

## Mental training and high performance sport

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### Abstract

Several motivational registers can be involved in sport (Durand, 1987, Thill, 1989). If the commitment of an athlete can respond to a direct search for the hedonic sensation provided by his activity or even to a need for affiliation, his accession and his maintenance at the highest level of the competition are more motivated. Accomplishment. For his early theoreticians (Atkinson, 1957, McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, and Lowell, 1953, Murray, 1938), the motivation for achievement is characterized by the behaviors that people exhibit when they task, to seek standards of requirement or performance, to set high goals. This definition seems to perfectly match the characteristics of elite sport practice. In the same logic, high-level sport can be likened to a context of achievement such as that described by Heckhausen (1974). For this author, several conditions must indeed be met in order to evoke a context of accomplishment.

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## 1. Introduction

Last (especially against obstacles), its intensity (efforts), its continuity (outside any external constraint) and finally its performance. However, this last indicator represents more the consequence of precedents. Indeed, it is likely that a motivated person (who is intensely, perseveringly, and willingly attempting a chosen task) increases his chances of achieving good results (Stipek, 1993). But this is only a probability, it is true, especially in sport, that motivated behavior can unfortunately be followed by failure.

First, the tasks to be performed in this context must be finalized with a good

and identifiable purpose. This is the case in sports activities, so much so that the achievement of the goals is the subject of evaluations in terms of performances.

By the presence of all these characteristics whose role is exacerbated by the media, financial and even political stakes that modern competition assumes, the sporting context solicits and intensely determines the athlete's motivation for accomplishment. This motivation has many relationships with performance by intervening at all times of the sporting life: during the competition but also after it, which is already the beginnings of the next. Impacts on performance can be direct and punctual by regulation of activation (Sanders, 1983), attention (Carver and Scheier, 1981, Duval and Wicklund, 1972, White and Duda, 1991), and anxiety (Duda, Newton, and Chi, 1990, Hal] and Kerr, 1997, Nicholls, 1989, Vealey and Campbell, 1988) that motivational states permit. But motivation acts mostly as a continuous process indirectly involved in performance. Its effects then manifest on the relevance of the objectives chosen by the athlete,

## **2- Factors responsible for the motivation of sport:**

Theoretical models, which have contributed most to the discovery of the factors involved in the motivation of accomplishment, can be grouped within two main currents: the models centered on the role of the perceptions of control and those interesting to the representations of the skill. When considering the application of explanatory theories of discouragement behavior to the field of sport, (Dweck, 1980) emphasizes that the key element for the individual resigned is what triggers feelings of incompetence in him. or unavoidable failure due to a loss of control.

### **2-1 Perceptions of control:**

The notion of control in motivation psychology currently has different meanings from one theory to another. The theory of resignation learned, developed by Seligman and his collaborators (Seligman, 1975, Abramson, Seligman, and Teasdale, 1978, Peterson, Maier, and Seligman, 1993) considers the notion of control in terms of a person's perceived relationship between the behaviors that it can implement and the results it can expect. The perception of independence between behavior and result, associated with certain representations relating to the causality of events, would be at the origin of resigned behaviors and negative emotional affects. The

cognitive evaluation theory of Deci and Ryan (1980, 1985) considers, under the term control, what determines the adoption of behavior in an individual. When this determinant has an internal origin, this individual engages in an activity freely. When the origin is external, the acts respond to more or less salient pressures, coming from the environment. By the degradation of the feeling of self-determination that they provoke, these pressures would affect the spontaneous and free aspect of the commitment of the individual, called intrinsic motivation. Different conceptions of control are thus solicited by the two theoretical models.

To summarize, the theory of resignation learned envisages the perception of the control that one can exert on the events; the theory of cognitive evaluation, on the other hand, is interested in the perception of control of one's behavior.

## **2-2 Perceptions of control over the causality of events:**

The idea of controlling the environment and the causal nature of events has long been the subject of many questions. Heider (1958) argues that the search for the causality of events that can be attributed to personal factors or impersonal factors, participates in the search for a cognitive balance between oneself and the environment. In this perspective, the notion of control can thus refer to the perception of a relation between one's own behavior and the medications of that environment.

