The Application of Sport Psychology for Performance Optimization

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Don Malone, July 1, 2024

**Abstract**

 As it pertains to performance optimization in athletes, Daniel Gould and Robert C. Eklund show us the importance of sport psychology and psychological skills training. The myths, training techniques and implementation of training techniques outlined in the reading show why psychological skills training is a vital tool in athletic performance. To better grasp an understanding of sports psychology, the authors give the readers five myths about sports psychology and how they debunked them. They give readers insight into the research they conducted to gather information and their findings from their research. They then illustrate the process of creating and implementing psychological skills training and how it correlates to an athlete’s peak performance ability. Then lastly the authors walk readers though the proper steps in designing and modifying psychological skills training specifically for your own individual groups. The seven steps to designing and implementing psychological skills training for athlete performance optimization goes into detail on how to identify objectives, define your objectives, identify strategies to develop specific psychological skills, design a training schedule, organize your skills training program, evaluate changes in athlete psychological skills and lastly identify obstacles to psychological skills training and create solutions to overcome them.

After reading the article, I would characterize it as very practical and educational. In my view, the authors do a great job in educating the readers on sports psychology and sport psychological skills training. I think they give clear descriptions of what each is and why they are important. Then they do a good job in giving readers the tools they need to implement their own psychological skills training and give great detail in how to properly follow each step in the process of implementation and what exactly each step is. I believe Gould and Eklund did a phenomenal job at making this article very practical to the reader as well as educational for anyone with little to no experience or tons of experience in the sport psychology field.

 The main concept in the article is applying sports psychology to athletes to have them reach their optimal performance level. The idea of sport psychology and how it is used is a topic that is increasing more and more in today’s athletes, and I think that it was discussed greatly by the authors in the article. Gould and Eklund do a wonderful in readers exactly how sports psychology is defined and practiced in today’s athletic settings. As well as defining what exactly psychological skills training is and a clear image of how it can help athletes as well as very specific steps to follow to get the best results possible when implementing psychological skills training to have athletes achieve their optimal performance in their specific sport. From my current standpoint as a high school teacher and coach, I am starting to see a lot of emphasis be put on the psychological side of how we train our athletes. From this perspective, this article is very beneficial to any coach from the youth level all the way up to high school. I believe another more subtle or supporting theme in the article is how to properly implement psychological training with athletes. I think the authors do a great job at giving the readers instructions on how to start working on psychological skills training with our own athletes. I also believe that as coaches, we should go into this type of training with the mindset of not necessarily training our athletes to win but train our athletes how to handle situations as they come up in life. So much of youth, high school, and college sports are focused on winning and getting kids to perform at their best to win, that as coaches we often forget that they have lives to live. I think psychological skills training not only can help athletes be successful in their sport, but also be successful in life. To me as a coach, I try my best to not only teach my athletes about the sport they play, but also teach them how to handle adversity in the “real” world. I truly believe that psychological skills training can greatly benefit an athlete’s personal life just as much as their athletic, competitive life. IN my opinion, this article does a great job at showing us exactly how to start and begin the process of using sports psychology to help athletes reach their optimal levels not just for performance, but for life.

 The author’s purpose in writing this article is to illustrate and show the importance of sports psychological skills training. Often when it comes to training, no one talks about the psychological side of sports. All coaches always talk about being mentally tough, but exactly how do you train mental toughness? Physical strength is generally always worked on in the off-season for athletes, but when do they make time to train psychological skills? I believe this article sheds light on the importance of training psychological skills and how to begin the process of starting to train psychological skills. I also believe the authors did a fantastic job of debunking myths around sport psychology. This served as a great purpose to show readers exactly what sport psychology is and what it isn’t. Gould and Eklund did a good job at providing evidence for each myth as to why it is in fact a myth. I believe having these myths at the beginning of the article really encourages readers to be invested into what the article says and perhaps even changes the perspectives of readers as they read through the article.

 Gould and Eklund wrote this article from the perspective of sports psychologists. I feel that they wrote in a way that helps readers understand what they are discussing and they do a good job of teaching what they are talking about throughout the article. They could’ve come from a perspective of knowing everything and written the article in a way that bashes those that do not believe or think sport psychology is important, but they chose to be very educational and practical in their article. I think this is great; I believe it allows readers to be taught more about sport psychology and psychological skills training as they read through the article rather than just be told about it. I appreciate that Gould and Eklund wrote the article in the way and perspective that they did because to me it was very informative and explanative on the topics discussed.

