

# *Coaching*

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## for the Inner Edge

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# Contents

## Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>xi</b>
<b>Part 1 Establishing a Solid Foundation</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Chapter 1 Understanding Sport Psychology .....	3
Chapter 2 Developing and Living a Practical Coaching Philosophy .....	13
Chapter 3 Motivation .....	23
Chapter 4 Communication .....	49
Chapter 5 Leadership .....	75
Chapter 6 Team Cohesion .....	105
<b>Part 2 Mental Training Tool Box</b> .....	<b>131</b>
Chapter 7 Beyond Shrinks: What Coaches Should Know About Mental Training .....	133
Chapter 8 Goal Mapping .....	149
Chapter 9 Imagery .....	177
Chapter 10 P <sup>3</sup> Thinking .....	201
Chapter 11 Physical Relaxation .....	225
<b>Part 3 Mental Skills for Athletes: The Big Three</b> .....	<b>237</b>
Chapter 12 Attentional Focus .....	239
Chapter 13 Managing Energy .....	267
Chapter 14 Self-Confidence .....	299
<b>Part 4 Putting It All Together</b> .....	<b>319</b>
Chapter 15 Implementing Mental Training: Selecting from the Menu .....	321
Chapter 16 Common Challenges Faced by Coaches: Special Recipes .....	335
<b>Postscript</b> .....	<b>357</b>
<b>Resource Guide for Coaches</b> .....	<b>359</b>
<b>References</b> .....	<b>361</b>
<b>Appendices List</b> .....	<b>371</b>
<b>Appendices</b> .....	<b>372</b>
<b>Index</b> .....	
<b>About the Author</b> .....	



# Detailed

# Contents

*Introduction* .....xi

## **Part 1 Establishing a Solid Foundation**

### **Chapter 1 Understanding Sport Psychology**

What is Sport Psychology? .....4  
Objectives of Sport Psychology: The Triad .....5  
    Achieving Optimal Performance .....5  
    Achieving Optimal Development .....5  
    Achieving Optimal Experiences .....6  
A Big Picture of the Inner Edge .....7  
    A Balanced Triad for the Inner Edge .....8  
    Building Blocks .....8  
    Mental Training Tool Box .....8  
    Mental Skills and Implementation Tips .....9

### **Chapter 2 Developing and Living a Practical Coaching Philosophy**

Who Needs Philosophy? We All Do! .....14  
Balancing the Triad: A Basic Coaching Philosophy .....15  
A Tilted Triad: Is Winning Really “the Only Thing”? .....16

### **Chapter 3 Motivation**

Defining Motivation .....24  
Test Your Motivation I.Q. ....25  
Motivation Myths .....26  
    Jug-and-Mug Myth .....26  
    You-Have-It-or-You-Don’t Myth .....27  
    The Natural Talent Myth .....28  
    Exploding Motivational Myths .....28  
Athletes’ Needs and Motivation .....29  
    Need for Stimulation and Challenge .....30  
    Need for Acceptance and Belonging .....31  
    Need to Feel Competent and Worthy .....32  
Self-Determination: The Most Misunderstood Motivational Need .....35  
    Intrinsic Motivation .....36  
    Extrinsic Motivation .....37  
    Keeping Motivation Fine-Tuned .....37  
Moving Effectively Along the Continuum of Self-Determination to Enhance Motivation .....38  
    Hook and Challenge .....38  
    Allow Control and Demand Responsibility .....39  
    Caution! Extrinsic Reinforcers in Use .....40

## **Chapter 4 Communication**

Importance of Communication for Coaches .....	50
Communication Basics .....	51
The Credible Communicator .....	55
Authenticity .....	55
Emotional Competence .....	56
Becoming a Power Listener .....	57
Blocks to Listening .....	58
Four Steps in Power Listening .....	60
PITCH It! Sending Effective Messages .....	63
Productive .....	63
Informational .....	64
Time It .....	64
Consistent .....	65
Honest .....	66
Managing Conflict .....	66
Approaches to Conflict Management .....	66
A Communication Strategy for Resolving Conflict: The Four “Olves” .....	68
Effective Confrontations .....	69

## **Chapter 5 Leadership**

Leadership Lingo .....	76
Transformative vs. Transactional Leadership .....	76
Transformative, or Triple-Loop, Learning .....	78
Power .....	80
Leadership Myths .....	81
The Born Leader .....	81
The Rah-Rah Leader .....	81
The Formula Leader .....	82
Three-Ring Circus Model of Leadership .....	83
The Separate Rings .....	83
The Interconnected Rings .....	83
From Circus Ringmaster to Mad Hatter: Required Leadership Roles .....	84
The Vision Hat .....	85
Remember the Law of Navigation (Chart Your Course) .....	85
Synthesize Information and Insights Into a Specific Action Plan .....	87
Live Your Vision and Action Plan .....	87
Wrapping up the Vision Hat: Beware the Vision Killers .....	90
The Relationship Hat .....	91
The Control Hat .....	93
Decision-Making Styles .....	93
Distinguishing Democratic Process from Democratic Decisions .....	94
Timing is Everything .....	95
The Reinforcement Hat .....	96
The Information Hat .....	97
Wearing the Hats: What Athletes Want From Coaches .....	98
Coach Behaviors Athletes Feel Hurts Their Performance .....	98
Coach Behaviors Athletes Feel Helps Their Performance .....	98
Nurturing Leadership in Athletes .....	98

## **Chapter 6 Team Cohesion**

A Case Study on Team Cohesion .....	106
Cohesion Basics .....	107
Task and Social Cohesion .....	107
Dynamic Nature of Cohesion .....	108
How Cohesion Influences Behavior in Sport .....	109
Team Building (TB) for Cohesion: HOW WE DO IT HERE! .....	111
Step 1: Where We Start .....	112
Step 2: How We Act .....	114
Step 3: How It Works .....	117
Example TB Exercises .....	121

## **Part 2 Mental Training Tools**

### **Chapter 7 Beyond Shrinks: What Coaches Should Know About Mental Training**

“You Either Have It or You Don’t” .....	135
Mental Skills Are Learnable .....	135
Mental Training is Necessary and Worthwhile .....	136
“I Don’t Need a Shrink” .....	137
Becoming Supernormal .....	137
An Educational Focus on Skill Development .....	138
“What Do You Actually DO in Mental Training?” .....	139
Using the Mental Training Tool Box to Build Mental Skills .....	139
Interdependence of Physical and Mental Training .....	140
“Where’s the Proof?” .....	142
“What If They Listen to You - and Not to Me?” .....	143
“I’ll Do It If You Guarantee Success” .....	144
Mental Skills, Like Physical Ability, Are Developed Over Time .....	144
Objectives of Mental Training .....	145

### **Chapter 8 Goal Mapping**

Why are Goal Maps Important? .....	150
A Map for How to Act .....	150
A Map for How to Think and Feel .....	152
Types of Goals .....	153
Outcome, Performance, and Process Goals .....	153
Long-Term and Short-Term Goals .....	155
SMAART Goal Mapping .....	155
Specific .....	155
Measurable .....	156
Aggressive yet Achievable .....	156
Relevant .....	156
Time-bound .....	157
Four Steps of Goal Mapping .....	157
Identify Your Purpose .....	158
Plan and Develop Your Goal Map .....	160
Act “On Purpose” .....	164
Put the Top Down and Turn Up the Music .....	168
Goal Mapping Tips for Coaches .....	171
Simple .....	171
Systematic .....	171
Synergistic .....	173

## **Chapter 9 Imagery**

What is Imagery? .....	178
Imagery as Recreating and Creating .....	178
Imagery as a Polysensory Experience .....	179
Imagery as a Mental Training Tool .....	180
Internal and External Imagery Perspectives .....	181
Does Imagery Work to Enhance Athletes' Performance? .....	181
Enhancing Sport Performance and Learning .....	182
Enhancing Competition-Related Thoughts and Emotions .....	184
Incidence of Imagery Use .....	184
Experiential Evidence that Imagery Works .....	184
How Does Imagery Enhance Athletes' Performance? .....	185
Symbolic Learning Theory .....	186
Bio-informational Theory .....	186
Can Imagery Hurt Athletes' Performance? .....	187
How Coaches and Athletes Can Use Imagery .....	188
Create a Productive Team Image and Model Your Belief in Imagery .....	188
Teach, Learn, and Practice Sport Skills .....	189
Teach, Learn, and Practice Performance Strategies .....	190
Create and Practice a Mental Focus for Competition .....	190
Create and Practice Pre-performance Routines .....	191
Correct Mistakes .....	192
Build and Enhance Mental Skills .....	192
Aid in Recovery from Injury .....	194
Tips to Make Imagery More Effective .....	194
Example Imagery Exercises .....	196

## **Chapter 10 P<sup>3</sup> Thinking**

What is P <sup>3</sup> Thinking? .....	202
Purposeful Thinking .....	203
Why Athletes Don't Think "On Purpose" .....	204
Why Athletes Should Think "On Purpose" .....	204
Can Purposeful Thinking Ever Hurt Athletes' Performance? .....	205
Summary: Purposeful Thinking as the First P .....	207
Productive Thinking .....	207
Choose to RESPOND .....	208
Characteristics of Productive Thoughts .....	208
Countering to Defeat Irrational Thinking by Athletes .....	210
Summary: Productive Thinking as the Second P .....	214
Possibility Thinking .....	214
Why Possibility Thinking is Important .....	215
Strategies to Enhance Possibility Thinking .....	216
Strategies to Teach P <sup>3</sup> Thinking to Athletes .....	217
Model P <sup>3</sup> Thinking .....	217
Establish a P <sup>3</sup> Thinking Culture .....	217
Normalize Tendency for R <sup>3</sup> Thinking .....	218
Help Athletes Understand Their P <sup>3</sup> and R <sup>3</sup> Tendencies .....	218
Counter R <sup>3</sup> Thinking .....	218
Emphasize "Triage" in Competition Thinking .....	218
Use Affirmations .....	220