The search for such a feeling of control sometimes leads individuals to try to persuade themselves that they are at the origin of the positive events that anger them. Such exaggeration is referred to as fundamental erratic (Ross, 1977) or illusion of control (Langer, 1975). For Thill (1987, 1989), certain ritual or superstitious practices widely used in sport would serve to fuel the beliefs of athletes in a form of control exercised by them, on a situation perceived as not controllable. The perception of a lack of relationship between behavior and actual or expected results corresponds to what Seligman and his associates call resignation learned. It is the learning or the perception of independence between the response emitted by the organism and the submission and / or subtraction of an unpleasant event (Seligman, Maier, and Geer, 1968: 258). The resignation learned can be set up as a result of an uncontrollable situation contributing to an individual perceiving independence between the behaviors that he may later attempt to implement and the results that he will be able to obtain. Thus, every time an individual fails in a situation in which he sees no way to reach the goal, he learns the

uselessness of his efforts and prefers to adopt a resigned, more economical attitude. The consequences are cognitive (failure to find a solution), motivational (effort reduction, abandonment) and emotional (anxiety, sadness, hostility, anger) registers. 'Self esteem. Resignation may extend beyond the very situation that generated learning (Hiroto and Seligman, 1975). In this case, resignation is invasive. The characteristics of resignation, such as its extent, for example, are determined by certain representations acting as cognitive mediators. The importance of the role of these representations deserves some attention.

Today, the dichotomy (intrinsic motivation extrinsic motivation) gives way to a more gradual conception of the concept of self-determination. For Deci and Ryan (1985), there would be a kind of continuum whose. Different degrees would correspond to different forms of extreme motivation. From this principle: Brière, Vallerand, Blais and Pelletier (1995) designed a questionnaire, the Scale of Motivation in Sports (EMS), to measure the level of adhesion of individuals to different forms of patterns in the sports field, as well as the lack of motivation for sport. Following an increasingly instrumentalized path, the continuum of self-determination is hierarchical in the following way (some examples used to illustrate the concepts of Deci & Ryan are adapted from the EMS of Brière and his collaborators):

Integrated regulation is the most self-determined form of extrinsic motivation. The actions are implemented because they are part of projects congruent with the personality of an individual. This is the case when a dynamic and active person

"Sport because sport drives and develops these qualities.

In terms of identification, the actions respond to a double investment: for themselves and for the benefits associated with them. Thus, one can play sports because it is also an opportunity to learn things that can be useful in life.

The introjected regulation corresponds to actions controlled by rules (pressures, controls) imposed by oneself. For example, playing sports because it's absolutely necessary if you want to stay in shape.

External regulation concerns the most instrumental actions. They are controlled by prospects of reward, reward or the threat of unpleasant events (sanctions). This is the case when you practice a sport for the prestige of being an athlete or to be well seen by others.

Motivation, on the fringes of this continuum, represents the total lack of motivation.

By looking at the various levels of instrumentalization of an athlete's activity vis-à-vis the goals that the athlete can pursue, the continuum of self-determination allows us to understand what motivates him to accept the many constraints inherent to the practice of a sport at the highest level. Between the two extremes represented by intrinsic motivation and external regulation, there are therefore intermediate levels, some of which guarantee relative self-determination (regulations integrated and identified in particular).

Finally, it appears that the most intrinsically motivated actions as they are characterized during flow states, for example, are to be searched for because of their motivational effects. It must be recognized, however, that the athlete can hardly escape certain external incentives such as money or prestige. In this case, the controlling aspect of these extreme agents must not become more salient than the feelings of self-determination and competence that correspond to the representations most likely to generate persevering behaviors.

### **3- The feeling of competence(self-efficacy):**

The notion of sense of competence may have different meanings, depending on the extent of the field in which that feeling is supposed to be exercised. In its most limited acceptance, the feeling of competence can be compared to the confidence in the movement (Griffin and Keogh, 1981, 1982) that the subject feels before the execution of a gesture. When trust refers to a particular task, the feeling of competence is to be compared to an expectation of personal effectiveness (Bandura, 1977, 1997) that can be defined as the subjective probability of possessing the necessary abilities to achieve result. If considered as finalized by the efficient and economical realization of a motor performance, this capacity refers to the notion of motor skill (Guthrie, 1957). We can then express the feeling of competence in terms of perceived skill. But it can be more general and cover the same class of activities as physical activities (Harter, 1982, 1990). For this author, the perceived competence with regard to sports activities contributes, with academic competence, social relations, physical appearance and social

behavior, to the construction of self-esteem understood as the general value that an individual attributes to his person.

For White (1959), achievement behaviors would be driven by a need to feel competent. The fact that the feeling of competence can be considered as an important factor in the motivation for achievement has given rise to a great deal of research initiated mainly in the field of schooling (Dweck 1986, Nicholls 1984a, 1984b) and continued in the field of physical activity. Sports (see Duda 1992, 1993, Roberts 1992, Weiss and Chaumeton 1992, for a Review).