 Throughout the article the authors bring up several important ideas around sports psychology and psychological skills training. The first key idea they discuss are common myths dealing with sports psychology. Gould and Eklund outline five different myths associated with sports psychology and tell readers exactly why each one is a myth. They do a great job at providing different evidence for each myth. Another idea the authors mentioned in the article is core sport psychology topics for athlete performance optimization. To help readers better understand this idea, the authors discussed three different research studies. The first study they cited was done by JM Williams and she compared successful athletes to less-successful athletes. The second study was conducted by Gould, Murphy, Tammen and May where they surveyed elite coaches and athletes associated with the United States Olympic Committee National Governing Body Sports Programs. The individuals in the study were asked to rate the importance of various sport psychological topics. Then the last study used to address core central topics for performance optimization was conducted by Dr. Shane Murphy. His study focused on actual problems and concerns of athletes in high level competition. These three studies showed that they all play a factor in performance optimization, but ultimately individual athlete differences need to think of and recognized as well to best determine a program of psychological skill training. The next big, key idea mentioned in the article is designing and implementing psychological skills training programs for athlete performance optimization. The authors give readers seven steps to design a psychological skills training program. They do a great job at explaining the process of each step and how to implement and start it. Each step builds on the previous step, so it forces you to follow them to get the best results. I think this is great because as a high school coach, my budget is limited and if I can follow these steps accordingly and begin to do psychological skills training with my athletes even at a basic level without a sports psychology consultant, that will help my athletes tremendously. I believe the authors do a great job at providing great evidence for the major points and ideas they present in the article. They give the readers facts and show previous studies by other sport psychologists as well as doing a great job at citing all the sources that they used for this article. Gould and Eklund cited and used many sources, one that stood out to me was the work of Dr. Shane Murphy. The authors reference his work that he did in 1987 as the first sport psychologist assigned to provide psychological consulting services at the U.S. Olympic festival. I found this interesting because he focused on dealing with practical problems like anxiety, training stress and fatigue, information on mental plans and visualization information. I also found this to be very informative and show that even the best of the best athletes that compete in the Olympics struggle and need help. It was shocking as well, that it was not until 1987 when a sport psychologist got assigned to provide consultant help to Olympic athletes. I think that just shows how little people knew about sport psychology back then and why it is so important and relevant in today’s world.

 Throughout the article the authors do a great job at showing why sports psychology and psychological skills training is important in athletes. Gould and Eklund do a fantastic job at giving good, useful information that can be taken and applied to athletes right away. The reasoning as to why psychological skills training needs to take place and the steps provided are great tools to get the process started. A weakness one could argue is that in one specific section of the article called “The Need for a Team Approach to Sport Science Training” it states they recommend a psychological skills personnel triad consisting of the athlete, coach and sport psychology consultant. They say this will help and lead to the best results. Now this could be a problem, because not every coach has the funds to hire a sport psychology consultant to work with their team. For instance, I know for my own high school baseball team that I coach, we do not have the funds to bring someone in to assist in psychological skills training. I will be the one working with all my athletes this upcoming offseason. So, I believe it would have been very beneficial to a lot of people reading this article if Gould and Eklund could have provided more insight into how to best and effectively work with your athletes in psychological skills training when a sport psychology consultant is unavailable or unobtainable for your program.

I thought “The Application of Sport Psychology for Performance Optimization” was very easy to read. The authors did a wonderful job at connecting the topics discussed in the article in a way that really made the paper have a good flow to it. I never once felt like I was reading something that was written in a way that I could not understand. Gould and Eklund did a great job in writing out and explaining all the information in the article. I found the information very important and relevant to myself. As a current high school teacher and coach, the article was very beneficial to me. In fact, I plan on creating and implementing some kind of psychological skills training for my baseball team this fall as part of our offseason program. I think sports psychology is a growing field with huge implications on athletes’ performances and the more research and findings we have, the better we will be.

 I fully believe the information given to the readers in the article can be used in a very practical way. The authors give us seven direct steps to designing a psychological skills training program with exactly what each step is and how to do each step. I do not think it can get more practical than that. I agree with key ideas in the article, and I like how the authors presented them to the readers and the information given with each idea. I think that psychological skill training is important and really something that we are only truly starting to understand and study. I believe that in the next five to ten years we will see immense growth in this field of study and majority of college athletic teams and even high school teams will start having a sport psychology consultant help with their athletic programs if they are not already.

The biggest idea that impressed me that I found most helpful was reading and understanding the steps in designing psychological skills training programs. I really enjoyed reading that section and reading about each step. I found how the authors wrote this section very easy to read and follow and I plan on implementing a PST program this fall with my baseball team. I will be following the seven steps listed in the article as my guide and adjust as needed according to athletes in my baseball program, but I fully believe that starting a psychological skills training program will help the baseball program.

Something that I would consider pursuing and looking into would be psychological skills training. I would be very interested in finding if there are multiple ways to teach and practice certain skills, what methods get the best results and is psychological skills training something that after a certain age or amount of time practicing does a person reach a max or limit out on their ability to learn? Also, I would be very interested in learning how to handle and coach athletes that struggle to reach their optimal performance level. This would be very beneficial to learn and apply in my current position.

Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed reading this article. I found it to be very educational and practical. It offered insights on how to help athletes get to their optimal performance levels and gave great information on how to implement PST programs. I know I will be using the steps given in the article as a guide this upcoming fall to implement a psychological skills training program for my baseball team during our offseason. I think any coach at any level should read this article, as I believe it offers great insight into helping athletes achieve their optimal performance level, not only on the field but also in life.