CHAPTER

17

Integrating and Implementing a Psychological Skills Training Program

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The authors of Chapters 9 through 16 have discussed peak performance characteristics, psychological theory, and exercises for training specific psychological skills. When sport psychologists began employing psychological skills interventions in the early 1980s, not many empirical data or controlled studies were available to help guide these initial attempts to improve performance. However, the last 25 to 30 years have produced a number of field-based studies that have investigated the effectiveness of different psychological interventions to enhance performance. Although we have learned a great deal from these studies, many questions still remain. Some of the most important questions include the following: How old and skillful should athletes be before beginning psychological skills training? Who should conduct the training program—the sport psychologist or the coach? Is there an ideal time during the year for implementing a psychological skills training program? How much time is needed for psychological skills training? What specific components should be incorporated in training, and how should those components be sequenced and integrated? What ethical considerations should one be aware of when implementing a program? In this chapter we address these questions and others, but first we must recognize that only preliminary data exist regarding some of these questions. Therefore, caution must be observed until more definitive studies are conducted.

Most comprehensive mental training programs stress the development of psychological skills and techniques such as anxiety management, imagery, goal setting, concentration, self-talk, thought stopping, routines, and confidence (just to name a few). The multitude of possibilities makes it very difficult to integrate all the components into one comprehensive mental training program. In essence, situational constraints (e.g., the athlete or team only has a few weeks to learn and implement a psychological skills training program) do not always permit the implementation of a comprehensive mental training program, and thus it is often necessary to plan an abbreviated program. Furthermore, although a number of mental training programs have

been developed (e.g., Blakeslee & Goff, 2007; Ravizza & Hanson, 1995; Thelwell & Greenlees, 2001; Thelwell & Maynard, 2003), there still is no general agreement among sport psychologists on how much time should be spent learning these techniques or what techniques are best for achieving certain objectives. For example, what technique should be used for an athlete who starts thinking ahead during competition to what might happen if he or she loses or wins the game?

Unfortunately, there are no ready-made solutions to questions of how coaches and sport psychologists can integrate and implement a psychological skills training program. The database is only recently being developed, and thus new information is constantly changing the way mental training programs are implemented. Nonetheless, if a mental training program is to be effective, strategies for putting all of the different components into place must be planned and well thought out. In this chapter we offer some suggestions and practical pointers for implementing mental skills training and for integrating various psychological skill components into these programs. Unless otherwise noted, these guidelines are the same for either the coach or sport psychologist, although we will discuss the pros and cons of taking on a dual role of coach/sport psychologist. Finally, we again caution you to view these recommendations only as suggested guidelines.

Before discussing the various aspects of psychological interventions to enhance perfomance, we feel it is instructive to note that there are several other approaches to intervention in sport and exercise psychology that are different from the focus of this chapter, which is psychological skills to enhance competitive performance. In fact, many of these approaches are similar to ones developed in the counseling literature that focus more on adjustment and personal growth. Murphy (1995) discusses many of these alternative interventions, and we recommend consulting his edited text to learn more about the details of these approaches. Examples of these psychological interventions include the following: (a) a life development model focusing on a psychoeducational-developmental approach over the life span; (b) a marital therapy model focusing on human relationships; (c) a family systems model, which makes the family central to helping athletes reach their potential; and (d) an organizational model, which focuses on how organizational dynamics influence the way psychological services are provided and received.

Are Psychological Interventions Effective in Improving Sport Performance?

Probably the most important question that sport psychology consultants need to ask themselves revolves around the effectiveness of their psychological interventions in enhancing performance and personal growth. It is the same problem that has plagued clinical psychologists and counselors over the years—demonstrating that what they do makes a difference in the behavior and well-being of their clients. Defending the effectiveness of psychological skills training programs in improving sport performance and well-being requires the accumulation of well-controlled, outcome-based intervention studies conducted in competitive sport environments. These are traditionally difficult to carry out because of time and money constraints, unwillingness of coaches and athletes to participate, and inability to adequately control the environment.

Fortunately, sport psychology researchers have been working hard to establish a database concerning the effectiveness of these psychological interventions in improving performance. Reviews by Greenspan and Feltz (1989), Vealey (1994), and Weinberg and Comar (1994) identified 45 studies employing psychological interventions in competitive sport settings, including such diverse sports as golf, karate, skiing, boxing, basketball, volleyball, gymnastics, baseball, tennis, and figure skating. Of the 45 studies, 38 (85%) found positive performance effects. Many of these studies employed a variety of psychological techniques as part of the total program package. See Meyers, Whelan, and Murphy (1996) for the most recent meta-analysis of psychological

interventions to enhance sport performance. Their analysis of 90 interventions indicated moderate to large positive effects on performance for interventions such as goal setting, mental rehearsal, anxiety management, cognitive restructuring, attentional focusing, and multiple components. Had someone reviewed the intervention studies since 1996, there is every reason to assume that the findings would indicate equally strong effectiveness.

Who Will Benefit from Psychological Skills Training?

Many coaches and athletes misunderstand peak performance sport psychology. They think mental training strategies are only applicable to elite athletes or that these techniques can only fine-tune the performance of the already highly skilled. In actuality, mental skills training should be beneficial for a variety of people, although, as previously noted, we need more studies across different skill and age groups and special populations. If beginning athletes are taught to set realistic goals, increase self-confidence, visualize success, and react constructively, we can expect their performance and personal development to progress faster than the performance and personal development of athletes who do not receive similar mental training. Special adjustments may be needed, however, based on the population of athletes. For example, very young athletes may need adjustments such as fewer goals, shorter training sessions, simpler verbal instruction, and turning the exercises into games, but these athletes can still benefit from some sort of mental skills training provided they are interested in receiving it (Orlick & McCaffrey, 1991; Weiss, 1991). Furthermore, Whelan, Meyers, and Donovan (1995) present a multisystemic model for intervention with the vast amount of competitive recreational athletes. Thus psychological skills training can be applied to sport participants at all levels of skill.

The ideal time for initially implementing training may be when individuals are just beginning to participate in sport. As any experienced teacher or coach knows, it is far easier to develop proper physical technique in a beginner than it is to modify poor technique in a more experienced athlete. Although never empirically tested, the same phenomenon may be true for psychological skills. Furthermore, early implementation ensures the establishment of a psychological skills foundation that will facilitate future achievement of full athletic potential, enjoyment, and benefit.

Highly skilled athletes also can certainly benefit from systematic psychological skills training programs. As athletes get better, physical differences tend to become smaller. At this level, minute adjustments and differences can literally mean the difference between winning and losing. For example, Orlick (1986) was one of the first to provide a number of case studies of Olympic athletes who systematically employed a mental training program. The athletes report that their mental training and discipline were a critical component of their success. Their comments generally reflect the notion that everybody they were competing against was physically talented. The key difference was in their consistency of mental preparation and training. Let's look at an example of an Olympic skier in her second year of mental training:

> Last year I got angry with myself or so upset about not performing well. Initially if I didn't get angry or punish myself, I would feel guilty, as if I wasn't taking it seriously. This year I'm keeping it in perspective and reminding myself what it's for. Now I'm thinking about enjoyment as well as intensity. This year for the first time ever, I pushed during a whole training camp. I never let up. I stayed interested and motivated. When I started to coast I stopped and went free skiing. I don't want to practice skiing at low intensity. (Orlick, 1986, p. 148)

Who Should Conduct the Psychological Skills Training Program?

Ideally, a psychological skills training program should be planned, implemented, and supervised by a qualified consulting sport psychologist. The

sport psychologist has the advantage of having more extensive special training and experience than a coach. Also, athletes may be more open in discussing difficulties with the psychological aspects of play because the sport psychologist does not decide who stays on the team and who gets to play. Even though it is desirable to have a sport psychologist administer the program, this is rarely feasible except perhaps at the highest levels of competition (and even here it is still a rarity for a sport psychologist to work and travel with a team throughout a season). The basic premise of this book is that it is also the responsibility of the coach to provide mental skills training and reinforce optimal psychological states; after all, who knows the athletes better and who works more closely with them? Thus, there are advantages to having mental skills training provided by the consulting sport psychologist *or* the coach.

When the mental training program is to be implemented by a sport psychologist, the selection of that person is critical. Who is qualified to be a sport psychologist? In 1991 the Association for the Applied Sport Psychology (*AASP Newsletter,* 1991) adopted criteria for certification for individuals working in the area of applied sport psychology. Basically, this certification requires individuals to have an extensive background in both the sport and psychological sciences as well as some practical supervised experience implementing psychological skills with sport and exercise participants (see Chapter 1 for a more detailed explanation of AASP certification). The USOC now requires AASP certification to become part of its sport psychology registry. Having an individual who is certified by AASP ensures a certain experience, background, and competence in applied sport psychology. However, just because an individual is certified does not necessarily mean he or she has the type of orientation or experiential background that would best meet the needs of a specific team or coach. For example, will the person's focus be on dealing with personal and emotional problems (i.e., clinical approach) or teaching mental skills for enhancing performance (performance enhancement approach)? Does the person have experience with younger athletes or primarily elite athletes? Is he or she sufficiently knowledgeable about the sport in which the psychological skills are to be applied? How much time does the person have to spend with the team? Does the person have references from teams or individuals he or she worked with in the past developing psychological skills? These and other questions guide the selection of the sport psychologist who best suits the athletes' specific needs and goal.

