Mental Preparation & Team Building with Female Athletes

Presented by: Karen MacNeill, Ph.D, R.Psych
It’s “Pat”

- Pat has had a great season training/ playing in Europe
- Comes to training camp and is given feedback that rattles Pat
- Notice that Pat is emotional upset, lacks focus and confidence in play... need Pat to execute next game

➢ What would you do?
➢ Would your approach differ if Pat was male or female??
Objectives

- Create awareness of the psychology of the female athlete
- Increase understanding of what mental fitness is and how to develop it
- Present factors that contribute to high performance teams
Outline

- Psychology of the female athlete
- Mental fitness development
- High Performance Teams
- Questions and Answers
Psychology of female
(Janssen, 2010; Matlin, 1996; Stevens, Gammage, & Waddell, 2007; USOC, 2006)

- Psychological gender differences are inconsistent

- Women vary widely from one another

- Be aware of your assumptions and bias

- Equality doesn’t mean that men and women are lead in the same way
Psychology of female

“You basically have to drive men, but you can lead women. Women relate through an interconnected web of personal connections, as apposed to a more traditional male hierarchal style”

- Anson Dorrance, UNC (USOC)
Relationships

- Team chemistry is highly valued - want to feel connected
- Social web - Belonging and being on same plane can be important
- Making connections with coach is highly valued
- May have higher expectations of women coaches - less forgiving
- Competition can be threatening
- Team issues can destroy performance

Implications

- Manage team chemistry
- Demonstrate value as person and as a player
- Normalize and foster competitive environment
- Develop a connective leadership style - talk to players and build relationships
Communication

- For women- communication is a way to establish rapport

- Women may listen less to what and more to how

- Women more likely to internalize general comments

- Women may have more need for expression and feedback

Implications

- Allow time for communication- 5 min huddle

- Explain communication philosophy- feedback, performance vs. personal communication (tone)

- Be specific, and directive in your feedback
Confidence and self image

- Likely more self-conscious and will internalize more than men
- May under-estimate or under-value capacities
- More sensitive to critical/negative comments
- May base confidence on luck and what others think
- May try to please- seek acceptance

Implications
- Create opportunities for success
- Provide criticism and be specific in providing feedback
- Catch them being good and value their contribution
- Debrief failures
- Be sensitive
Anxiety and Emotions

- No clear difference in overall anxiety

- Females pre-competitive anxiety (1-2hr before event) increases more than males

- More emotionally sensitive and expressive

Implications

- Normalize anxiety

- Identify demands and supports in place to manage

- Be aware how comfortable you are with neg. emotions- empathy

- Promote mindfulness and process emotions
Key Points

- Athlete-centered model is the best approach-
  - Respect individual differences

- Connection is Keys
  - Build relationships, have communication strategies,

- Sensitivities- feedback, body-image, emotions,

- Awareness- your own bias, comfort, approach
Mental Fitness

“Even the woodpecker owes his success to the fact that he uses his head”
Factors Impacting Performance

Core competencies:
- Physical, mental and athletic skills and abilities

Environmental stimuli and performance demands:
- Competitive, interpersonal, team, organization, event, challenges

Individual Characteristics:
- Coping style (approach/avoidant), core beliefs, personality,

Behavioural Self-Regulation:
- Interconnection between thoughts, feelings, actions
Interconnection

Thoughts
Doubts, worry, problem solving, self-focus on internal process, task focus

Actions
• Over function
• Avoidance
• Reactive
• Committed

Feelings
• Anxious, doubtful, fear of failure, frustrated, angry
• Excited, nervous, confident, composed

Physiology
• Racing heart, muscle tension, upset stomach, short breath, sleep prob.
Mental Fitness - Jones et al. (2007)

Mental fitness is having the natural or developed psychological edge that enables you to:

Generally
- Cope better than opponents with the many demands (comp, training, life) that sport places on performer

Specifically
- Be consistent and better than opponents in remaining determined, focused, confident, composed and in control under pressure
Mental fitness Attributes

- When you think of a mentally fit female athlete who comes to mind?

- What attributes and characteristics does this person have?
Mental Fitness Attributes

How do you know when you are mentally fit?

