The task and ego orientation in sport questionnaire essay sample

The athlete is a 30-year-old male golfer. He is a relatively new golfer on tour and has a reputation for hitting the ball an extremely long way off the tee. His coach is concerned however, as when things are not going well for the athlete he can become very aggressive towards himself, other players and even the crowd. He is often distracted by the crowd and gets upset by some of the comments they make. After an initial meeting with the coach, who described these problems, an intake interview was arranged with the athlete.

The intake interview was all about getting the athlete to tell his story, as " without the stories, we have nowhere to go." (Andersen, 2000). A close examination of the athlete's thoughts and behaviours gave an idea of where to intervene in order to attempt to improve his performance. From the initial meeting with the coach and interview with the athlete, problem areas were raised and it was decided to use questionnaires to gain further information. The two questionnaires used were the Task and Ego Orientation in Sport Questionnaire (TEOSQ) (Duda and Nicholls, 1992, cited in Singer, Hausenblas, and Janelle, 2001) and the Competitive State Anxiety Inventory – 2 (CSAI – 2) (Martens, Vealy, and Burton, 1990). These allowed further specific needs of the athlete to be addressed and from the results, possible interventions prescribed.

Achievement Goal Theory and Goal Orientation Theory

Goal Orientation Theory was developed from Gill and Deeter's (1988) work on the Sport Orientation Questionnaire. The theory takes a social cognitive

approach to explain variability in behaviour and social influences and effects of behaviour in achievement settings.

According to achievement goal theory, three factors interact to determine a person's motivation: achievement goals, perceived ability, and achievement behaviour. In order to understand someone's motivation, we must understand what success and failure mean to them. (Weinberg and Gould, 1999) The best way to do that is to examine a person's achievement goals and how they interact with his perceptions, or perceived ability, of competence.

In order to do this, the athlete was interviewed, the coach's observations were noted and questionnaires were used in order to triangulate data and identify the athlete's achievement goals, his perceived ability, and his achievement behaviours.

Nicholls' theory of achievement motivation extends from Bandura's theory of self-efficacy and reflects the notion of situation-specific self-confidence, as opposed to a global personality trait (Weinberg and Gould, 1999). According to Nicholls (1984) and Duda (1987) the defining feature of achievement motivation is the way an athlete comes to view their own perceived ability (cited in Cox, 1998.) Self-efficacy is an individual's confidence and beliefs regarding competence and success in performing a specific task. (Cox, 1998.) Bandura's theory of self-efficacy (1986) proposes that self-efficacy is fundamental to competent performance (cited in Cox, 1998.) In competitive situations, the higher the level of self-efficacy, the higher the performance

accomplishments are and the lower is the emotional arousal (Bandura, 1982, cited in Cox, 1998.)

It became clear from interviewing the athlete and from the results of the CSAI-2, that his level of self-efficacy, in being the new golfer on tour, was relatively low.

Nicholls (1989) proposed two major goals, or bases for subjective success; these are task and ego orientation. This relates to the way in which we judge our perceived competence or ability. Goal orientation then relates to thoughts, attitudes, and behaviours.

Task goal orientation is where the focus is on improving relative to the athlete's own past performances. The athlete's perceived ability is not based on a comparison with others. (Weinberg and Gould, 1999)

Ego goal orientation is where the focus is on comparing with and defeating others. The athlete has a high perceived ability when they win, but a low perceived ability when they lose. (Weinberg and Gould, 1999.)

An individual who endorses an ego goal is interested more in displaying their ability rather than focusing on improving it. When an individual adopts ego goals, their perceived ability is referenced through social comparison, that is through comparing themselves to the performance and or effort exerted by others. (Singer et al., 2001.) When challenged, or made to question their ability, their sense of self is threatened, leading to maladaptive patterns of achievement behaviour. A preoccupation with the adequacy of their ability

may result in anxiety and may subsequently lead to task-irrelevant thoughts rather than focused attention on the task at hand. A consequence of such negative cognitions and affect is a decrease in performance. (Singer et al., 2001.)

