Communicating with Gerry is a challenge. He is often silent. He seems to trust nobody and he is defensive. Besides, he continues to tell me he is a bad person, and I do not really know him. As a mental trainer he does test my skills. He does not initiate conversation and when I am outside the school area he takes on a 'tough boy' gang leader stance. I feel culturally lost. Once when driving with him across town he pulled out a scarf wrapped it around his head and to me appeared to move into another personae. After some moments we arrived at the high school. I turned to him before we got out of the car and said, "Take that off your head. It is not appropriate." To my surprise he did. Soon he was in an animated conversation with his prospective high school vice principal who showed a genuine interest in him. This was a spontaneous visit I had arranged to show him where he might go to school next year if he would continue to stay motivated and perform well in school, and respect his house arrest. I am introducing and offering him insight into the concept that you have very little control over those things around you, but you do have control over how you choose to respond to them.

One day I arrived at school to find out that he is in the lock up in the local jail. To continue to maintain my focus is difficult, but I reached deep inside myself and paid a visit to the lock up. Apparently he was found out after his curfew drunk and his foster mother did not want him to return home intoxicated. When Gerry told the judge the following day he would rather live in jail than with his present foster mother the judge decided to send him back to the lock up for awhile to let him think.

By the time I made my visit, he was strongly into nicotine withdrawal and looked lost in his oversized custody clothes in the meeting room.

The despair I feel inwardly as I meet with the adolescents like Gerry and the Alex challenge my focus. I remind myself that if I lose the focus, they have little chance, and our community has more at risk. Having a healthy and happy life when I am not working with such boys keeps me centered.

Today, two years later Gerry is in grade eleven in an academic stream and living out of closed custody with foster parents who take an active role in his life. A change in his home situation came as a result of constant dialogue with the social services agency. Working with school personnel I lobbied hard to have him transferred to a family with the ability, energy and commitment to offer Gerry. He lives in a surrogate two-parent family. Gerry did spend time in closed custody prior to his grade ten high school entry. He returned unhappy for the experience. Presently he is enjoying success in school and he has experienced a number of positive experiences with caring people in the past three years. Hopefully these experiences along with the kindness and commitment he experiences will continue to motivate him to be more confident. As a mental trainer maintaining hope is always a challenge.

Many lessons have been learned from working with Gerry. Probably the most important for me was learning not to be intimidated by him and his situation. How did I do that? I chose not to give up and to be optimistic. Besides I worked in flow. Sometimes I did not know what would happen next but I always faced the situation honestly and directly. I worked in flow. For example, going to the judges who work with him and suggesting they work with him in a different manner was a risk taking measure, as was visiting him in the local prison. Driving him across town to the local high school one day after school when the situation presented itself may have led to a confrontation when he put on his headscarf. I took the risk and he had a spontaneous meeting with the vice-principal of the high school that encouraged us all. Always I responded honestly to situations even when I felt sometimes like walking away.

Digging deeply into his school records and learning he had never been a school problem helped me to predict the problems were not going to occur in school. It also led me to work with his probation officer to tighten up his order and exclude him from a high-risk community center, a mall where troubled youth are known to go. I learned how to communicate with police officers, probation officers and court officials in ways I had not known. I learned that boys like Gerry have lessons to teach me, whether it is about hope, communicating, or not giving up.

Case Study Three: John

John is a young child who is potentially a young offender. John has no trust in anyone including himself. Although he is eight years old and in grade two he does not know how to read and he has been suspended from school for long periods in kindergarten and again in grade one. Although he lives with his father and sister now, in the past he has lived in a foster home. His mother, who lives close by, has made and continues to make false promises. She is an active alcoholic. John does not believe anyone and he trusts no one**.** John believes he ‘can’t’.

As a mental trainer I set up situations where children may learn how to take control and learn to trust. In John's case it is teaching him how to swim. Although it sounds simple, it is actually a labor-intensive task that requires continual patience. John has been in a swim program with a private swim instructor for six months and he is still not swimming on his own. He does move about the pool with a life jacket and his personal swimming teacher. He is unable to trust enough to put his head back and float with out support. It took him months to allow his personal swim instructor to help him lie on his back in the water with her support. Still putting his head fully back is a problem. If let be, he would hang onto the edge of the pool for the entire session. Even though he is resistant, he wants to go swimming every week. School reports indicate he is behaving more appropriately at school and he is now attempting to learn to read. As I drive him to swimming, he is reading the street signs. For the first time in his school career of three years he has not been suspended from school.

