

## A critical assessment of psychological skills training in sports

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### ■ ABSTRACT

Sport psychology is the scientific study of people and their behaviours in sport and exercise activities. The aim of the study of sport psychology is to be able to apply the knowledge learned about these to practical uses. Sport psychology is an interdisciplinary science that draws on knowledge from the fields of kinesiology and psychology. It involves the study of how psychological factors affect performance and how participation in sport and exercise affect psychological and physical factors. In addition to instruction and training of psychological skills for performance improvement, applied sport psychology may include work with athletes, coaches and parents regarding injury, rehabilitation, communication, team building, and career transitions. Psychological Skills Training (PST) is an individually designed combination of methods selected to attain psychological skill needs. There is no single idyllic PST package, each programme must be individualised based on the psychological state of the individual and the sport. To assemble a successful PST programme, it is important to distinguish between PST skills and PST methods. PST skills are the psychological qualities or attributes that need to be developed (*i.e.* confidence, concentration), the PST method is the tool that will be used to help improve the PST skill.

■ **Key Words** : Psychology, Performance, Psychological training,

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Psychological skills training (PST) is an individually designed combination of methods selected to attain psychological skill needs (Gill, 2000). There is no single idyllic PST package and each programme must be individualised based on the psychological state of the individual and, the sport. To assemble a successful PST programme, it is important to distinguish between PST skills and PST methods. PST skills are the psychological qualities or attributes that need to be developed (*i.e.* confidence, concentration), the PST method is the tool that will be used to help and improve the PST skill (Calmels *et.al.*, 2003). Much of the early research utilizing prescriptive PST programmes used single PST methods and examined their effect on performance (Garza and Feltz, 1980). Thelwell and Greenlees (2001) argued that when implementing a PST programme, it is improbable that a single method will be employed by a sports psychologist. Thelwell and Greenlees (2001) highlight that it is more effective

to employ a combination of mental skills that relate to the specific sport.

Sport psychology is the scientific study of people and their behaviours in sport and exercise activities. The aim of the study of sport psychology is to be able to apply the knowledge learned about these to practical uses. There are two objectives that the field of sport psychology aims to meet. These are:

- To understand the effects of psychological factors on physical performance.
- To understand the effects of participating in physical activity on psychological development, health and well-being.

**Typical questions that a sport psychologist might ask are:**

- “How does anxiety affect the accuracy of an athlete's movements?”