

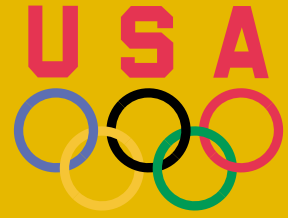
MIND GAMES

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OLYMPIC

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COACH



**PSYCHOLOGY
FOR HIGH-LEVEL
PERFORMANCES**

*Understanding
The Path To
The Podium:*

REFLECTIONS FROM OLYMPIANS
ON THE PROCESS OF SUCCESS

*Coaching
Performance—*

WHAT SORT OF JOB ARE
YOU DOING?

**CRITICAL
COACH
BEHAVIORS**



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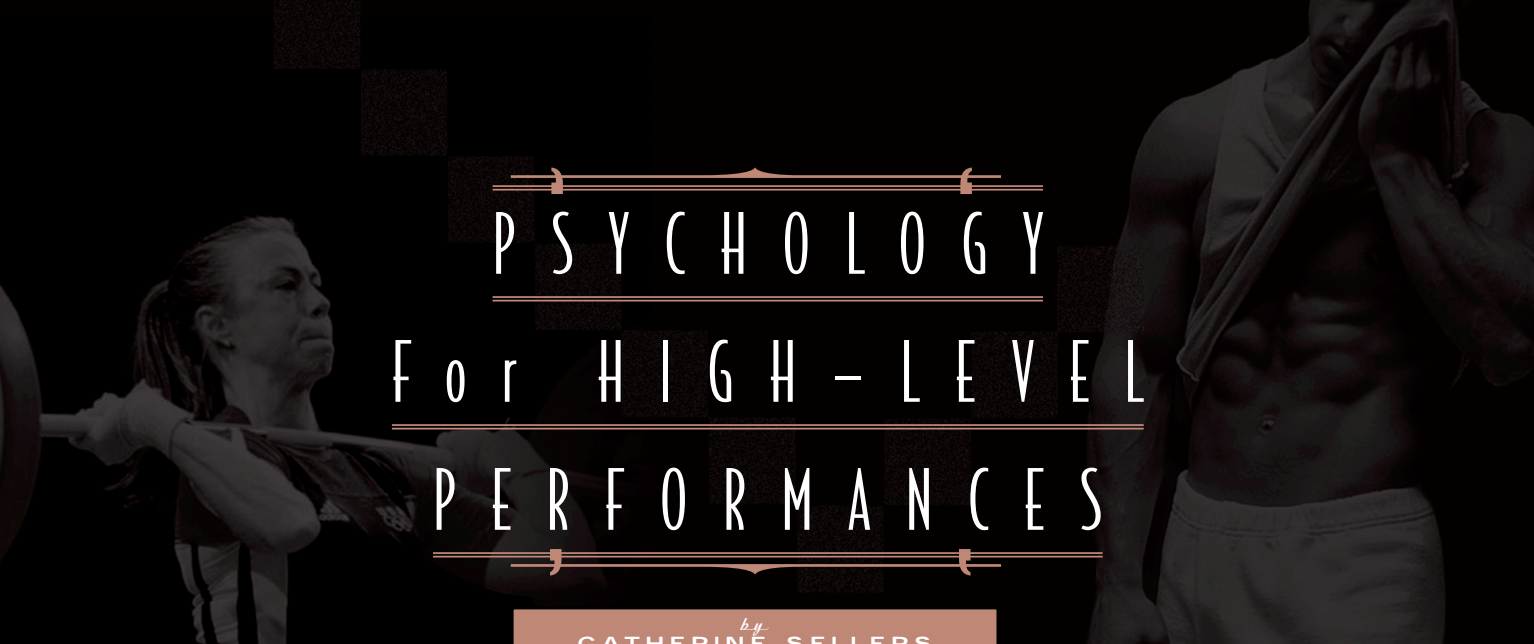
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PSYCHOLOGY

For HIGH-LEVEL

PERFORMANCES

by
CATHERINE SELLERS
USOC Coaching and Sport Sciences

The issues below are focused on the Olympic level athlete, but they are common issues in an uncommon setting. Coaches at all levels who are faced with high performance competitions—state championships, NCAA championships or any National Championship—will face these issues.

