

Sports psychology



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Sport Psychology Athletes in today's society are bigger, stronger, and faster than ever before but they still share the same goals as their predecessors, climb to the top of their sport and be crowned champion. Unlike in previous generations, the " game" is no longer just a game, it's a booming business. Major League Baseball alone boasts a three point seven billion dollar a year industry.

In this new generation of big business, how do athletes cope with the pressure of grossing fifteen million dollars a year and performing in front of twenty thousand screaming fans packed into Madison Square Garden or seventy-two thousand fanatical " Cheese Heads" at Lambeau Field? One of those answers is with sport psychology. But one answer leads us down a convoluted path with many other unanswered questions. This paper will define sport psychology and identify where it come from. It will also discuss the objectives of sport psychology and how are they applied.

The final topic will describe sport psychologists do. According to the sport psychology program at San Diego State University, sport psychology can be defined as " the study of people and their behavior in sport and exercise contexts", or " the effect of sport itself on human behavior", or " a field of study in which the principles of psychology are applied in a sports setting. "(SDSU, web para. 1) How did we arrive at this definition? The history of sport psychology can be divided into five periods dating as early as 1895 to the present.

The first period is from 1895-1920. Norman Triplett, a psychology professor at Indiana University, was the first researcher to confirm that bicyclists sometimes rode faster when they raced in groups or pairs than when they

rode alone. Following Triplett's work in 1899 is E. W. Scripture of Yale. Scripture believed that a certain set of personality traits could be fostered through participation in sports. In 1903, G. T. W Patrick wrote an article for the " American Journal of Psychology" that stated attending sporting events allowed fans to release pent-up emotions.

We wrap up the early era with Coleman Griffith. Griffith began informal research of basketball and football players in 1918. His research led to the second period of sport psychology named in his honor, the Griffith era. The Griffith era of sport psychology begins in 1921 and runs into 1938. Coleman Griffith is considered the grandfather of North American Sport Psychology due to his contributions during this period. Between 1921 and 1931, Griffith published over twenty five research articles relating to sport psychology.

Griffith was also appointed as the director of research in athletics at the University of Illinois in 1925. The focus of the department was psychomotor skills, learning, and personality. The largest accomplishments of Griffith come in 1926 and 1928 when he wrote Psychology of Coaching and Psychology of Athletics respectively. We close the Griffith era when Phillip Wrigley hires him as sport psychologist for the Chicago Cubs in 1938. The third and fourth periods of sport psychology are by far the slowest developing time for the new science.

This portion begins in 1938 when Franklin Henry of the University of California, Berkeley established the psychology of physical activity graduate program. The forties and fifties were rather stagnant but we arrive in Rome, Italy for the first World Congress of Sport Psychology in 1965. Following the World Congress gathering is the first annual North American Society for the

Psychology of Sport and Physical Activity (NASPSPA) conference in 1967. NASPSPA closed the door on the fourth period in 1974 when they published the proceedings of their conference for the first time.

Our current period in sport psychology is considered the contemporary period. The first event of the contemporary period was the establishment of the “ Journal of Sport Psychology”, which is now known as “ Sport and Exercise Psychology”. One of the most monumental steps was during the 1984 Olympic Games when American television emphasized the role that sport psychology played in premier athletic training. The US Olympic Team hired its first full-time sport psychologist in 1985. The trend continued in 1986 as The Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology (AAASP) is established.

The AAASP began to publish their official journal in 1989. Finally, the AAASP began to award the “ certified consultant” designation in 1991. Now that we know what sport psychology is and where it began, we can attempt to determine the objectives of sport psychology. The first basic objective in sport psychology is to learn how psychological factors shape a person’s physical performance. The second objective is to comprehend how participation in athletics affects a person’s psychological health, development, and well-being. With those two objectives in mind, how do we actually apply them?

First off, there are a number of reasons for sport psychology, and for every reason, there is a distinct group of people who are using sport psychology to their advantage. With that said, let’s move on to those reasons. The first reason for sport psychology is probably the most obvious, the pursuit of

excellence by athletes. Simply put, sport psychology plays a vital role in how athletes train. Next is the enormous salaries paid in professional sports today. A 24 year old college graduate being drafted by a professional sports team is suddenly a very wealthy person overnight.

Most people need assistance in transitioning to that kind of lifestyle. Our third reason is the undisputable fact that the recognition gained by athletic competition is huge. Most children cannot tell you that the current Vice President of the United States is Dick Cheney but could tell you who Alex Rodriguez or Ron James are, who they play for, and what position they play. The final reason for sports psychology is what is known as the fitness movement. The phenomena can be dated back to the fifties where fitness was beginning to be sold as a way of life.

It is safe to say that fitness is a way of life. The television can confirm this as it is filled with ads that include sports drinks and home exercise equipment. What groups is sport psychology for? We can start with our children when we let them play tee ball and pee wee football and work all the way through senior citizens taking aerobics classes at the nearest community center. We can also include our novice intramural softball leagues on the weekends all the way to our elite professionals and Olympians competing on the world stage.

Applying sport psychology techniques to most of the different groups in sports is very basic. The most popular group for sport psychologists are coaches, teachers, fitness trainers, and elite athletes. Coaches, teachers, and fitness trainers receive basic reinforcement and motivation training to help them get their teams to perform. Our elite athletes however have a full

scope of services offered to them. Most professionally owned sports teams have a team of three to four sport psychologists assisting the organization. It can be considered a type of insurance policy on their investment.

Let's discuss how this "insurance policy" work for the pros. Sports psychologists handle many issues depending on the sub area of sport psychology in which they certified. The two basic areas are clinical sport psychology and educational sport psychology. The less traveled path of these is the clinical approach. These specialists are licensed psychologists and primarily deal with severe emotional disorders. Examples of these are athletes with eating disorders and substance abuse. The most common area of sport psychology is the educational side.

Educational sport psychologists have been trained with a sport science background. This type of psychology is considered the mental coach approach. The goal of these psychologists is to assist coaches and athletes with shortcomings in their confidence level, dealing with performance anxiety, and improving concentration skills. Educational sport psychologists are typically employed by professional sports teams. These psychologists are not certified in clinical psychology and usually refer athletes with more severe disorders to a clinical psychologist.

With sports and exercise such a big part of today's society, there comes a need for a field dedicated to the psychological aspects of sports and exercise. Sport psychology has grown from an accidental study of cyclists to a science that can identify what athlete performs better and why. This paper has defined what sport psychology is and where it started. I have also covered the objectives of sport psychology and how they are applied. Finally,

I covered what sport psychologists do. The next time you sit down to watch a professional sports contest you can ask yourself if this athlete is mentally prepared to perform today.

WORKS SITED American Board of Sport Psychology. <http://www.americanboardofsportpsychology.org/> Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology. <http://www.aaasponline.org/> Martin, Scott. <http://www.coe.unt.edu/martin/KINE5121/5121intr.htm> University of North Texas. 2004 SDSU sport psychology <http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~psyched/index.html> Street and Smith. “ For a handful of sport psychologists serving teams, a mind is a terrible thing to overlook”. Street and Smith’s Sports Business Journal. http://www.mwiop.com/perf_consult/articles/sport_a.html December 1999.