Together he and I continue to discuss how 'can't' is a word that puts on his brakes, and stops him from being successful. Very slowly John is learning that by saying he can, he is taking control over how he responds. There have been occasions when he has turned to me and yelled, "I can't, I can't, I can't." Patience is important! Rewarding him is also critical. A behavior modification program that focuses on positive reinforcing 'I can' is in place. Incorporating a trip to McDonald's within the reward system has worked as a motivator.

Unfortunately at this moment John is not progressing as well as one would want to report. Several factors seem to be related to his faltering success. His mother does not support the mental training plan, or other programs. She is actively destructive on occasions, phoning accusing the school or the swim coach of some infraction. She will on occasion call the police to report someone. She is bright, manipulative and vocal and people want to stay away from her. His father, now the single parent John lives with, is losing hope and is tired. This results in his being inconsistent with John. There are difficulties with the school and home communications. In the face of this adversity realism is important and commitment to what can be done, however small the act is. To believe that with time life may turn around for John is necessary. I realize that it is most important for me not to loose my focus. Continuing to provide positive opportunities for him is important.

John's case teaches me that I may not always realize the successes that I would like. However there are the small steps that may be very important and I need to learn not to overlook them. For instances, John is learning to relax in the water. He is trying to learn to read. By wanting to continue to go swimming he is indicating that it is an important event for him. He has not been expelled from school this year for whatever reason. Again with John's case as with Alex's and Gerry's cases, it is important to maintain a dialogue with everyone who is working with the person concerned. Responding in a creative way to each situation as it presents seems most important. Persistence, commitment and large measures of hope are mandatory. Keeping a positive focus when others may be discouraged is the challenge.

Commitment

I have learnt that it is my commitment that fuels my hope in the face of adversity. Young offenders and children at risk de-

mand patience and stamina. I am prepared to persist, to work through the adversity, and find the solutions. I do believe that my strength as a mental trainer with my clients comes from being positive and not feeling hopeless. There are opportune moments that present themselves, times when I am more receptive and observant, and when my clients are ready to receive my support or direction. When these moments occur, I am prepared to grasp the opportunity, and to make a meaningful connection. I am prepared to stay positive and focus on the solution until the moments present themselves because I have learned that there are many rewards when I assist an offender overcome his negative behaviors, or support very young children as they attempt to step into the greater world.

A best moment for me as a mental trainer came one week when I was at a social. The physical education teacher from Alex's school came over to me, and said, "Alex has changed. He is not out seeking attention as he was in the beginning". He said, "In the beginning I thought this boy is real trouble. Now he is quiet, relaxed, and like most of the other boys in school his age. He is a pleasure to be around." I was thrilled.

My commitment is to support my clients realize their strengths and if they have no goals, and are not focused, I attempt to help them discover their raison d'être. I find that young children at risk are often without direction and initially cannot articulate goals. With these clients I emphasize stating a goal. With a young child it may be simply 'I can.' Once they have a goal, it can grow as they experience a success, however small it may be. My work includes helping people refocus on their goals when they lose their focus, or experience set backs. It also includes establishing a plan to help them communicate better (Orlick, 1986). I also assist the adults who live and work with them to support and refocus the children and adolescents when they become distracted, make errors and loose their direction. Whether it is helping people set goals, developing strategies, focusing, refocusing or communicating, mental skill training is a critical to my work.

My mental training model incorporates sports, but it could also involve the fine arts and the performing arts. Presently I work closely with the community swim coach. However, high performance in sports is not the central focus of my mental training with young offenders and children at risk of offending. Living positively is the focus and the commitment I offer, and I do it using the mental training model.

Consistency makes a difference. As a mental trainer I present myself as consistent and focused, and I provide a framework for my clients that demonstrates my commitment. I do what I say I am going to do. I am always on time, and often early. I know I am in for the long haul and I live my commitment. I focus on walking my talk. I believe they can and I don't falter. I am ever mindful that it is their commitment to their project, not my commitment to their project. For example, when working with a young offender I turned to him and told him that choices are his, and then I asked him if he knew what the saying meant, "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink."