Coaches work very hard in the planning and preparation of elite athletes for Olympic competition. They will examine all facets of periodization, technical training, strength training, team building... they leave no stone un-turned in their pursuit for the best performance and ultimately a medal.

The Olympic Games is not a typical or normal experience for an athlete, coach or administrator. The Games is a completely different environment for the majority of the athletes that compete. The differences vary from the distance to food, the security of getting from one point to another, to the inability of family and personal coaches to visit the athlete as they normally might do. The Olympic Games is not comparable to any other international competition, it is its own separate entity.

We asked two past Olympic Head Coaches—Deanne Vochatzer (1996 Olympics—Women’s Track and Field) and Doug Beal (1984-2000 Olympics—Men’s Volleyball) to provide some insights into their experiences in dealing with “medal-stopping” issues. We then asked Dr. Kirsten Peterson and Dr. Peter Haberl of the USOC Sport Psychology department along with Dr. Gloria Balague of the University of Illinois at Chicago to come up with ideas to help coaches and athletes turn the potential “medal-stopping” issues into “medal-winning” performances.

In preparing for Athens, what issues would you want coaches to know prior to their arrival in Athens?

ISSUE ONE: Families and Friends

Coach Vochatzer:

Family issues! A lot of athletes, particularly our female athletes, made poor decisions that impacted their Olympic Games preparation and competition based on societal and cultural pressures rather than the same preparations that put them on the team. For example, security would only allow the Olympic coaches and one other person designated by the athlete to be in the warm-up areas. An athlete has a variety of choices—personal coach, trainer, massage therapist, manager, agent—and many female athletes succumbed to the pressures put on them and had the wrong people with them in the warm-up track—husband or boyfriend as opposed to the personal coach or massage therapist.

Coach Beal:

I would agree that family issues can be a major problem at the Games. The men’s volleyball team consists of older and more mature athletes than some of the other Olympic sports. We have a number of married athletes and some with children. We want the athlete and their families to enjoy the Olympic experience, but we can’t have the athlete worrying about their families—where they are staying, arranging tickets, and credentialing the right people, in lieu of staying focused on the competition. Men’s volleyball is one of the longest competitions in the Games. We start at the beginning and typically the gold medal match is right before the closing ceremonies, so we deal with these issues constantly over the course of the competition.

Peterson: As the coaches have already pointed out, family and friends can be some of the biggest obstacles to Olympic success. On the other hand, they can also be an athlete’s most important support. The trick is in educating the family and friend support staff on how

they can best be helpful and assist them to adhere to the plan. Everyone in the equation—athlete, coach/staff and family/friends has a role to play in making this work. Athletes can help themselves by recognizing what their likely needs will be at the Olympics and clearly communicating these to family and friends. For many athletes, however, the idea of “educating” their parents can in itself be a daunting task. How do you tell your Mom and Dad, much less Great Aunt Mary, that they can come to the Games, but can’t see you until you have finished competing?

Balague: Prevention and education are the best interventions. Most people have good intentions and believe that their presence at the big event will be positive, but for the athlete this is not a social event. To address Coach Beal’s issue, a person of the athlete’s trust should be designated to deal with ticket request and such.

Coach Vochatzer:

The athletes must have time to be somewhat “selfish” during their preparation and truly feel that it is ok. There simply is not enough emotional energy to satisfy the demands of preparation for competition and having to be “sociable” with family and friends. As it gets closer to the competition more space is needed to allow for moody behavior, which is to be expected as the pressure to perform increases. The support group usually tries to push in on the athlete and tempers get very short and emotional flare-ups become more frequent. Out of the 51 women on the 1996 team, we had 22 who were married and seven had children, I had to referee a number of breakups and near breakups due to the support group not understanding the needs of the athlete as we got closer to the Games and the actual competition.