### **Chapter 11 Physical Relaxation**

How Athletes Can Use Physical Relaxation .....	226
Methods of Physical Relaxation .....	227
Imagery .....	227
Self-Talk .....	227
Power Breathing .....	228
Conscious Muscle Control .....	230
Tips for Coaches .....	233

## **Part 3 Mental Skills for Athletes: The Big Three**

### **Chapter 12 Attentional Focus**

Attentional Capacity in Athletes .....	240
Attentional Readiness in Athletes .....	241
Attentional Narrowing as the Result of Anxiety .....	241
Self-focused Attention as the Result of Anxiety .....	242
Panicking and Choking in Sport: Why They Occur .....	243
Attentional Selectivity in Athletes .....	245
Selective Attention as Part of Expert Performance .....	245
Types of Attention Needed by Athletes .....	246
Differences in Attentional Skills .....	248
Associative and Dissociative Attention .....	249
Attentional Selectivity Problems .....	249
Strategies to Enhance Athletes' Attentional Focus .....	251
Build a Strong Physical Machine .....	251
Overload Processing Demands .....	252
Practice Focusing in Training .....	252
Teach to Selectively Attend .....	253
Focus on Appropriate Goals .....	253
Manage Arousal and Anxiety .....	254
Help Athletes Become Aware of Attentional Skills .....	254
Pre-performance Routines .....	255
Focus Plans .....	259
Refocusing in Problem Situations .....	260

### **Chapter 13 Managing Energy**

Competitive Energy as a Natural Resource .....	268
Different Feeling States Experienced by Athletes .....	269
Feeling States Result from Intensity and Direction of Competitive Energy .....	269
Athletes Experience Feeling States Mentally and Physically .....	270
All Forms of Competitive Energy are Potentially Positive and Negative .....	271
Purposes of Feeling States .....	272
Why Stress is Important for Athletes .....	272
Flow: The Optimal Energy Zone .....	273
Flow as a Balance Between Challenge and Skills .....	273
Why Flow Leads to Peak Performance .....	274
Can Athletes Train for Flow? .....	275
How Competitive Energy Influences Athletes' Performance .....	276
Intensity of Competitive Energy (Arousal) and Performance .....	276
Pleasant and Unpleasant Feeling States Related to Performance .....	281
Anxiety and Performance .....	285
How to Optimize Competitive Energy in Athletes .....	287

P <sup>3</sup> Thinking and Feeling in Response to Competitive Pressure . . . . .	287
Managing Negative Energy . . . . .	291
Creating Optimal Energy Profiles for Athletes . . . . .	293
Energy Management for Coaches . . . . .	294
<b>Chapter 14 Self-Confidence</b>	
What Confidence IS and What It Is NOT . . . . .	300
Understanding Confidence . . . . .	300
Myths About Confidence . . . . .	300
What Do Athletes Need to Be Confident About? . . . . .	303
Confidence as the “Mental Modifier” . . . . .	304
Goals, Effort, and Persistence . . . . .	305
Cognitive Efficiency . . . . .	306
Emotional Adaptiveness . . . . .	306
Sources of Confidence for Athletes . . . . .	307
Achievement . . . . .	308
Preparation . . . . .	308
Self-Regulation . . . . .	308
Models . . . . .	309
Feedback/Encouragement . . . . .	309
Other Sources . . . . .	309
Are Some Sources of Confidence Better Than Others? . . . . .	310
Self-Confidence in Teams . . . . .	311
Strategies to Enhance Confidence in Athletes . . . . .	311
Perspiration . . . . .	312
Regulation . . . . .	313
Inspiration . . . . .	314
<b>Part 4 Putting It All Together</b>	
<b>Chapter 15 Implementing Mental Training: Selecting from the Menu</b>	
Commit to the Inner Edge . . . . .	321
Put First Things First . . . . .	322
Start Small - Stay Simple - Follow Through . . . . .	322
Choose an Entry Point . . . . .	323
Developing a Goal Map as an Entry Point . . . . .	323
Identifying Critical Success Factors as an Entry Point . . . . .	323
Self-Evaluation Activities as Entry Points . . . . .	324
Focus on the Skills - Use the Tools . . . . .	325
Focus on Confidence . . . . .	325
Focus on Managing Energy . . . . .	326
Focus on Focus . . . . .	326
Yearly Plans for Optimal Physical and Mental Training . . . . .	327
Sample Mental Plans . . . . .	328
<b>Chapter 16 Common Challenges Faced by Coaches: Special Recipes</b>	
Burnout . . . . .	336
Why Do Athletes Burn Out? . . . . .	337
Why Are Some Athletes More Susceptible to Burnout Than Others? . . . . .	337
Helping Athletes Avoid and Deal With Burnout . . . . .	338
Coaches and Burnout . . . . .	341
Wrapping Up Burnout . . . . .	342
Coaching for the Inner Edge with Injured Athletes . . . . .	342

	Mental Skill Reduces Athletes' Vulnerability to Injury .....	342
	Mental Training With Injured Athletes .....	342
Slumps	.....	345
Inconsistency	.....	347
	Importance of Emphasizing Consistency .....	348
	What Consistency Means .....	348
	Responding to Inconsistencies .....	348
	“Playing to the Level” .....	348
Perfectionism	.....	349
	Positive and Negative Perfectionism .....	349
	Identifying Negative Perfectionist Athletes .....	350
	Coaching Negative Perfectionistic Athletes .....	350
Commitment	.....	351
	What is Commitment? .....	351
	Building Commitment in Athletes .....	351
<i>Postscript</i>	.....	<i>357</i>
<i>Resource Guide for Coaches</i>	.....	<i>359</i>
<i>References</i>	.....	<i>361</i>
<i>Appendices List</i>	.....	<i>371</i>
<i>Appendices</i>	.....	<i>372</i>
<i>Index</i>	.....	<i>401</i>
<i>About the Author</i>	.....	<i>407</i>

# Part

# One

## Establishing a Solid Foundation

Learning to coach for the Inner Edge begins with the basics. The first six chapters in Part 1 are designed to provide you with a solid foundational understanding of sport psychology. In the first chapter, the field of sport psychology is explained as it relates to coaching effectiveness. Then, we move on to the basic topics of coaching philosophy, motivation, communication, leadership, and team cohesion. As shown below in Figure 1.1, these basic topics form the building blocks needed for the Inner Edge. Your athletes gain the Inner Edge when they are part of a program in which

- there is a consistent and effective coaching philosophy,
- motivation is nurtured and enhanced in athletes,
- communication flows easily and honestly,
- innovative leadership is provided, and
- the whole is stronger than the parts through team cohesion.

Read with an open mind. Learn from the master coaches and elite athletes who are described throughout these chapters. Consider the ways in which you can use this knowledge in your program with your athletes. Be thoughtful, innovative, and willing to move beyond your comfort zone and familiar ways of thinking. Get the Inner Edge!

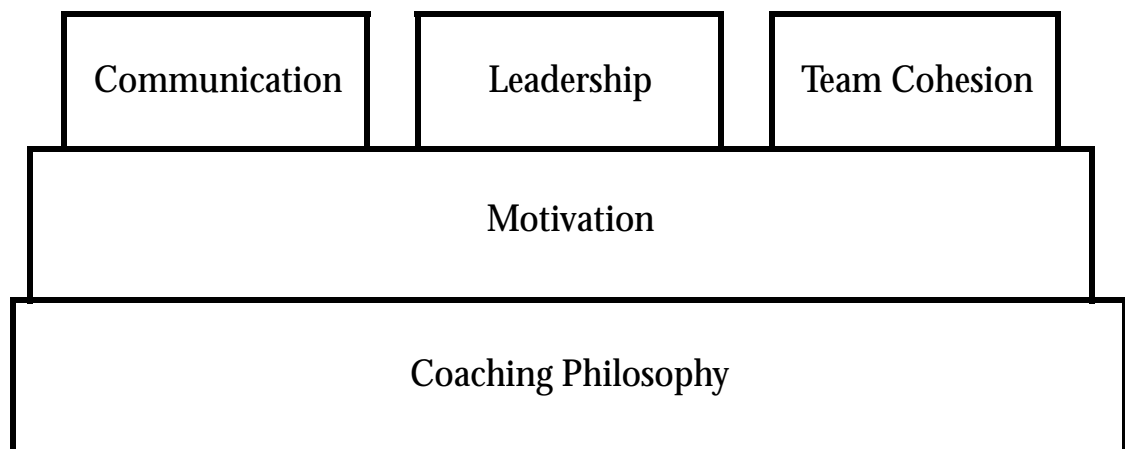


Figure 1.1 Building Blocks for the Inner Edge



# Chapter

## One

# *Understanding Sport Psychology*



Photo courtesy of Miami University IT Communications

### Chapter Preview

In this chapter, you'll learn:

- what sport psychology is about
- how sport psychology integrates with other sport sciences
- how the objectives of sport psychology may be thought of as a “triad”
- about research in sport psychology that supports the triad

**M**ichael Johnson let the pressure wash over him as he stood on the track waiting for the start of the 200 meter race in the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games. The entire world knew that he was attempting to become the first man to strike Olympic gold in both the 200 and 400 meter races. Amazingly, Johnson seemed eager to create more pressure for himself by confidently stating his intention to win both races and then appearing on the track in glistening gold shoes as a public declaration that anything less than gold medals in both races would be a failure. He won the 400 meter race in Olympic record time, and now faced his second challenge, which he wanted the most. Later, Johnson revealed what he was thinking at this moment: “There was pressure

from the . . . people who expect you to win . . . But I crave [pressure]. I live for that very moment in the blocks” (Moore, 1996, p. 30). Johnson exploded from the blocks to win the race in a world record 19.32 seconds, a time that most track aficionados would not have predicted to occur until a few decades later.

