Overcoming Psychological Barriers: Applications for Peak Performance

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Overview

- Introduction
- Defining Peak Performance
- Comparing High Achievers (HA) & Low Achievers (LA)
- Considerations for Identifying Barriers to Peak Performance
- Common Barriers to Peak Performance
- Considerations for Building a Culture of High Achievement
- Strategies for Overcoming Barriers to Peak Performance
- Final Thoughts
Introduction
Introduction - Background

• Background:
  – Former NCAA DI athlete
  – MS in Sport Psychology
    • Applied work & research
  – Coaching
    • High school, NCAA DI & DIII levels

• Inspired by:
  – Personal experience
  – Articles by professionals in field
  – Discussion with colleagues
Introduction - Philosophy

• Coaching Philosophy
  – Holistic approach emphasizing personal, interpersonal, physical & psychological growth
  – Assist student-athletes in actualizing their potential while providing them with skills in which to excel in other avenues of their lives
  – The “Head Case” Myth
    • All athletes can improve
    • Accountability of athletes’ performance
      – Physical skills
      – Mental approach
Introduction - Purpose

• Focus of discussions/articles:
  – Mental approach outcomes of high achievers (HA)
  – The differences b/w HA & low achievers (LA)

• How do we get non-HA closer to their potential?
  – Special considerations?
  – Strategies?
Introduction - Purpose

• Purpose:
  – Identify some common psychological barriers to peak performance
  – Make considerations for building a culture of high achievement
  – Provide specific strategies for overcoming psychological barriers
What is Peak Performance?
Defining Peak Performance

• Definition:
  – “…state of superior functioning...clearly focused attention, lack of concern with outcome, effortless performance, perception of time slowing down, & a feeling of supreme confidence (Brewer et. al, 1991)

• Characteristics of Peak Performance
  – State of Flow
    • Demands & skills are high
    • Motivation & confidence high
    • Complete concentration & control
  – Peak performance, not necessarily ELITE
    • Specific to individual
    • Timely & repeatable
Comparing High & Low Achievers: Achievement Motivation
Achievement Motivation of HA & LA

• HA:
  – High motivation to achieve success
  – Low motivation to avoid failure
  – Focus on pride of success
  – Seek out challenges, able competitors, demanding tasks
  – Perform well in evaluative settings
    • Adopt process goals
Achievement Motivation of HA & LA

• LA:
  – Low motivation to achieve success
  – High motivation to avoid failure
  – Focus on shame & worry that may result from failure
  – Perform poorly in evaluative settings
    • Adopt outcome goals
Achievement Motivation of HA & LA

• Attributions of HA:
  • Success = stable, internal, controllable
    • Ability (stable), effort (internal), race plan (control)
  • Failure = unstable, external, uncontrollable
    • Bad luck (unstable), competitor’s performance (external), poor weather (out of control)
  • Enhanced expectancy of success & intrinsic motivation

• Attributions of LA:
  • Success = unstable, external, uncontrollable
  • Failure = stable, internal, controllable
  • Decreased expectancy of success & intrinsic motivation
Comparing High & Low Achievers: Self-Confidence
Self-Confidence of HA & LA

• Self-confidence of HA:
  – Stable
  – Past successes
    • Competition & training
    • Goal achievement
  – Motivated by modeling
  – Positive verbal persuasion
    • External & internal
  – Higher competency & control
    • Skills to meet demands
    • High level of preparation

• Self-confidence of LA:
  – Unstable
  – Past failures
    • Competition & training
    • Faulty goal-setting
  – Threatened by modeling
  – Negative verbal persuasion
    • External & internal
  – Low competency & control
    • High levels of arousal & anxiety
Comparing High & Low Achievers: Psychological Skills
Psychological Skills of High Achievers

• Concentration
  – HA able to “quiet the noise”
    • Focus on relevant cues
      – Refrain from over-analysis
      – Limit distractors
    • Can refocus quickly
      – Positive self-talk
Psychological Skills of High Achievers

• Arousal & Anxiety Regulation
  – High self-awareness
  – Arousal/anxiety = facilitative
  – Routines to achieve optimal level
    • Reducing techniques
    • Inducing techniques
Psychological Skills of High Achievers

- Individualized Zone of Optimal Functioning
  (Hanin, 1980)

**Figure 4.5** Individualized zones of optimal functioning (IZOF).
Considerations for Identifying Barriers to Peak Performance
Identifying Barriers to Peak Performance

- Understanding the athlete:
  - Personality type
  - Attributions

- Ongoing process:
  - Recruiting
  - Individual meetings
  - Evaluate, evaluate, evaluate

- Identify barriers through:
  - Open discussion
  - Experience
  - Observation
Common Barriers to Peak Performance
Common Barriers

- Faulty Motivational Processes
- Issues with Self-Confidence
- Faulty Psychological Skills
Common Barriers

• Faulty Motivational Processes
  – Achievement motivation:
    • Fear of failure & uncertainty
  – Faulty attributions
  – Faulty motivational orientation:
    • Losing sight of process
    • Lack of dedication to mastery
    • Lack of passion & resilience
Common Barriers