Haberl: Coach Vochatzer provides some examples of the negative impact of family that will be useful in raising awareness. A useful approach here is to use examples of past Olympians on how family affected them and how they approached the issue. Here are two positive ones, that illustrate diametrically opposed solutions, yet highly effective ones: Bonnie Blair’s medal winning Olympic performances were accompanied by a huge contingent of extended family members (40+ people), yet everybody knew that they wouldn’t get to see her until her events were over. So for her the best approach to prepare for competition was to solely focus on her self and communicate that approach to her family. Karch Kiraly, on the other hand, decided to live with his family in Atlanta. Spending time with his children provided him with a sense of balance and

normalcy that helped him re-energize and stay focused. There is no cookbook approach to this planning process.

Balague: Athletes need to understand that they only have a small window of time for this type of event and it requires some degree of selfishness to achieve excellence in any field. The Olympic Trials and Games are not the time to make changes in competitive routine: If one is used to being alone in their hotel room before competing, sharing the room, even with a very supportive spouse, is a change that is likely to increase stress. These discussions should be held months before the events.

Peterson: The USOC Sport Psychology department has developed an excellent pamphlet regarding this topic called “How can Olympic Friends and Family help Olympians Perform their Best”? This is available online at www.usolympicteam.com/sportscience.

ISSUE TWO: Coaching Pressure

Coach Beal:

The pressure is on the coach to try to deal with as many of the issues as possible. The coach is trying to keep the athlete focused on performance.

Balague: Let’s first address the stress on the coach. Particularly at the Olympic Games, coaches are likely to try to take care of everything and everyone, ignoring their own needs. They must remember that one cannot give what one does not have. It is important that coaches learn what works for their own stress management. They should find some “down time,” even if it is brief, and realize that there is always going to be something that needs to be done and someone who needs something, but part of what needs to be done is to keep oneself alert and motivated. At the Olympic Games, the USOC provides a space for a coach that allows them to unwind. Sometimes, coaches from other sports can be a great support system.

Haberl: How do you and your athletes react to ever-changing, stressful, uncontrollable and distracting situations? What are your tendencies, when do you reach your breaking point, how do you re-charge your batteries, how do you “immunize” yourself from stressors, how do you maintain control of yourself? It is important to allow the athletes to be exposed to the “germs” of distraction and stress, for only then can they develop the “antibodies” to fight off any “attack” at the Games. Much of what happens at the Games is beyond the athletes’ and coaches’ control, but attitude is not.

ISSUE THREE: Competing Motivations

Coach Beal:

The coach has to understand that there are a variety of competing motivations for the athlete. They want to do the best that they can at the Games. There are conflicting motivations, particularly for team sports. Some athletes want to maximize the opportunity for exposure for themselves. They can be looking for personal gain from this experience and how it can help them in their professional careers. It is totally understandable, but the coach has to deal with the problems that arise.

Coach Vochatzer:

Difficulties can begin right after the team is selected. That time frame from post-Olympic Trials to the Olympic Games is critical. Athletes have to have enough time between competitions to let their endocrine systems recover and yet be “race sharp” for the Games when it really counts. Education and assistance for coaches, staff, athletes and agents is imperative ahead of time, so that good decisions can be made for Olympic preparation. Athletes have to balance the opportunities for financial gain with the objective of winning a medal.

Peterson: There are numerous and compelling reasons for some athletes to “go their own way” during the Olympics. Successful teams have a mission at the Games, as well as clearly defined roles for each player. A team-oriented culture reflects the importance of respect and trust—how players and staff treat each other, can we depend on each other when the going gets rough? The key is a commitment to the team mission.

ISSUE FOUR: Dealing With Constant Change

Coach Beal:

Trying to establish a consistent training routine and a consistent daily routine is extremely difficult. It is probably the number one issue for the coach. Practice time is very disrupted. You do not have that home-court advantage at any time and no control over the court. Everything is a problem; simple tasks have layers of bureaucracy to go through. Even dealing with security at practice can become an issue. You hope that you have players with past Olympic experience because they have expectations and have an understanding of what is going on.