Most all athletes have experienced the intoxication of peak performance in sport, although most of us will not achieve our peak performances in the Olympic Games as did Michael Johnson. Sport arouses passion and competitive intensity in us because we all have at least briefly experienced *being in the zone* or performing at a level commensurate with our physical and mental potential. What a feeling it is to experience this

*zone* where performance seems so automatic and even effortless! However, it is far more typical for athletes to perform when they are *not* in this automatic, optimal performance zone. This requires athletes to be mentally skilled, to focus effectively and manage their thoughts, emotions, and actions during competition. The goal for any athlete is to perform optimally, whether that involves performing in the *zone* or being mentally skilled to perform well when things are not automatically clicking. The quest to understand, and help athletes achieve, optimal performance in sport has spawned the various sport sciences, or areas of systematic study and research, such as sport physiology, sport biomechanics, sport medicine, and sport psychology.

Consider how Michael Johnson used knowledge from the sport sciences in achieving his peak performance. Sport physiology was important in designing appropriate fitness training for the specific energy demands of the 200 and 400 meter sprint races. Sport biomechanics was important in helping Johnson develop and refine his individualized running technique, which allowed him maximum acceleration and minimum drag to enhance his speed. Sport medicine played an important role in providing the latest injury treatment and rehabilitation in his training for the Olympics. And finally, Johnson utilized principles from sport psychology to remain mentally tough throughout years of grueling workouts, to develop and maintain a competitive focus free of distraction, and to optimize his energy level at the point of competition to enable his mind to control his body to achieve its maximum performance.

Although sport psychology is the focus of this book, it should be noted that all of the sport sciences work in an integrated fashion to enhance sport performance. Michael Johnson had earned his ability to be confident based on his persistence in a sound physiological training program. His physical and mental energy levels were primed at their optimal point in relation to the physiological needs of this specific event. His competitive focus was developed in concert with his biomechanical technique training in which he learned how most efficiently to direct his attention to run using proper mechanical form. Effective sport performance is the culmination of knowledge gained from all the sport sciences,

although our primary interest in this book is in sport psychology.

## What is Sport Psychology?

**Sport psychology** is the study of how individuals think, act, and feel when participating in sport. Thus, sport psychologists are interested in *how the thoughts, behaviors, and emotions of athletes influence and are influenced by their sport participation*. Think about this relationship. What are examples of ways that athletes' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are linked to the social context of sport? Why does an intelligent, easy-going ice hockey player drop his gloves and fight with an opponent on the ice? Why do athletes believe that it's harder to win on the road than at home (and often let this belief affect their performance)? Why would a talented high school basketball player, who is being wooed by every college coach in the country, suddenly lose her shooting touch in the championship playoffs?

These questions all capture the **psychosocial aspects of sport participation**—which is the focus of study in sport psychology. This simply refers to the ways in which psychological factors (e.g., personality of the athlete) interact with social factors in sport (e.g., competitive pressure, leadership style of coaches, crowd size) to influence athletes and their performance. The hockey player fights because hockey is marketed as an aggressive sport, and hockey players are encouraged and expected to fight to increase fan attendance. The home advantage has been documented in sport meaning that statistics show that teams win more at home than on the road. However, the home advantage has been talked about so much by coaches and the media that athletes often put themselves at a psychological disadvantage by believing it. This socially constructed belief affects athletes' competitive behavior in terms of effort and confidence, which subsequently hurts their performance on the road. The talented basket-

### Personal Plug-In

What questions do you have about the psychosocial aspects of sport participation? Identify 3-4 questions about sport psychology that you think are the most interesting. Be creative—ask hard questions!

ball player in our example probably fell prey to competitive stress based on the increasing pressure of performing well to carry her team to a championship, earning a college scholarship, and gaining the approval of her parents and coach. In other words, the social pressures she faced influenced her thinking, and detracted from her ability to relax and focus on the process of playing.

## **Objectives of Sport Psychology: The Triad**

From a practical standpoint, three objectives of sport psychology are presented in this chapter for athletes and coaches. These three objectives represent a *triad* that emphasizes that the field of sport psychology attempts to help athletes achieve (a) *optimal performance*, (b) *optimal development*, and (c) *optimal experiences* in sport.

### ***Achieving Optimal Performance***

Research has shown that sport psychology interventions, or mental training, can enhance athletes' performances in a variety of sports (e.g., Greenleaf, Gould, & Dieffenbach, 2001; Greenspan & Feltz, 1989; Patrick & Hrycaiko, 1998; Thelwell & Greenlees, 2001). Several of the techniques presented in this book, such as imagery, relaxation, and purposeful self-talk, have been shown to enhance athletes' performance. At the elite level, such as the Olympics and World Championships, a consistent finding is that successful athletes engage in systematic mental preparation more so than less successful athletes (Greenleaf et al., 2001; Gould, Eklund, & Jackson, 1992a, 1992b, 1993; Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, Medbery, & Peterson, 1999). In a study of professional baseball players, mental skills were just as predictive of batting averages as were players' physical skills, and for pitchers, their mental skills were more important in predicting their success than their physical skills (Smith, Schutz, Smoll, & Ptacek, 1995). In addition, mental skills were predictive of players' survival in professional baseball two and three years later (Smith & Christensen, 1995).

Clearly, coaches understand that athletes who are mentally skilled in terms of confidence, coping ability, and concentration typically perform better than those athletes who are less mentally skilled. Research supports this observation, and in addition

demonstrates that mental skills can be taught to athletes, which in turn enhances their performance. Thus, *helping athletes achieve optimal performance* certainly is an important objective of sport psychology. But does that mean that sport psychologists are only concerned with performance? Absolutely not. The two other important objectives of sport psychology are *helping athletes achieve optimal development* and *helping athletes achieve optimal experiences*. Because performance (and winning) is so important in our society, the objectives of optimal development and experiences for athletes are often overlooked.

### ***Achieving Optimal Development***

Earl Woods says, "If you treat your child with admiration, respect and love, a miracle will occur" (Reilly, 1995, p. 66). The miracle in this case is Earl's son—Tiger Woods—who at age 21 won the prestigious Masters golf tournament, and has since fulfilled predictions that he could be the greatest golfer of all time. In Tiger's first big tournament as a child, Earl took him to the first tee and said, "Son, I want you to know I love you no matter how you do. Enjoy yourself" (Reilly, 1995, p. 65). The rise of Tiger Woods to stardom has been chronicled not only due to his outstanding physical abilities as a golfer, but also due to the unique environment in which he developed his competitive skills. His father prepared him to handle the psychological rigors of competition, but he did it in a way that allowed Tiger to develop his physical and mental skills without the stress of disappointing or letting down his parents which has been shown to be a source of stress for many young athletes. And not once did his parents ever insist that he practice. Tiger Woods developed the internal motivation to learn and improve his game without constant needling from his parents or coaches.

Tiger Woods, a megastar on the professional golf tour, represents the second objective of sport psychology—*optimal development*. Not everyone can become a successful and famous professional athlete like Tiger Woods, but the field of sport psychology attempts to help all athletes experience the optimal development of their physical skills as well as the optimal development of important self-perceptions such as feelings of self-worth and competence.



A great deal of research in sport psychology supports the importance of optimal development as an important goal for sport psychology. This research indicates that by focusing on personal development, individuals can enhance the quality of their sport participation. Children join sport teams to develop skill, have fun, and be with their friends (Lee, Whitehead, & Balchin, 2000; Weiss & Petlichkoff, 1989). Sure, winning becomes an important objective for athletes at later ages, but it's clear that kids really just want to learn how to play. All developmental theories of motivation emphasize that children must develop a sense of autonomy or ability to master physical skills to feel personally competent before they can engage in intense social comparison such as competition. Children lose motivation to participate in sport when they set unrealistically high standards usually in comparison to other athletes or when they play only for external reasons (e.g., pleasing their parents, winning trophies). For example, researchers have shown that 8-12-year-old children who participated in a mastery-oriented sport climate that emphasized personal improvement developed higher skill levels and were more motivated to continue than children who participated in a competitive-oriented sport climate (Theeboom, De Knop, & Weiss, 1995). The secret to keeping kids motivated to participate in sport is to help them to develop skills and improve, so that later they can meet the challenges of competition.

Many people mistakenly believe that an emphasis on development is important for children, but that adults should have a more mature perspective and focus on outcomes. But this is not true! Research has shown that one of the characteristics of highly successful Olympic and World Champion athletes is that they clearly define personal performance goals for each day of training and that their competition focus plans emphasize a task performance focus, as compared to less successful athletes that tend to think more about possible outcomes and upcoming competitors (Gould, Eklund, & Jackson, 1992a; Orlick & Partington, 1988). In Chapter 8, you will learn how to design individualized goal maps so that you can chart the developmental progression of athletes in achieving their goals in sport.

## ***Achieving Optimal Experiences***

Consider the following quotes to better understand why optimal experience is an important objective in sport psychology.

