

Psychological Influence on Performance

With significant pressures on athletes to constantly improve their performance, the mental state of the athlete becomes more important. Top athletes have to cope with tough training schedules, competition stress, media attention and have to balance their commitments to coaches, family and their personal lives.

Motivation

How and why do athletes choose their sport? Apart from a **natural physical aptitude** for an activity, there must be some reason why training and competing in a particular sport appeals to them. What is their motivation?

- **Intrinsic**
The motivation is the pure pleasure derived from participating in the activity. In other words, you do it because you love it.
- **Extrinsic**
The motivation is the desire to achieve something external: medals, money, fame, etc.

Another motivating factor is the level of excitement or arousal that the athlete experiences as part of the game. Excitement releases adrenaline into the bloodstream, causing the breathing and heart rate to speed up which transports more oxygen to the body, and this can improve their performance. Adrenaline in the bloodstream also causes the body to become tense and the person can become nervous and anxious. A high arousal level would not be beneficial to a snooker player or golfer, they need to remain relaxed and controlled throughout their performance.

Personality

Different personality types enjoy different activities. One division of personality types includes:

- **Introvert**
The person is quiet, enjoys time alone, is focused on doing things on their own.
- **Extrovert**
The person actively seeks the company of others and often has a wide social circle.

Personality type is a main factor in choosing sports; introverts may enjoy sports where they compete on their own, whereas extroverts will be more happy playing in a team. There are many more personality types, and it's worth exploring how personality type influences a person's choice of activities, or their position in the team.

Goal Setting

Setting goals within training and performance is a useful tool in measuring progress. It provides an opportunity for rewards (if you succeed in meeting that goal) or for reviewing your training methods (if you don't meet your goal).

The National Coaching Foundation (NCF) recommends that goals be SMARTER. This means:

Specific	Make sure you know exactly what you want to achieve. For example: a good goal would be "I will improve my serve" and a bad goal would be "I will improve"
Measurable	You must be able to assess your level of success. For example: a good goal would be "I will improve my percentage of successful free-throws." and a bad goal would be "I will be a great basketball player."
Accepted	You and your coach must agree on what you're doing.
Realistic	It has to be within the realms of possibility.
Time Phased	You should set a target date to achieve your goal. For example: a good goal would be "By Easter I will bench press 50 kilos." and a bad goal would be "I want to eventually bench press more."
Exciting	You should be challenged and stimulated by your goal.
Recorded	Write down how and when you achieved your goal before moving onto the next one. It helps you track your overall improvement.

Test your knowledge of sports psychology!

1. Jenny participates in swimming purely for her own enjoyment. This is an example of which type of motivation?

- a) extrinsic b) external c) intrinsic d) internal

2. In which sport would a high arousal level not be beneficial?

- a) weight-lifting b) gymnastics – beam c) basketball d) 100m run

3. True or False: Personality type has no effect on what sports a person would enjoy.

4. Which of the following goals follow the SMARTER guidelines?

- a) I will row to China tomorrow.
b) I will row faster than I do now.
c) I will row 1000 metres every day.
d) In three weeks time, I will row 1000 metres in 8 minutes.