

Psychological strategies

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Psychological strategies can be used by athletes to enhance motivation and manage anxiety, including concentration/attention skills, mental rehearsal, visualisation, relaxation and goal setting. An elite basketball player can use the above strategies in many ways to have a successful outcome while maintaining motivation and anxiety when playing a game. Concentration and attention skills allow the athlete to focus on the task at hand and ignore other distractions. Concentration or attention skills refer to the ability of the athlete to focus their thoughts and energy into the task at hand.

It allows the athlete to focus on relevant cues and ignore distractions, for example, the crowd booing, when shooting for a netball goal. Mental rehearsal and visualisation is where individuals conduct perfect practice in their mind prior to performance, thereby enhancing their ability to physically perform the skills when required. Athletes who are susceptible to a state of over-arousal can implement relaxation techniques such as controlled breathing, massage, meditation, yoga, progressive muscular relaxation and self-hypnosis to manage this over-arousal.

Mental rehearsal, visualisation and imagery involve practising the performance or skill, or the environment in which it is performed in the athlete's mind. This allows athletes to develop a visual image of the performance in a non-threatening environment. This visual image can help the performer focus on the movements required to produce an optimal performance, increase concentration and confidence. Goals settings are targets that an individual aspires to achieve and can be short or long term, and behaviour or performance oriented. Setting goals allows an athlete's progress to be planned and monitored over a period of time.

Goal setting also increases motivation and commitment levels providing the athlete with a clear direction. Goals need to be realistic and achievable to be effective. Goals may relate to areas such as the overall performance, specific skills involved, fitness or behaviours. Relaxation techniques are techniques that, with practice, reduce arousal levels and limit the impact of over-arousal. Relaxation helps the athlete lower their stress level and calm themselves before a performance. Techniques that can be used to achieve this include progressive muscular relaxation, meditation, centred breathing, and hypnosis.