*“The most memorable match I ever had as a pure tennis player, playing for the love of the game and the competition, was a match I lost—the Wimbledon final of 1990 against Edberg. I was down two sets to love, I came back and had a 3-1 lead in the fifth. Eventually, I lost 6-4 in the fifth. It isn't important that I lost that match, because I was on top of my game, I sensed the beauty and joy of the game, I stuck with it through the ups and downs and I played like a champion. That's good enough for me.”* **Boris Becker**, winner of six Grand Slam events, including three Wimbledon titles (Becker, 1998, p. 54)

*“As a white-water canoeist I discovered that the challenge of running a river is not a conflict between human and nature, it is a melding together of the two. You do not conquer a river, you experience it. The calculated risk, the momentary sense of meaning, and the intensity of the experience let you emerge exhilarated and somehow better. It is a quest for self-fulfillment rather than a quest for victory over others or over the river. Many sports can be viewed in the same way. Each experience or exploration can lead to enlightenment and discovery. There is no way to fail to experience the experience, and experiencing becomes the goal. The experience may lead to improved performance, self-discovery, personal satisfaction, and greater awareness, or it may simply be interesting in its own right.”* **Terry Orlick**, internationally-known sport psychology consultant (Orlick, 1990, p. 5)

*“I had learned what it means to ride the Tour de France. It's not about the bike. It's a metaphor for life, not only the longest race in the world but also the most exalting and heartbreaking and potentially tragic. It poses every conceivable element to the rider . . . and above all a great, deep self-questioning. During our lives we're faced with so many different elements as well, we experience so many setbacks, and fight such a hand-to-hand battle with failure, head down in the rain, just trying to stay upright and to have a little hope. The Tour is not just a bike race, not at all. It is a test. It tests you physically, it tests you mentally, and it even tests you morally.”* **Lance Armstrong**, six-time winner of the Tour de France (Armstrong, 2001, pp. 68-69)

What do you notice about these quotes? It seems that Boris Becker, Terry Orlick, and Lance Armstrong were highly motivated to achieve optimal experiences as they faced the challenges of professional tennis, raging rivers, and the French Alps. Becker is a great tennis champion who won multiple Wimbledon titles, Orlick is a highly successful consultant and author, and Lance Armstrong is a six-time Tour de France champion. Yet they clearly indicate that for them, focusing only on the outcome misses the essence of what their sports mean to them. These examples emphasize the importance of the third objective of sport psychology, which is to help athletes understand how to achieve optimal experiences in their sport participation. Sport psychologists want to help athletes enjoy quality sport experiences, to have fun, to feel more competent and worthy, and to gain personal fulfillment and meaning through their sport participation. Athletes don't have to be world-class tennis players or Olympians to enjoy optimal experiences in sport. Thus, the material in this book is designed for coaches at all levels who want to apply some basic ideas from sport psychology to help athletes more fully enjoy their sport experiences.

Can you remember a time when you were engaged in an activity that was so absorbing that you completely lost track of time? If you can, then you are recalling your experience of *flow*. Flow, originally defined by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) as *an optimal mental state involving total absorption in a task*, is what most athletes refer to as being *in the zone*. Most everyone involved in sport has enjoyed this feeling of sheer absorption, or flow, and it is this feeling that typically leads individuals to fall in love with sport and seek out these feelings when playing sport.

Flow is not the same as peak performance, but in sport, flow often coincides with or results in peak performance, and the strategic use of mental skills during competition is associated with achieving flow (Jackson, Thomas, Marsh, & Smethurst, 2000). Interestingly, athletes indicate that getting into flow involves such factors as maintaining an appropriate task focus, keeping a positive mental attitude, and feeling physically ready to perform. Research with hundreds of elite athletes from various sports has supported several common characteristics of the peak performance state such as effortless perfor-

mance, sense of control, lack of conscious thinking about performance, extraordinary awareness of what other athletes are going to do, and feeling highly energized (Cohn, 1991; Jackson, 1992; Loehr, 1984; Ravizza, 1977). Consider the following description of an athlete's flow experience:

I felt like I could do almost anything, as if I were in complete control. I really felt confident and positive . . . I felt physically very relaxed, but really energized and pumped up. I experienced virtually no anxiety or fear, and the whole experience was enjoyable. I experienced a very real sense of calmness and quiet inside, and everything just seemed to flow automatically . . . Even though I was really hustling, it was all very effortless (Garfield & Bennett, 1984, pp. 37, 95).

These characteristics of flow and peak performance seem to fuel athletes' passion for their sport participation. Flow experiences are described as *autotelic*, which means that *the experience of playing sport is a reward in itself without concern for the outcome*. Thus, sport psychology often focuses on ways to help athletes achieve optimal experiences to enhance the joy and personal meaning that sport participation can often provide.

In summary, sport psychology attempts to enhance the quality of athletes' participation in sport by helping them achieve

- optimal performance,
- optimal development, and
- optimal experience.

### Personal Plug-In

Recall in as much detail as you can an event in which you experienced flow. This experience could be in sport or in other recreational or leisure activities. Some people get into flow while they work. Identify your flow experience and jot down as many specific characteristics of this experience as you can remember.

These three objectives form the sport psychology *triad*. The examples of Michael Johnson, Tiger Woods, Boris Becker, Terry Orlick, and Lance Armstrong used in this chapter illustrate the three fac-

tors that make up the sport psychology triad. The essence of sport participation involves the thrill of experiencing an *optimal performance*, the feeling of pride and accomplishment that we experience through the *optimal development* of competency, and the satisfaction and savoring of an *optimal experience* that has great meaning in one's life. Sport psychologists work as teachers, researchers, and consultants to develop and apply knowledge about the psychosocial aspects of sport participation that influence the triad. A common misconception about sport psychology is that it focuses only on performance enhancement. However, the triad emphasizes the importance the field of sport psychology places on not only optimizing the performance of athletes, but also optimizing their development and experiences.

### **A Big Picture of the Inner Edge**

In summary, the objectives of sport psychology include the triad of optimal performance, development, and experience for athletes. In the remaining chapters of the book, the various topics in sport psychology that can help coaches and athletes gain the Inner Edge are introduced. In these chapters, you'll get specific tips about how you as a coach can use sport psychology to get the Inner Edge. Take a look at the *big picture* of the Inner Edge in Figure 1.2 for an illustration of the sport psychology topics that are in the upcoming chapters of this book.

### **A Balanced Triad for the Inner Edge**

The pinnacle of the Inner Edge shown in Figure 1.2 is the triad representing optimal performance, optimal development, and optimal experience. Notice that the triad, shaped as a triangle, is perfectly balanced, meaning that the Inner Edge is achieved when the objectives of optimal performance, development, and experience are in balance. (This is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.) All the other parts of the *big picture* serve to keep the triad in balance so athletes can achieve the Inner Edge.

### **Building Blocks (Chapters 2-6)**

The building blocks that form the foundation for the Inner Edge, shown at the bottom of Figure 1.2, are discussed in the rest of the chapters in Part 1 of the book. A practical and meaningful philosophy for coaches and athletes is the most basic building

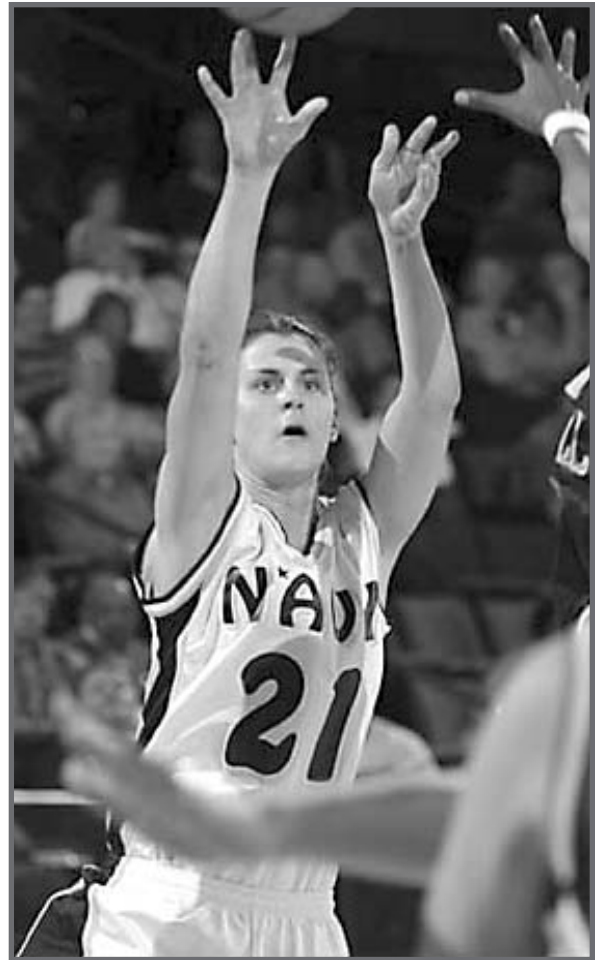


Photo by Navy Sports, courtesy of USMC

block to provide a stable and consistent grounding for the Inner Edge. In Chapter 2, the importance of developing and living an effective coaching philosophy is discussed. Motivation (Chapter 3) is the next building block for the Inner Edge, because motivation is the energizer that turns your coaching philosophy into behavioral action in your athletes. The remaining three building blocks are communication, leadership, and team cohesion. The essential human skill of communication is discussed in Chapter 4 to emphasize how your interpersonal skills influence your effectiveness as a coach. In Chapter 5, leadership is discussed as another critical building block for coaches to help athletes achieve optimal performance, development, and experiences in sport. Chapter 6 focuses on team cohesion, so that you may better understand how the elusive *team chemistry* influences the Inner Edge.

