The "Psychology" of Sport: Mental Toughness Skills for the High School Student-Athlete

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Dr. Carr's Background

- Collegiate football (DIII) player: GA FB Coach

- Sport Psychologist @ Washington State University, Arizona State University, The Ohio State University, Purdue University, & Indiana University (current consulting role)

- US Ski Team (10 yrs); USA Diving (4 yrs); 2 Olympic Games (2002, 2008); USOC Sport Psychology Registry since 1992

- Professional teams: Arizona Cardinals (1994-95); Kansas City Royals (1999-2005); Columbus Crew (1996-2000); Indiana Fever (2001 to present); Oklahoma City Thunder (2009-2011); Indiana Pacers (2011-Present)

- Over 20 years experience as a psychologist in sport and performance (US Navy OCS)

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What is Performance Psychology?

- …refers to "excellent" performance within a field where excellence counts (Hays, 2006)

- Performance often occurs in front of others (e.g. audience)

- Performers must meet certain performance standards…are judged to a certain proficiency/standard…there are consequences to poor performance…and, good coping skills are intrinsic to excellent performance (Hays and Brown, 2004)

- …talents/skills must be delivered at a specific point in time

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$$A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C$$

Thoughts   **Behaviors**   **Consequences**

What is "Excellence" in Athletes?
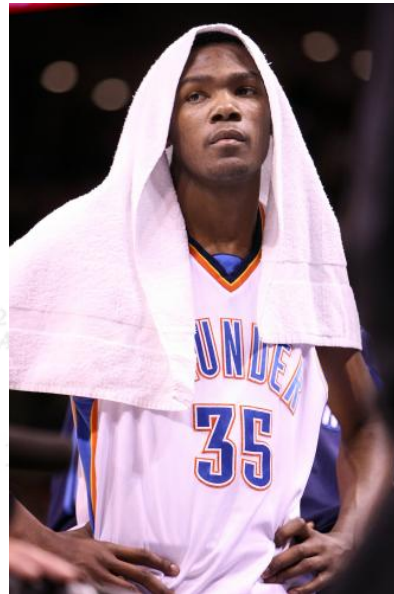
What are some of the characteristics of elite, high-performing athletes….or "excellent" athletes (and other elite performers)?

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Personal Characteristics of Elite Athletes

- Self-confidence
- Motivation (intrinsic)
- Competitiveness (focus on process)
- Independence
- Open and striving to learn and improve
- Need to be creative and innovative

- Perseverance
- Leadership
- Mental "toughness"
- Strong/smart work ethic
- Sense of "balance"
- Use of mental preparation skills
- Optimistic

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What is Mental "Toughness"?

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Mental toughness is having the natural or developed psychological edge that enables you to:

*Generally, cope better than your opponents with the many demands (games, training, lifestyle) that sport places on a performer

*Specifically, be more consistent and better than your opponents in remaining determined, focused, confident, and in control under pressure   (Jones, et al, 2002)

- **Self-belief**

- ***belief in ability to achieve goals**

- ***belief you are different to opponents**

- **Motivation (desire/determination)**

- **Intrinsic motivation and using adversity as a source of determination**

- **Accepts competition anxiety, but has plan on how to deal with it**

- **Can maintain focus…ability to "balance"**

- **Maintains technique/effort in face of fatigue/pain**

Why Mental Training?

- **How much of your sport (0-100%) is "mental"? (Confidence, Composure, Focus)**

- **Of all the mistakes/errors in your sport performance, what % of them are "mental" mistakes?**

- **Of all your training and preparation as an athlete, what % do you spend doing "mental training"?**

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- **Goal Setting Skills**
  -Focus on Process…not Outcome
  -"SCRAM"
  -Everyday application

- **Composure Skills**
  -Relaxation training (10-15 minutes/day)

- **Concentration/Focus Skills**
  -Imagery training
  -Visualizing "success" w/controllables

- **Develop your own "mental routine" that creates a connection with your "optimal performance"**
  - **-What is my "optimal" performance?**
  - **-How do I prepare for this?**
  - **-Consistency in routine generates enhanced confidence**
  - **-"Focus" provides clarity; decreases "pressure"**

GOAL: Enhanced Confidence/Composure/Concentration

Achieving *"Flow"*
(Csikzentmihalyi, 1990)

- **Having Goals**

- **Being immersed in the activity**

- **Paying attention to what is relevant**

- **Enjoying the activity (emotional and cognitive)**

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Questions?

Thank You!

Additional questions?

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