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REVIEW ARTICLE

**PSYCHOLOGY AND SPORTS
PERFORMANCE**

Psychology and Sports Performance

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Psychology is an increasingly popular and important area of human performance, which concerns research into sporting and athletic performance, particularly with regard to improvement. It is now accepted that superior sporting performance is not just dependent upon physical and motor skills but on perceptual and cognitive skills as well. Thus sports psychologists are playing an increasingly important role in individual and team sports.

Sports and exercise psychology has been defined as the scientific study of people and their behaviours in sports and exercise context and the practical application of that knowledge.

Where there is behaviour, there is psychology. Physical education and sports make an art-science combine dealing with movement, motion, activity, play, recreation and the like. In essence, they are activity based endeavors; in function, they are enhancers of health and fitness; in objective, they are developmental to the core; in nature, they are joyful, recreating and relaxing, and in purpose, they are and ought to be out and out educational. The branch of psychology which is intimately connected with human behaviour on the playfield – both under practice and competitive situations – with a view to bring about quantitative improvement in performance, is usually called “exercise and sport psychology”. It is basically of applied nature. Physical education, an educational endeavour, is much wider in range and focus than elite competitive sport.

Whereas the one is extensive and general, the other is intensively performance-oriented and specific. Like circle within circle, they are inseparable. Where as physical education is milk, sports are butter churned out of it. There cannot be butter without milk. The physical educator and the coach grapple with almost the same problems and parameters of behaviours. It would be futile to segregate physical education and sport on psychological parameters and put them in watertight compartments. The divergence or convergence in the application of psychological principles to the understanding and modification of behaviour in physical education and sports is more a matter of degree than of kind. Psychology in physical education or exercise has its focus on general processes and procedures of learning, motivation, play, growth and development etc. In sports its concerns

become more or less specific. Besides, skill-acquisition, greater emphasis is on psychological training, coping strategies, interventions, mental skills and the like. Both in activity and psychological dimensions, the sport-perspective is much more specific than physical education scenario. The psychological problems of performing athletes are more subtle, serious and complex than of those who engage in physical activity for fun, fitness, health, recreation and play. That, perhaps, is the reason why activity behaviour has been subjected to more vigorous research in sports context than play or exercise context over the last four decades.

The need for psychologizing education has been emphasized since the days of Pestalozzi who, as Ross (1955) puts it, felt that the mind of the pupil is the primary concern of the educator, and that 'the art of education must be based on an accurate knowledge of the mental processes'. The major objectives of education and physical education precisely are (a) acquisition of skills, and (b) high level of performance in physical and intellectual acts and activities. Man's ability to learn and to perform are governed by natural laws as well as contrived procedures and processes. The centre of all educational and sports endeavour, is the individual (child). Teaching is impossible without complete knowledge of learners' physical potential, mental abilities and intellectual powers at all stages of learning and factors and conditions associated with them. Sport psychology at the baseline is essentially educational psychology. Williams (1964) aptly remarked: "physical education in its methods and materials should reflect modern psychologyThis is the true function of the teacher to use the native impulses of the young as a starting point for assimilation of knowledge, acquisition of skills and development of the habits of the society into which the youth comes".

The relationship between education and psychology as well as between body and mind is well defined. It needs no overemphasis. Without complete understanding of the behaviour which is the central theme of psychology, its modification would be difficult to conceptualize. In order to optimize human potential for learning and performance, the raw material of innate behaviour (instincts, emotions, reflexes) is required to be understood in its biological as well as social contexts and treated accordingly.

Psychology, therefore, helps the teachers/coaches to understand the real springs of human behaviour and devise ways and means to direct and guide the out-flow of psychic energy into channels which irrigate the fertile tracks of human development to the optimal level. The ultimate beneficiary in this process is the individual.

