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**How Sports Psychology Can Improve Performance**

**By Dr. Patrick J. Cohn**

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Mental Game Coaching is that the segment of sports psychology that concentrates specifically on helping athletes break through the mental barriers that are keeping them from performing up to their peak potential. By focusing on the mental skills needed to be successful in any sporting competition, mental game coaching seeks to achieve the overall goal of performance improvement.

Sports Psychology is about improving your attitude and mental game skills to help you perform your best by identifying limiting beliefs and embracing a healthier philosophy about your sport. Below is a list of the top ten ways that you can benefit from sports psychology:

1. Improve focus and deal with distractions. Many athletes have the ability to concentrate, but often their focus is displaced on the wrong areas such as when a batter thinks "I need to get a hit" while in the batter's box, which is a result-oriented focus. Much of my instruction on focus deals with helping athlete to stay focused on the present moment and let go of results.
2. Grow confidence in athletes who have doubts. Doubt is the opposite of confidence. If you maintain many doubts prior to or during your performance, this indicates low self-confidence or at least you are sabotaging what confidence you had at the start of the competition. Confidence is what I call a core mental game skill because of its importance and relationship to other mental skills.
3. Develop coping skills to deal with setbacks and errors. Emotional control is a prerequisite to getting into the zone. Athletes with very high and strict expectations, have trouble dealing with minor errors that are a natural part of sports. It's important to address these expectations and also help athletes stay composed under pressure and when they commit errors or become frustrated.
4. Find the right zone of intensity for your sport. I use intensity in a broad sense to identify the level of arousal or mental activation that is necessary for each person to perform his or her best. This will vary from person to person and from sport to sport. Feeling "up" and positively charged is critical, but not getting overly excited is also important. You have to tread a fine line between being excited to complete, but not getting over-excited.

## How Sports Psychology Can Improve Performance

5. Help teams develop communication skills and cohesion. A major part of sports psychology and mental training is helping teams improve cohesion and communication. The more a team works as a unit, the better the results for all involved.

6. To instill a healthy belief system and identify irrational thoughts. One of the areas I pride myself on is helping athlete identify ineffective beliefs and attitudes such as comfort zones and negative self-labels that hold them back from performing well. These core unhealthy beliefs must be identified and replaced with a new way of thinking. Unhealthy or irrational beliefs will keep you stuck no matter how much you practice or hard you try.

7. Improve or balance motivation for optimal performance. It's important to look at your level of

motivation and just why you are motivated to play your sport. Some motivators are better in the long-term than others. Athletes who are extrinsically motivated often play for the wrong reasons, such as the athlete who only participates in sports because of a parent. I work with athlete to help them adopt a healthy level of motivation and be motivated for the right reasons.

8. Develop confidence post-injury. Some athletes find themselves fully prepared physically to get back into competition and practice, but mentally some scars remain. Injury can hurt confidence, generate doubt during competition, and cause a lack of focus. I help athletes mentally heal from injuries and deal with the fear of re-injury.

9. To develop game-specific strategies and game plans. All great coaches employ game plans, race strategies, and course management skills to help athletes mentally prepare for competition. This is an area beyond developing basic mental skills in which a mental coach helps athletes and teams. This is very important in sports such as golf, racing, and many team sports.

10. To identify and enter the "zone" more often. This incorporates everything I do in the mental side of sports. The overall aim is to help athletes enter the zone by developing foundational mental skills that can help athletes enter the zone more frequently. It's impossible to play in the zone everyday, but you can set the conditions for it to happen more often.

I will add that sport psychology may not be appropriate for every athlete. Not every person who plays a sport wants to "improve performance." Sport psychology is probably not for recreation athletes who participate for the social component of a sport or do not spend time working on technique or fitness to improve performance. Young athletes whose parents want them to see a sports psychologist are not good candidate either. It's very important that the athlete desires to improve his or her mental game without having the motive to satisfy a parent. Similarly, an athlete who sees a mental game expert only to satisfy a coach is not going to fully benefit from mental training.

Sports Psychology does apply to a wide variety of serious athletes. Most of my students (junior, high school, college, and professional athletes) are highly committed to excellence and seeing how far they can go in sports. They love competition and testing themselves against the best in their sport. They understand the importance of a positive attitude and mental toughness. These athletes want every possible advantage they can get including the mental edge over the competition.

Dr. Patrick J. Cohn is a master mental game coach who works with athletes of all levels including amateur and professionals. Visit [PeakSports.com](http://PeakSports.com) to gain access to over 500 exclusive mental game articles, audio programs, and interviews with athletes and coaches to enhance your athletic potential: [www.peaksports.com/membership](http://www.peaksports.com/membership) or call 888-742-7225.

### **Sports Supplement**

**By Rolf Rasmusson**

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Sports Supplement - what is it?

We are all aware of what is a nutrition or diet supplement, but what is a sports supplement? A sport supplement is a subcategory of nutrition supplements. The sports supplement is associated with rising sport results, intensifying training, lowering the consequences like muscle pain, etc. Many athletes use some type of sports supplement or supplements, but if you are an athlete you need to be careful as some of the chemicals used in production of supplements or some of the supplements themselves can be on the banned substance list.

Sports Supplement - caffeine.

Caffeine is an example of a sports supplement. Athletes have used caffeine for a long time as it helps them to stay alert and improve endurance. A good thing about caffeine is that there was a lot of research done about it. According to many sport researchers, caffeine supplements claim that caffeine improves athletic performance, increases energy, delays fatigue, improves fat burning, and enhances body fat loss.

Sports Supplement - protein.

Protein is another example of a sports supplement. According to many athletes, high protein diets help to increase muscle mass and gain strength. Unfortunately there is no scientific proof of that nowadays. Protein supplements claim that protein supports muscle growth, increases muscle strength and mass, improves recovery, etc. Again, no research is available to prove these claims.

Sports Supplement - creatine.

Creatine is yet another example of a sports supplement. According to many sport researchers, creatine supplements seem to enable muscles to work harder before becoming fatigued. Creatine supplements claim that creatine improves high power performance of short duration, increases muscle mass, delays fatigue. If you are an athlete, you need to be careful about using creatine sports supplements as there is very little research regarding safety of creatine.

Additional interesting content at [www.nutritional-supplement-4u.com](http://www.nutritional-supplement-4u.com)



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