If a sport psychology consultant conducts the program, we recommend that the coach, or coaching staff, attend most or all of the initial group training sessions for a number of reasons. First, the coach's presence tells the athletes that the coach thinks the sessions are important. Second, the sport psychologist will not be present during most of the physical practices and competitions; a knowledgeable coach can be a key person in ensuring the effectiveness of mental skills training by seeing that appropriate application of such training occurs. Ideally, the sport psychologist and coach should have special meetings to discuss ways for the coach to apply and reinforce whatever the sport psychologist emphasizes in mental skills training sessions. Third, misunderstandings regarding what the sport psychologist is doing will not occur because the coach will know exactly what is happening and will be providing feedback regarding what needs to be done. Ravizza (1990), in his work with professional baseball teams, notes that in the early stages a good portion of his work with coaches was done in the locker room, hotel lobby, or at meals. As the relationship progressed, they set aside mutually convenient times for formal meetings to discuss how individual players were performing, as well as any other relevant issues.

Our understanding about how to conduct psychological skills training programs with athletes has increased rapidly over the years. Along these lines, a number of sport psychologists have written about their consulting experiences with athletes and teams. In fact, as far back as 1989, separate issues of *The Sport Psychologist* (1989, #4; 1990, #4; 1991, #4) were devoted to psychological interventions with a variety of sports as

well as with physically and mentally disabled athletes.

As psychological skills training programs have been developed in recent years, it has also been suggested that it is important that we understand the sport psychologist–athlete relation to maximize the effectiveness of the intervention. For example, Petitpas, Giges, and Danish (1999) have argued that the effectiveness of psychological interventions is closely tied to the quality of the relationship between athlete and sport psychologist. They draw on the counseling psychology literature, which has demonstrated that of all the techniques and variables examined the only one that has consistently related to positive therapeutic outcomes has been the counselor–client relationship (Sexton & Whitson, 1994).

In addition, certain counseling competencies have been rated as essential for sport psychologists working with athletes (Ward, Sandstedt, Cox, & Beck, 2005). These include such competencies as recognizing limits of competency or expertise, respecting confidentiality, understanding how their own values and biases may impact psychological processes, making appropriate referrals, understanding the unique athlete culture, understanding the influence of the athletic environment on athletes, and taking into consideration cultural differences when working with athletes. Thus, it would appear that sport psychologists should look closely at the counseling psychology literature to help facilitate a positive athlete–sport psychologist relationship. In fact, some sport psychology research has already indicated that the ability to build rapport, create a positive environment, and provide concrete suggestions is highly correlated with successful sport psychology interventions (e.g., Gould, Murphy, Tammen, & May, 1991; Martin, Wrisberg, Beitel, & Lounsbury, 1997). Therefore, it appears that having good counseling skills will facilitate the effectiveness of a sport psychology consultant administering mental training programs to athletes.

In addition to counseling skills, recently it also has been demonstrated that sensitivity to ethnic and racial diversity and sexual orientation (Barber & Krane, 2005) in applied sport psychology settings will enhance the quality of the relationship. Being sensitive to such multicultural concepts as identity, enculturation, generalizations, and stereotyping has been shown to be helpful in dealing with a more and more diverse clientele (Kontos & Breland-Noble, 2002). Therefore, there is probably a need for more sport psychologists of color to help with the increasing number of African American, Latino, and American Indian athletes. Along these lines, Butryn (2002) argues that there is a need for more multicultural training programs for sport psychology consultants working with diverse athlete populations.

Of course, the philosophy and implementation of mental training programs differ somewhat from one sport psychologist to the next. Each person has to understand the nature of the team or individual athletes he or she is working with and integrate that with his or her own background, training, and orientation. It's important for the sport psychologist to communicate his or her philosophy to the athletes and coaches at the outset and to make sure that everyone understands the parameters of the consultation.

It was previously noted that one of the drawbacks of having a sport psychologist conduct a psychological skills program is the difficulty in being with the athletes on a day-to-day basis. In many cases the sport psychology consultant cannot provide continuous services, either because the organization is diffused over a wide geographical area or because the consultant or athletic group cannot make the time commitment necessary to provide ongoing services. Coaches, of course, have the best access to athletes on a daily basis and are thus in a position to administer psychological interventions over the course of a season. Smith and Johnson (1990) have developed an innovative consultation model in their work with the Houston Astros minor league player development program. They call this model "organizational empowerment," and we will discuss it in some depth since it serves as an excellent prototype for sport psychology consultation.

In this model of service delivery, the sport psychology consultant trains one or more qualified individuals within the sport organization to provide psychological services to athletes and coaches. The consultant then oversees the program and provides ongoing supervision of the actual trainers. This approach thus empowers a sport organization to provide its own sport psychology services under the supervision of the consultant.

In setting up this program, one of the major challenges was to provide continuity to a major league baseball club that has minor league teams in several cities over a wide geographical area. Smith and Johnson strongly believe one-shot or occasional psychological skills training, no matter how competently carried out, cannot be as effective as that provided on a continuous basis over an extended period of time. In addition, they feel there are real advantages to having someone identified with professional baseball as the service provider, given that the trainer has the requisite background in counseling and psychological skills training. A "baseball person" may have an easier time establishing credibility within what is still a very traditional baseball establishment and may find it easier to coordinate psychological skills training with the technical aspects of player development because of the deeper knowledge of the game.

In their specific case, Smith (the sport psychology consultant) trained Johnson (a manager in the Astros organization with a Master's degree in psychology). An intensive 6-week training program was established prior to spring training. In addition, Smith accompanied Johnson to spring training for 10 days of hands-on training plus a series of orientation workshops for staff and players. Weekly and sometimes daily telephone supervision continued throughout the remainder of spring training and the regular season. Once Johnson felt comfortable with his new skills, Smith worked with him to help put together a psychological skills training program. Smith helped in overseeing the program, but it was Johnson who was in charge of implementing the day-to-day psychological exercises.

Another alternative model has been proposed for the delivery of sport psychology services to athletes and coaches (Kremer & Scully, 1998). Briefly, this model identifies the coach rather than the athlete as the primary target for psychological intervention. Thus, the sport psychologist becomes more of a management consultant who is part of the team along with the coach and support staff. This challenges the myth that sport psychologists are "shrinks" who can provide instant solutions for athletes whose problems have baffled their coaches.

When Should You Implement a Psychological Skills Training Program?

It is generally agreed that the *least* desirable time to implement a psychological skills program is after the competitive season has started, when the athlete is facing a string of competitions in quick succession. At this time, mental training often amounts to no more than a quick-fix, bandage approach and consequently is rarely, if ever, effective. One of the underlying principles of this book is that psychological skills are learned and therefore need to be practiced systematically, just like physical skills. To draw an analogy, golfers or tennis players would not change their grip on the club or racket right before a tournament without extensively using the new grip in practice for several weeks or even months. Similarly, we should not expect athletes to be able to learn new psychological skills in such a short period of time.

For these reasons, most sport psychology consultants believe the best time to initially implement psychological skills training is during the off-season or preseason. During this period there is more time to learn new skills, and it is easier to try new ideas because this is the time of year when athletes are not so pressured with winning. Some athletes have reported that it took several months to a year to fully understand and integrate their new psychological skills into actual competitions. This underscores

the importance of viewing mental training as an ongoing process that needs to be integrated with physical practice.

When Should Athletes Practice Psychological Skills?

The rudiments of most psychological skills should first be taught and systematically practiced during special training sessions. The first or last 15 to 30 minutes of practice is often a good time for training. The content of the particular session will determine whether it is better held at the beginning or end of practice (see earlier chapters for suggestions on which training exercises are better practiced before or after physical workouts). Homework assignments also can be given, but unless the athletes are self-directed, it is better to have most mental training practice occur under someone's supervision.

As soon as possible the psychological skills practice should be integrated with physical skills practice. When integrating the two, the rehearsal of mental skills should have a performance-specific focus. For example, once athletes have learned the skill of relaxation and recognizing tension, they should be instructed to scan their muscles for harmful tension and practice appropriate differential relaxation while performing. Specific performance times should be identified—for example, always scan and relax before pitching, shooting a free throw, serving a tennis ball, or taking a shot in golf. Once relaxation skills have been effectively integrated into physical workouts, they should be tried during simulated or practice competition and later during actual competition. It is important not to proceed too quickly from learning to competition because the psychological skills may not be fully integrated and therefore performance decrements could occur.

This progressive method of practice is also psychologically sound from a learning standpoint because it allows athletes to gain knowledge and competence in using each mental skill as environmental demands slowly become more variable, challenging, and applicable. The ultimate goal is for the practice of mental skills to become such an integral part of all physical practices that the training program does not appear to be something extra. This type of systematic, consistent practice of mental skills is likely to achieve lasting optimal results rather than short-term placebo effects.

Let us provide some concrete illustrations of integrating psychological skills into actual physical practice. For example, let's say a tennis player is having trouble hitting the ball short, thus allowing his opponent to take the offensive. A practice drill can be set up where he has a goal to get 20 balls in a row over the net between the service line and baseline to work on his depth of shot. If he misses, he has to start over from zero. In addition, he may also use a cue word like "lift" when he swings to make sure that he follows through on the shot and lifts his racquet after impact. With this type of drill the player is practicing his concentration skills by using a concentration cue and setting the conditions of practice to require extreme concentration. In addition, this drill creates pressure. The player will typically start to get a little tight as he approaches the goal of 20 consecutive shots because he doesn't want to miss and have to start all over at that point.

