

Question 22 (continued)

- (c) Analyse the psychological strategies athletes could employ to enhance performance. 10

Psychological strategies are employed by athletes to improve performance by controlling arousal and anxiety, ~~creating~~ ^{creating} a source of motivation and drive or aiding in self-confidence, self-esteem and self-assurance of one's ability. Psychological strategies enhance performance by providing the mental toughness necessary to enable optimal execution of skills.

~~Mental state~~ Anxiety is a psychological response characterised by fear or apprehension ~~by~~ when confronting a task perceived to be potentially threatening. Whilst some anxiety is beneficial - contributing to over-arousal, excess state or trait anxiety can lead to mental and/or physical paralysis, preventing the ^{proper} execution of what would otherwise be a routine movement. Mental rehearsal and visualisation can ^{help} overcome anxiety.

Mental rehearsal involves imagining a successful performance prior to competition. It should take place in the competition environment to include environmental cues and should take place at the same speed as competition. The athlete visualises a successful performance and is able to ^{create} feelings of success and accomplishment.

Visualisation is similar to mental rehearsal, except that a skill is visualised rather than the whole performance. Both are extremely useful in enhancing performance as not only do they help overcome anxiety by calming the athlete, but they also build self-confidence and assure the athlete of their ability, allowing them to perform better.

A lack of focus is another common problem that can be detrimental to performance, it occurs when the athlete focuses on external cues ~~rather than~~ ^{rather than} ~~thinking~~ ^{thinking} about doing, rather than simply performing the task. The development of attentional and concentration skills is a strategy that can help increase focus. It involves training the mind to

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block out external cues (eg, the crowd applause or the sledging by opponents), to focus on the task at hand. This skill takes time, but can be practiced at training by implementing it into the program.

Goal setting is an extremely useful psychological skill used to enhance performance. When an athlete needs to continuously train they can ^{lose} interest, drive, determination and motivation. Goal setting helps sustain the athlete's interest and aids in maximising effort during training which results in improvements, thus an improved performance. Goals set need to be specific and measurable (eg, an athlete might aim to decrease their time by 5 seconds in a 400m swim). An action plan needs to be implemented and goals should occur in a specific time frame. An action plan might involve a series of smaller goals that act as stepping stones up to an ultimate goal (eg, daily training goals such as improving "streamline" in tumble turns leading up to an eventual improvement in time). All goals need to be recorded to make them real for the athlete. Evaluation of ^{progress towards} goals is ~~important~~ important, as is a reward if these goals are achieved (eg, a trip to McDonald's after a good training session in which daily goals are achieved). In this way, goal setting can enhance performance by sustaining interest and motivation needed to develop physical attributes.

End of Question 22

Positive self talk is a useful tool for enhancing performance as it is occurring, particularly in games or longer individual sports (eg marathons) when it is not possible to perform other mental strategies already suggested. Positive self talk involves erasing negative thoughts (eg, "I'm going to lose", or "I can't catch up now"), and replacing them with positive and motivational thoughts (eg, "good catch" or "gee that was a good tumble turn"). In this way the athlete remains positive & focused throughout the performance, thus enhancing their performance.