• Issues with Self-Confidence
  – Lack of or fluctuations in confidence
    • Low perceived competence
    • Low perceived control

• Faulty Psychological Skills
  – Poor arousal/anxiety regulation
    • Self-awareness
    • Coping strategies/routines
  – Loss of focus/concentration
    • Over-analysis
    • Poor self-talk
Considerations for Building a Culture of High Achievement
Building a Culture of High Achievement

- Emphasize qualities of HA
  - You get what you train
- “Walk the talk”
  - Actions match philosophy
  - Model desired qualities
- Foster support & cooperation
- Building trust
  - Process & product
Building a Culture of High Achievement

• Establish Motivational Climate
  – Foster task/mastery approach
    • Demand change, not perfection
    • Embrace failure
  – Enhance intrinsic motivation
    • Perception of competence & control
  – Enhance competitiveness
    • Practice competing
    • Develop skills to compete
Building a Culture of High Achievement

• Establish effective communication
  – Feedback
  – Reinforcement

• Empower athletes
  – Provide autonomy
  – Accountability of development
  – Foster faith development
Strategies for Overcoming Psychological Barriers
Strategy 1: Training & Competition Plans

• Training Plans
  – Informed by research/experience
  – Individualized
  – Prioritization of skill acquisition
    • Planned progressions
    • Training themes
  – Volume & intensity considerations

• Competition Plans
  – Individualized
    • Athlete input
    • Consider academic calendar
    • Transparency
  – Competitions
    • Events contested
    • Define number of efforts
    • “Being clutch”
  – Ensure health during championship season
## Strategy 1: Training & Competition Plans

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<td>LJ x 6</td>
<td>LC</td>
<td>TJ x 3-6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*Finals Week
Strategy 1: Training & Competition Plans

• Barriers Addressed:
  – Faulty motivational processes
    • Enhanced commitment to process
  – Self-Confidence
    • Enhance perceptions of control
  – Focus/concentration
    • Enhanced focus on competitive opportunities
Strategy 2: Goal Mapping

• Systematic Goal-Setting (Weinberg & Gould, 2016)
  – Directs attention & mobilizes effort
  – Enhances intrinsic motivation & persistence
  – Leads to changes in psych factors (e.g., motivation, confidence) which lead to enhanced performance

• Goal Mapping
  – Personalized plan
  – Variety of goals & strategies
  – Systematic evaluation
Strategy 2: Goal Mapping

- The Goal Mapping Process:
  - **DO YOUR HOMEWORK**
    - Who are the competitors?
    - Rate of improvement?
    - Performance standards (e.g., time, height, distance)?
  - Set outcome goals
    - Competitive finish in major championships (e.g., NCAA’s, Conference)
  - Set performance goals
    - Performance standards needed to achieve outcome goal(s)
    - Set consistency goals
  - Set process goals*
    - Measureable, short-term goals
    - Focus on skill acquisition & mental training priorities
    - Discuss goal-achievement strategies
Strategy 2: Goal Mapping

• The Goal Mapping Process (cont.)
  – List perceived obstacles
    • Plan for overcoming
      – Action-oriented
  – Evaluation process
    • Ongoing
    • Mid-season & end of season
    • Goal adjustment
      – Goals achieved
      – Circumstances change
      – Too lofty/too easy
# Jumps Goal Setting

**Outcome Goals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indoor</th>
<th>Outdoor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Top 3 NE D1/D2s (Jump at least 5.40m)</td>
<td>- Top 3 NE D1/D2s (Jump at least 5.50m)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Qualify for NCAA’s (approx. 5.60m)</td>
<td>- Top 8 Nationals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Top 8 Nationals (Jump at least 5.75m)</td>
<td>- Be All American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Be All American (Be a top 8 finisher)</td>
<td>- Be a top 8 finisher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Performance Goals (Include Consistency Goals)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indoor</th>
<th>Outdoor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Jump 5.65m</td>
<td>- Jump 5.80m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I want to jump 5.40m or better, 50% of the meets during indoor.</td>
<td>- I want to jump 5.50m or better, 50% of the meets during outdoor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I want to jump 5.25m or better, 100% of the meets during indoor.</td>
<td>- I want to jump 5.35m or better, 100% of the meets during indoor.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Process Goals (Make objective/measurable)**

- Work on being more consistent with my approach so I can mark 75% of my jumps.
- Put my finish together so I will stop losing some distance from my finishes. Staying neutral the majority of the time.
- Improve my clean by 1 lb from indoor.
- Improve general strength to help stay injury free.