Coach Vochatzer:

Nothing is etched in stone at the Olympic Games—we had 16 time schedule changes just for track and field from the time we arrived in Atlanta. Then, we had the Atlanta Olympic Park bombing—that dramatically changed our routine—what happened one-day was completely changed the next day. The athletes and staff MUST be ready to adapt so it does not take away from the competition preparation and performance.

Balague: Train for flexibility! Sometimes ask the athlete in practice to do a short version of a warm-up. Other

times simulate a rain delay. Practice at different times, facing the sun or away from it. We hardly ever use all of our resources. Things do not have to be perfect. If they are, enjoy it, if they are not, adapt. The athlete must find a balance between “enjoying the Olympic experience” and getting things done. Different individuals have different attentional needs, but staying focused on the Olympic competition too long will leave an athlete drained, both physically and emotionally.

Peterson: There is probably no right decision, only the right one in the moment, and the ability to shift thinking and make necessary changes will be much more useful than thriving on being correct.

Coach Beal:

The difference between a gold medal and a result can be extremely small at this level. As a coach, I have to get them to re-focus on our game plan, particularly after an unexpected loss to a team we knew we should have defeated. Dealing with injuries to players and not knowing if a recovering athlete is at 100% is a challenge at any time, let alone when this is one of the biggest moments in a player’s career.

Peterson: It is telling when an athlete’s goals are just to “make the team” as opposed to “win a medal.” Sometimes athletes, especially athletes contemplating their first run at the Games, have a hard enough time buying into the concept that they are Olympic caliber, much less contenders for a medal. Even if medalling is not totally realistic, it is important to talk about the process of individual performance excellence.

Balague: My main advice for an athlete trying to win an Olympic medal would be to remain focused on the process, which is the only controllable thing. What do I need to do in order to win a medal? I would then do backwards goal setting, and set concrete examples of what needs to be done one month before, three months, six months, etc. It is important to keep in mind that when the goal is so narrow, the pathway to that goal cannot be too narrow. If the athlete encounters an obstacle (e.g., an injury) he or she must regroup and formulate an alternative plan. Obstacles block the path, not the goal. Finally, it is essential to reset goals after making the team. Sometimes athletes reach their goal of making the Olympic team and then...they are done because they never looked past it and set new goals. This would be important for a team after an upsetting loss as well.

U N D E R S T A N D I N G

the path to the

P O D I U M

by Suzie Ricwald, Ph.D.
&

Kirsten Peterson, Ph.D.

USOC Coaching and Sport Sciences

Reflections from Olympians on the Process of Success

Introduction

It is an image etched into our collective memories—an ecstatic Olympic athlete clutching a medal after a successful performance at the Games. Equally compelling for others striving for similar goals is the question of how that athlete was able to achieve that level of success. What differentiates the paths of medal winners from the almost successful athletes? To aid in our understanding of how athletes succeed at the Olympic level, we must first understand the process of their development and significant influences along the way. To understand this and much more, the Athlete Development Division administered the *Talent Identification and Development (TID) Questionnaire* to over 2,100 U. S. Olympians who competed in Summer and Winter Olympic Games from 1984-98. The first report from that survey, “The Path to Excellence,” contained an analysis and interpretation of the quantitative data. Specifically, the report described the general patterns and trends that characterized the career-long development of those Olympians. It was the first in-depth study conducted by the U.S.Olympic Committee to provide a view of the development of U.S. Olympians (for a copy of the report go to www.usolympicteam.com/excellence/).

This article presents the analysis and interpretation of the qualitative (open-ended) questions from the TID Questionnaire. Specifically, two questions asked of these Olympians were to list the five factors that they

believe contributed most to their success and to list the five most significant obstacles they had to overcome in order to achieve success in their sport. After a brief description of how the athletes’ responses were analyzed, we’ll take a look at what these Olympians had to tell us regarding factors influencing their success and obstacles they had to overcome.