Hope grows with a consistent focused approach. I work at being a good listener, I am patient and I enjoy embracing the problem of the moment facing the individual. By being prepared, hanging around, or simply just waiting until the moment

occurs, I am able to responsibly provide service. I often receive a referral when a student or school population is in crisis. Although there are disappointments when people give up, or re-offend or others interfere in the mental training process, I try to take this in my stride. When I realize that I could have concentrated more, been more in the moment, I let go, and begin again. I do not believe progress must be a straight line.

My self-care is important. If I am going to continue to generate hope within my clients, I need to be well rested, eat well, have lots of fun in my private life, and be well organized. My physical environment both indoors and outdoors plays an important role in generating a peaceful and spiritual atmosphere for me to rest and let go of my work. By using a personal diary, I find that I know when I need to let go or push myself a little harder until the moment when I can rest. I am becoming more aware sooner that I need to let go of the stress and regroup and refocus. Since I have started to involve myself in the mental game, I have become more aware of my need to monitor my own self-talk, and to play with my own positive body language. Recognizing what I need to do to assist me when working with others has become critical. Once I have recognized the negative self-talk or my exhaustion, I release, regroup, refocus, relax, and get ready to work again. I do this through my recreational sports: cross-country skiing, swimming, biking and rowing. My yoga practice helps me to maintain my balance between working and caring for myself. Balance has been a skill I have needed to develop to a greater extent since I began working with young offenders.

Being committed seems to be involved in maintaining hope. If commitment exists and a problem arises and it always does, solutions present themselves. With young offenders if hope exists, it is buried deep within them. They are often lost and without commitment. My role as a mental trainer is to help them find, uncover, and rediscover their hope and their commitment. Keeping it simple smart (KISS) is important (Halliwell et al.1999). By this I mean that it may be a very small achievement that will assist a young offender find hope within. Smartness seems to be connected with being capable of understanding that the big jump originates from the little jumps. Positive experience feeds hope. For example, for one young child at risk, it was the day she dived off the side of the pool that sparked her hope. From then on she was not constantly whining that she 'could not'. She felt a 'can' and she found hope, joy. She continued to persist. Next week she jumped off the high dive three times with the coach standing close by. She initiated the dives herself. No one said to her, "Go jump off the high dive."

Conclusion

I have learned a number of lessons from working with the Alex's, Gerry's and John's of the world. For example, play one pitch at a time, be confident and focused in the moment (Ravizza & Hanson 1995). Another lesson is live in flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). When I am faced with a child who is out of control, or an adolescent who is about to be charged I focus on the process, not look at the outcome. For example, focusing on the fact that Alex hurt another through impulsiveness not deliberation, can not be my focus. My focus as a mental trainer is to have Alex renew his commitment to finish school and to not go back to closed custody. I have to assist him find within himself the courage and stamina to stay on task despite his present charge. Helping him realize that he

must take control of his actions and supporting him in the process is important.

What is making a difference to my commitment, is that I am learning everyday. I am keeping it simple. I am living in the moment. I act, let go, evaluate, and act again. I am letting go of the negatives, what does not work and replacing the negatives with new energy. It is the process of breathing, of living in the moment. Oxygen in, carbon dioxide out. Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in, breathe out. As I realize the rhythm I am becoming better. As the children and adolescents sense my commitment, they learn. They begin to act, let go, evaluate and act again.

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Lessons Learned: In Pursuit of Excellence

Kelly **Doell**, University of Ottawa, Canada

Additional contributors include: Louise Friend, Natasha Danschinko, Marcela Donoso, Jessica Fraser, Jamie Galipeau, Alex Lamontagne, Kristin Marvin and Paul Sealy,

In the following article, graduate students enrolled in Terry Orlick's "Sport Psychology and Mental Training Consultation" course (all of whom were students as well as athletes or coaches) discuss the role of lessons learned in pursuit of excellence.

In all of our graduate course work, consulting experiences, research pursuits and quests for individual improvement, Orlick consistently emphasizes the importance of drawing out lessons and applying those lessons on a daily basis: "Learn from every experience, every opportunity, every challenge, every day. Act on those lessons. This is the path to personal excellence".

