



Confidence: A Key to Success

A wise man once pointed out to me that the Latin roots of the word confidence mean “trust in self.” In sport, confidence has been defined by Vealey (2000) as “the beliefs or degree of certainty that individuals possess about their ability to be successful” (p. 556).

As an athlete, belief in yourself is an important part of your performance in your sport. In fact, in a recent review of the research, Williams and Krane (2001) concluded that a higher level of self-confidence was one of the variables that consistently distinguished successful from less successful athletes. Confidence is also a key aspect of peak performance, also known as “flow” (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999).

Without confidence, could an athlete consistently make a free throw? Serve an ace? Block a penalty kick? Sink a 4-footer? Kick a field goal? Not likely... And these examples just barely scratch the surface. Think about how confidence influences your performance in your sport.

While a thorough discussion of this topic is beyond the scope of this newsletter, you can start on your journey towards becoming a more confident athlete (and coaches can use this process also) by returning to the Latin roots noted above. In order to “trust in self,” one must have knowledge of self. This means knowing your strengths, in order to capitalize on them, and your weaknesses, in order to compensate for or improve on them. As such, a self-assessment of skills is a good place to start.

Assessing Skills

Consider and write out the skills required to perform well at your position in your sport. Most likely, you will develop a list that includes both physical and mental skills, such as “focused,” “fast,” “patient,” or “consistent.”

Next, rate yourself on each of the skills that you listed. Perhaps the easiest type of rating scale to use is from 1 to 10 (with a rating of “1” indicating “needs a lot of work” and a rating of “10” indicating “fantastic!”). This will require that you look at your own skills honestly. Remember, we are looking to develop “trust in self.” And, yes, many of you who have worked with me in the past will no doubt recognize the beginnings of a Performance Profile.

This self-assessment can also be enhanced with feedback from coaches, psychological questionnaires, and the use of post-performance techniques such as sport journaling, viewing tapes, and using imagery to further clarify strengths and weaknesses.

Improving Confidence

Once you have your strengths and weaknesses listed, you can begin to use this list to help create opportunities to capitalize on your strengths and to compensate or improve on your weaknesses.

Research highlights three areas that impact an athlete’s self-confidence: achievement, self-regulation, and social climate (Vealey, 2000). It should

be no surprise that, over time, these areas are also the keys to gaining self-confidence.

Achievement can be used to enhance self-confidence by demonstrating physical ability and mastering the skills needed to “do the job” athletically. Self-regulation includes the ability to manage one’s behaviors, thoughts, and feelings. Techniques such as goal-setting, imagery, and self-talk can be used to both improve athletic performance and enhance self-confidence. Finally, issues such as social support and the leadership and feedback style of the coach have been shown to have an impact on the social climate aspect of confidence.

In summary, confidence is an important quality of successful athletes. It takes time to develop and requires that you know your strengths and weaknesses. With this knowledge, you can exert more control over your preparation and performance in your sport which can also help you improve your confidence. For more information about confidence in general or about specific strategies for building confidence, contact your local sport psychologist.

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