

## The mental abilities of the athlete

The concentration of a player that execute a free basketball shooting, the ability of a striker in knowing to maintain the calm when shooting a penalty, the strong motivation that has supported many of our great athletes in the 50 km. of Cross-country skiing, the ability of one woman skier to eliminate the distraction factors and only pay attention to the distance when doing the giant slalom of the alpine ski: these are only some of the psycho-physically features that contribute to the success of an athlete or an entire team and that carry it the result. What thoughts cross the mind of a cycling athlete while is at the beginning of the decisive release of the climbing? In this case the inner dialogue is a determining factor for the attainment of the result: the legs "turn", as it is said in cycling jargon, but the athlete's thoughts are positive, full of confidence in own physical and mental abilities. And how much counts the cohesion of group in putting to point "the wall" in one volleyball match of our "nazionale azzura" The team-factor, needed in training, is not only an automatically applicable tactical plan, but it is, above all, a human factor that finds its force in the proper interpersonal relations between the athletes of the group.

In order to win you need feet, heart and head: the physical condition and tactical and motive abilities of the athlete are the foundation a good performance, but if we add the situation's emotional control and mental ability developed and trained, we have the necessary conditions in order to obtain a good result. But we never have to neglect the concept human being - athlete; the agonist is not a robot, it is not a gigantic mechanism supported by sponsors and other complex economic manoeuvres. The athlete is a human being which has chosen to defy himself and the others, with its scrawniness and its limitless potentialities; the sport psychologist must have as a priority the support, help and contribution for the athlete as a human being and only after for the athlete that the human being represents.

The sport psychology is a young discipline that has the possibility to bring valid contributions in the high level sport as well as in the initiatory phase of sport, studying a series of attitudes and behaviors within the sportive environment and their consequent impact on the quality of the performance, and subsequently applying the strategies for the improvement of the athletic gesture.

This discipline is like a point of encounter between scientific search and application in the field. Its bed is constituted mainly from trainers, managing staff, athletes, arbitrators, sport's doctors, technicians, psychologists and all those who operate at every level in sport. We can define the sport psychology as a psychology of the action that has as objective the complete understanding of the human being and his being athlete.

### The Mental Training:

By techniques of mental training we refer to many modal methods imprinted to the learning and to the improvement of some abilities that interest the agonistic activity. Here is a mental directory of the main strategies or abilities more important:

#### Focusing the attention and concentration (Focusing)

The concentration is the ability to focus the attention on a task for a determined period of time, without being distracted by inner distracting factors (for ex. negative thoughts) and exteriors (for ex. the noise of the crowd).

#### The increase of motivation and self-esteem

The self confidence is the true key of the motivation: if the athlete has self confidence and is confident about what he is capable to make is not only motivated, but increases its probabilities to have successes. If the athlete tries only to satisfy its needs of emergency, its esteem and approval, the VICTORY will escape and the sense of personal identity will depend on external factors. The transition happens when the athlete begins to discover these qualities WITHIN him. Instead of trying the approval, he finds its sense of intimate VALUE. He becomes confident enough to be capable of being a valid player even if commits errors.

## **Goal setting**

Many times, same athletes do not accurately define an adapted scale of objectives to pursue during the year, and this insufficient ability to plan specific standards of ability to complete a task can compromise all the season. The objects must be subdivided in sub-objectives to short, medium and long term, difficult but reachable, established to gradually improve the performance to the result (that we often know is unpredictable).

## **Imagery**

The athletes come progressively be trained to the mental representation of visual images, inserting imagined multi sensorial stimulus and so favouring a greater involvement and cognitive on behalf of the subject. The ability to visualize includes some activities applicable to the sport, among which the observation of other athletes in action (live or video registration) followed by the imagined repetition of motive sequences (motive idea training); the sequent step will consist in the practical execution of the movement, first observed and then visualized. The technique of the Imagery, always preceded by a short relaxation session, will also be used before the contest as moment of concentration and distance visualization.

## **Management of the physiological activation (Management of the Arousal)**

By the "arousal" we mean the intensity of the physiological and behavioral activation of the organism in psycho physiology: when the organism must carry out a performance it must be activated, that is to put in motion a series of characteristically processes of arousal state: the increase of the vigilance and the attention, the muscles activity prepared for the effort, the heart and the lungs prepared for the energy consumption. It is of fundamental importance for an athlete to reach up and to maintain its optimal psycho physiology level activation in every circumstance, training itself with simple techniques of activation or deactivation depending on circumstances.

## **Relaxation**

The relaxation techniques, like the Autogenously Training or the Progressive Relaxation of Jacobson, come used in order to acknowledge the muscular tension when relaxed and active (corporeo Inventory), in order to manage stressful situations of anxiety or stress and are preparatory for any imaginative activity.

## **Management of the pre-agonistic anxiety**

The prevention and the treatment of the anxiety is one of the main problems and one of the greatest objectives of the medicine and the sport psychology. The pre agonistic anxiety is linked to an imminence of a particularly and feared competition, but sometimes the anxiety state can extend also to other situations, sportive and extra-sportive, and can become objectively groundless. There are techniques that manage the pre-agonistic anxiety: relaxation and systematic desensitization.

## **Communication**

The nowadays athlete expects with deserved respect and consideration on behalf of the Federation and the trainer; it does not want to be excluded from the sport management activity that regards him. This necessity to dialog and to plan together reveals a lot of communications problems of between the athlete and the trainer, which often tends to not consider the requirements dictated by the emotional and cognitive evolution of the young agonist, but to focus its single attention on the aspects of motive development. The group meetings between athletes and trainer are of great usefulness, the group meetings between trainer and leaders, athletes of same team with communications problems between players. One of the most demanded request from the Federations Sport which the sport psychologist can put into effect

**inside the team is a Course of Mental Training (multi modal package on the mentioned activities mentioned), with weekly meetings that last an hour or two for ten - fifteen weeks.**

**The scope of these courses is to give the opportunity to learn the techniques in order to improve the athletic performance and subsequently to render the subject completely independent: in fact the athlete, helped by audiovisual supports, is in a position to train him by himself daily, without having to establish a relationship of dependency with the sport psychologist.**

**Regarding the trainers (but not only they), of extreme actuality and usefulness turns out to be the Course of formation on the Psychology of the Sport and the Psychology of the accident and the rehabilitation: these courses allow to learn knowledge about the way athletes think and feel (especially for unlucky athletes) that often are invisible within the framework of sport activity.**

Biograpfy

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**Dott.ssa Marina Gerin Birsa**

**Psicologa dello Sport**

**email: [gerinbirsa@tiscali.it](mailto:gerinbirsa@tiscali.it) .**

**[www.psymedisport.com](http://www.psymedisport.com)**