In most of his classes (at the graduate and undergraduate level) Orlick requires his students to keep a "Lessons Learned Journal" to help ensure that lessons are captured, remembered and acted upon. He also encourages athletes and other performers to keep a log on lessons learned so that they can speed up the learning process and enhance the consistency of their best performances.

When we read articles and books for his classes, he asks that we write down the most relevant lessons we have learned from each reading and challenges us to reflect on how we will apply these lessons in real world situations. Reading and performing with this goal in mind has helped us to accelerate the application of concepts and lessons in real-world performance or consulting contexts.

In the following pages we share one example of lessons learned. These lessons are focused on what each of us learned from Orlick's 2000 edition of *In Pursuit of Excellence*. These lessons were personally meaningful but varied largely in content, probably due to our different backgrounds, experiences and stages of life.

> *As much as In Pursuit of Excellence was geared towards top performers, it also assists us in the pursuit of excellence in life; a pursuit to be the best that we can be. Keeping my own life in mind, I felt encouraged and motivated. Setting goals, taking risks, staying focused and all the other underlying ingredients of the "Wheel of Excellence" are very relevant in my life at the moment.(JF)*

> *I have learned the importance of setting priorities appropriately to gain control of my present life and to steer my life onto the path I want (the path that has heart). This will always be relevant to my life. (LF)*

Visions of Excellence
Orlick maintains that excellence in performance and life "begins with a vision of where you want to go and a commitment to do what it takes to get there".

> *The Wheel of Excellence allowed me to immediately see what I need to do, mentally, to be my best. The fact that the best leaders and performers in the world are strong in these areas gives me a clearer vision of what I need to work on to reach my goals. (KD)*

Commitment to Excellence
Orlick refers to commitment as "the 'heart' of human excellence".

> *One simple question in this book hit me hard "Are you doing something everyday that takes you a step closer to your goals?" (p.18). I now know that it is crucial for me to be organized, have a plan and write down my daily goals to help me achieve excellence. (KM)*

> *The book has helped me make a firm commitment to bettering myself, first as a person and second as an athlete. Making a total commitment to achieving my personal and athletic goals has rejuvenated my excitement about what lies ahead and I am already feeling the benefits of seeing something I want in my life and committing myself to going and getting it. (JG)*

Mental Preparation for Excellence
A large part of attaining excellence is "becoming more aware of your own capabilities, strengths, and weaknesses and charting your own path to excellence" (Orlick, p. 79).

On positive images…

> *After reading this book, I have realized that seeing yourself making great plays and putting yourself in glorious, realistic situations can only help develop your confidence. (ND)*

On simulation training…

> *In the book, an astronaut (Chris Hadfield) described the importance of simulation training. Such detailed simulations are very important in modern day coaching if athletes are to master their desired performance responses and coping strategies. (PS)*

On learning from setbacks…

> *It was reiterated in the book that one cannot spend their life living with regret. The book motivated me to learn from my mistakes, and draw positive lessons for the future. (JF)*

On confidence…

> *In Pursuit has helped me learn that confidence is an important tool for success. I know I am good enough but I also know I can be better. Attitude can help people get to the next level. (ND)*

On coaching…

> *What was particularly interesting for me was the fact that the book was mainly centered around players perspectives. So, being a coach, I was able to get a players point of view towards issues such as effective feedback, positive communication and mental preparation. I am sure that I have some players who do not*

fully understand what I am trying to teach them or are afraid to ask questions because they think I will get upset with them. In Pursuit helped me realize that there are many areas of my coaching that need improvement. I have a better understanding on how to create a better communication link with my players. (AL)

On communication…

Anxious feelings interfere with the message trying to be communicated. This book has identified some strategies I could use to overcome these anxious feelings, which I will immediately implement to achieve my goal. Understanding my communication patterns will help me to develop the skills I need to be more effective. (PS)

The chapter on Getting the Best from Coaches reminded me that as a coach that I have my own coaching "style", but not all athletes learn the same way. Therefore, I need to concentrate on determining what is the best learning style for each player and use this knowledge to help the athlete improve. (MD)

Overall

There is no doubt that I need to develop many of the mental skills described in this book in order to be on the path to excellence. It seems to me that all of these things must begin with a firm commitment to my goals and myself. I have come to realize that the greatest risk is not risking at all. (JG)

Everybody is unique. In Pursuit of Excellence recognizes this and explains that some techniques might work for some athletes but not for others. (JF)

In sum, we believe that the emphasis Orlick places on drawing out lessons from all of our experiences and acting on them, is important in helping us to develop as students, athletes, coaches and consultants. Looking for personal lessons through *In Pursuit of Excellence* provides one example of a larger process that can lead us to simple, step-by-step strategies for reaching our potential. This approach to ongoing learning can be applied in many pursuits, to help reduce stress, improve relationships, embrace challenges and commit to goals that will enhance the quality of our lives and improve the consistency of our performance.

