

RELAXATION AND VISUALIZATION TECHNIQUES APPLIED TO CYCLING

The aim of relaxation is to develop the capacity of self-control of the athlete in order to reduce anxiety, thus allowing them to adopt behaviors, ways of thinking and feeling appropriate to the task. Moreover, the experience of self-control tested during the relaxation training increase self-reliance and help the concentration during the race, thus alleviating the problems caused by attention decreases. Relaxation is a psychological condition that allows the body to recover strength and energy through the induction of a general state of calm and helps to eliminate any unnecessary form of psycho-physical tension. Relaxation is primarily a mental and physical condition that is reached through a process linked to "let go nicely with the mind and the body". It means reaching a state of relax in the muscle and make up your mind to gradually achieve total relaxation. It's necessary that the athlete will train constantly to relax, getting pleasure and satisfaction as to the physical training. The relaxation that I present in this work is a kind of soothing relaxation, that originates from the basics of autogenous training of Schultz (stages of heaviness and warmth).

The first steps to prepare for the imaginative relaxation are:

- Choose a quiet and comfortable place, at least for the first few times, then the athlete will be able to relax anywhere, including the roadside;
- learn the technique of relaxation in a state of good health and with sufficient energy, then the athlete can also relax when physical and psychological conditions are not optimal;
- have the right attitude in learning this skill: we must not be too skeptic or expect immediate improvements. The relaxation will be effective after a few weeks of mental training. A good relaxation technique is preliminary to the ability to display runway or analysis of motor gesture.

THE VISUALIZATION

The ability to imagine it should be trained in order to:

1. help athletes to acquire or exercise the more complex motor patterns;
 2. structuring strategies to be followed in a particular context;
 3. acquire psychological characteristics which develop greater self-confidence, reach the awareness of own value, control the stress, focus attention and improve concentration skills.
- The imagination is a skill that most of the athletes didn't sufficiently developed by a classical training.
 - The imagination is an experience that occurs without specific external incitation.
 - The imagination concerns not only the visual sense, but also the sense of hearing, the sense of smelling, the sense of touching and the sense kinesthetic.
 - The empirical and experimental evidences show the effectiveness of imagination in helping athletes to develop physical and mental abilities.
 - The program of imagination training applied to sport takes place in three stages: the sensory awareness training, the vividness training and the controllability training.
 - Athletes should initially practice the imagination training in an environment free of distractions.
 - Athletes get greater benefit in training the imagination in a state of relaxed attention.
 - The most important aspect of imagination training is to train every day.
 - The imagination training can be practiced even when the athletes are tired, when they are injured or when the facilities and equipment are not accessible.
 - Athletes should imagine not only the performance but also the result of the performance.
 - It may be helpful to improve the skills, use your imagination as if it were slowed down a slow motion, while it is not advisable in any case to imagine a fast scene.
 - The imagination must always be preceded by a session of relaxation.

EXAMPLE OF RELAXATION SESSION

Close your eyes, inhale and exhale slowly.

Your body becomes heavier, more and more heavy and relaxed, concentrate on your feet, which are relaxed and heavy.

Turn slowly the attention to the calf muscles, now you'll feel them relaxed and heavy, also the legs are relaxed.

Go on stretching all the muscles of your body, your stomach, the abdominal muscles, arms, hands, neck, muscles of the face, forehead, eyes.

You feel good, very good, calm and tranquility surround you.

Now begin to imagine yourself while you're going down in the street: the day is cloudy and cold, and you're able to perceive the cool wind on your face. You're participating in an important race, very important. Imagine yourself while you're reaching the goal you've set: you are concentrated, the goal is defined, specific and you want to achieve it, you can achieve it.

You have undertaken, you have prepared yourself to do your best. All your thoughts are directed towards your goal, you feel grow your motivation and you feel very positive. Observe carefully the scene, the colors, the colors of your clothing, the environment around you, listen to the sounds and try to feel the weight of your body. Now move slowly and open your eyes.

1. Read the session of relaxation and try to put it into practice: if you feel the need to record it to help you relax, do well, or ask someone you trust to read with calm and relaxed tone, very slowly, the words of relaxation and visualization.

2. After the first session of relaxation, reflect on it and answer to these questions:

a - How long was your relaxation session (including visualization)? It should last between 10 to 15 minutes max.

b - How do you feel relaxed on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 corresponding to very tense and 10, which corresponds to very relaxed?

c - comment briefly your relaxation session, what were the areas where they felt more muscle tension?

3. Now think about your visualization experience and answer the following questions:

a - How sharp was the image displayed on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 representing not at all and 10, which corresponds to very clearly?

b - How did you distinctly heard the noise present in a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 representing not at all and 10, which corresponds to very clearly?

c - How did you clearly felt the movement of your body inside on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 representing not at all and 10, which corresponds to very clearly?

d - How much did you clearly perceived emotions on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 representing not at all and 10, which corresponds to very clearly?

e - In your opinion, how was the picture? Stable and easily controllable? On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 representing not at all and 10, which corresponds to very stable and easily controllable, which is your choice?

These exercises help the athlete to be aware of his mental state linked to muscle tension and mental, in order to improve its performance.

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