

Valley Area Swim Team

Psychology

Its All In The Mind

The increased stress of competitions can cause athletes to react both physically and mentally in a manner, which can negatively affect their performance abilities. They may become tense, they worry about the outcome of the competition and they find it hard to concentrate on the task in hand.

The 4C's

Concentration, confidence, control and commitment (the 4C's) are generally considered to be the main mental qualities that are important for successful performance in most sports.

- Concentration - ability to maintain focus
- Confidence - believe in one's abilities
- Control - ability to maintain emotional control regardless of distraction
- Commitment - ability to continue working to agreed goals

Concentration

- This is the mental quality to focus on the task in hand. If the athlete lacks concentration then their athletic abilities will not be effectively or efficiently applied to the task.

Common distractions are: anxiety, mistakes, fatigue, weather, public announcements, coach, opponent, negative thoughts, etc.

Athletes will develop a routine for competition which may include the night before, the morning, pre-competition, competition and post-competition routines. If these routines are appropriately structured then they can prove a useful aid to concentration.

Confidence

Confidence results from the comparison an athlete makes between the goal and their ability.

When an athlete has self confidence they will tend to: persevere even when things are not going to plan, show enthusiasm, be positive in their approach and take their share of the responsibility in success and fail.

Control

Identifying when an athlete feels a particular emotion and understanding the reason for the feelings is an important stage of helping an athlete gain emotional control. An athlete's ability to maintain control of their emotions in the face of adversity and remain positive is essential to successful performance. Two emotions which are often associated with poor performance are anxiety and anger.

Anxiety comes in two forms - Physical (butterflies) and Mental (worry, negative thoughts, lack of concentration).

When an athlete becomes angry the cause of the anger often becomes the focus of attention. This then leads to a lack of concentration on the task at hand, performance deteriorates, and confidence in ability is lost which fuels the anger - a slippery slope to failure.

Commitment

Sports performance depends on the athlete being fully committed to numerous goals over many years.

Sport commitment can be undermined by:

- anxiety about performance - competition
- lack of commitment by other athletes

Many people (coach, friends, etc) can contribute to an athlete's levels of commitment with appropriate levels of support and positive feedback, especially during times of injury, illness and poor performance.