

# PSYCHOLOGY AND SPORT

By

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## **What is the Psychology of Sports?**

Simply put, psychology is the study of the mind and its behavior in relation to a particular field of knowledge or activity of an individual or group. Sport Psychology is the study and application of the characteristics of the mind as it relates to sports.

## **How important is the mental aspect of sport?**

Extremely important. Most coaches and athletes at the elite/professional levels feel that mental preparation is the difference between winning and losing.

## **Which group showed the greatest improvement?**

In the U.S., sport psychology has been used to correct problems. In the former Soviet Union, Sport Psychology concentrated on creating methods to maximize performance. In one experiment, four matched groups of world class Soviet athletes diligently trained before the 1980 Winter Games at Lake Placid, as follows:

Group I- 100% Physical Training

Group II- 75% Physical Training, 25% Mental

Group III- 50% Physical Training, 50% Mental

Group IV- 25% Physical Training, 75% Mental

## **Which group showed the greatest improvement? What's your answer. See Below.**

Mental Training/Sport Psychology has been proven to be a valuable tool and is becoming a necessity for many coaches and athletes looking for "THE EDGE."

*"I always treated every race as if it were the Olympics, so when I raced in the Games I was mentally ready."*

Bonnie Blair 5 - Olympic Gold Medals

Speedskating

## **THE EDGE**

With more research and experience behind them, serious athletes are speaking out on the benefits of mental training. More and more athletes are looking for qualified mental trainers to teach them practical techniques to handle the stresses of competition and enhance performance.

Organizations such as the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology (AAASP) are working hard to develop guidelines for mental trainers and to disseminate up-to-date information in the field by holding comprehensive seminars. Mental training must be included along with physical training to meet today's demand for excellence. Those that fail to incorporate mental training into their programs may find themselves unable to catch up.

*“The real purposes of games is to teach us things that will be valuable for the rest of our lives.”*

Fred Shoemaker  
Professional Golf Instructor

*“I always believed that I had all the answers for my athletes, but suddenly I found I was helpless in dealing with an athlete’s problem. I never really believed in sport psychologists. That has changed.”*

Joe Sweeney Coach-Women’s Cross Country Running  
University of St. Thomas, MN

## **TYPICAL SPORTS PERFORMANCE SESSIONS**

The sessions are generally conducted in a comfortable office setting, but can be held on site. The session usually includes a brief interview, instruction and practice, post session interview and discussion. Office sessions may be followed by actual physical performance on the field. These techniques should be tailored to meet your needs and may vary from individual to individual. Generally, the sessions last 20 to 50 minutes but may last up to a few hours.

Mental training is most effective in the context of a predetermined series of sessions. These sessions may be daily, weekly or monthly, depending on personal needs and objectives. Although many athletes report significant progress toward their goal after only a few sessions, one must understand that it takes time to change.

*“The feeling is what you are after, rather than just picturing it. It was through actually feeling it in my mind that I started to make all my jumps consistent.”*

Brian Orser  
Olympic Silver Medalist - Figure Skater

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **How can I benefit by using mental training techniques?**

You can benefit in many ways. Better preparation, increased confidence, and more focused performance. One Olympic caliber swimmer, who had plateaued for three years, set three personal bests in one meet, after just two sessions of mental training.

### **Will messing with my mind hurt my performance?**

No! You unconsciously use mental techniques all the time. Ever hear of psyching yourself up? Getting up for the game? Using mental training techniques in a structured and consistent way has been proven to enhance performance not hurt it.

### **Are these techniques proven, or will I be a guinea pig for someone?**

Mental training is merely taking what you are already doing and structuring it. Most techniques are well known and safe. Although more research is needed, there is little that one needs to fear when working with a trained consultant.

### **Can these techniques be used to help injured athletes?**

Yes! An exciting new area of sport psychology has to do with the psychological reduction of pain due to injury. Psychological profiles of injury-prone athletes are emerging along with psychological methods to reduce pain and speed healing.

### **THE ANSWER:**

Group IV. Taken from Peak Performance-Mental Training Techniques of the World's Greatest Athletes by Charles A. Garfield, Ph.D.

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Two of his clients include the Phoenix Suns and the City of St. Paul, MN. He is a sport psychology and injury management resource for USA Speed Skating and is the former USA Track and Field/Sports Medicine Committee Chair for Minnesota.

Dr. Petras has been listed in the Sports Psychology Resource Guide for USA Track and Field elite athletes. He currently divides his practice between Minnesota and Arizona.

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