Another example would be a golfer who typically gets down on herself whenever she makes a poor shot. Specifically, she uses a lot of negative self-talk to put herself down and criticize herself. First, during practice rounds she could carry a small logbook and record the type of shots she hits and then her self-talk. Keeping a log will enable her to be more aware of exactly what she is saying and under what specific conditions. Then the coach can help her come up with a number of positive self-statements that are either motivational (e.g., "hang in there, you still have nine holes to play") or informational, if there is a technique error (e.g., "bring club head straight back"). These statements can then be used in practice in place of the negative self-talk until the player feels comfortable using them in competitive matches.

How Much Time Should Be Spent in Mental Training?

By now it should be obvious that the time needed for practicing mental skills varies according to what is being practiced and how well it is learned. If a new mental skill is being introduced, special 15- to 30-minute training sessions 3 to 5 days per week may be needed. As athletes become more proficient, fewer special training sessions are necessary. However, special sessions still may be advisable for individual athletes who are experiencing difficulty learning the mental skills.

When separate times are not being designated solely for mental training, it is very important that the coaching staff or sport psychologist provide verbal reminders for integrating mental skills practice with physical skills practice. In addition, appropriate reinforcement for the use of these mental skills during practice is crucial for athletes' motivation since they are attempting to develop new habits and possibly break some old bad habits. This can be a difficult task, and a positive approach is important to keep spirits up, as well as providing informative feedback to help athletes integrate the mental skills into their physical performance.

The time frame we have just recommended may not be desirable if a sport psychology consultant is implementing the training, particularly when the sport psychologist has to spend time traveling to reach the team. Under such circumstances, fewer and longer mental training sessions are usually held unless a coach or other organization member is trained to carry out the mental training program. Most of the initial meetings should be group sessions to best use the sport psychologist's time. However, research has indicated that individual sessions and individualized training programs are needed to optimize the effectiveness of mental training programs (Seabourne, Weinberg, Jackson, & Suinn, 1985). It is particularly critical that athletes be assigned training exercises to practice during the times the sport psychologist is not with the team. The same stepwise building of competence that we described earlier should be observed here.

The traveling sport psychology consultant must design practice exercises in such a way that maximum feedback occurs from participation and that adherence to training is likely to occur. In the absence of the consultant, the coach or an individual designated by the coach can play a major role in ensuring compliance and feedback if he or she assumes responsibility for personally conducting the training exercises or at least provides the time for athletes to practice. If this is not possible, the coach or designated individual should remind athletes of their homework assignments and briefly discuss the athletes' reactions to the exercises once the homework has been completed. However, maximum effectiveness is likely only when this individual and the sport psychologist work together as a team.

A logical question that arises after a mental training program has been put in place is "When can athletes stop mental skills training?" In the truest sense, mental skills training continues as long as athletes participate in sport. In this sense, mental skills are no different from physical skills. Retention will not occur without continued practice. When we hear the names of such athletes as Peyton Manning, Roger Federer, Tiger Woods, Anika Sorenstam, Tim Duncan, Candice Parker, and Michael Phelps (just to name a few), we think of individuals who are highly skilled and great competitors. However, these same athletes are also known for their great practice habits, especially making sure that the mental aspects of their respective sports are integrated into their physical practice on an ongoing basis.

If athletes never stop mental skills training, what is the ideal length of time for their first exposure to a formal mental skills training program? Most sport psychology consultants would recommend an average of between 3 and 6 months because it takes time to learn these new mental skills, use them in practice, and then integrate them into actual competitive situations. The specific sport, time available, existing mental skills, and commitment of individuals are all factors that should be considered in determining actual length of time. For example, we have worked with athletes who simply needed

Table 17-1 **Prerace Mental Preparation Plan**

General Warm-Up	Start Preparation
Physical and Mental	***Physical and Mental***
Night Before Race	
• Receive number, determine how many minutes after start I race. • Figure out what time to awaken and leave for hill in the morning and approximately how many free runs or training course runs to have before start. • Estimate how long to put number on, stretch inside lodge. • Spend ideally no more than 20 to 25 minutes in start area.	• Arrive at start 20 minutes prior to my start. • First get race skis in snow, check them to see if all is ready; see rep (equipment person). • Begin stretching, running; think happy, relaxed thoughts. • Apply these comments to mental imagery.
Morning of Race	
• Light run, exercises, begin the morning on a positive or high note. • Wake up feeling good about myself, be optimistic, flow. • Important for me not to project (e.g., about outcomes); just feel good about myself for myself. • Free skiing and training courses to feel aggressive and pumped, yet calm and relaxed. • Focused and concentrated while skiing. • Mental imagery (to know course and feel good about myself on the course).	• Heavier physical preparation. • Get into skis, binding check. • More imagery of race focus and feeling—include correction imagery if needed. • Quicker physical activity. • 1 minute: Take coat, warm-ups off, intense, focused on task. • 30 seconds: Ready myself in start, think only of course and of myself. • Explosive start.

to change a small part of their mental approach and were able to do that in under 2 months. In contrast, Orlick (1986) has noted that many of the Canadian Olympic athletes he has consulted with developed psychological plans and mental preparation that were extremely detailed and precise, as seen in the example provided in Table 17-1 for an Olympic alpine skier (Orlick, 1986, p. 34).

Setting Up a Mental Skills Training Program

Thus far we have discussed some important questions surrounding the use of mental training programs, including who will benefit, who should conduct the program, when to implement the training program, when to actually practice the mental skills, and how much time to spend on

mental training. Although this information is important in understanding mental training programs, it does not really tell us exactly what to do in setting up such a program. Therefore, we will attempt to outline some of the critical components of implementing a mental skills training program.

Self-Regulation: A Key to Effective Mental Training

One of the critical aspects of successfully implementing a mental training program is the use of self-regulation. Self-regulation can be defined as the processes by which people manage their own behaviors that are directed toward specific goals. These processes include goal setting, planning, observing, and evaluating behaviors (Kirschenbaum, 1997). Being able to regulate and control one's behavior is an essential part of any athlete's mental training plan, and this process has six specific phases.

The first phase is *problem identification.* This phase encourages you to evaluate progress in your sport thoroughly and to remain open to new suggestions about all aspects of performance. Being open to, or seeking out, suggestions for improvement in your mental skills is a step in the right direction. For example, you might become aware that you lose your concentration by thinking negatively at critical junctures during competition. This awareness is a critical first step on the road to improvement. The next step is to establish a *commitment to change.* This usually involves *developing specific plans* and *setting goals.* After problems are identified and commitments are made, *actions* must be initiated so that positive steps toward *goal attainment* can occur. This execution of self-regulated change can be viewed as a feedback loop with self-monitoring leading to self-evaluation, which in turn leads to self-consequation (Kirschenbaum, 1997). For example, you might monitor your progress toward a goal of improving your average golf score from 85 to 80. After several rounds, you could evaluate whether you achieved your goal. If you did, you might treat yourself to a great dinner; this would be an example of positive consequation. Although self-regulation implies a solitary pursuit of goals, in sport you also have to manage the environment, which might include teammates, friends, and coaches as well as specific playing and practice conditions. The long-term goal of self-regulation is to maintain behavior change over time and across different situations. This is called **generalization.** It is often difficult to achieve because it requires dedicated, consistent, systematic practice of mental skills over time.

Discuss Your Approach—What You Do and What You Don't Do

Many athletes are still fairly naive or uninformed about what sport psychology is and what sport psychologists do. Therefore, we believe it is important to spell this out right at the outset of the initial meeting. Although most athletes typically view sport psychology solely in terms of performance enhancement, they also should be made to understand its mental health aspects and potential for application outside of sport. In fact, as reflected in the title of this text, sport psychology has as much to do with personal growth issues as it does with achieving maximum performance. Therefore, these two different aspects need to be clearly communicated to athletes.

In addition to conducting a brief discussion on what sport psychology is, it is equally critical that sport psychologists spell out their specific approach in dealing with psychological problems in sport and exercise. Sport psychologists use two approaches when working with athletes: clinical and educational. Research and experience have indicated that the large majority of athletes consulting with sport psychologists require an educational approach as opposed to a clinical approach. Athletes typically need to develop a psychological skill such as improving concentration or managing anxiety rather than to deal with a deep-seated, severe psychological problem. Therefore, we will focus on the educational approach, but it should be made clear that if an educational sport psychologist or coach comes across an athlete who has such a serious psychological problem that it is beyond his or her skills to treat, then the athlete should be referred to a qualified individual or counseling center. (See Chapter 20 for a discussion of when it may be appropriate to refer athletes for counseling or psychotherapy.)

Thus, the sport psychology consultant should tell the athlete what he or she does and does not do, as many people still believe that if athletes see a sport psychologist then something must be psychologically wrong with them. This is especially true of younger athletes, who can be extra sensitive to the idea that they "have to see a shrink." Rather, we try to emphasize that if an athlete stayed after practice to work with the coach on a particular move or physical technique most people would applaud this extra effort to improve. Similarly, if an athlete realizes that he or she needs to work on some aspect of the mental game such as concentration skills, then this also should be applauded. In essence, working to improve mentally should not be looked on as a weakness but rather as simply another way for an athlete to improve performance as well as enhance personal growth.