" The major contributor to the expected adaptive and maladaptive patterns associated with task and ego goals of motivation appears to lie in the source of control," (Biddle, 1999, cited in Singer et al., 2001.) Those who endorse task goals measure success through self-referencing, this can be done on any aspect of performance, including the outcome, (Duda, 1996, cited in Singer et al., 2001.) In contrast, when evaluating personal achievement, those who endorse ego goals tend to rely on aspects of their performance that lie outside of their control.

The Task and Ego Orientation in Sport Questionnaire (TEOSQ) was developed to measure individual differences in the proneness for task and ego involvement and follows Nicholls' (1989, cited in Singer et al., 2001,) ideas regarding the measurement of achievement goal orientations by basing it on subjective success.

There has been a considerable amount of work done examining the factorial and construct validity as well as the reliability of the TEOSQ, (Duda and Whitehead, 1998, cited in Singer et al., 2001). It has been suggested however, that the assessment of goal orientations needs to be more situation specific in order to be provide more useful information. (Harwood and Hardy, 1999, cited in Singer et al., 2001).

The results of the TEOSQ completed by the athlete gave scores of 3. 5 for Ego orientation, and 2. 86 for Task orientation. (1= Low; 5= High) It was concluded from these results that the athlete had a high ego orientation and an average task orientation. It can be seen from responses in the interview conducted with the athlete, and from observation, that having such a high ego orientation has had a detrimental affect on his performance and his approach to the situation. Displays of aggression toward himself, other players and even the crowd are certainly not conducive adaptations of achievement behaviour.

" A high ego orientation coupled with low task orientation was predictive of a stronger dispositional tendency for athletes to experience cognitive anxiety when they compete." (Singer et al., 2001, pp431).

Anxiety

"… athletes who participate in competitive sport invariably have to deal with a great deal of pressure. This pressure is most often associated with elevated levels of stress and anxiety, which form an integral part of high-level sport." (Gould et al, cited in Singer et al, 2001. pp290) Hence the mere nature of the golfer competing at such high level sport is a precursor to stress and anxiety.

Gould et al, (1984, cited in Singer et al., 2001,) argued that if the causes of debilitating anxiety in a competitive setting could be identified, then sport psychologists would be well-equipped to help athletes avoid sources of their anxiety. Strategies for enhancing self-confidence are important means of

reducing the amount of state anxiety that individuals experience. (Weinberg and Gould, 1999.)

Martens, (1987, cited in Weinberg and Gould, 1999,) identified two common sources of situational stress, these are: the importance an athlete places on an event or contest; and the uncertainty that surrounds the outcome of that event. The golfer has identified that the importance placed on playing on tour is very high for him. He also indicated his uncertainty at the outcome of playing at this high level. This implies that both sources of situational stress are very high for him when competing. An athlete with low self-esteem is likely to have less confidence and experience and more state anxiety that an athlete with higher self-esteem. (Weinberg and Gould, 1999.)

Weinberg and Gould (1999) give at least two explanations for how increased arousal influences athletic performance, these are: increased muscle tension and coordination difficulties; and changes in attention or concentration levels. Nidegger, (1976, cited in Weinberg and Gould, 1999) reinforces this by stating that an increased arousal and state anxiety influence athletic performance through changes in attention and concentration, for example by affecting attention style. Weinberg and Gould, (1999) go on to say that athletes have to learn to shift their attention to appropriate task cues when competing, and that increased arousal and state anxiety cause athletes to attend to inappropriate cues. For instance, most athletes perform well-learned skills best when they fully concentrate on the task. Unaware of their levels of concentration, they perform on automatic pilot. Unfortunately, excessive cognitive state anxiety sometimes causes performers to focus on

inappropriate task cues by " worrying about worrying" and becoming overly self-evaluative. (Weinberg and Gould, 1999.)

The coach initially identified that the golfer is often distracted by the crowd when competing and that he gets upset by the comments they make. Further evidence from the interview, and the results from the CSAI-2 support this observation.