#### **4- Representations of the competency and goals of accomplishment:**

According to Nicholls, there are two different ways that individuals use their skills. The first, self-referenced, involves a comparison referring to internal or objective standards; the attention of the subject then turns on his personal progress or on the success of a particular task. The second, normatively referenced, solicits a process of social comparison, the results being of an incentive nature only to the extent that they allow the demonstration of a skill superior to that of others. Depending on the way in which their competence is represented, people will tend to set two types of goals. In the case of a self-referenced representation, they will preferentially orient themselves towards the objectives invested on the control of the tasks (Nicholls, 1984a, 1984b) still called goals of learning (Dweck, 1986) or goals of control (Ames, 1984). A normatively referenced representation will encourage the adoption of goals of ego involvement (Nicholls, 1984a, 1984b) also referred to as performance goals (Dweck, 1986) or goals centered on fitness (Ames, 1984).

For these authors, the type of purpose developed, combined with the level of perceived skill, has important motivational consequences. A person who thinks he is skilled or competent in a particular area will demonstrate adaptive behaviors, whatever the type of goal developed (invested on the task or the ego). On the other hand, if she feels herself incompetent, this person will concentrate on making efforts only if she pursues goals invested in the task. If, on the other hand, their motivational goals are ego-oriented, they will implement strategies to escape the judgments of others by choosing tasks with a low level of difficulty (ensuring success) or very high difficulty (in which failure is not dishonorable). When the avoidance of a

task of optimal difficulty from its own resources will be impossible, this person will seek to protect his ego by showing clearly that it fails because it makes no effort. Thus, in the eyes of others, his performance can not be attributed to a lack of skill.

In the sporting field, Burton (1989) tested the effects of a training program on the setting of masters' goals in competition swimmers (which the author calls performance goals in opposition to the goals of result). covering five months.

## **5- Determination of motivational orientations:**

The importance of the role of achievement goals, in adopting adaptive or poorly adaptive models of performance, raises the question of the genesis of these. Several types of factors seem to contribute to the determination of motivational orientations: they are developmental, differential, cultural and contextual factors.

### **5-1 Developmental factors:**

The representation that a child can build about his skill is more precise at around 11-12 years old. It becomes more objective and differentiates itself from the notion of effort (Nicholls, 1978, Nicholls and Miller, 1984). The children then become able to identify the causes of their successes or failures and thus to attribute them, either to their level of skill or to their efforts. Thus, for Roberts (1984), it is from this age (when the possibility of objectively representing one's competence seems acquired) that children, developing ego investment goals, flee competitive sports when they perceive themselves as unkind.

### **5-2 Differential factors:**

Motivational orientations respond to relatively stable characteristics of the personality: some individuals pursue one type of goal more than another. The different contexts that a person faces during his or her development contribute to the genesis of these stable traits. In addition, differences between boys and girls are observable. Boys seem to be more ego-oriented, while girls are more oriented towards controlling tasks (Duda, 1988). Boys are also more competitive than girls; the latter being more interested in achieving the objectives set (Gill, 1986, 1988). We observed in young adults a imperviousness of the boys to the instructions and the co-operation constraints formulated vis-à-vis a task of collective learning (in pairs) in an



aquatic skill (Gemigon, d'Arripe-Longueville, and Huet, 1996). While these boys jointly pursued self-referenced goals and normatively referenced goals (of ego promotion and even hyper-competitiveness) despite the instructions, the girls preferentially referred to internal comparison standards.

### **5-3 Cultural factors:**

Transcultural studies of motivational orientations in terms of goals are few. Yet, it seems that differences can be observed between athletes of different ethnic origins. Intervention with the athlete should be able to take these differences into account. For Duda and Allison (1990), therefore, interethnic studies of motivational goals should be more widely developed. For the moment, it appears that Anglo-Saxons are more oriented towards social comparison, towards the demonstration of competence and towards competition than individuals of Spanish origin (Duda, 1985, 1986a), black (Duda, 1986a). ) and the Navajos (Duda, 1986b). Given these results, which only partially interest the French sports coach, we can only regret the lack of comparative data with European athletes.

