



Taking Control of Motivation

In the previous issue of *Performance Enhancement News*, we began a discussion about motivation and defined this important concept as the willingness to work hard and to sustain that effort. We looked at several factors that can influence an individual's motivation including the athlete's belief in his or her own abilities, how an athlete explains the reasons for his or her successes and failures, and why an athlete has made significant sacrifices in order to play his or her sport(s).

These factors help address the question, "Why do you play?" The answer to this question gives important insight into what drives an athlete to maintain effort, even in the face of adversity. (For more information about those factors, see the September 2008 issue of the newsletter.)

Goal Orientation

From Achievement Goal Theory (AGT, Nicholls, 1984) is found a fourth motivational factor – that of goal orientation. This concept includes portions of the other three factors and expands on them. Per Duda and Treasure (2001), AGT assumes that motivation is influenced by the way individuals judge their own competence and how they perceive success. AGT identifies two types of orientations: ego and task.

Athletes that are primarily **ego-oriented** focus on their abilities and on demonstrating that their abilities are superior when compared with others. They tend to see their physical abilities as both something stable and as "a gift." For this type of athlete, winning is the only way of demonstrating high levels of competence.

Ego-oriented athletes tend to select tasks that are very easy in order to maintain their view of their skills as superior. If directed to learn a task that requires them to push themselves in a direction in which they are unsure of their abilities, they are not inclined to put forth full effort unless they

are successful at the task quickly. Failed attempts often result in an overall decrease in performance. If this decrease becomes a chronic experience for the athlete, he or she may eventually lose interest in the sport altogether.

Task-oriented athletes, on the other hand, believe that their physical ability can increase and is dependent on their effort. They are interested in improving their skills and will put a lot of effort into learning new skills even at the risk of making mistakes. When faced with adversity, they put forth even more effort in order to get beyond the obstacle(s).

These two orientations are considered to be independent of each other. This means that an individual can be high in both task and ego orientation. Also, he or she can be low in both or high in one and low in the other.

While an in-depth examination of the four resulting goal orientation groups is beyond the scope of this newsletter, I will briefly mention two of the groups:

High ego/High task-oriented athletes may be the individuals you most enjoy working with. They tend to be the most adaptive athletes and usually have multiple sources of subjective success and perceived competence (Duda & Treasure, 2001). Motivating these athletes is usually not an issue as they frequently are able to motivate themselves.

High ego/Low task-oriented athletes, due to their need to display superior abilities, may have the most motivational problems. As noted previously, if they cannot overcome adversity fairly quickly, performance may suffer which can also lead to decreased interest and very low motivation (Duda & Treasure, 2001).

Most of us can think of athletes that fit into each of the categories of goal orientation. As a coach, I will bet you would prefer a team full of high-ego/high task-oriented

athletes. Unfortunately, not all athletes put forth effort and approach challenges in this manner.

How You Can Help

Helping athletes develop an ego orientation is not usually a problem as the U.S. culture tends to reward achievement over effort. Coaches, however, can influence the development of a task-orientation. First, they can set mastery-oriented goals with their athletes. These are goals that emphasize personal standards of success based on effort, improvement, and skill development. These goals should allow all of the athletes on a team to feel successful and competent (Burton & Raedeke, 2008).

Second, the way a coach gives feedback can help in developing a task-orientation. Placing emphasis on hard work, preparation, effort, and skill development will help athletes learn the importance of the process of skill-building versus only the outcome (Burton & Raedeke, 2008).

Third, the coach can make both successes and failures learning opportunities. By doing so, athletes can learn to take credit for success by viewing it as due to effort and preparation. They can also learn to take responsibility for failure and view it as due to insufficient effort, skill development, or preparation. In both situations, the athlete learns that he or she has control (Burton & Raedeke, 2008).

You will no doubt notice that winning is not emphasized while effort is. Winning is of course important, but it is the outcome that athletes have the least control over. They have absolute control over the effort they make. If you have a team putting in a lot of preparation and effort into their sport, winning tends to follow.

For more information about this topic or any other topic related to mental skills or sport psychology, contact your local sport psychologist.

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References

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Announcement: UAB Sport Psychology's Mental Toughness Course

Developing mental toughness is a process that is only now becoming more completely understood. UAB Sport Psychology has created a course to help athletes develop the skills consistent with the emerging literature regarding mental toughness.

This course will focus on helping the individual athlete develop self-awareness of mental strengths and areas needing more work. Additionally, participants will learn a variety of mental skills used by elite athletes in order to further develop their own mental toughness, such as controlling emotions, self-talk, and focus; managing energy; and using imagery as a performance tool. These skills form the basis of the individual athlete's pre-performance routines, regrouping plans, and general mental preparation strategies that will allow him or her to perform to the best of his or her abilities. Participants will also learn ways to incorporate mental toughness training into physical practices and their life in general in order to make the most out of both.

The course will start on January 12, 2009. It will meet one night per week for 10 weeks at UAB-Huntsville from 6:00-7:30 pm. The course will be limited to 25 athletes ages 15 and older. There will be homework between each class. At the end of the course, each participant will have a notebook that they can use to continue to guide them as they strengthen their mental toughness long after the class is over. For a more detailed description and for registration materials, go to www.monciersportpsychology.com and follow the "Mental Toughness Course" link. Registration ends January 9, 2009.

You can now hear Dr. Moncier on the radio on WUMP (730 AM or 103.9 FM) on Wednesday mornings during "The Griff Show" which airs from 6:00 to 9:00 am M-F. If you are not in the North Alabama area or do not have access to a radio at work, you can listen to the show by directing your computer's web browser to www.730ump.com and clicking on the "On Air Now" link at the upper right corner of the page.