In discussing your philosophy or approach, a contemporary way of making initial contact with athletes is through electronic methods such as e-mail or Web pages. It appears that more and more people use the Internet as a communication tool and are getting more and more comfortable using this medium. Along these lines, an interesting study by Zizzi and Perna (2002) comparing traditional versus electronic contact found that the electronic group completed more contacts and assessments compared to the traditional group 1 month after taking a workshop. In essence, results suggested that electronic contact methods are at least as good as, and in several cases superior to, traditional contact (e.g., phone, in-person contact methods regarding generating requests for service from athletes on a short-term basis).

Emphasize the Importance of Mental Training

Another important component to an initial meeting with athletes is convincing them of the need for systematic mental training. This can be done in many ways. One way to start is to have athletes identify how important their state of mind is in achieving success by having them decide what percentage of their game is mental. Then compare this percentage to the actual percentage of practice time spent training mental skills. The disparity is usually because the mental side of sport is recognized as very important, yet little or no time is spent specifically practicing these mental aspects.

Providing anecdotes about the importance of mental preparation from relevant, well-known amateur and professional athletes is another effective way to increase receptivity. Such anecdotes are usually much more motivating than a recitation of the results of research studies on mental training. Along these lines, a study from the U.S. Olympic Training Center (Murphy, Jowdy, & Durtschi, 1990) revealed that more than 90% of Olympic athletes surveyed regularly used some sort of mental preparation and training in preparing for competition. This type of information can help athletes realize that mental training does work and is being used by many of our very best athletes, although athletes of all ability levels can benefit from such training.

Fortunately, the popularity of applied sport psychology has evolved to the point that it is becoming easier to sell a mental skills training program to most athletes. Nevertheless, some athletes still will refuse to accept mental skills training. Most sport psychologists recommend not forcing unreceptive athletes to participate. Conversely, there also can be problems with athletes who are highly enthusiastic about mental training. Occasionally this enthusiasm can lead to unreasonable expectations. Athletes, coaches, and sport psychologists must realize that no amount of mental training will substitute for poor mechanics, lack of practice, or limited physical aptitude. Also, good psychological skills cannot replace hard physical conditioning and training.

Assess Psychological Strengths and Weaknesses

Once athletes are informed of the approach the sport psychologist plans to take and are convinced of the importance of mental training, the next step is to determine the athletes' psychological strengths and weaknesses as related specifically to sport. A needs assessment helps reveal those psychological skills that are deficient or appear to have the most adverse effect on performance and personal satisfaction. In addition, it

should also reveal the strong points of each athlete from a mental perspective. When something is bothering athletes or they are struggling with a specific problem, they often overlook all the things that they do well, and these should not be forgotten.

In conducting the initial evaluation of athletes' psychological strengths and weaknesses, it is important that sport psychology consultants first understand that there are factors outside the psychological realm that influence performance. These include such things as physiological conditioning, biomechanics (technique), strategy, and equipment. For example, a golfer who has a major flaw in his or her swing may attribute the resulting poor performance to ineffective concentration, whereas the underlying problem is biomechanical. A gymnast who more frequently falls off the balance beam may not have developed an anxiety problem, but she may have experienced a growth spurt to which she has yet to adjust. The important point is that one must not try to interpret all aspects of performance from a psychological perspective.

In terms of the actual psychological skills evaluation, one procedure we recommend is an oral interview as well as written psychological inventories and behavioral observation. In this way the athlete will have a chance to tell his or her story face to face as well as to respond to some objective questionnaires. This also helps the consultant in looking for consistencies (and inconsistencies) between oral and written statements.

There are various approaches to conducting an initial interview, but the one we recommend is the semi-structured interview, which Orlick (2000) outlines in detail. Some general questions provide structure to this type of interview, but there is leeway to use the athlete's responses to form other follow-up questions. For example, some key questions might include the following:

- Summarize your involvement in your sport, noting important events both positive and negative (this is a good starting point as it lets athletes talk about themselves and become more comfortable).
- Describe what you believe to be your greatest psychological strength and your biggest weakness.
- Describe the boundaries of any specific psychological problem you are currently having (i.e., when, why, how).
- What is your relationship with your coach?

It is our experience that this interview typically lasts approximately 1 hour. Of course, individual differences and time constraints can alter this time frame to some degree. The initial interview is very important not only to find out where the athlete needs help but also as a place to start building the trust that is critical for any therapeutic relationship. For a sport psychology consultant to be maximally effective, the athlete needs to feel comfortable and believe that the consultant not only is competent but cares about the athlete's particular situation. One thing that we have found important is that the consultant needs good conceptual knowledge of the sport to be effective and build credibility with the athletes.

In addition to the interview, reseach has revealed that between 63% and 75% of sport psychology consultants use paper and pencil questionnaires (O'Conner, 2004) to assess psychological skills related to sport as well as more general mood states. Although many different inventories are utilized, some of the more popular ones include the following: Sport Competition Anxiety Test (Martens, 1977), Competitive State Anxiety Inventory-2 (Martens, Vealey, & Burton, 1990), Sport Anxiety Scale (Smith, Smoll, & Schutz, 1990), Test of Attentional and Interpersonal Style (Nideffer, 1976,) Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28 (Smith, Schutz, Smoll, & Ptacek, 1995), and Trait-State Sport Confidence Inventory (Vealey, 1986). In addition, the Ottawa Mental Skills Assessment Tool (OMSAT-3), has been developed by Durand-Bush, Salmela, and Green-Demers (2001) to assist consultants and coaches in their designing of appropriate and individualized mental training programs as well as to help researchers assess the effectiveness of interventions with sport performers.

Furthermore, a number of sport-specific inventories have been developed, such as the Tennis Test of Attentional and Interpersonal Style (Van Schoyck & Grasha, 1981) and the Anxiety Assessment for Wrestlers (Gould, Horn, & Spreeman, 1983), that provide more directed questions toward a specific sport.

It should be noted that applied sport psychology consultants should consider a number of factors before administering questionnaires or other formal assessments to athletes (Beckman & Kellmann, 2003). For example, to be used effectively, assessment instruments need to be reliable and valid for the individual athlete or sport group in question, be seen as useful by the athlete(s), and be completed honestly by the athlete(s). In addition, sport psychology consultants need to provide athletes with a clear identification of the purpose of the assessment, and make sure that the athlete and coach (if applicable) are committed to the assessment.

Once the interview and psychological inventories have been completed, we recommend that written feedback be provided to each athlete that highlights his or her psychological strengths and weaknesses as they relate to sport performance and participation. This assessment should be given to athletes in a second one-on-one meeting and athletes should be provided with an opportunity to react to it. This provides an opportunity to get consensual validation from athletes in terms of the evaluation of the sport psychology consultant. At times we have found the oral interview and written assessments to be contrary, and this is a good time to bring any discrepancy up and have the athlete resolve it. The assessment should conclude with recommendations for the type of skills and intervention program that the consultant thinks would best suit the athlete's needs.

One weakness of using interviews, questionnaires, and behavioral observation to determine an athlete's psychological strengths and weaknesses is that the athlete plays a relatively passive role in the process. This often results in the sport psychology consultant having to convince athletes that they really need to work on particular psychological skills (Butler & Hardy, 1992). Motivation and adherence problems will occur in the psychological skills training program if the athlete does not fully accept the decisions reached in the needs assessment. Butler and Hardy propose that using performance profiling resolves this problem, and an increasing number of sport psychology consultants are using the approach and finding it very effective.

For these reasons, we recommend performance profiling as an alternative approach to assessing psychological strengths and weaknesses. When using performance profiling, the athlete, with his or her own labels and definitions, determines the psychological skills needed for success. Once done, the athlete rates him- or herself on each of the identified constructs. Butler and Hardy (1992) propose that the rating use a 0–10 scale anchored with "not at all" and "very much." The athlete's resulting constructs are then displayed in the form of performance profiles. See Figure 17-1 for one example of plotting and using a performance profile to determine psychological needs and goals.

In this particular example, an athlete client of one of the authors had the goal of making the national team. Four months before the qualifying competition, the athlete, with the help of the sport psychologist, determined what psychological skills he would need, and their relative importance, in order to make the national team (see the dark bars depicting long-term goals). The athlete then assessed his present weakness and strength specific to each of the constructs he identified (see the shaded bars). This information was displayed pictorially and together the athlete and the sport psychologist determined what progress the athlete wanted to make in the next month and exactly what he would have to do to reach each of his psychological skills goals. See the clear bars added later to represent the athlete's short-term goals. (Note: The athlete had previously received some psychological skills training and was adamant that he simultaneously work on all the constructs.)