Overall, the five building blocks discussed in Chapters 2-6 ensure that athletes

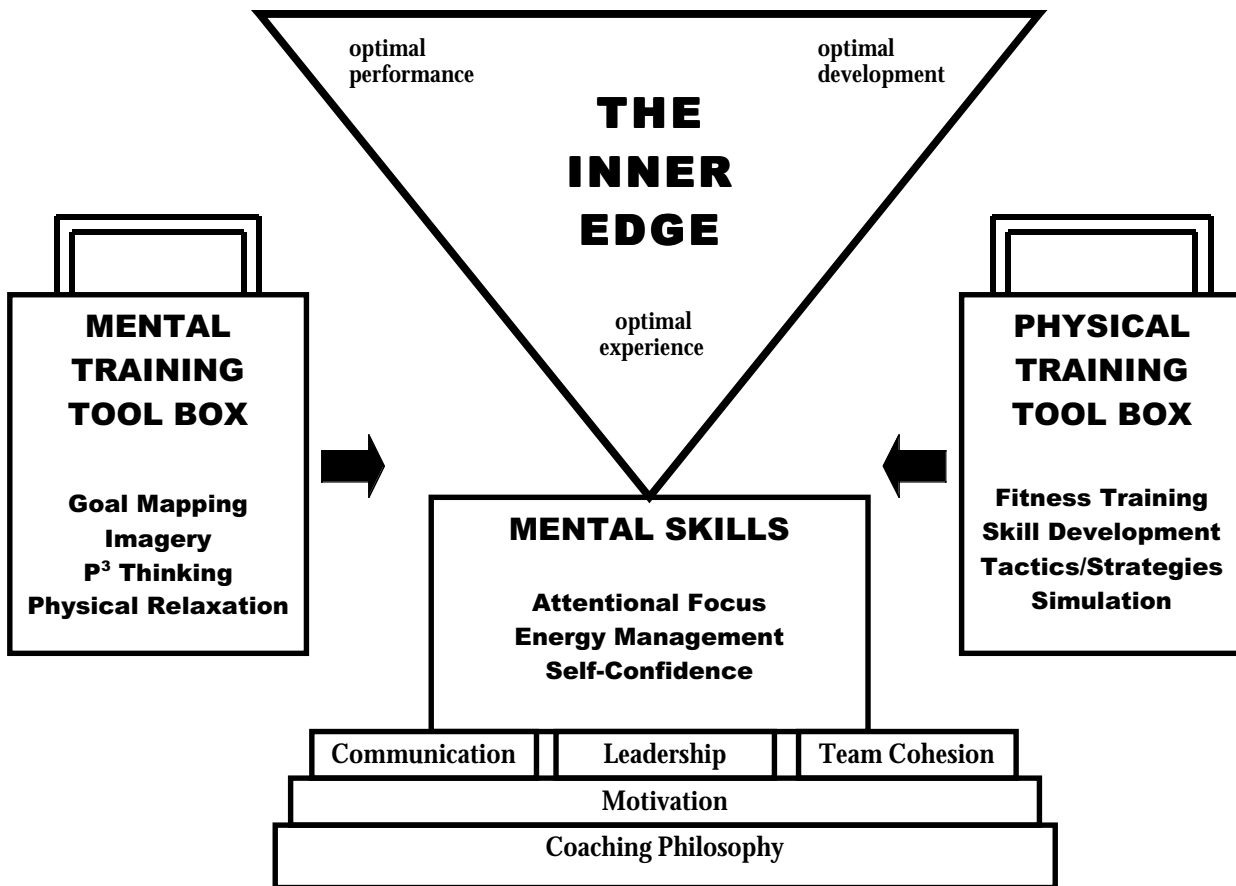


Figure 1.2 The “big picture” of the Inner Edge

- are advantaged by having a coach with a sound and practical coaching philosophy,
- have strong internal motivation to achieve and a coach who understands motivation,
- thrive in a climate characterized by skillful and effective communication,
- reap the benefits of effective decision-making and leadership, and
- belong to a cohesive team.

If any of these building blocks were removed, the foundation for the Inner Edge would be shaken, athletes’ mental skills could be disrupted, and the triad might tip precariously and become unbalanced (see Figure 1.2). We don’t want this to happen! Thus, Part 1 of the book is dedicated to helping coaches understand how to design and build a solid foundation for the Inner Edge.

***Mental Training Tool Box (Chapters 7-11)***

With these solid building blocks in place, coaches and athletes are now ready to move on to

mental training. Part 2 of the book begins with Chapter 7, which introduces coaches to the basic premises behind mental training and attempts to dispel myths about sport psychology and the nature of mental training. The remaining four chapters in Part 2 introduce coaches to the mental training tool box (shown on the left side of Figure 1.2), or the four mental training tools that can be used by coaches to build mental and physical skills in athletes. In Chapter 8, the concept of goal mapping is presented as a tool to help athletes develop a sense of purpose, and to plan and actively pursue their goals in a purposeful manner. In Chapter 9, imagery is introduced as a mental training tool that helps athletes visualize their way to success in sport. In Chapter 10, P<sup>3</sup> Thinking is presented to help athletes engage in effective thinking to optimize their performance, development, and experiences. In Chapter 11, physical relaxation is explained as a tool to help athletes identify and reduce physical tension in their bodies. All of these tools are part of the mental training tool box that coaches and athletes carry with them, providing

the needed tools for developing and maintaining the Inner Edge.

Although not the focus of this book, a physical training tool box is also shown in Figure 1.2 to emphasize that mental and physical training work hand in hand to help athletes achieve the Inner Edge. Sound fitness training, repetitive practice for skill development and execution, and the effective use of tactics and strategies all contribute to the Inner Edge for athletes. Simulation of competitive situations in training is an extremely important tool to get the Inner Edge in performing in different types of pressure situations. Examples of practicing mental skills through simulation in physical training sessions are provided throughout the book.

### ***Mental Skills (Chapters 12-14) and Implementation Tips (Chapters 15-16)***

Part 3 of the book presents the three mental skills of attentional focus, energy management, and self-confidence. The ability of athletes to achieve optimal performance, development, and experiences in sport is dependent on their ability to focus attention (Chapter 12), manage competitive energy (Chapter 13), and compete with confidence (Chapter 14). As shown in Figure 1.2, the mental training tools in the tool box are used to enhance the mental skills of athletes. The mental skills rest on the foundational building blocks so that athletes have a consistent and productive environment within which to enhance their focus, confidence, and energy management.

Part 4 of the book (Chapters 15-16) is dedicated to help you integrate your sport psychology knowledge into personalized mental plans that meet the specific needs of your athletes and your program. A cursory knowledge of isolated mental training concepts is not necessarily helpful to coaches and athletes, so Part 4 is designed to help you integrate your knowledge into useful mental training ideas. In Chapter 15, implementation ideas for how to select from the mental training *menu* are provided, and sample mental training plans are provided for different situations. In Chapter 16, *special recipes* are provided for common challenges faced by coaches, such as slumps, burnout, inconsistency, and rehabilitation and return from injury.

## **Wrapping Up**

You now have the *big picture* of how to get the Inner Edge as presented in this book. The **Inner Edge** is *the advantage that athletes create for themselves by honing the sharpness or keenness of their mental skills*. You as the coach can help your athletes gain the Inner Edge in many ways, as shown in Figure 1.2. You can set the foundation by establishing a consistent and effective coaching philosophy, understanding motivation and team cohesion, and being a strong communicator and leader. You can use tools in your mental training and physical training tool boxes to help athletes develop and hone their mental skills to be more focused, energized, and confident. And you can help athletes balance the objectives of optimizing their performance, development, and experiences in sport. The remainder of the book is designed to help you do all these things.

Although the breadth of information may seem overwhelming, it is my intent to provide you with practical examples of how to get started in small ways to incorporate sport psychology into your coaching. Actually, you probably know more than you realize! Many coaches are masters of the Inner Edge. Hopefully, the ideas presented in the book can enable you to more consistently and effectively use sport psychology concepts in training your athletes.

## **Summary Points for Chapter 1**

1. Sport psychology is the study of how the thoughts, behaviors, and emotions of athletes influence and are influenced by their sport participation.
2. Knowledge about sport psychology is most useful to sport practitioners when it is integrated with knowledge from the other sport sciences.
3. Sport psychology professionals engage in research, teaching, and consultation with athletes and coaches to develop and apply knowledge related to the psychosocial aspects of sport.
4. All sport psychology topics examine the ways in which the psychological characteristics of athletes interact with the social characteristics of sport and society.
5. The main objectives of sport psychology represent a triad that focuses on gaining the

Inner Edge by helping athletes achieve optimal performance, optimal development, and optimal experiences.

6. Research supports that mental skills and the systematic use of mental preparation enhances athletes' performances in a variety of sports.
7. Flow occurs as an optimal experience for athletes when they are totally absorbed in the activity to the point where playing sport is a reward in itself without concern about winning and losing.
8. Research has shown that athletes believe that personalized physical and mental preparation strategies enhance their ability to achieve flow and peak performance.
9. By focusing on personal development and improvement, athletes of all ages can enhance their motivation and feelings of personal competence and self-worth.
10. The *big picture* of the Inner Edge demonstrates how the building blocks, the mental and physical training tool boxes, and mental skills all interact to help athletes achieve optimal performance, development, and experiences.
11. Achieving the objectives of the sport psychology triad requires the effective implementation and mastery of the sport psychology knowledge in this book along with the optimization of physical skill and training.

## Glossary

**autotelic:** the experience of playing sport is a reward in itself without concern for the outcome

**flow:** an optimal mental state characterized by total absorption in the task; typically called *in the zone*

**Inner Edge:** the advantage that athletes create for themselves by honing the sharpness or keenness of their mental skills

**psychosocial aspects of sport:** the ways in which psychological factors, such as the personality of the athlete, interact with social factors in sport, such as competitive pressure and crowd size, to influence athletes and their performance

**sport psychology:** the study of the how the thoughts, emotions, and behaviors of athletes influence and are influenced by their participation in sport

## Study Questions

1. Define sport psychology.
2. What do we mean by the term *psychosocial*? Provide several examples of psychosocial phenomena in sport.
3. Explain the *triad* that represents the three objectives of sport psychology. For each objective, identify at least two questions that represent areas of interest or study for the field of sport psychology.
4. Define and explain *flow*. What are the characteristics of flow that have been identified by athletes?
5. Many people associate sport psychology with performance enhancement. Although this is one objective of the field, explain why the other objectives are just as important as performance enhancement for athletes of all ages. Cite some research to support your answer.
6. Why is it important to integrate knowledge from sport psychology with knowledge from other sport sciences in helping athletes achieve the highest quality sport participation?
7. Why are the building blocks shown in Figure 1.2 important in maintaining mental skill over time?

## Reflective Learning Activities

### 1. The Zone

All athletes have experienced playing in flow, or the zone, where performance is effortless, their awareness is sharp, and they are focused on the quality and enjoyment of playing their sport, as opposed to the pressure to perform perfectly and win. Although flow is an elusive quality, many athletes believe that they can do things to increase their ability to get in the zone.

Consider the following questions about flow, and brainstorm to think of several answers for each.