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Editorial Statement

The focus of The Journal of Excellence is the sharing of knowledge and wisdom that is relevant to the lived experience of excellence in any domain (e.g., sports, performing arts, health, workplace, education, joyful living). Qualitative research of an applied nature, such as case studies, interventions, interview studies and narrative studies are welcomed. The journal also publishes personal accounts, short commentaries, interviews, poems or stories that offer insights into the nature of high level challenges and the mental links to excellence. Reviews of books, videos, films or conferences as well as notices of upcoming conferences and events will be considered.

The Journal of Excellence is looking forward to sharing your ideas with others committed to enhancing excellence in all domains.

Louise Zitzelsberger, PhD
Editor

Instructions to Contributors

Submissions to the Journal of Excellence should be in English only. In preparing manuscripts for publication, authors should follow the guidelines in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (4th ed., 1994)*. Please submit one copy of your manuscript in Microsoft Word and forward it as an attachment to: Journal@zoneofexcellence.com

All submissions must be preceded by an abstract not exceeding 150 words. All figures and photographs should be submitted on-line in Tiff format (600 dpi.). Tables should be included in the Word document A short biographical sketch describing each author area(s) of expertise, performance or research interests and affiliation(s) should accompany the article.

The Journal of Excellence is a refereed journal using a blind review process. The editor and two other reviewers read manuscripts. The review process is completed as quickly as possible.

The Editor of the Journal of Excellence can be reached through:
Fax: +1-819-827 2652
Email: Journal@zoneofexcellence.com

About the International Society for Mental Training and Excellence (ISMTE)

Introduction

Founded in 1989, the focus of the ISMTE is excellence in performance and excellence in living. The founding President, Lars Eric Unestahl, organized the First World Congress in Örebro, Sweden, in 1991. Terry Orlick became the second President in 1991, hosted the 1995 World Congress in Ottawa, Canada and initiated the Journal of Excellence. Keith Henschen became the third President in 1998. Keith and Rich Gordin hosted the 1999 World Congress on Mental Training and Excellence, in Salt Lake City, USA.

The next World Congress on Mental Training and Excellence will be hosted by Pavel Bundzen in 2003, in St.Petersburg, Russia.

Vision

Education and Training for better people, better performers and a better world.

Mission

- Promote Excellence in Sport, The Performing Arts, Education, Work, Health and Life.
- Create, collect, produce and share valuable, practical resources and educational opportunities for those in pursuit of excellence, and those assisting others in pursuit of excellence.
- Serve as a vehicle for the on-going advancement of knowledge, education, interventions and consulting in Mental Training and Excellence.

Focus

- Excellence within multiple pursuits: Sport, Performing Arts, Workplace, Health, Education and Joyful Living.
- Committed to a truly applied orientation with practical research and experiential knowledge as a base.
- Focused on what is relevant in the real world of application to Quality Performance and Quality Living.
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Mental Training

Mental Training is centered on the systematic training and nurturing of mental skills and perspectives that are linked to performance excellence and quality living.

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ISMTE sponsors the publication of the on-line Journal of Excellence, which is devoted to nurturing excellence in all human endeavors – excellence in performance and excellence in living.

The biannual internet based Journal of Excellence is applied in orientation, relevant in content, and wide-ranging in application to a variety of performance disciplines and real world applications.

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The World Congress

ISMTE hosts a World Congress on Mental Training and Excellence every 4 years.
The first was held in Sweden in 1991, the 2nd in Canada in 1995, the 3rd in the USA in 1999 and the 4th will be held in St. Petersburg, Russia in 2003.
The World Congress provides a forum for people from around the world to share their knowledge and practical insights, related to Mental Training and Excellence. Many applied presentations and practical workshops are offered by leaders in this field.

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