The performance profiling sheet also has the advantage of providing one format for the athlete and sport psychology consultant to periodically assess and record the athlete's progress

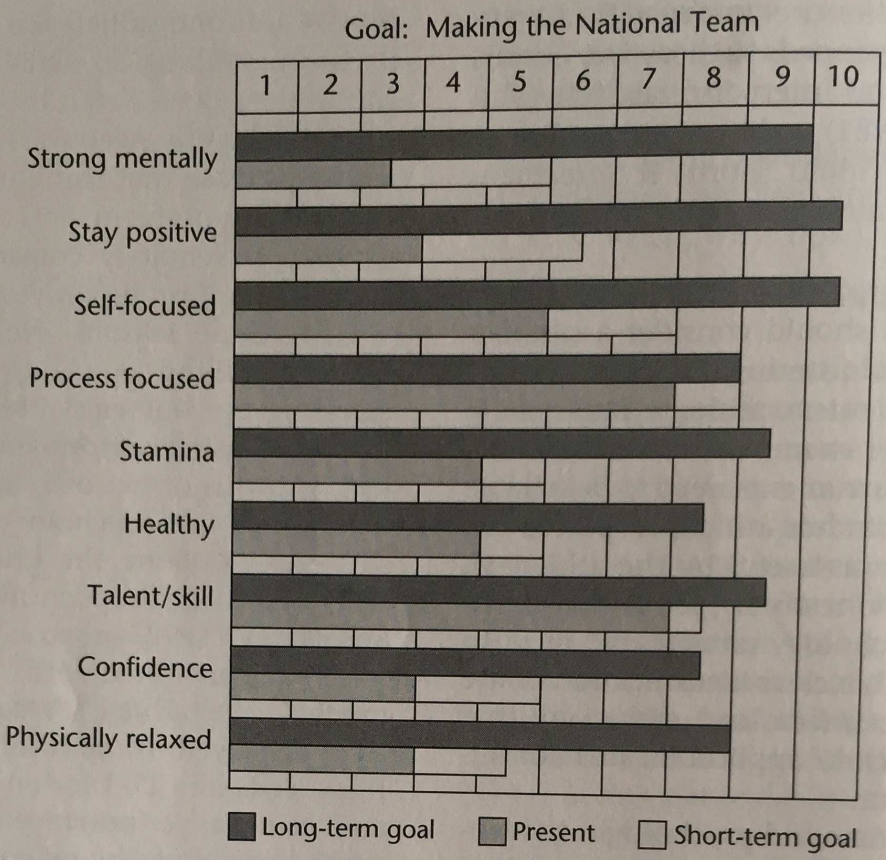

Figure 17-1 **Example of using performance profiling to determine psychological needs and goals**

in using interventions to reach his or her goals. This is done by using that same 10-point rating scale. Once done, draw a new bar to depict the rating, or you can extend or shade in the existing bar depicting starting status (labeled "present") and short-term goals. When using performance profiling in this way, we also recommend modifying the sheet in Figure 17-1 to allow sufficient room for comments after listing each construct.

The sport psychology consultant and coach can assess the psychological strengths and weakness of teams by using essentially the same procedure as that described for the individual athlete. We recommend putting the team members into groups of three to five players. Have each group take 5 to 10 minutes to identify the constructs that they perceive as important to reach the team's goal. Then have a team discussion regarding each construct identified by the groups, with the goal of reaching consensus regarding what psychological skills to include. After identifying the resulting constructs and their relative importance, have the small groups use the 10-point scale to rate the present status of the team on each of the constructs. Also ask the groups to provide a rationale for their decision. Once finished, have all team members discuss each group's ratings and rationale until some consensus is reached regarding a final rating. One bonus of using the preceding procedure is that the discussion of the rationale for the ratings often results in a clear identification of both the attitudes and behaviors that the team members want to encourage and those that they want to discourage.

Regardless of the approach used to assess psychological strengths and weaknesses, if a sport psychology consultant is working with an entire team, it is essential that the coach be involved in the needs assessment because he or she is more likely to know the team's mental strengths and

weaknesses over a period of time. This might, in turn, require different psychological approaches based on the team's history. For example, quite different psychological needs would probably be perceived for a team with a long history of losing compared to a team that climbed to the top and was currently experiencing the pressure of trying to maintain number-one status.

An obvious implication of this discussion on needs assessment is that the coach should be wary of anyone who suggests a canned mental training program that does not provide for the specific needs of a given group of athletes. Although such a program may be better than nothing, the more attention that is paid to the individual needs and the maturation and experiences of the given group, the more likely it is that the program will be successful.

Analyze Demands of the Sport

As noted in Taylor's (1995) conceptual model for integrating athletes' needs and sport demands in the development of competitive mental preparation strategies, every sport has unique physical, technical, and logistical demands that require special preparation by participating athletes. These characteristics that distinguish different sports also affect the type of mental preparation and training an athlete may employ. Thus, sport psychologists need a detailed understanding of important aspects of the sport in which they are working.

As Taylor (1995) notes, sports that involve explosiveness and anaerobic power (e.g., 100-yard dash) will differ greatly from those requiring endurance and aerobic conditioning (e.g., long-distance running and cycling). Patrick and Hrycaiko (1998) used such an approach in developing a mental training package for endurance performance. Similarly, a sport or sport skill requiring great precision (e.g., golf putting) might differ from one requiring more gross motor movements (e.g., power lifting). Furthermore, a sport or performance that lasts a very short time (figure skating) would require a different set of psychological skills than one that lasts hours (e.g., a marathon). Whether a sport or sport skill is self or externally paced influences optimal mental training interventions (e.g., see Lidor, 2007, for preparatory routines in self-paced events). Self-paced skills are ones in which the environment is relatively stable and predictable and the performer, within a few limitations, can initiate the activity when ready (e.g., free throw shot, tennis or volleyball serve, soccer penalty kick, golf). Externally paced skills typically occur when the performer has to react to an unstable and unpredictable environment (e.g., tennis and volleyball except for serving, most team sport skills). In essence, the demands of the sport or sport skill need to be carefully analyzed and considered when devising a mental skills training program.

One example of a mental training program that took into consideration the nature of the task was conducted by Terry, Mayer, and Howe (1998). Specifically, they developed a mental training package for scuba diving, basing their work on the fact that this activity can be very anxiety producing and that the ability to respond effectively under stress is crucial to survival. Therefore, their mental training program emphasized relaxation and coping skills (both cognitively and somatically oriented) such as deep rhythmic diaphragmatic breathing, guided imagery, and attentional focus. Results revealed that the mental training group exhibited lower levels of cognitive anxiety, higher levels of self-confidence, and significantly better performance than did the control group.

Determining What Skills to Include

Once the assessment is complete and all needed psychological skills have been listed, the coach or sport psychologist must decide how many of these skills to emphasize. This decision should be based on when the program is first being implemented (e.g., preseason, practice season, competitive season) and how much time the athletes and coach are willing to devote to mental skills training. Several questions are pertinent at this point:

- How much practice time will be given up on the average each week for mental skills training?

- How many weeks of practice are available?
- Will there still be time to practice mental skills after the competitive season starts, or after the first couple of losses?
- How interested are the athletes in receiving mental skills training?

The answers to these questions will help provide a realistic perspective on the commitment to mental skills training and the time available for accomplishing psychological skill objectives. When there is not adequate time or commitment for a comprehensive training program, it is better to prioritize objectives and emphasize a few to work on initially rather than work superficially on all of the needed skills. The coach or sport psychologist may even wish to develop a 2- to 3-year plan (Gould, 1983; Orlick, 1986).

Although there is certainly no definitive answer as to what a psychological skills training program should include or in what sequence these skills should be taught, Vealey (2007) provides a thoughtful analysis of the nature of psychological skills training programs. Specifically, Vealey (2007) proposes a number of skills that can and should be developed in a well-rounded psychological skills training program (see Table 17-2). It's important to note that these skills reflect areas related to personal development as well as performance enhancement.

Table 17-2 Mental Skills for Athletes

Foundation Skills:	Achievement drive
	Self-awareness
	Productive-thinking
	Self-confidence
Performance Skills:	Perceptual-cognitive skill
	Attentional focus
	Energy management
Personal Development Skills:	Identity achievement
	Interpersonal competence
Team Skills:	Leadership
	Communication
	Cohesion
	Team Confidence

Source: Vealey, 2007.

The most basic skills, termed **foundation skills,** represent those qualities that are basic and necessary psychological skills. The first foundation skill is *achievement drive,* which is the compelling desire to overcome obstacles to accomplish something worthwhile. The second foundation skill is *self-awareness.* Before athletes can start changing some of their previous bad habits, they need to understand and become aware of exactly when and where their problem behaviors occur and what they are thinking and feeling at that time. In addition, athletes need to be aware of what they typically think and feel when performing at their best. That is, do they have an ideal performance state that is associated with peak performance? (See Chapter 9 for more detail on typical peak performance characteristics.) Keeping a sport journal is one way to increase awareness of performance states and to understand how different situations bring about different emotional reactions. (See Chapter 10 for suggestions regarding how to keep a journal and implement other techniques for increasing awareness.) If athletes are sufficiently motivated and have become aware of the relationship between their thoughts and feelings and behavior, they can begin to develop their thought processes and self-confidence. The third and fourth foundation skills are *productive thinking* and *self-confidence* which not only are critical to sport performance (see Chapters 9 and 15) but also are central to a wide array of behaviors outside the world of sport and physical activity (Bandura, 1986). Thus, it would appear inappropriate to begin other psychological skills training until individuals learn a certain level of proficiency in the foundation skills.