Psychology in physical education and sport is not simply an academic subject at the training colleges. In fact, it is practised by coaches and athletes in the field setting. Psychological intervention, coping strategies, mental skills such as imagining, concentrating, focusing team interaction and cohesion are all practical tasks in which athletes, teachers/coaches, and sport psychologists play a reciprocally cooperative but decisive role. All other things being equal, an athletic event/game is won in the mind. One of the goals of applied sport psychology is to investigate human performance to stabilize and to enhance sport performance by striking balance between the physical and mental dimensions of performance. Sports without psychology are a headless horseman trying to run in various directions without accomplishing anything worth the name.

Today, there is no sport without sports psychology. "Though its content areas began with a behavioural emphasis, sport psychology is now looking at dynamics and inter-actional variables, with a major interest in mediating variables – the athletes, perceptions and cognitions"

Singer (1981) vouches for the fact that "sports psychology is an applied psychology, in the same way military and industrial psychology are. It encompasses various branches of psychology as they are related to our ability to understand athletic performance, how to make it better, and how to influence favourable psychological outcomes from experiences in sports and exercise programs". Like physical education, which derives its substance from a variety of sciences, humanities and arts, sports psychology borrows its content and methods mostly from social psychology, clinical and counseling psychology, development psychology, psychometrics, performance psychology and learning psychology. It is yet to evolve itself as a discipline in real sense of the term. In "how –to-make performance better" scenario, sport psychology raises itself from the theoretical level and ventures into the practical, and often peculiar situations in which the athlete and the coach become the real direct consumers of psychological principles governing performance. In this respect, sports psychology is gradually evolving itself as a discipline of highest practical value.

Psychological development among the sports person is paramount important for achieve excellence in sports activities. Psychological condition like organizational health and adjustment among physical

education teachers is essential for organizing better sports activities in schools and colleges.

INDIAN SPORTS

India - known for its fanaticism for cricket and hockey; started its sports odyssey long back during the great Vedic Era of India. Initially, the development of sports (games) in India gathered momentum after its important role, in maintaining the physical health, was coined by the people of India. Hunting, swimming, boating, archery, horse riding, wrestling and fishing mark the stage of infancy of Indian Sports (Games). Then came the Martial Arts which was also a strong way of self defence apart from a vigorous physical exercise.

In India, sports (games) is seen as 'a way of realizing the body potential to its fullest'; also known as "Dehvada" in ancient India. The philosophical foundation of the sports (games) in India lies in the history of India dating back to Vedic Era in which the Atharva Veda said: ", " Duty is in my right hand and the fruits of victory in my left". These words in the traditional mantra hold the same spirit as that of the Olympic oath that implies: ".....For the Honour of my Country and the Glory of Sport." The history of India also beckons of an interesting link between Greece (The Motherland of Sports in the world) and India which dates back to 975 B.C. when both the nations pioneered in the sports (games) like chariot racing and wrestling.

The golden history of sports in India is also evident in the immortal Indian epics like Ramayana, Mahabharata etc. Whereas during the period of Ramayana; hunting, archery, horse riding, swimming were the royal games; Mahabharata made a mark in the sports like dicing, gymnastics, wrestling, chess (Shatranj) and gulli danda. Puranas mention about the threatening game of rope fighting. The archeological excavations of Harappa and Mohanjodaro along with the religious manuscripts like Puranas and Vedas are the standing testimonials of this glorious history of Indian sports.

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Today sports in India have achieved a zenith in terms of popularity and as a career option. Olympics, Commonwealth Games, Asian Games, SAF Games,

Wimbledon and many other world sports tournaments see Indians as one of the most leading sports participants in the world. From Tendulkar, Paes, Bhupathi, Anand, Geet Sethi, Karthikeyan to Sania Mirza lead the present sports generation of India. Cricket, Hockey, Football, Weightlifting, Snooker, Kabaddi, Kho Kho and Archery are the sports of India that have been deep seated into an Indian psyche, whether of a sports person or a sports lover. Not only physical strength, power and satisfaction but also a strong alternative of recreation; sports in India have paved a long way towards the road of success and have made themselves a hallmark in the world of sports.

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