2014 NSCAA Convention
Mental Toughness in athletes: IDEAS AND APPLICATION

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Why study mental toughness?

• 82% of wrestling coaches felt mental toughness was the most important psychological attribute in determining success (Gould, 1987)
  – Only 9% of coaches felt they were successful in developing mental toughness

• Mental toughness may have more to do with winning than do such physical attributes as speed and power (Williams, 1998)
What is mental toughness?

• Being able to perform consistently at the upper range of one’s abilities regardless of competitive circumstances (Loehr, 1986)

• Having a psychological edge that enables an athlete to cope consistently with the pressures and demands of sport during competition, training, and life; being more consistent and better than your opponent in remaining determined, focused, confident, and in control under pressure (Jones, 2002)
“The most important attribute a player must have is mental toughness.”

-Mia Hamm
Not mental toughness
General sport findings

- Sheard & Golby (2006)
  - Studied swimmers
  - Administered a 7 week Psychological Skills Training (PST)
  - Skills addressed included Mental Toughness
  - Post-intervention saw increases in performances as well as psychological skills
Soccer specific findings

- Coulter, Mallett, & Gucciardi (2010)
  - Interviewed Australian players, coaches, and parents
  - All 3 groups cited the following as characteristics of mental toughness:
    - Work ethic
    - Physical toughness
    - Personal values
    - Sport intelligence
    - Competitive effort
    - Resilience
    - Self-belief
    - Coping under pressure
    - Winning mentality
    - Tough attitude (i.e., commitment, professionalism, sacrifice, discipline)
Soccer specific findings

• Coulter, Mallett, & Gucciardi (2010) con’t.
  – Sport-specific components may not warrant inclusion in conceptualization of mental toughness (MT components across sports)
  – It is important recognize the components and behaviors of mental toughness when providing feedback to athletes
  – Unique situations call for unique blends of the components of mental toughness attributes
Soccer specific findings

• Crust, Nesti, & Littlewood (2011)
  – Coaches and athletes differed on assessing mental toughness
  – Players displayed higher mental toughness self-ratings than coaches
• Gucciardi, Gordon, & Dimmock (2008)
  – Reported 7 major characteristics
    • Confidence
    • Concentration and focus
    • Motivation
    • Commitment
    • Positive and tough attitude
    • Resilience
    • Enjoying and handling pressure
    • Quality preparation
Soccer specific findings

• Gucciardi (2009)
  – Coaches and experience were strong factors in developing mental toughness
  – Achievement goals and a task mastery orientation were important to mental toughness development
Soccer specific findings

• Gucciardi, Gordon, Dimmock, & Mallett (2009)
  – Examined the role of the coach in developing mental toughness

  • Coach-athlete relationship: needs to address personal as well as sport-specific issues
  • Coaching philosophy: “coaches prioritizing athletic and personal development above coaching success” (p. 1490)
  • Training environment: coaches need to create an environment where each player is continuously challenged; the value of hard work, self-motivation, and physical toughness is emphasized
  • Over-emphasis on weaknesses was felt to negatively affect mental toughness; addressing weaknesses while emphasizing strengths was better for development
Mental toughness attributes

• Having an unshakable self-belief in your abilities to achieve your competitive goals
• Having an unshakable self-belief that you possess unique qualities and abilities that make you better than your opponent
• Having an insatiable desire and internalized motives to succeed
• Bouncing back from performance set-backs as a result of increased determination to succeed
• Thriving on the pressure of competition
Mental toughness attributes

- Accepting that competitive anxiety is inevitable and knowing that you can cope with it
- Not being adversely affected by others’ good or bad performances
- Remaining fully focused in the face of personal life distractions
- Pushing back the boundaries of physical and emotional pain while maintaining technique and effort under distress (in training and competition)
- Regaining psychological control following unexpected, uncontrollable events in competition (Jones et al., 2002)
Mentally tough all the time

• Pre-competition

• Competition

• Post-competition
Mentally tough all the time

- Pre-competition = training
  - Role definition
  - Role expectations
  - Challenges
  - Proper preparation
Mentally tough all the time

• Competition
  – Handling adversity
  – Handling success
  – Emotional control
  – Directed forgetting
Mentally tough all the time

- Post-competition = lifestyle
  - Possess long-term goals
  - Believe in an ability to do things
  - Get along well with others
  - Reflective learning
Can we develop mental toughness?

• Coach training programs influence the development of mental toughness (Gucciardi et al., 2009)
  – Gordon (2012) - cricketers
  – Steffen (in press) – coaches

• Don’t we have to try?
Four C’s of mental toughness

• Control
• Commitment
• Challenge
• Confidence

(Clough, Earle, & Sewell; 2002)
How do we develop mental toughness?

• Evaluate
  – Coach’s/players’ ratings

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How do we develop mental toughness?

• Evaluate
  – Paper and pencil instruments
    • Mental Toughness Scale
      – 11 items
      – Designed for elite and sub-elite athletes
    • MTQ48
      – 48 items
      – Addresses the 4 C’s directly
Control

- The belief that an individual can remain influential (as opposed to being powerless or helpless) during confrontations with stress (Crust, 2007)
Control

• How do we develop a sense of control?
  – Structured training
    • Simulated game situations
    • Artificially imposed pressure
      – Numbers down
      – Time restriction
      – Pre-set score
Emotional control
Control

• How do we develop a sense of control?
  – Imagery
    • To control ourselves
      – Internal
        » Seeing things as we while executing the task
    • To control our environment
      – External
        » Watching ourselves on screen
Commitment

• The tendency to become deeply involved in what one is doing
Commitment

– Establish long term goals
  • S – specific
  • M – measurable
  • A – adjustable
  • R – realistic
  • T – timely
– Coach and player agreement
– Get buy-in
Challenge

• The belief that change rather than stability is normal in life
Challenge

– Continuous short term goals
  • Physical
    – Fitness
  • Competitive
    – Results-oriented
  • Technical
    – Task mastery
Confidence

• The belief you can successfully perform a desired behavior or activity (Weinberg & Gould, 2011)

• Benefits
  – Confidence arouses positive emotions
  – Confidence facilitates concentration
  – Confidence affects goals
  – Confidence increases effort
  – Confidence affects game strategies
  – Confidence affects psychological momentum
  – Confidence affects performance
Confidence

- Four factors (Bandura, 1976)
  - Mastery performances
  - Vicarious experiences
  - Verbal persuasion
  - Optimal arousal
Confidence

• Mastery performances
  – Just do it....right
  – Reps
• Vicarious experiences
  – Modeling
  – Demos
Confidence

• Verbal persuasion
  – Coaching points
  – Questioning

• Optimal arousal
  – Physical
  – Mental
Confidence

• Can the coach design training sessions to positively produce:
  – A high number of successful reps?
  – A good visual representation of the task desired?
  – A good flow of correct technical and tactical information?
  – A proper physical and emotional state?
Mental toughness

• We desire it on our athletes
  – Better performances
  – Consistent performances
  – Better lifestyle

• We desire it in ourselves
Take home points

• Mental Toughness
  – Hard to define
    • We know it when we see it, so look for it!
  – 4 C’s
  – Measure/evaluate players in each of the 4 C’s
Take home points

• Mental toughness
  – Develop training sessions to improve desired characteristics
  – Personalize it
    • Apply your own blend of the 4 C’s
      – Team-wise
      – Position specific
      – Allow for personalities
I am the greatest. I said that even before I knew I was.
- Muhammad Ali

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References


References


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