" Anxiety is a negative emotional state characterized by nervousness, worry, and apprehension and associated with activation or arousal of the body. Thus anxiety has a thought component (e. g. worry and apprehension) called cognitive anxiety. It also has a somatic component, which is the degree of physical activation perceived." (Weinberg and Gould, 1999, pp72)

The CSAI-2 was developed as a sport-specific inventory to measure the cognitive and somatic components of A-state (momentary anxiety states). (Martens et al, 1990). This development followed a systematic psychometric process. Evidence supporting the construct validity of the CSAI-2 is provided through a systematic progression of research studies reviewed by Martens et al, (1990). The usefulness of the inventory as a diagnostic instrument for clinical purposes has not yet been established.

It was important that prior to the athlete completing the CSAI-2, all instructions were completely understood and in particular that his responses were based on how he felt at that moment. Ideally the test should be conducted as close as possible before competition and within an hour prior

to it. (Martens et al, 1990.) The test was administered thirty minutes prior to the golfer competing in an important game.

The CSAI-2 is scored by computing a separate total for each of the three sub-scales, with scores ranging from a low of 9 to a high of 36. The higher the score, the greater the cognitive or somatic A-state or the greater the state of self-confidence.

The scores that the golfer achieved on this test were: Cognitive A-state, 32; Somatic A-state, 23; State self-confidence, 16. These results indicate a very high cognitive A-state and a moderate somatic A-state by the athlete. Significant was the very low score on state self-confidence.

It is important to note that the CSAI-2 measures intensity of state anxiety and says nothing about the individual's perception of whether his response, be it high or low, would hinder or facilitate performance. The athlete's perception of whether his ' felt' response, relative to a specific item on the CSAI-2, was good or bad for future performance has been labelled direction of state anxiety. (Cox, 1998)

Jones and Hanton (1996, cited in Cox, 1998,) found that athletes who expect to attain their goals feel ' in control', and view anxiety symptoms as facilitative as opposed to debilitative. The study was done using the revised CSAI-2 scale which gives direction to the anxiety score, in terms of whether the athlete felt it to be facilitating, or debilitating toward their performance.

Responses from the golfer during the interview indicate that his high cognitive A-state score is possibly debilitating toward his performance.

Intervention

Self confidence is important as this makes the golfer feel good about himself. If self confidence is low, doubts set in and he perceives himself as unable to perform successfully. Therefore, attempting to try new techniques and overcoming difficult aspects and fears of the competition will be more of a challenge.

To improve self confidence the coach needs to create practices, sessions and environments that not only improve technique and skill but also guide and council the golfer to a certain extent. This will immediately make the golfer feel competent and will then develop his self confidence. What should follow from this direction is more success in the athlete's performance and therefore an improvement in his self confidence.

Self confidence can also be enhanced through vicarious experience for example watching others perform and carrying out skills successfully. Another method is verbal persuasion using self-talk or reinforcement from the coach.

One of the first steps of the plan is to develop a personalised list of positive self-statements, maybe after each competition, to look at some of his achievements. These are written down several times after every competition. After a time these affirmations become easier to repeat and the

golfer will become more comfortable with positive thinking. He will then be able to repeat these in a competition situation as a way of sustaining confidence. This will also allow the golfer to focus on himself and not on the crowd. This plan could also be used as a recording and used before and after a competition. Some examples of what to use on the list would be; " I am confident in my ability", " I have the skills to perform well", " I feel mentally strong", " My behaviour before was wasted energy which does not help me".

It is important that the list is changed occasionally and to also have it available even when things are going well. This eventually should set a strong sense of self belief, it is important that the golfer truly believes what he has written and to not feel like he is being arrogant or big-headed in any way. What he is writing is personal to him, know one else will need to see this so he must be honest.

Another specific list to use would be a competition-specific self affirmation. The golfer would benefit from identifying with statements that are related to a specific performance this would act as attitude reminders. Examples for this would be; " My preparation has been excellent for this competition", " I know I can handle the pressure of this performance", " I will maintain a fighting spirit throughout this tournament", " Any anxiety that may occur I will transform into energy and inspiration".

Any of these lists can be used whenever the golfer is feeling doubtful and use them as a positive mental preparation.

Goal setting is one of the most important coaching tools, because it can give performers direction and then help them to achieve success. Through goal setting new techniques can be learned and also guide their concentration from anxiety, frustration and aggression to focus more on a technique and this will increase the athletes motivation.