The **performance skills** in Vealey's (2007) model are some of the traditional psychological skills that most sport psychology consultants attempt to teach including *energy management* (e.g., arousal regulation) *attentional focus,* and

perceptual-cognitive skills (e,g, decision-making skills). These skills are addressed in detail in various chapters throughout the text. The premise is that exceptional performance is most likely to occur when these skills are learned and integrated into an athlete's actual competitive performance.

"**Personal development skills** are mental skills that represent significant maturational markers of personal development, and that allow for high-level psychological functioning through clarity of self-concept, feelings of well-being, and a sense of relatedness to others" (Vealey, 2007, p. 290). Two personal development skills that Vealey (2007) feels are especially important are *identity achievement* (establishing a clear sense of identity) and *interpersonal competence* (interacting effectively with others). Taking a life skills approach is an example of a mental training intervention that focuses on personal development skills.

The final category of mental skills is **team skills,** which are collective qualities of the team that are instrumental to an effective team environment and overall team success. Team skills are made up of (a) *team confidence*—the belief that the team has the collective resources or team abilities to achieve team success, (b) *cohesion*—the team's ability to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its goals, (c) *communication*—the process of interpersonal interaction within the team that facilitates team success and athletes' well-being, and (d) *leadership*—the ability of individuals to influence others on the team to think and act in ways that facilitate team success and the quality of the team's social-psychological environment.

Sport psychology consultants have a wide variety of methods and techniques that they can choose from to develop and enhance the preceding psychological skills. The most commonly used methods are the four traditional techniques of goal setting (Chapter 11), imagery (Chapter 14), physical relaxation and arousal regulation (Chapter 13), and thought control (Chapter 15).

Regardless of the specific skills and methods to be included in any psychological skills training program, it will be more effective if psychological objectives appropriate to the athletes are identified and if these objectives are defined in easily understood and measurable terms; Table 17-3 provides some examples. Such definitions help clarify exactly what the objective means and what outcomes are expected once it is achieved. The definitions also provide a clear foundation for planning strategies to accomplish the objectives and for assessing how effective the strategies were in achieving the objective.

Evaluation of Program Effectiveness

It is not easy to evaluate the impact of a psychology skills training program, yet evaluation is essential for improving a training program and the skills of the person in charge of the program. In fact, evaluation should be an essential feature of any organizational as well as individualized intervention. Aside from the accountability demands that ethically oblige sport psychology consultants to evaluate the effectiveness of what they do (see Smith, 1989), practical considerations are also important.

First, program evaluation provides consultants and coaches with the information needed to gauge the effectiveness of the various components of their programs and to make modifications where needed. Second, an evaluation provides consumers with an opportunity to provide feedback concerning areas that they feel weren't included or to suggest changes in the way the program was conducted. Third, evaluation is the only way we can objectively judge whether the program achieved its intended goals in changing some aspects of the individual's or team's behavior or performance.

It is important to note that evaluation should be a continuous process. Sport psychology consultants should assess the strengths and weaknesses of the content and delivery of their sessions, especially team sessions. Questions such as the following might be addressed: Did the session accomplish its objective(s)? Were explanations of psychological concepts and directions for practicing the training exercises adequate? What techniques appeared to work best? Was

Table 17-3 A Sample of Psychological Skills Objectives and Outcomes

Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3
Positive Mental Attitude	*Coping With Mistakes and Failures*	*Handling the High-Stress Situation*
Don't make negative statements at games or practices.	Accept the fact that mistakes and failures are a necessary part of the learning process.	Learn to interpret the situation as a challenge rather than a threat.
Change "I can't" statements to "I can" statements.	Don't make excuses. Appropriately accepting responsibility will help turn failures into success.	Recognize too much tension. Achieve appropriate differential relaxation.
Always give 100% effort.	Stay positive even after a stupid mistake.	Keep thoughts positive and focused on the task at hand.
Don't talk while coaches talk.	Be supportive of teammates even when they are making mistakes.	Image goal of performing well under high-stress situations.
Hustle during all plays and drills.	Keep focused concentration rather than dwelling on mistakes.	Focus concentration on appropriate cues.

time allotted appropriately during the session? Are any additions or deletions warranted? How responsive did the athletes appear to be? Writing a critique is more beneficial than simply trying to remember strengths and weaknesses. Plans for future sessions may need to be modified on the basis of the results of each session evaluation.

A more formal, total evaluation should occur at the end of the mental skills training program. This evaluation might include team and individual discussions as well as written evaluations by the athletes and coaches. The evaluation should focus on the players' assessment of the value of the program from both a psychological and performance perspective. Objective performance data should be used in addition to subjective reports from coaches and athletes. For example, one recommended objective data system entails behavioral assessment, which involves collecting and analyzing information and data to identify and describe target behaviors, identify possible causes of the behaviors, select appropriate treatment strategies to modify the behaviors, and evaluate treatment outcomes (Tkachuk, Leslie-Toogood, & Martin, 2003). In addition, athletes should be asked how often they actually practiced their skills. When psychological skills programs don't work, one of the major reasons is simply because athletes do not systematically practice what they have learned. Information should also be obtained on different aspects of the program, such as group sessions, individual sessions, and written materials. Additional questions can be asked, such as, What did athletes see as the major strengths and weaknesses of the mental skills training? What mental skills improved the most? What exercises were the most helpful? What suggestions do athletes have to make the program even better in the future? To help out new sport psychology consultants, Partington and Orlick (1987a, 1987b) provide a sample sport psychology evaluation form as well as data on what makes a consultant effective from both the coaches' and athletes' point of

view. In addition, Poczwardowski, Sherman, and Henschen (1998) provide additional suggestions on the key points when conducting programs and making evaluations.

Anderson, Miles, Mahoney, and Robinson (2002) suggest that a practitioner-administered case study approach to evaluation should be employed, which uses a number of effectiveness indicators to accommodate the constraints of a practice setting and fulfill the functional criteria for evaluating practice. More specifically, they break down effectiveness indicators into four distinct categories. These include the quality of support (e.g., consultant effectiveness), psychological skill and well-being (e.g., anxiety control, happiness), response to support (e.g., changes in knowledge and attitude), and performance (objective, subjective). This presents a more well-rounded view of evaluation than simply performance (bottom line), which is the focus of many interventions.

Practical Pointers for Teaching Mental Skills

In the preceding chapters on mental skills training the authors have presented many excellent pointers for teaching specific mental skills. The following pointers apply either to the entire psychological training program or to its components.

Provide the What, Why, When, and How of Training

For mental skills to be of maximum value, the athlete must consciously and continually choose to utilize mental training methods. This necessitates a high level of commitment, an understanding of proper execution, and ultimately the ability to be self-sufficient in mental preparation. This can be accomplished in a number of ways. Athletes who are taught the what, why, when, and how of mental skills training are much more likely to acquire the necessary knowledge base to become self-sufficient in mental training as well as the motivation to follow through with the program. At the beginning of each special mental training session, the coach or sport psychologist should outline for the athletes the purpose, content, and approximate length of the session. The educational aspect of the program is critical to provide athletes with an understanding of what principles the program is based on and how it works. It is also a good idea to allot time for discussion and questions after practicing each exercise and at the end of each session. In addition to enhancing forthright self-examination and the learning process, the sharing that occurs in these discussions often improves communication and understanding among teammates and leads to better group support and more team cohesiveness.

Stress Personal Responsibility

When it comes to performance, some athletes have the attitude "When you're hot, you're hot, and when you're not, you're not." These athletes view peak performance as more a consequence of fate than something under their own personal control. Implementors of mental skills training should teach the opposite attitude. Peak performance is not mysterious; it is a product of the body and mind, both of which can be controlled. This is why, with the right physical and mental training, athletes can learn to repeat their best performances more consistently. This means learning to be in control of oneself instead of letting the environment or others do the controlling. The athlete must ultimately accept the fact that only he or she can take responsibility for being physically and mentally ready to compete.

Be Flexible and Individualized

When teaching mental skills to a group of athletes, the best approach is to be flexible and individualized. All athletes do not learn mental skills in the same way and at the same pace any more than they do physical skills. Within reasonable time constraints, a variety of techniques should be introduced and practiced. Do not force everyone into a fixed pattern. Instead, encourage athletes to modify or combine techniques until they

derive the most effective method for them. A backup technique should also be identified and practiced for those times when the preferred one fails to accomplish its objective.

Providing handouts and cassette or CD recordings of exercises and specific concepts, including the ones in this book, is another way to ensure that athletes have a variety of exercises with which to work and the knowledge base for making modifications and application. Although many athletes like to use recordings and handouts when they practice, be sure they do not become so dependent on them that they cannot practice the mental skills without such props.

Use Goal Setting and Journal Assignments

You can also enhance and individualize the teaching of specific mental skills by using goal setting and journal assignments. This is one reason many sport psychology consultants suggest that athletes be encouraged to keep a journal (see Chapter 10) and set goals (see Chapter 11) early in a training program. The following is an example of their use.