### **6- PROSPECTS FOR APPLICATION:**

Whether it remains the responsibility of the coach or it comes from the assistance of a "mental trainer", the intervention with the athlete must be concerned with the development and maintenance of the motivation of the latter . It can not then be freed from taking into account the psychological processes involved in the motivation of accomplishment, which are the perceptions of control and competence mentioned above. Since the motivational perspective is inevitably long-term, the following recommendations are only useful in the context of attitude education. An attitude is a state of mind or a general psychological predisposition towards something; this predisposition directs in a certain sense all the interactions with the object in question (Mucchielli, 1994: 13). Here, the predispositions to be developed have as their object the sporting practice in respect of which the athlete is likely to generate certain representations of his own control and competence. Far from wanting to constitute a comprehensive reference system of the possible intervention sectors, these proposals address a few key moments in sporting life, namely the determination of objectives, the



analysis of the past performance and, in general, the motivational climate that surrounds the sporting life, especially during training.

### **6-1 Goal setting:**

The effect of goal-setting techniques on performance was first studied in the context of industrial and organizational psychology. For Locke and Latham (1985), the hypotheses usually validated in this field must be verified in that of sports performance. Thus, the competitive situation is supposed to increase the performances. Specific and difficult goals must be more effective than vague and easy goals. Short-term goals should facilitate longer-term goals. The effectiveness of the goals increases when they are shared by the athlete and when information about his progress is provided.

Evaluate progress in achieving goals. This requires that evaluation strategies are initially planned with the goal setting program.

### **7- Analysis of the past benefit:**

The sporting event, as a moment of truth, has an informational value that has consequences on motivation and emotions. The analysis of the results, and the way in which they are obtained, then appears decisive for the maintenance of a high level of commitment of the sportsman.

This is why the logic that animates the analysis of the past service is part of a dual temporal dimensionality of mental recovery and preparation (Gemigon, 1996). The past result appears only as one of the factors that can influence the cognitive processes involved in future abandonment or perseverance behaviors. These cognitive processes or mediators are representations about the athlete's control of the situation and his or her own competence.

Preserving the feeling of control of events

The sportsman does not escape a general tendency which leads the human being to wonder about the why of his results. However, the resulting emotional impact of a sporting performance degrades the objectivity of the causal analysis. Also, is it preferable to avoid any technical or tactical "hot" analysis of a Sports performance.

From the causal analysis of the results depend on the representations on the controllability of the environment and events. These representations are at the origin of determining consequences for the sportsman. As highlighted by the work of Seligman and his collaborators, the perception of independence

between the behaviors and the results obtained is generating resignation. The resulting deficits directly affect performance, motivation and the emotional sphere. The characteristics of causes perceived as responsible for the results obtained play on the severity of the deficits thus observed.

If the highlighting of internal causes (personal factors) and stable (these factors intervene regularly), after a success, proves conducive to the adoption of persevering behaviors, the attribution of a failure to these same causes becomes detrimental .

On the other hand, an attribution to internal but unstable causes, relying on the amount of effort deployed, for example, preserves the perception of control over the events, whatever the result. Thus, the circumstantial aspect of a failure that will be perceived as sunnable, if one decides to invest more effort, will not affect the motivation of the subject.

### **7-1 Goal setting:**

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term goals, as well as their acceptance by the subject, would lead to the greatest progress in performance.

Nevertheless, many sports coaches, as well as mental preparation specialists, participate in the development of goal programs based on the cognitive-behavioral models these, here are the words of Bob Dwyer, coach of the Australian rugby team, as reported in the May 16, 1995 newspaper The Team (p.10): [...] even after a match won 73-6, as this 1th the case against Samoa, I can find criticisms to emit and the players are receptive Forgetting the bulletin board is saving time to work.

Finally, a positive perspective subordinate to the efforts to be provided will be evoked by insisting that the shortcomings observed can be filled during future training.

## **8- The development and maintenance of a motivational climate:**

According to Nicholls' theory, a person pursuing exclusively ego-oriented goals will tend to implement strategies to win judgments or to escape the judgments of others. An athlete who is sure of his competence is not affected by such an orientation. On the other hand, in an athlete who doubts his ability, this can be achieved by having fun with the difficulty. The role of accomplishment orientations (task or ego) of the sportsmen in the behavior of the behavior of abandonment. These orientations are influenced by competition, which helps to develop ego-oriented goals in individuals. By the social comparison it sets, it is a double-edged year playing the role of a motivational tool serving only winners. If for Locke and Lathain (1985), the competitive situation is one of the best situations in the world. . Recall that these two types of goals are not inconsistent (Nicholls, 1984a, 1989, 1992) and the adoption of competitive goals in the pursuit of master goals (Gemigon and The Bars 1995, Roberts 1992, Roberts and This situation was also confirmed in the study of the dyadic situation (Gemigon, Arripe-Longueville, and Huet, 1996). than girls, has not hindered them from pursuing goals referred to as being more or less relevant to these norms. In fact, it seems to be an effective strategy for certain people (see the boys) ate to the detriment of the adoption. of mastery goals. If in the sporting context, the athlete inevitably has to set himself competitive goals, it is also

important to be concerned with maintaining an orientation towards mastery goals corollary to the other goals.