The goals need to be challenging but realistic, helping to translate into the overall aims of the golfer into specific tricks, moves, plays, times and programs, routines, scores and performance levels. These short term goals need to relate to the long term goals with specific target dates for achievement. Even successfully completing one of the short term goals will help to maintain motivation and build self confidence. The short term goals could include mastering a certain skill, doing intense workouts, getting adequate rest or completing so many of these goals by the end of the week. The short term goals are essentially to improve the golfer not only physically but mentally. The long term goals need to include a routine or program needed for an important event for example, speed, distance, time, or skills that the golfer wants to attain by the end of the year or achieving a good performance or a personal best in an important competition. The coach and golfer must agree on goals that will apply to the golfers needs and that will also be useful for his long term needs.

Many sports people have problems with the pressure that society puts on winning. If the task or performance was concentrated on more, then winning would come naturally, winning would come later. It is important that the view of losing is modified so whether the golfer wins or loses he will achieve some

personal success through training and competition. Encouraging the golfer to focus on personal achievement rather than winning gives him greater control and confidence in his ability for success.

" Imagery is a psychological activity that is mostly inward, belonging to the class of ' private events'". – (Singer et al., 2001).

Everyone has the ability to generate and use imagery. Betts conducted one of the first studies into the use of imagery in 1909. He found that imagery is often used in doing tasks such as simple association, logical thinking and mental multiplication. Imagery is used widely in athletes of all levels in both training and competition to facilitate skill learning and improve performance.

It is widely perceived that imagery is most commonly used and most effective immediately prior to competing. The most widely practiced method of imagery within sport is Cognitive Specific Imagery. Cognitive Specific (CS) imagery has three standards; a physical practice condition, an imagery condition, and a control condition. The physical practice condition involves the participant actually performing the set skill for a number of repetitions or a given amount of time. Then during the imagery condition the participant would mentally rehearse the set skill for the same number of repetitions or a given amount of time. During the control condition the participant should not do any physical or imagery practice, they should rest or practice an unrelated skill.

It is generally agreed that although imagery does not give as effective results as physical practice, it does go some way to facilitating the learning and performance of motor skills.

The plan is to incorporate CS imagery into both the golfers training and also into his competition scenarios.

It would be beneficial during training if the golfer was able to use the different conditions in order to learn and perfect skills. For this to be achievable it will also be necessary to involve and educate the coach.

A good example of the use of these techniques would be on the golfers stroke play, both long and short. To start, before going anywhere near the golf course, time must be spent on the driving range. Here the golfer should use both physical practice and imagery to control his use of the club and stroke selection. The coach outlined that the golfer has a reputation for hitting the ball far from the tee which suggests a good technique is definitely there.

One approach would be for the golfer to start with his tee shot, with an initial target of 250 yards, although this should be altered so that the golfer has the experience and so is able to use imagery on tee shots of varying distances. During the practice condition, which should last for approximately 30 balls, the golfer should be constantly thinking and adjusting his stroke, with assistance from his coach, until the right distance is met on a regular basis. The purpose of setting a specific distance is so that the golfer is not just hitting the ball as far as he can, but actually putting thought into his

technique and power distribution. Following on from the practice condition should be imagery which will allow the golfer to go over the technique used when playing the stroke and visualising it mentally. It is important that as much time is spent on this imagery stage as was spent on the practice condition. The final condition, control, can be met in either of two ways. Either via rest, were the golfer should make no thought about the previous task, or by practicing a totally unrelated skill, putting for example.

An essential part of Cognitive Specific (CS) imagery for the golfer will be taking the skills and knowledge gained on the driving range and directly applying them to a competition scenario.

For example, during the next competition the golfer may find himself in a situation where it is necessary to hit a straight drive off the tee around 240-260 yards onto the green. As soon as the golfer reaches the tee all previous thoughts and performance should be ignored and all his attention should be put onto visualising the practice sessions. This increased concentration should enable the golfer not only to perform more consistently and to his full potential, but also to not be concerned with any comments coming from the crowd because of the state of concentration.