- a. What are some things athletes can do in (choose a specific sport here) to increase their chances of getting into flow?
- b. What are some things that coaches can do in (specific sport) to help athletes get into flow?
- c. What are typical things in this sport that disrupt flow for athletes?

d. How do coaches disrupt flow in athletes (often unknowingly)?

(10 minutes in groups of 3-4; participants divided into groups that represent specific sports and ages)

## ***2. Megatrends***

Emerging social forces are changing the nature of sport in our society. Identify several of these social forces that are influencing or will influence the nature of sport participation. Discuss how these emerging social forces may interact with psychological characteristics of athletes to affect the sport psychology triad (or the ability to achieve optimal performance, optimal development, and optimal experiences). (8 minutes in groups of 3 and then overall 10 minutes large group discussion).

# Chapter

## Two

### *Developing and Living a Practical Coaching Philosophy*



Photo courtesy of UT Lady Vol Media Relations

#### **Chapter Preview**

In this chapter, you'll learn:

- why sport psychology is based on philosophy
- why it is important to develop and live an effective coaching philosophy
- about “balancing the triad” as a coaching philosophy
- how coaches can keep the “triad” from becoming unbalanced

*“Some of the winningest coaches . . . were philosophers, people of learning and wisdom. For these coaches, philosophy and sport are not mutually exclusive. Indeed they are one and the same. To coach is to believe in something: the game, the athlete, the quest for excellence, the process of challenging one’s self and striving to overcome. [They] could transform people and inspire them to dazzling heights of achievement. The athletes of these coaches were blessed with . . . a deeper perspective on life, on people, on themselves.” Gary M. Walton, from his book *Beyond Winning: The Timeless Wisdom of the Great Philosopher Coaches**

**W**hen philosophers held court in ancient Greece, their ideas were respected and revered. Today, philosophy is viewed by most people as abstract, boring, and impractical. In this chapter, we’re going to explore how a well thought out philosophy serves as a concrete, exciting, and practical foundation for coaches to effectively

apply knowledge from sport psychology to help athletes achieve success in sport and fulfillment in life.

Socrates, one of the greatest philosophers in history, is famous for saying “The unexamined life is not worth living.” Socrates didn’t know a thing about sport psychology, but with these words he captured the most critical building block for the



Inner Edge. We have to examine our lives—to understand what is important to us and what we value. The key to developing an effective personal philosophy, as Socrates knew, is to know yourself. This is why the study of sport psychology must begin with an understanding of one’s philosophy. This is particularly crucial for coaches, who need a deeply rooted guidance system that keeps them on course as they face difficult decisions and challenges. Not only is it important for coaches to develop a sound philosophy, but they must also live this philosophy every day. Effective coaching for the Inner Edge begins with you *walking the walk* along with *talking the talk*. Thus, a sound coaching philosophy is the most basic building block (see Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1) in helping your athletes develop the necessary mental and physical skills to be successful.

## Who Needs Philosophy? We All Do!

A **philosophy** is simply the *basic beliefs that guide our behavior every day*. Our philosophy helps us to interpret the events in our lives, and it gives our lives meaning and direction. It helps to keep us consistent and directed by a sense of purpose when we face the daily stresses and obstacles of life. Consider the following philosophies and the ways in which these philosophies have influenced the behavior of the individuals:

*“I try to think like nature to find the right questions. You don’t invent the answers, you reveal the answers from nature. In nature, the answers already exist.”* **Dr. Jonas Salk**, inventor of the Salk polio vaccine

*“I am an educator. I have always felt my responsibility was broader than wins and losses.”* **John Thompson**, former men’s basketball coach at Georgetown University

*“I’m no role model.”* **Charles Barkley**, former professional basketball player known for his many off-the-court scuffles

*“I’m not afraid of storms, for I have learned how to sail my ship.”* **Louisa May Alcott**, famous author

*“Genius is 10% inspiration and 90% perspiration.”* **Thomas Edison**, famous inventor

*“In the end, all business operations can be reduced to three words: people, product, and profits. People come first. Unless you get a good team, you can’t do much with the other two.”* **Lee Iacocca**,

business executive who saved Chrysler from corporate disaster

*“What I owe to my team is to make sure everybody plays and works hard and I have an opportunity to play them.”* **Joe Paterno**, legendary Penn State football coach, after his team won the game but dropped in the national polls because he refused to leave his starters in to run up the score

*“I am just a common man who is true to his beliefs.”* **John Wooden**, winner of 10 national titles as UCLA basketball coach

Philosophies are more than words—they are personal *how to* manuals that guide our decisions and behavior. Clearly, the philosophies just presented have influenced the decisions and behavior of the individuals who held the philosophies, as well as others who were touched by the implementation of these philosophies. Lee Iacocca’s philosophy influenced thousands of workers in his corporation, and John Thompson’s, Joe Paterno’s, and John Wooden’s philosophies have enriched the lives of many college athletes. Consider your beliefs, values, and philosophy about sport participation and your role and responsibilities as a coach. Do you think that coaching philosophies should differ for coaches at the youth, high school, collegiate, and professional levels? Why or why not? Regardless of your answer, coaches at all levels should spend some time in self-reflection to understand their beliefs and values regarding their role as a coach, and their objectives and the ways in which they pursue these objectives when working with athletes.

Your coaching philosophy is based on your personal values and beliefs about your role as coach in relation to the lives of your athletes (Lyle, 2002). It is not simply a tactical philosophy, such as “pressure defense and push the ball” or “conservative, ball control.” A coaching philosophy is much broader, and focuses on how your beliefs and values about your role as a coach impact your behavior toward your athletes and team every day. If coaches forego the important step of reflecting upon and developing their coaching philosophies, they lack a basis for all their decisions and coaching practices. Your coaching philosophy is like a well. Athletes come to you all the time for water (questions, problems, need for guidance and teaching), and if you don’t have a deep, steady source of water from your coaching philoso-

phy well, you will be unable to consistently hydrate your athletes when they need it.

You can learn from the coaching philosophies developed by others by reading popular books written by coaches or books on coaching effectiveness. Coach Mike Krzyzewski's (2000) *Leading with the Heart*, Tony DiCicco and Colleen Hacker's (2002) *Catch Them Being Good*, and Anson Dorrance's (2002) *The Vision of a Champion* are all good sources to learn about the philosophy and leadership styles of highly successful coaches. Coaching philosophies suggested in popular coaching effectiveness books include "Athletes first - winning second" (Martens, 1997) and the "double-goal" model (Thompson, 2003). The "athletes first - winning second" philosophy suggests that coaches keep the three objectives of fun, winning, and development of athletes in perspective by prioritizing the wellbeing of athletes ahead of the team outcome of winning. The "double-goal" model emphasizes the equal priority of the coaching objectives of striving to win and teaching life lessons to athletes. The key to all the philosophies presented in these books is how they help coaches keep their values and coaching objectives in perspective and in mind to guide them in the myriad of daily decisions they must make regarding their athletes, their teams, and their overall programs. That is, your coaching philosophy logically leads you to such specific behaviors as use of practice and training time, recruitment practices, communication with athletes, rewards and discipline, decision-making, leadership style, goal mapping, and even your personal motives for coaching (Lyle, 2002).

## **Balancing the Triad: A Basic Coaching Philosophy**

In the previous section, you learned about the importance of philosophy as the foundation for all other sport psychology principles. Based on the example philosophies presented, it should be clear that developing a coaching philosophy is a deeply personal and individualistic experience. Nowhere is a sound philosophy more needed than in competitive sport. Sport in our culture is wildly popular, and athletes at young ages are receiving stunning social and economic rewards for achieving athletic excellence. It may be hard for parents, coaches, and young athletes to keep their lives in perspective when they

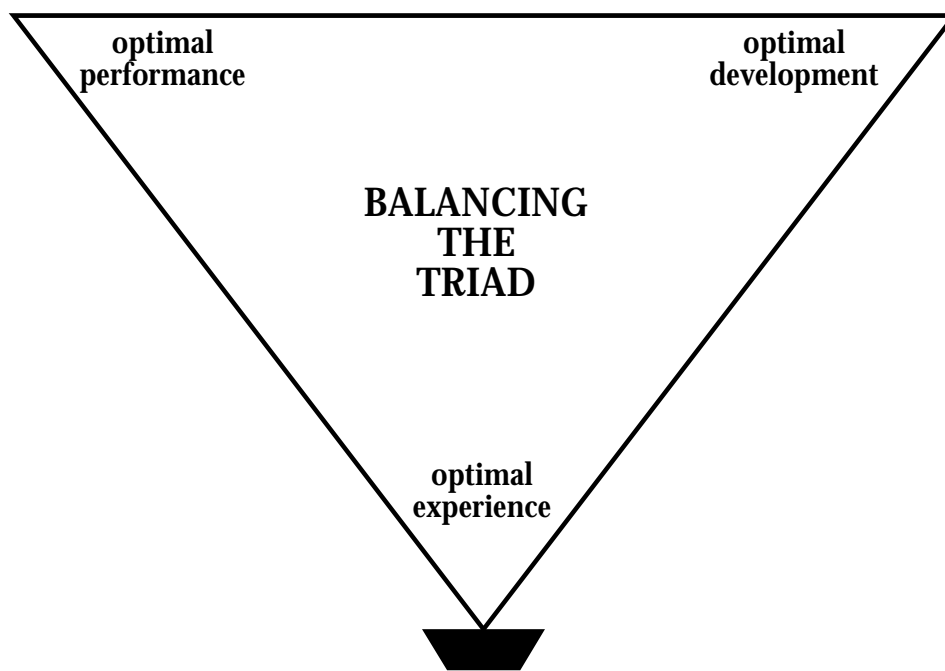
### **Personal Plug-In**

On a blank sheet of paper, jot down some thoughts that represent your current philosophy about coaching. This might include what you see as your most important objectives as a coach, and the values and beliefs that will guide you in making everyday decisions about your athletes and your team. Consider your coaching philosophy a work in progress—don't worry if it's not well developed at this time.

believe that multi-million-dollar professional contracts, Olympic gold, and lucrative endorsements are readily available.

