



Performance Enhancement News

UAB Sport Psychology

Volume 1, Issue 2 – August, 2006

Providing information to individuals and teams seeking optimal performance

New Beginnings...

“Is it time for school already?”

I can't tell you how many times I've heard the question in the past week. High schools and colleges are gearing up to start the academic year. By the time you read this, I'll bet that if you work at a school, you've either started (or are getting ready to start) the routine “all over again.”

I've always enjoyed this time of year. It is a time to reengage with friends and coworkers. It is a time to meet new people and do new things. For coaches and athletes, this time of year offers numerous opportunities for new beginnings. If last year's team performed well, this is an opportunity to start building on that success. If the team did not meet expectations, this is the time to introduce new ideas and new traditions.

Regardless of team history, coaches begin a new year with similar issues. One such issue is that coaches must effectively add new athletes and sometimes new coaching staff to their team so that it functions in a unified fashion. Sport psychologists refer to this process as team building.

We all know of teams that have had an abundance of talent but were unable to meet expectations because they failed to function as an effective unit (the 2004 U.S. Olympic men's basketball team comes to mind). We also know of teams that may not have had the most talented athletes but did work as a unified group and were very successful (George Mason, an 11th seed, earning a trip to the final four in the 2006 NCAA men's basketball tournament, is one such team).

Imagine what a well-functioning and highly talented team could do!

A second issue that coaches must address at this time of year is team needs. This requires a coach to honestly assess how his or her team did during the previous season, predict how the team should do during the current season with the current roster, and decide how to improve the performance of the team. This assessment is often an ongoing process through the preseason.

Imagine a scale upon which team strengths and weaknesses can be “weighed” against each other. If the scales are tipped toward strengths, you have the luxury of working primarily toward building upon strengths with less focus on correcting or compensating for weaknesses. On the other hand, if the scales tip towards the weakness side, you most likely will spend more time correcting and working to compensate for these weaknesses.

With experience, most coaches develop strategies for team building and assessing team needs. However, if the normal strategies are not working or if a coach wishes to learn new plans and strategies for team building and/or needs assessment, consultation with a sport psychologist may be helpful.



This Issue's Highlighted Sport: Basketball

Q: What mental skills are commonly used in basketball?

A: As with all sports, playing basketball well requires a combination of physical and mental skills.

The mental skills used depend upon the game situation. For instance, athletes can use concentration skills to keep themselves focused and “in the game,” even during time outs and time on the bench. Concentration skills can also be used to maintain focus in spite of distractions such as the crowd and the opposing players.

Other mental skills used include: managing emotions and staying in control, even in the face of a “bad” call by a referee; developing free throw pre-shot routines which can increase the success rate of foul shots; and focusing on the present and not worrying about past mistakes or thinking too far ahead (which will help an athlete keep his or her full attention on the game).

Developing the mental skills necessary to play well happens in much the same way that physical skills are developed: through hours and hours of practice under the guidance of either a sport psychologist or a coach who has been trained in sport psychology principles.

As an example of the importance of mental skills in basketball, consider the free throw pre-shot routine of Steve Nash of the Phoenix Suns. Imagine what impact his routine has on his free throw success. As we all know, many games are won or lost at the free throw line.

This quarterly publication is being offered to you free of charge. You may share this newsletter with others as long as it is distributed in its entirety. If you prefer not to receive a copy, either call 256-551-4479 or send an email to moncierj@uasomh.uab.edu. Use these same methods to request additional copies of *Performance Enhancement News*, to request an electronic version, or to be placed on the mailing list.

Dr. Jim Moncier is a licensed psychologist in Alabama and Florida. He is an assistant professor in Psychiatry and Family Medicine at the University of Alabama School of Medicine, Huntsville Campus. He is a member of the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology and of Division 47 (Exercise and Sport Psychology) of the American Psychological Association. His sport psychology

practice includes work with athletes, coaches, and teams in high school and collegiate sports such as basketball, football, golf, soccer, softball, track, and wrestling.

To schedule a sport psychology consultation with Dr. Moncier, call 256-551-4479. Questions regarding sport psychology services can be directed to Dr. Moncier via email at moncierj@uasomh.uab.edu.

This publication © 2006 by UAB Sport Psychology

Performance Enhancement News
UAB Sport Psychology
301 Governors Drive, Suite 150
Huntsville AL 35801