Belief - confidence and strength that you can perform
Focus - staying on task and know when to switch off
Distraction control - control thoughts, environment, reactions
Motivation - revisit goals, patience, discipline, intensity
Composure - remaining in control vs. being controlled
Mindset - optimistic, positive self-talk
Handling demands/pressure - adapting and coping
Handling success and failure - learn lessons, refocus
Regulating performance - consistency, engagement,
Sport-life-balance - manage energy in all areas of life
## Mental Fitness Attributes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>Rank 1</th>
<th>Rank 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focused on task</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage demands</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged/motivated/intensity</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief in ability</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage distractions</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to remain calm and composed</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Mental Preparation

- Awareness and readiness

- Mental fitness competencies
  - Education
  - Integration
  - Exposure training

- Team functioning

- Issues - individual, team, org
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Energy Management</strong></td>
<td><em>Maintaining the level of activation that is required for peak performance</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Relaxation, stress/pressure mgnt, managing uncertainty, emotional mgnt, imagery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus</strong></td>
<td><em>Maintaining optimal concentration on the task at hand and regaining focus in face of distractions</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Focus, manage distractions, performance planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Confidence and commitment</strong></td>
<td><em>Demonstrating complete trust and belief in ability to execute task and achieve goals.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Strength building, managing thoughts, goals, risk taking, imagery</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Energy Management - Performance & Activation

Good

Poor

PERFORMANCE

Poor Performance

Maximum Performance

Moderate (Optimally aroused)

Low (Underaroused)

High (Overaroused)

EMOTIONAL AROUSAL

Poor Performance
Catastrophe Theory - Hardy, 1996

Especially at (perceived) important moments (e.g. anxiety, consequences)
Focus and Activation

Level of Activation
## Energy Management Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Energy Mgmt:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Maintaining the level of activation that is required for peak performance</em></td>
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</table>

- Relaxation training- breathing, calming behaviours, music, socialization
- Activation- physical activities, challenge, goal-setting, consequence, music, social,
- Create awareness of internal and external demands and developing plans to manage these.
- Exposure and simulation- “fire drills”
# Focus Strategies

**Focus:**

- Maintaining optimal concentration on the task at hand and regaining focus in face of distractions

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<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identify key performance factors- technical, tactical, mental attributes needed for optimal play</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Distraction control- identify key distractions, awareness of reaction to these, plan for reaction</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Performance Planning- Pre-comp, performance plans, debriefing and post comp plan</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Exposure to different demands- “fire drills”</td>
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# Focus and Performance Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action/ feelings</th>
<th>Activation- 7</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skate hard, Win battles</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shots on net</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Composed</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>On task at hand</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“ quick release”, “NOW”</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distractions</th>
<th>Doubt</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rxn- over function, tense, lose focus</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Breath, review key focus, imagery, reminder of past success</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Success Factors</th>
<th>Composure, activation 7</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus on task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Win battles</td>
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## Confidence Building Strategies

### Confidence & Commitment:

- **Demonstrating complete trust and belief in ability to execute task and achieve goals.**
  - Highlight key strengths - bright spots
  - See success - “why I rock” video, visualization
  - Goal-setting and performance monitoring
  - Experiential opportunities to use strengths
Mental Prep- key points

- Identify and monitor mental fitness attributes

- Develop mental competencies and skill sets

- Use of exposure and experiential experiences to make athlete more resilient- “fire drills”

- Debrief and reframe
High Performance Teams

“A successful team is a group of many hands but of one mind.”

- Bill Bethel
High Performance Teams

Self- Management

Clear vision

Role-acceptance

Communication

Attitude
High Performance Teams

- What contributes to a high performance team?

- What contributes to a dysfunctional team?

“ It is amazing what you can accomplish when no one cares who gets the credit”

- Harry Truman
High Performance Teams

Common Vision

P= Strengths – Interferences

Roles and responsibilities

System of communication

System of accountability

Norms and “rules”

Shared leadership

Willingness

Results!!!
Five dysfunctions of a team
(P. Lencioni, 2005)
Team Building Strategies

- Identify common vision
  - Values, roles, norms, tolerance, expectations

- Create awareness and accountability:
  - Energy makers and energy takers
  - Monitoring

- Communication strategies and trust building
  - 5 min huddle; System to address issues
  - Time together; what do I need, what can I give

- Formal and information team-building
  - Events, group challenges,
High Performance Teams

“Teamwork remains the one sustainable competitive advantage that has been largely untapped”

- P. Lencioni
Key Messages

- Be aware of the specific needs of female athletes
  - Understand key needs
  - Be aware of personal coaching style and bias

- Develop mental fitness competencies
  - Energy management
  - Focus
  - Confidence and commitment

- Put calculated effort into developing a high performance team
Questions?

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