We have already pointed out that the context in which an individual is influenced by his motivation (Ames 1984, Ames and Ames 1984, Ames and Archer 1988). Epstein (1988) highlights the role of several factors, the variable variables (type of Tasks, nature of the Authority, Rewards, Organization of the Groups, Evaluation modalities, Time allowed to reach the objectives), which constitute elements of the structure of the fulfillment context. If these authors are interested in the field of schooling, Ames (1992) considers the teaching intervention on these factors applicable to the field of sports training, with the aim of creating a climate of control. Also, she proposes to act on the factors identified by Epstein:

### **8-1 task type:**

To propose to the athlete various tasks that solicit personal issues (individualized tasks) as well as his active involvement. Help them set realistic and accessible goals in the short term.

### **8-2 Authority:**

Involve the athlete in certain decisions, give him responsibilities towards others. Help him develop skills to self-organize and self-evaluate.

### **8-3 Recognition:**

Valuing each person's personal qualities, individual progress. Ensure equity in the interest and rewards bestowed on each member of the team.

### **8-4 Groupings:**

Adopt forms of varied and flexible groupings. Do not be afraid to use heterogeneity and especially the diversity of skills of individuals.

### **8-5 Evaluation:**

Adopt an individualized and meaningful evaluation for everyone, taking into account personal progress criteria and mastery criteria in addition to the performance criteria in competition. Involve the athlete in the evaluation procedures of his own acquisitions (self-evaluation).

### **8-6 Time:**

Give athletes the time they need to improve. Help them organize their own work and progress plan.

In fact, these recommendations serve as a plea for a climate of democratic training, contributing to an education of attitudes of responsibility and self-determination. Far from being denied, the role of the coach should rather be

considered here as the organizer of a more meaningful personalized performance preparation for each athlete, with respect to his or her perceptions of control and competency with respect to objectives to be clearly identified. In addition, the role of a particular type of climate must be considered taking into account the perception of this climate by the individual. It is indeed the way in which this climate is perceived and subjectively conceived which seems to be predictive of the cognitions responsible for the adoption of adaptive behaviors or not. We can only emphasize the need to adapt the training context to the characteristics of athletes. Thus, for Weinberg (1992), one of the major problems to be solved is the identification of the most appropriate goals for individuals with different personalities and motivational styles. Further studies should be undertaken in order to understand the conditions and modalities of individualization of the motivational climate.

## 9- Conclusion

When reading this chapter, the coach or athlete, expecting a strong prescriptive value of motivation theories in the sporting context, may feel some disappointment. The fact that the prospects of intervention on the motivation of athletes, as they have been exposed, seem limited is due to several reasons. First of all, the sociocognitive sciences, and in particular psychology, are not exact sciences, if there are any -. The complexity of the cognitions involved in behavior is matched only by the multiplicity of interactions of its determinants. In addition, while some of these determinants are currently important objects of study, many of them remain to be explored or addressed in the context of sport.

Becoming thus socio-cognitive psychology, especially from the development of studies on the motivation of accomplishment in the 70s, she also apprehends the emotions generated by the perspectives and the findings of attaining or not attaining these social values. By focusing on a complexity that leads her to leave more and more of the laboratory, she can no longer ignore humanistic considerations that are often perceived as the exclusivity of a therapeutic or prophylactic psychology.

## 10-Recommendations:

As regards the physical preparation of the athlete, the physiological transformations are the result of an intense, long and regular solicitation of

the biological substrates concerned. The same goes for mental preparation as a long process of education, one of whose goals is the transformation and development of the motivational attitudes best suited to develop in an athlete the feelings of control, self-determination and competence. Refusing to compile a collection of recipes applicable to any athlete (which would certainly have been very appealing to the user of this book, but oh so inefficient and illusory!), The few recommendations above are only intended to be set of benchmarks for those who only want and modestly help an athlete to give himself the means of his ambitions. May the words of J. R. Germont (1995), Olympic Preparation Manager for the Atlanta Games, to illustrate the philosophy of this contribution: The good coach is the one who does everything not to be indispensable.

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