A runner, after having been taught to recognize tension and to relax, identifies that he grimaces and his neck and shoulder muscles tighten when he is running under poor weather conditions, after experiencing the first signs of fatigue, and when a steep hill is coming up. He records this in his journal. Next, the runner sets a reasonable goal for correcting the problem: "In one week I will run a workout over hilly terrain keeping my face, neck, and shoulder muscles relaxed throughout the run." After he records the goal, he plans and records a strategy for reaching the goal: "(1) Do 5 minutes of progressive relaxation (PR) each day on just the face, neck, and shoulder muscles. (2) After PR practice, visualize running fluidly over hilly terrain. (3) When running, frequently scan the face for tension—if needed, relax the face so the forehead is smooth as glass and the jaw is slack. When the face is relaxed, scan neck and shoulders for unwanted tension. If tense, relax by slowly rolling the head and/or dropping the shoulders." Each day the runner records his progress in achieving the goal. Once the runner feels he is consistently achieving the goal, he may want to establish a slightly more difficult goal and repeat the process.

Precompetition and Competition Plans

The ultimate goal of psychological skills training is for each athlete to learn how to create consistently at competition time the ideal performance state (thoughts, feelings, bodily responses) typically associated with peak performance. Rarely will this occur if precompetition preparation and competition behaviors are left to chance or good and bad breaks. Athletes get ready for competition in a variety of ways, but more often than not they do not have a consistent pattern of readying procedures. Performance is likely to be enhanced if an athlete's preparation becomes more systematic.

One of the objectives of precompetition planning is to arrange the external and internal world in a way that maximizes the athlete's feelings of control. The athlete's **external world** consists of the actual physical surroundings, what is happening in these surroundings, and the physical things the athlete does. The **internal world** is the athlete's physical states, thoughts, feelings, mental images, and attentional focus. The greater the familiarity, routine, and structure in the external environment, the easier it is for the athlete to be in control of his or her internal world. The external world can be stabilized in a number of ways—for example, eating similar meals the same amount of time before each competition; always arriving at the contest site with a set amount of time for precompetition preparation; establishing a set dressing ritual; and following the same equipment check, taping, and warm-up procedures.

Maintaining a constant and familiar external world is even more critical with away competitions. This is more easily accomplished when athletes diligently adhere to elaborate and consistent precompetition plans before both home and away games. The coach can also increase familiarity with the site of away games by taking the athletes to the site before the competition

begins, ideally at least a day before. Some coaches and sport psychology consultants even advocate getting films of the away facility, including the locker rooms, and showing these films to their athletes well before a competition (see Chapters 14 and 16 for further elaboration on how such films can be used and why they are effective in improving performance).

The best precompetition and competition plans consist of procedures that ready the athlete physically and mentally for competition. The typical physical preparations should be supplemented with emotional and cognitive readying procedures if athletes are to maximize their chances of being ready to peak at competition time. This entails planning procedures for monitoring and controlling the task at hand as competition nears. It also means monitoring and controlling emotions so that the energy and excitement for competing build slowly.

Mental monitoring and readying procedures should be integrated with certain external markers such as waking up the morning of competition, traveling to the competition, arriving at the competition site, getting dressed, doing warm-up exercises and technique drills, and dealing with the short time between physical warm-ups and the beginning of competition. When some athletes arrive at a competition site, they like to find a quiet place where they can practice 5 to 10 minutes of relaxation exercises such as deep breathing or passive progressive relaxation. Such athletes believe these relaxation procedures have the benefit of bringing them to the same starting point prior to each competition before they begin the rest of their on-site preparation. Other athletes combine their dressing ritual with cognitive focusing techniques designed to narrow attentional focus to what the athletes want to do during the competition. Often athletes end their dressing ritual or precede their physical warm-up with a 5- to 10-minute imagery exercise of exactly what they want to feel and perform during competition. Some athletes even use *all* of these readying procedures.

The most effective readying procedure is individual; this means that the length, content, and sequencing of behavioral protocols vary greatly from one player to another—even when the players are on the same team. Such variability stems partly from different needs in creating an ideal performance state and different preferences for the mental training exercises.

Some interesting qualitative research by Gould, Eklund, and Jackson (1992) and Eklund, Gould, and Jackson (1993) on thoughts and cognitions of Olympic wrestlers highlights the importance of precompetition and competition plans as well as individual variability. First, some between-group differences among medalists and nonmedalists revealed that medalists had competition plans firmly in their minds and did not spontaneously second-guess these plans during matches, whereas nonmedalists reported that spontaneous deviations from competition plans developed for matches and often had negative consequences (i.e., poorer performance). In addition, medalists had very systematic preperformance routines that they consistently adhered to throughout the Olympics, whereas nonmedalists reported deviating from their preperformance routines, especially in matches that they considered less challenging or less important.

Despite these differences between medalists and nonmedalists, interviews revealed individual differences and variations among the medalists. For example, one medalist placed great importance on prematch focus. "I just try to think about the techniques I am going to use and what strategies I am going to do and get that into my mind before I go out on the mat so I am focused on what I am going to do" (Eklund et al., 1993, p. 43). Conversely, another medalist deemphasized preperformance routines and strategy, feeling that they made them "too programmed." This orientation is captured in the following quotation: "I don't worry about strategy and technique. I try to keep my mind clear of getting caught up in all that stuff. If I have watched a wrestler and what he does—that is all I need to know. I don't go over what I am going to do or what different strategies I am going to try to use. I just keep my mind clear and when I get out there, I just react" (Eklund et al., 1993, p. 44).

Table 17-4 **Refocusing Plans for an Olympic Speedskater**

Worries about Competitors before the Race

- They are human just like me. We'll see what they can do in the race, not in warm-ups or in training. I need to focus on my *own* preparation.
- All I can do is my best. Nobody can take that away from me. If my performance is good, I'll be happy. If it's not so good and I try, I shouldn't be disappointed.
- I'm racing for *me*. It's *my* max that I want.

Worry about Competitors during the Race

- If I start to think about others during the race, I'll shift my concentration to *my* race, *my* technique—"Stay low, race your race."
- "I have the potion—I have the motion."

Pre-Event Hassles

- Skate blades don't cut the ice—carry a small sharpening stone to pass over the blades.
- Delay in start—if I'm already on the ice and it's likely to be a short delay, jog around, keep moving, stay warm, do a mini warm-up with some accelerations. Follow normal prerace plan when approaching the line.
- Windy or snowy conditions—it's the same for everyone. Just go out and do what you can do.

Worries during Competition

- Poor start—no problem, it can happen. It's not the start that determines the final results. Follow your race plan. Push your max.
- Not hearing a split time—it's okay. Just skate well and race your race.
- Pain in legs—shift focus to the specifics of the task to be done, the steps in the turn, pushing the blade to the side, pushing hard to the finish line.

Source: Reprinted by permission from T. Orlick, 1986, *Psyching for Sport* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Publishers), pp. 165–166.

Some excellent examples of precompetition and competition planning come from the work of Orlick (1986) with Canadian Olympic athletes. Orlick has the athletes he works with develop very specific precompetition and competition plans. However, in addition, his athletes develop precompetition and competition *refocusing* plans in case things don't go exactly as they originally planned. This is extremely important because things out of an athlete's control can throw off his or her plans at the last second. And, as Jack Donohue, Canadian Olympic basketball coach, says, "What happens to you is nowhere near as important as how you react to what happens to you." A refocusing plan is aimed at helping athletes refocus away from unwanted external distractions or internal distractions such as worries, self-doubt, and self-put-downs. Table 17-4 provides a good example of precompetition and competition refocusing plans for an Olympic speed skater.

Stress Application to Other Life Pursuits

One tremendous bonus that comes from implementing a mental training program is that the skills learned are applicable to life in general as well as to athletics, and the benefits last long after the competitive year is over. The training program can assist athletes in applying their

new mental skills by suggesting relevant uses in nonathletic settings. For example, suggest that athletes learn to do their homework more quickly by using mental training concentration skills. With these skills, athletes can become more aware of when their mind is wandering and can bring their focus of attention back to the task at hand. If an athlete gets so uptight before tests that he or she cannot remember what was learned, the same relaxation and positive thinking skills that athletes are taught to control competitive anxiety can be used for test-taking anxiety and many other stressful situations people face in life. When athletic programs offer both physical and mental skills training, they provide a better argument that participating in competitive sport can also be a valuable educational experience.

A recent issue of the *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* (2002, 4) focused on the application of psychological skills typically used in sport and exercise settings to other settings and endeavors such as business, medicine, space travel, and special forces. More and more sport psychology consultants are practicing in areas outside of sport, fueled in part by the renewed interest in the psychology of excellence. For example, Loehr and Schwartz (2001) have discussed the similarities of high performers, whether they be elite athletes or CEOs working for a Fortune 500 company. Similarly, Murphy (1996) discusses the transfer from working with elite athletes at the Olympic Training Center to working with performers in the corporate arena. Murphy reports that his clients (whether sport or nonsport) tell him that the skills they are taught help them achieve their best under pressure, allow them to stay focused during difficult tasks, and enable them to enjoy even the most challenging assignments. Thus, the transfer from sport to other areas of life seems to be a fertile ground for future practitioners and researchers.

Practice It before Teaching It

Before teaching any of the mental training exercises to athletes, sport psychology consultants and coaches should take the time to practice each technique themselves. Personally experiencing an exercise is an excellent way to increase one's ability to teach a specific technique and to answer any questions athletes may have about it. An additional bonus of practicing the exercises, particularly if the practice is systematic and long term, is that the practitioner will accrue psychological benefits similar to those the athletes receive from the practice.

