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Is motivation more important than ability in a successful competitive performance?

In order to learn and perform any skill, especially in sport, we must have the abilities required. Knapp (1963) defined ability as "our innate physical attrib utes that determine our potential for a given sport". These can be perceptual, motor or most commonly a combination of both. Abilities are often seen as the building blocks of sport. Without the basic building blocks or movement vocabulary, we will never be able to develop skill fully. Motivation is therefore defined as "the external stimuli and internal mechanisms that arouse and direct our behaviour" Sage (1974). Motivation therefore has two parts to it: an inner drive, which comes from our own satisfaction and need to do the task, and the external rewards we want to achieve, such as our desire to win the cup or to be voted player of the match. "If we are not in a positive psychological state, we will make mistakes in performance and will not learn to perform at our best". F. Galligan (2000).

The sport itself can affect the type of motivation required and the effect this has on the performance. Individual sports such as gymnastics, require a lot of intrinsic motivation due to the fact they are competing alone most of the time. Intrinsic motivation comes from within the player and can involve such things as using imagery or self talk. In this kind of situation an athlete is forced to be responsible for their own actions and decisions, something a highly motivated player with confidence will recognise and appreciate. This combined with their ability to compete and perform will enhance the success of their overall performance.

Individual performers will also experience extrinsic motivation, however they will receive less of it than team sport players. Extrinsic motivation comes from an outside source and may be intangible, such as praise from a coach, or tangible, such as the incentive of winning a trophy or the prize money. But in team sports the extrinsic motivation would mostly come from other team members encouraging each other. Biddell (1984) suggested "extrinsic motivation is of benefit at first and can drive individuals to participate and work hard initially, but in long term extrinsic motivation is not enough on its own, there must also be elements of intrinsic motivation". Examples showing what Biddell is suggesting can often be seen in sport. If football players were solely motivated by money, many of them would not continue to perform well once they had gained a contract paying them £50,000 per week. Money is no longer an issue.

The relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is important. Extrinsic rewards can lay the foundation for future motivation by attracting newcomers to the activity, but if rewards are given continually, then the performer might begin to perform just to get the reward and lose the enjoyment of the sport. In individual sports such as golf, the performer will require a lot more motivation to perform well than those of team sports such as football, whether it be intrinsic or extrinsic. Because in team sports, performers can hide their lower ability behind the overall performance of the team, however this can not be done in individual sports.

Ability is essential in making a performance successful, regardless of what type of activity it is, but motivation levels varies for type of activities. As well as motivation enhancing performance, it can also work the other way round, and the ability to perform well can improve motivation. There are lots of different types of ability such as co-ordination, speed, reaction time, balance, agility, manual dexterity and depth perception. These are gross motor skills that a person can be born with but they can be enhanced also. Gross motor skills are required in sport because without them we would not be able learn skills such as a smash in badminton. Abilities are needed to perform skills in sport. Knapp (1963) defined skills as "the learned ability to bring about pre-determined results with maximum effeminacy, often with the minimum outlay of time or energy or both". In sport, skill is seen as a co-ordinate act, involving complex movements brought together in a consistent and smooth manner. A term commonly associated with skill and ability is technique. In order to perform a particular skill in sport, we must have the required technique. In order to learn the technique fully, we must be motivated to train hard and must have the necessary abilities. (skill = ability + technique).

Arousal can also help or hinder players of sport. It is defined as "the degree to which we are activated and ready to perform the tasks ahead". Philip Allan, (2005). Motivation can affect a player's level of arousal and if a player is aroused to an optimum level, this is when the performer will be best at quick thinking, most alert, enthusiastic and quick at decision-making. performance therefore will be greatly improved. Hull's drive theory can help explain this (1). This theory suggests that as our arousal increases, so does our performance. Performance = habit x drive. The drive part of the theory relates to the initial challenge or drive that begins to motivate the performer. The initial motivation will result in increased effort, which should produce a better performance, and the reinforcement gained by success will help the performer to repeat the successful responses.

Over-arousal or stress, however, can affect our ability to make decisions. For example if a football player was to perform with a high level of arousal this may result in them making a bad tackle and hurting someone, but could still improve performance because they will work harder, but if a snooker player performed with a high level of arousal then they would not be able to concentrate because they will be too excited and they need to be calm so their performance would decrease. This can be explained by the inverted U theory (2). This states that as arousal increases, so does performance, but only to a point, optimum level. Any further increase in arousal will actually cause deterioration in performance. Therefore, at both low and high arousal levels, performance is sub-optimal. This can also vary according to the skill being performed(3). For example a professional rugby player has to perform a lot of gross skills, which involves large muscle movements, such as tackling and sprinting, which are also simple tasks, this therefore would increase levels of adrenaline because more blood is being pumped around the body to give it more oxygen and t herefore arousal levels would increase resulting in increased performance, but only to a point. Another example would be in badminton, the player has to perform a lot of fine skills, which involve small muscle movements, and which are also complex tasks such as a backhand flick of the wrist. Therefore the badminton player will need less arousal than the rugby player to increase performance.

In all sports, ability is essential to complete a successful performance, but some sports

require a certain amount of motivation as well as ability to perform successfully, for example, a 100m sprinter will have very good ability, but will run faster when put up against other athletes who have very good abilities as well, because of the competition and this therefore motivates the sprinter. Whereas in golf, it is more about the technique and therefore ability to perform well. This therefore shows that motivation can help a great deal sometimes but is not needed as much as ability to complete a successful performance.