**Potential Obstacles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obstacle</th>
<th>Strategy for Overcoming Obstacle</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Injury</td>
<td>Engage in appropriate pre and post practice activities: foam rolling, ice bathing, stretching, proper cool downs etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other athletes</td>
<td>No other strategy than working as best I can and believing myself.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strategy 2: Goal Mapping

- Barriers Addressed:
  - Motivation
    - Enhanced commitment to process
    - Dedication to mastery of skills
    - Enhanced persistence & resilience
  - Self-confidence
    - Enhanced perception of competence
      - Successful past performances
  - Focus/Concentration
    - Enhanced attention to skill development
Strategy 3: Competition Goal-Setting

• Competition Goal-Setting Process:
  – Prior to & after each meet
  – Set outcome, performance, & process goals
  – Evaluate process
### MEET: Bowdoin (Pre)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process Goal(s) for Meet</th>
<th>Performance Goal(s) for Meet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>HJ</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Focus on starting curve later</td>
<td>- Win</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Use arms and hold knee drive</td>
<td>- Jump 5'4&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Stay aggressive at higher heights (don’t overthink)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### MEET: Bowdoin (Post)

- **Achieve process/performance goals? Why/why not?**
  - I achieved my goals this week.
  - I’m super psyched for the season after this meet. Really proud of how I handled myself at 1.69m. Usually I get too freaked out by higher heights to take good jumps, but I think I figured out a way to get over that by thinking about what happens when the bar seems high to me in practice. A lot of times in practice this year the bar has seemed really high but I still [miraculously] have had the ability to clear it, so I just thought about that.

- **Positive Takeaways/way forward?**
  - I think I did a good job of starting the curve later and using my arms and holding my knee drive. I still think I can do better with holding my knee drive and helping myself up over the bar better. I think I did wayyyyy better than I ever have at not overthinking higher heights.
Strategy 3: Competition Goal-Setting

• Barriers Addressed:
  – Motivation
    • Enhanced commitment to process
    • Evaluation of process
    • Enhanced resilience
  – Self-confidence
    • Sense of control
    • Build off past performances
  – Focus/Concentration
    • Enhanced attention to task development
Strategy 4: Addressing Self-Talk

• Improving Self-Talk
  – Attribution Retraining
    • Evaluate/reframe attributions
      – Successes - stable, controllable, internal
      – Setbacks - unstable, external, uncontrollable
    • Focus on pride of success, minimize shame of failure
  – Self Talk Logs
    • Thought stoppage
    • Reframe negative self-talk
    • Refocusing cue words
Strategy 4: Addressing Self-Talk

• Barriers Addressed:
  – Diminished fear of failure
  – Shift achievement motivation
    • Incentive for success
    • Pride of success
  – Self-confidence
    • Improved thought stoppage/reframing
  – Enhanced focus/concentration
    • Refocused thoughts
Strategy 5: Pre-Competition Routines

• Developing Pre-Competition Routines
  – Awareness of optimal zone (IZOF)
    • Evaluate best performance(s)
      – Address mindset & preparation
        » Days prior & during
      – Prioritize controllable factors
      – Identify optimal arousal/anxiety levels
        » Tailor strategies to recreate mindset
Strategy 5: Pre-Competition Routines

- Developing Pre-Competition Routines
  - Strategies for Arousal/Anxiety Regulation
    - Imagery
      - Controllability & vividness
    - Breathing techniques
    - Cue words/self-talk
    - Music
Strategy 5: Pre-Competition Routines

• Barriers Addressed:
  – Motivation
    • Diminished fear of failure
      – Arousal/anxiety perceived as facilitative
    • Enhanced resilience & coping
  – Self-confidence
    • Enhanced perception of control
    • Visualization of successful performance
  – Enhanced focus/concentration
    • Focus on task rather than obstacles
Strategy 6: Developing Cue Systems

- Manipulating Motor Learning
  - Augmented feedback
    - Knowledge of performance
    - Knowledge of results
  - Feedback directs attention
    - Internal focus:
      - Body’s movement or specific body part
    - External focus:
      - Effects of movement or outcome
Strategy 6: Developing Cue Systems

• Developing Cue Systems
  – External focus
    • Automatic & relevant processing
    • Enhanced performance
  – Internal focus
    • Conscious processing & interference
      – Decreased accuracy
      – Reduced power output
      – Slower movement
    • Over-analysis
Strategy 6: Developing Cue Systems

• Internal Cues
  – Acceleration
    • “Extend through the hip”
    • “Keep the heels low”
  – Max Velocity
    • “Extend vertically through hip”
  – HJ (Curve Running)
    • “Run foot over foot”

• External Cues
  – Acceleration
    • “Push the ground away”
    • “Mow the grass”
  – Max Velocity
    • “Hammer the nail”
  – HJ (Curve Running)
    • “Push against the curve”
Strategy 6: Developing Cue Systems

• Cue System Considerations:
  – Clear/concise messaging
  – Periodization of cues
    • Avoid staleness
    • Progression of skill acquisition
    • Fading feedback
  – Rehearsal of communication
    • Meet simulation
Strategy 6: Developing Cue Systems

• Barriers Addressed:
  – Improved focus/concentration
    • Less over-analysis
    • Focused on outcome of movement
    • Enhanced motor learning & performance
Conclusion & Final Thoughts
Final Thoughts

• “Many roads lead to Rome”
• Put in the time
• Be patient
• Prioritize & develop
• Evaluate, evaluate, evaluate
• Trust yourself
Helpful Resources


Questions?