Teach by Example

In regard to psychological control—or any type of behavior—good coaches and sport psychology consultants teach and lead by example. If the person leading the mental training program does not exemplify what he or she is teaching, it is highly unlikely the athletes will model it either. The coach who appears calm, confident, and in control during a competition usually has athletes who act the same way. Players are more likely to offer encouragement and support to one another when they have a leader who models encouragement (Wescott, 1980). The next time you see athletes consistently losing control and concentration after poor officiating calls, look to the bench, and you probably will see the coach behaving similarly. Watch how athletes react to poor performance. Athletes who become negative or rattled after mistakes are often led by coaches who react similarly. For psychological training to be maximally effective, the coaches and sport psychology consultants must exemplify in practice and competition the behavior they expect from athletes.

Observe Practices and Competitions Whenever Possible

As noted earlier, one of the disadvantages of sport psychology consultants conducting mental training programs with teams is their lack of day-to-day availability. Despite this limitation, it is critical that consultants attempt to attend some practices and competitions. We have found that this is particularly important at the beginning stages of the intervention. This firsthand view can provide consultants with

critical information that might not be evident from an interview or paper-and-pencil measure. As noted earlier, the problem might be biomechanical or physical in nature rather than psychological, and this would not likely show up in an interview or a test. Perhaps even more important than the information gained is the trust developed when athletes know the consultants care enough about them to see them perform. In surveys evaluating the effectiveness of sport psychology consultants (Gould, Tammen, Murphy, & May, 1989; Partington & Orlick, 1987a), a critical component to the perceived effectiveness of sport psychology consultants that directly affected building trust between athletes and consultants was the amount of time the consultants spent being with and observing the athletes.

Emphasize Strengths as Competition Nears

Behavior by the coach and sport psychology consultant prior to and during competition is particularly critical. The nearer the time to competition, the more important it is that they are reassuring and complimentary toward athletes. This is not the time to be critical of technique or anything else. Besides, it is too late to change weaknesses, so there is no reason to focus on them. Instead, if at all possible, get athletes to think they are looking great and help build their confidence. In short, now is the time to build from what is positive, to play to strengths rather than weaknesses. Such behavior by the coach and sport psychology consultant will help athletes build and maintain confidence rather than self-doubt prior to competition. This usually means better performance.

The preceding recommendation is particularly critical with athletes who have higher anxiety and lower self-confidence. Williams et al. (2003) found that when these athletes perceived the coach to lose emotional control, become negative, or fail to be supportive, this was likely to lead to poorer performance and more difficulty maintaining optimal mental states and focus. Using the self-monitoring or outside monitoring described in the next section should help coaches and sport psychology consultants assess their behavior prior to and during competition.

Monitor Your Behavior

In Chapter 10, Ravizza suggests that athletes become more aware of their behavior, thoughts, and feelings through self-monitoring. The same awareness on the part of coaches and sport psychology consultants can help them become more effective in working with athletes. For example, by means of self-monitoring, coaches and sport psychology consultants can become more conscious of how they communicate with athletes during different situations. They should monitor what they say as well as what they communicate with their body language. They should ask themselves such questions as "How is my behavior likely to change in certain situations?" "Am I a good role model for the mental discipline and psychological control I wish to teach?" The awareness created by conscientious and objective self-monitoring is a necessary first step in becoming more effective in working with athletes.

There is also merit in having someone else observe and evaluate one's behavior. For example, if a coach has a sport psychology consultant working with the team, he or she would be an ideal person to observe the coach's behavior during practices and games. Coaching behaviors should be analyzed on the basis of the principles for desirable behavior elaborated in earlier chapters. Evaluation would be facilitated if special forms were employed (e.g., Smith, Smoll, & Hunt, 1977; Tharp & Gallimore, 1976). The information presented in earlier chapters can be used to help plan a specific strategy for modifying a coach's behavior in a direction that is more likely to facilitate the performance and personal growth of his or her athletes.

Ethical Considerations for the Coach and Sport Psychology Consultant

Sport psychology is a relatively young profession, and the people practicing applied sport psychology in the 1970s and early 1980s had little to guide them in terms of ethical issues. The purpose of this section is to call attention to some basic ethical concerns involved in implementing mental skills training. A more thorough discussion of these topics can be found in Moore (2003); Whelan, Meyers, and Elkin (1996); and Sachs (1993).

To better understand what specific situations and circumstances applied sport psychologists perceive as particularly difficult and possibly controversial from an ethical perspective, Petitpas, Brewer, Rivera, and Van Raalte (1994) administered surveys to individuals practicing applied sport psychology. Results revealed that four classifications of behaviors were identified as requiring the most difficult ethical judgments or were perceived as controversial. These included (a) conflicts with confidentiality (e.g., reporting recruiting violations to appropriate officials); (b) conflicts between personal values and professional ethics (e.g., working with an athlete who uses steroids); (c) conflicts with dual relationships (e.g., socializing with clients); (d) conflicts with self-presentation or advertising (e.g., including athlete testimonials in advertising). Any profession has many ethical gray areas, making decisions extremely difficult at times.

To help guide professionals working in applied sport psychology settings deal with ethical dilemmas more effectively, sport psychology associations such as the Association for Applied Sport Psychology, the North American Society for the Psychology of Sport and Physical Activity, and the Canadian Society for Psychomotor Learning and Sport Psychology have developed modifications of the American Psychological Association's Ethical Standards (1992). At the core of these standards is the general philosophy that sport psychology consultants respect the dignity and worth of the individual and honor the preservation and protection of fundamental human rights. In addition, consultants are committed to increasing the knowledge of human behavior and of people's understanding of themselves and others in sport environments. The essence of this philosophy is that the athlete's welfare must be foremost. For a more detailed discussion of ethical principles please consult the American Psychological Association's ethical guidelines (1992). In addition, McCann, Jowdy, and Van Raalte (2002) provide ethical guidelines especially for assessments.

Potential Problem Areas

Although the potential benefits of implementing a psychological skills training program are clearly demonstrable, there are of course some problems that a consultant or coach will have to deal with throughout the process. Each situation, naturally, will offer its own unique set of problems. For example, working one on one with individual athletes is quite different from working with an entire team. Working with Olympic athletes or professional athletes might present an entirely different set of problems than working with high school athletes. If the consultant or coach does not adequately deal with these problems, they can severely reduce the effectiveness of the program. Some examples of common problems include the following:

- Overcoming player reluctance about participating in a mental training program.
- Spending too little time with individual athletes in a team setting.
- Gaining the trust of the athletes.
- Making sure athletes systematically practice their skills.
- Lacking knowledge about the specific sport.
- Maintaining contact with athletes throughout a competitive season.
- Getting full cooperation from the coaching staff or organization.

A sport psychology consultant needs to be aware of these potential problem areas and ready to deal with them if necessary. It has taken most of us several years to learn many of these things by trial and error. Many of us made mistakes in our early years of consulting because we simply weren't aware of, or hadn't experienced, many of these nuances of setting up and implementing a mental training program. However, with good preparation, careful thought, and a sense of commitment, this can be a very rewarding experience. After all, helping individuals reach their potential both inside and outside the world of sport is what it's all about.

Summary

In this chapter we have addressed many general issues relating to the integration and implementation of a psychological skills training program. In summary, (1) there are advantages to having either a coach or a sport psychologist implement a psychological skills training program, (2) athletes of all types and age and skill levels can benefit from mental training, (3) mental skills training should continue for as long as an athlete participates in sport, (4) the initial mental skills training program should probably last 3 to 6 months and start in the off-season or preseason, (5) a psychological skills needs assessment should be made to determine the specific components to be incorporated in training and the psychological objectives to be achieved, (6) there is no one best way to sequence and integrate psychological components even though one was proposed, (7) once basic mental skills are acquired they should have a performance-specific focus and be integrated with practice of physical skills, and (8) real benefits from psychological skills training will only occur with long-term systematic practice.

We have also suggested practical teaching pointers that apply either to the entire psychological training program or to many of its components. Stress that athletes accept responsibility for their mental state. Be flexible, eclectic, and individualized in planning training techniques. Stress personal growth and how to use mental skills in nonathletic settings. Practice techniques before teaching them. Teach by personally exemplifying the mental skills being taught. Finally, we concluded the chapter with ethical considerations that all psychological training implementors need to be aware of and observe in their own behavior.

Study Questions

1. Discuss who will benefit most from psychological skills training.
2. Are psychological skills intervention programs effective in enhancing performance? Provide evidence to support your answer.
3. What are some advantages and disadvantages of a coach or sport psychology consultant conducting a mental training program?
4. How much time should be spent in mental training?
5. When is the best time to practice psychological skills?
6. When is the best time to implement a psychological skills training program?

7. Discuss what would be covered in a first interview with an athlete.
8. Discuss the use of psychological inventories to help assess athletes' psychological skills.
9. Discuss Vealey's distinction between psychological methods and psychological skills. What are the different categories of psychological skills? What impact does this distinction between methods and skills have on the implementation of a psychological skills training program?
10. John, a golfer, goes to a sport psychologist because his play is "erratic." One of the sport psychologist's observations is that he has no consistent preshot readying procedure. How might the sport psychologist help John develop a preshot routine, what might it include, and why should this intervention improve John's performance?
11. Discuss how a psychological skills program might be evaluated.
12. Discuss five practical pointers that may help make a psychological skills program more effective. Cite specific practical examples and research to support your points.

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