In this section, I offer a philosophy that serves as the foundation for this book, and it represents a philosophy that seems useful for coaches. It is my belief that to effectively understand and practice the basic tenets of sport psychology, the three objectives in the sport psychology triad introduced in Chapter 1 (optimal performance, optimal development, and optimal experience) must be kept in balance or perspective. As shown in Figure 2.1, *balancing the triad* means that the quality of sport participation is enhanced by focusing on the complete triad, as opposed to overemphasizing one side of the triad at the expense of the others. Keeping the triad in balance, or at least keeping all three objectives in perspective, is critical to successfully apply the principles of sport psychology presented in this book. Keeping the triad in balance or perspective, then, is critical in coaching for the Inner Edge.

Look at the triad pictured in Figure 2.1, and consider how an overemphasis on each objective can create an unbalanced perspective on competitive sport. Obviously, the balance between performance, development, and experience undergoes continuous shifts when you consider situational and developmental factors. At various times in an athlete's career, he or she may be more fixated on one corner of the triad than others. A coaching philosophy appropriate for young children should clearly emphasize the development of skills and enjoyable sport experiences over high-level performance expectations. An elite athlete undergoing rehabilitation from a serious injury should shift to more of a developmental focus and use a systematic goal mapping plan (presented in Chapter 8) to facilitate her return to top competitive



**Figure 2.1** Balancing the triad provides perspective needed for the Inner Edge

form at a high-performance level. Due to the extreme social pressure to win and perform perfectly, a philosophy that embraces a balanced triad of performance, development, and experience is often ignored due to an overemphasis on performance. Research has shown that youth sport coaches typically state that their philosophies emphasize development and experience (fun), but that their behaviors often emphasize performance (winning) over the other two objectives (Gilbert, Trudel, & Haughian, 1999; McCallister, Blinde, & Weiss, 2000; Wilcox & Trudel, 1998). This problem is discussed in the next section.

### **A Tilted Triad: Is Winning Really “the Only Thing”?**

Vince Lombardi was misquoted. Lombardi, the legendary coach of the Green Bay Packers, is popularly associated with the quote “Winning isn’t everything, it’s the only thing.” In reality, what Lombardi really said was “Winning isn’t everything—but making the effort to win is.” Lombardi’s foundational philosophy won him the respect of his players. His former quarterback Bart Starr said,

*“Lombardi felt that every fiber in your body should be used in an effort to seek excellence, and he sought this goal every day of his life with complete dedication . . . He never expected more from us than he was willing to give of himself” (Flynn, 1973, foreword).*

Vince Lombardi’s misquote has influenced the coaching philosophies of youth football coaches in America more than any coaching clinic or sport psychology textbook. A big problem in sport is the overemphasis on performance outcomes and the neglect of the essential objectives of development and enjoyment of the sport experience. Let’s examine several examples of how philosophies that are based on a tilted triad with performance overriding the other two objectives can be destructive.

Christy Henrich, an elite American gymnast, paid the ultimate price when her compulsive and perfectionistic devotion to gymnastics ended with her death from the eating disorder anorexia nervosa. In a tragic attempt to make her body fit society’s expectation of a petite spunky gymnast, Henrich starved herself to death.

A softball game in Cincinnati, Ohio, between two teams of eight-year-olds ended in a brawl among parents and multiple lawsuits when the game was postponed due to extreme heat. Never mind that the soaring heat and humidity had already forced three of the young players to be taken to the hospital for observation due to heat exhaustion. The parents of the players whose team was winning at the time of the postponement verbally and physically attacked the umpires and opposing parents, while the eight-

year-old players from both teams sat and watched with confusion and embarrassment from under a nearby shade tree.

A soccer dad pleaded no contest to an assault charge after he punched a 14-year-old boy who had scuffled for the ball with the man's 14-year-old son, leading to both boys' ejections from the game. The punch split the victim's lip, and the father was sentenced to 10 days of community service and ordered to undergo counseling (Nack & Munson, 2000).

These true stories illustrate out of balance competitive philosophies where an over-emphasis on performance outcomes caused irrational and even tragic consequences. Many people fail to understand that optimal performance in sport is most likely to occur when athletes focus on developmental goals and the enjoyment of optimal experiences in their sport. Even if you disagree with the balanced triad philosophy because you believe that winning is everything, the point is that winning (or optimal performance) is most likely to occur when the triad is in balance! Consider the following example of two Olympic figure skaters.

Midori Ito and Kristi Yamaguchi arrived at the 1992 Albertville Olympic Games with very different mindsets. Ito arrived in Albertville with the hopes of an entire country on her shoulders—no Japanese woman had ever won a gold medal in the Winter Games. As the 1989 world champion and the first woman to perform a triple Axel jump in competition, the pressure on her to win the gold was tremendous. "I was the favorite," said Ito, "and I knew the Japanese people expected a gold medal" (Swift, 1992, p. 72). As the competition approached, the normally chatty Ito became aloof and withdrawn, and in her practices she began missing her jumps. When Ito fell during her long program, the gold medal was lost and the headlines back in Japan read "Midori Fails."

Kristi Yamaguchi had just the opposite experience from Midori Ito. Even though Yamaguchi was the reigning world champion, she and the press considered herself an underdog to Ito at the Olympics. Unburdened by high expectations and pressure, Ya-



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maguchi concentrated on enjoying the experience of being a part of the Olympic Games. She marched in the opening ceremonies, stayed in the Olympic Village, and went dancing with other athletes. Yamaguchi admits that she was mentally prepared to live with the result if Ito won the gold medal over her. This acceptance and Yamaguchi's focus on the experience of the Olympics freed her from the pressure and expectations that Ito faced, and Yamaguchi went on to win the gold medal.

The philosophies of Kristi Yamaguchi and Midori Ito served as the basis for one athlete to relax and allow her body to perform optimally, and for the other athlete to lose focus on the rational perspective needed to calm her negative thoughts and feelings. The point is that it was easier for Yamaguchi to achieve optimal performance because she had the balance of savoring the optimal experience of the Olympics and accepting whatever outcome occurred as part of her development. Ito, in contrast, fell victim to the performance pressure that resulted from an overemphasis on winning the gold medal, which overshadowed her personal developmental goals and robbed her of her enthusiasm for the Olympic experience. It should be noted that even though Ito had failed in the eyes of many Japanese, she did win the silver medal and responded by saying, "I was never disappointed for myself, only that I had let down the people of Japan" (Swift, 1992, p. 73).

It is important to realize that an unbalanced triad or unrealistic coaching philosophy is often influenced by the cultural and competitive structures of society, such as nationalistic pride in the case of Midori Ito, the exploitation of college athletes by overzealous coaches who yearn for big contracts and fame, and society's shallow belief that winning is the essence of sport as opposed to the *pursuit* of winning and personal achievement. Consider the following reaction from Dan Jansen, who although he won an Olympic gold medal in 1994, wrote about his experiences in a chapter titled "There's More to Life than Skating Around in a Circle" (Jansen, 1999):

*"In 1984, my only goal was to make the Olympic team; to represent the United States at the Olympic Games. I hit that mark ... [and] once I made the team, I hoped that with a great race, a top ten finish might be possible. I finished fourth, just 16/100ths of a second from winning a bronze medal, and was overjoyed. When I returned home... one of the most common reactions I received was, 'That's too bad, no medal.' That's when I realized the disparity in how various people define success" (p. 4).*

Canadian figure skater Brian Orser won a silver medal in Calgary in 1988, and returned home to the following headline in the *Toronto Star*: "Orser Magnificent—But Still A Loser" (Perman, 2002). Nike ran an ad during the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games with the slogan "You Don't Win the Silver, You Lose the Gold." So according to the popular press and an influential marketing firm, Midori Ito, second best in the *world*, Brian Orser, second best in the *world*, and Dan Jansen, fourth best in the *world*, were losers. Incredible.

These examples reinforce the constant interaction of the psychological characteristics of athletes with the social aspects of sport and society discussed in Chapter 1. Christy Henrich fell victim to our cultural expectation that gymnasts are petite and lean as well as society's overemphasis on physical attractiveness in females. Burnout in athletes typically occurs as the result of our culture's insatiable desire to push child athletes to specialize early at the expense of a balanced triad and an enjoyable childhood. Other problems in sport, such as aggression, violence, and a lack of sportsmanship, occur due to an imbalanced triad brought on by our cultural obsession with winning and irrational reasoning that violence against

others is part of the game. It is essential that coaches and athletes recognize how society and the sport subculture create pressures to conform to behavioral codes that are unhealthy and destructive. This may be referred to as **hyperconformity**, which is defined as a *rigid code of behavior defined by the sport structure that athletes are expected to follow without question.*



## Clipboard

### Frosty Westering - Balancing the Triad

In over 20 years as head football coach at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington, Forrest "Frosty" Westering's teams never had a losing season while winning three national championships and playing for three others at the NAIA Division II level. Westering's coaching style was not to motivate by fear as many football coaches do, but rather to inspire his players to play for each other, which gave them a source of inner strength typically lacking in externally motivated athletes. Football practice under Westering (now retired) began at a three-day break-away camp on an Oregon beach, where they played softball, built human pyramids, and competed in bizarre relays. The purpose of breakaway camp was to bond as a team, learn to trust each other, and enjoy the experience of being a PLU football player. Then, when the real practice and contact drills started, the players worked hard because they wanted to work hard. As a coach, Westering was a football workaholic, and everyone worked hard for him because Westering lived, breathed, and sweated every slogan that he spouted (e.g., "Doing your best is more important than being the best"). Westering's empowering coaching style instilled commitment and motivation in his players. During the season, PLU players always held hands when they entered and left the field. Once before an important game, Westering ordered his players to partner up and play an impromptu game of rock-paper-scissors before taking the field. After winning a national championship, Westering was most touched by a note from a stadium janitor who said in all his years he had never seen a team leave a locker room in such good condition as did PLU. Westering is a legend in the Pacific Northwest; he never yearned to leave PLU, which is

evident in the book he wrote titled *Making The Big Time Where You Are*. If Westering sounds like an isolated eccentric, maybe we should reconsider what we accept as the norm that defines coaching practices. Perhaps we should start to consider Frosty Westering as the norm and begin to view with skepticism the controlling and dehumanizing coaching practices commonly seen in college football.

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Let's take time out here for a quick gut check.

- Do you think that a coaching philosophy that includes an emphasis on optimal development and experience is unrealistic or naive in today's society?
- Is it possible to achieve a balanced perspective and philosophy when nineteen-year-old athletes sign professional contracts worth more than the gross national product of many small countries?
- Do you actually believe that the greatest athletes in the world care about optimal experiences and optimal development as much as the bottom line, which is based on performance?

My response to the gut check? No, it's not unrealistic or naive to focus on development and experiences along with performance. Yes, it's possible to achieve a balanced competitive philosophy in today's society. And, yes, I believe that the greatest athletes—the ones who raised the level of their sports along with their performance—such as Martina Navratilova, Mia Hamm, Michael Jordan, Wayne Gretzky—all possessed a sound and balanced philosophy that allowed them to perform their best when it meant the most.

In 1999, at age 42, Payne Stewart surprised the golfing world by winning the prestigious U.S. Open over many young golfers in their prime, such as Tiger Woods, David Duval, and Ernie Els. Stewart attributed his win to his philosophical maturity, which allowed him to retain his competitive fire yet keep his work as a professional athlete in perspective. Stewart worked with Richard Coop, a sport psychologist, who summed up Stewart's philosophical development:



Photo by Dale Sparks, All-Pro Photography

*“An athlete is used to proving himself by what he does on the field, and Payne was no different. But that approach ultimately makes the result too important, and the resulting pressure gets in the way. It's better to prove yourself by what you are in life. Then the understanding that you remain a good person no matter the outcome on the playing field allows you to release the pressure and more easily have a good outcome” (Diaz, 1999a, p. G56).*

The greatest athletes know how to keep competitive pressure in perspective because they focus on the joy of playing that drew them to sport in the first place. Legendary basketball center Bill Russell won two national collegiate championships, an Olympic gold medal, and 11 National Basketball Association World Championships in his illustrious career. Yet in his book titled *Second Wind: The Memoirs of an Opinionated Man* (Russell & Branch, 1979), he admits that championships were not his motivation for playing. Russell states that his greatest pleasure in basketball came during competition when both teams were playing at their peak, which in Russell's

mind elevated the game to unprecedented levels of excellence. He admits that on some nights when the caliber of play escalated to this level, he found himself even rooting for the other team to keep up the challenge. Russell admits, “when the game ended at that special level, I literally did not care who had won” (Russell & Branch, 1979, p. 157). This powerful statement from one of the winningest athletes in basketball history is a personal testimony to the power of flow and peak experience in sport.

Therese Brisson, member of the Canadian Women’s Ice Hockey team that won the gold medal at the 2002 Olympic Games, explains the importance of perspective and how it affected her team’s performance:

*“It’s not all about the medal. In fact, athletes who seem to have the most success think the least about the outcome. The focus is on the process and on being the best you can be the day that it matters the most. My team was not able to do that in Nagano . . . After this disappointment . . . at the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, we won the gold . . . The difference was that we were able to focus on the journey so that we would be the best we could be on the night it mattered most” (Starkes & Ericsson, 2003, p. x).*

Even though optimal performance is an important objective, all athletes can enjoy sport simply for the pleasure and excitement that it provides. Tennis champion Pete Sampras has talked of the intense personal meaning that he felt when playing at Wimbledon, much like the intensity of meaning that professional golfers feel when playing a round at St. Andrews in Scotland, where the game of golf was born. Coaches should help athletes reflect on what sport means to them to develop a strongly rooted competitive philosophy, which may help them regain meaning when they face pressure and lose perspective and balance in their sport participation. Bob Rotella (1995), a successful sport psychology consultant, believes that athletes with healthy philosophies naturally and effortlessly think better than athletes with unhealthy philosophies. Rotella’s point illustrates the direct link between how athletes think, feel, and act (sport psychology), and the values and beliefs upon which these thoughts, feelings, and actions are based (philosophy). As illustrated in the quote above by Therese Brisson, focusing on the experience frees ath-



Photo by Nick Manning, courtesy of © stock.xchng iv

letes up to perform their best, as opposed to focusing on the pressure of having to perform well to win. Keeping the triad in balance actually helps athletes to win, so help your athletes adopt a healthy perspective to serve as the foundation for their Inner Edge!

## Wrapping Up

Don’t let the P-word fool you! Remember that philosophy is not impractical and boring, but rather a practical guide to help you maintain a productive perspective when coaching for the Inner Edge in the challenging world of sport.

In this chapter, I’ve attempted to challenge you to develop and refine a strongly rooted coaching philosophy from which your operational plan as a coach can flow. Keep in mind that a coaching philosophy is a work in progress—something that is constantly developing and changing as you gain additional experiences and new perspectives. It is important that you consider not only the words that describe your coaching philosophy, but also that you identify key behaviors that represent your philosophy in action. Remember to walk the walk by modeling your com-

mitment and belief in your philosophy every day. Living your philosophy makes it real and powerful to athletes, and allows them a firm grounding within your program from which they can face and overcome obstacles in their pursuit of excellence. This is the first essential step in moving beyond coaching a *team* to developing and maintaining a *program*. Plan, develop, and live a coaching philosophy that allows your program to flourish in the long-term as a fertile and challenging climate for athletes.

Also in this chapter, I've introduced a philosophy that serves as the basis for the rest of the book, and one that I believe is crucial for gaining the Inner Edge. All coaches should develop their own coaching philosophy based on their individual beliefs, values, and personality, yet I believe that keeping the sport psychology triad in perspective serves as a basic guide for any coaching philosophy. All of the psychosocial principles discussed in this book, such as goal mapping, self-confidence, and focusing attention, must start with a mentally healthy perspective about competition.

## Summary Points for Chapter 2

1. Because a coaching philosophy requires self-reflection and an understanding of personal values and beliefs, it is the foundation for the Inner Edge.
2. Philosophies guide our behavior every day by helping us interpret events that happen to us, by serving as the foundation through which our lives develop meaning, and by keeping us consistent and goal-directed.
3. Because sport achievement in our society is so highly valued and publicized, it is essential for coaches to develop and maintain a sound philosophy to maintain a proper perspective when faced with difficult decisions.
4. The coaching philosophy espoused in this book is *balance* or *congruence* between the three sport psychology objectives of optimal performance, development, and experience.
5. Although developmental and situational factors may at times cause athletes to emphasize one part of the triad over others, an effective philosophy serves to keep the three objectives of sport psychology in perspective.
6. The most common source of imbalance in the sport psychology triad is an emphasis on performance outcomes, while ignoring the essential objectives of development and enjoyment of the sport experience.
7. Most great athletes understand that competitive pressure is kept in perspective by focusing on their enjoyment of and personal development through sport, even as they strive intensely to perform well and win.

## Glossary

**hyperconformity:** a rigid, and typically harmful, code of behavior within the sport subculture that athletes are expected to follow without question  
**philosophy:** the basic beliefs that guide our behavior every day

## Study Questions

1. Why does philosophy serve as the foundation for the Inner Edge?
2. Explain why an athlete, a coach, and an athletic administrator could benefit from the development of and adherence to a sound philosophy of competition.
3. Explain the concept of the balanced sport psychology triad as the philosophy provided in this chapter. Generate several examples of how the triad becomes unbalanced in different ways.
4. Discuss how coaching philosophies are developed as psychosocial phenomena. That is, explain how society influences the types of philosophies that coaches adopt.

## Reflective Learning Activities

### 1. Tilting The Triad

Brainstorm examples that you have experienced as an athlete or coach of an out-of-balance sport psychology triad and the consequences that occurred due to this imbalance. Also, can you think of personal examples where the triad was out of balance due to optimal experience and/or optimal development overshadowing optimal performance?



(25 minutes total; groups of three for 10 minutes to identify examples and 15 minutes for overall class discussion)

**Example**

1: \_\_\_\_\_

Describe triad imbalance: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Consequences: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Example**

2: \_\_\_\_\_

Describe triad imbalance: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Consequences: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Example**

3: \_\_\_\_\_

Describe triad imbalance: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Consequences: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**2. Buck the System**

The sport psychology triad is often tilted out of balance due to the unquestioning acceptance of sport norms by athletes and coaches. Norms are commonly accepted social rules that govern behavior in a society. An example of a sport norm is that females should not participate in high school wrestling because it is a male sport. Norms are very powerful because they become internalized values that are accepted without question or reflection, and lead to hyperconformity by athletes who follow these norms even to the point of personal physical harm and violence toward others. It is extremely important that coaches and athletes learn to be reflective about sport norms so that they may question the appropriateness of certain sport practices and develop an effective philosophy about sport participation to change negative and even destructive social norms.

- a. Identify several examples of unquestioned sport norms by athletes and coaches.
- b. For each norm, discuss why the norm exists and how it is sanctioned or controlled.
- c. Discuss the implications of these norms, and outline ways in which negative sport norms could be broken to enhance the quality of sport participation.

(24 minutes total; 12 minutes in groups of 4; then 12 minutes for large group discussion)

**3. Developing Your Philosophy**

The balanced sport psychology triad was presented in this chapter to set the philosophical foundation of the book. Do you agree that it is a useful and relevant philosophy or not? How might your coaching philosophy differ from the balanced triad?

Take some time to reflect upon your goals and beliefs, and then draw a model that represents your coaching philosophy. Your model could be a geometric figure like our triad or it could take a very different form. Be creative and honest in drawing out your philosophy.

(Overnight individual assignment and then spend 20 minutes in groups of four with each person presenting his/her model to the group followed by questions/discussion)