Factors Influencing Olympic Success

759 Olympians responded to listing up to five factors that contributed to their success and generated a list of 3,178 success factors that were grouped into higher-order factors. We have provided a definition of the top ten factors to help you in assessing if this might be a similar issue for your athletes. Additionally, we provide you with the percentage of athletes who identified this as a factor influencing their success (in parentheses).

1. Top Ten Factors Influencing Olympic Success

Dedication and Persistence (58%): These Olympians were quick to acknowledge the positive influence of their inner drive, desire, persistence, and commitment to achieving their goals; to being the best they could be.

2. Family and Friends (52%):

The influence of family and friends was pervasive in the development of these athletes. The support or influence provided by these individuals varied greatly and included financial and emotional support, instill-

ing confidence, providing an introduction to the sport, technical advice, and the provision of stability. Bottom line—the support provided by family and friends was invaluable.

3. Coaches (49%):

Not surprising, these Olympians identified excellent coaches throughout their development as having a significant influence on their success. As identified by the athletes, coaches provided such things as expertise, encouragement, and motivation.

4. Love of Sport (27%):

Many of the Olympians in this study felt that their love of and passion for the sport greatly influenced their success, often providing them with the necessary motivation to continue training in less than optimal conditions.

5. Training Programs and Facilities (22%):

Opportunities and access to good training were critical. These athletes identified the opportunity to train with club, college, national level, or resident teams as affecting their success. Additionally, access to programs and facilities was important. Within given sports, are opportunities and facilities available for developing athletes to take advantage of?

6. Natural Talent (22%):

While the athletes exerted a significant influence on their success through their dedication and hard work, natural or God-given talent was also recognized as a critical factor. Olympians in this study noted that a genetic predisposition played a role in their success.

7. Competitiveness (15%):

A strong competitive nature and love of competition was identified as a factor influencing success.

8. Focus (13%):

The athletes reported their ability to stay focused on their goals and the task at hand, despite distractions such as significant others or other life roles, as having a significant influence on their success.

9. Work Ethic (12%):

These Olympians worked for the success they achieved. They reported that hard work and a strong work ethic was a factor that influenced their success.

10. Financial Support (12%):

Rounding out the top 10...money. The financial support the athletes received from sources such as sponsorship, college scholarship, private donors, athlete grants, and fundraising contributed to their success.

Obstacles to Overcome to Achieve Olympic Success

The second question asked Olympian respondents was to list up to five obstacles to their success. In total, 756 Olympians responded and generated a list of 2,653 obstacles to success. The top ten obstacles to success have been included, with a brief explanation of each factor and the percentage of athletes who identified this as an obstacle. Note that several of these obstacles are the “flip side” of some of the identified success factors, adding even greater strength to the importance of that factor.

1. Lack of Financial Support (53%):

These Olympians identified lack of financial support as the biggest obstacle they faced. Some implications of this obstacle included increased stress and insecurity, compromised training due to having to work, and inability to compete nationally and internationally.

2. Conflict with Roles in Life (33%):

These athletes reported that an obstacle to their success was the conflict they experienced in trying to balance/manage multiple roles including work, career, school, family, and athletic endeavors. In many cases, compromises in some roles (i.e., postponing college) were necessary to pursue athletic goals.

3. Lack of Coaching Expertise or Support (29%):

Just as great coaching influenced success, lack of good coaching presented an obstacle to success. Lack of coaching was related to having coaches with limited knowledge or expertise as well as experiencing conflicts with the coach.



4. Lack of Support from USOC and NGB (22%):

Olympians in this study reported that the lack of appropriate support from both the USOC and their NGB (National Governing Bodies) at times undermined their athletic endeavors. Issues with these organizations were broad ranging and included a lack of mental preparation programs, no organization or encouragement, and being too bureaucratic.

5. Mental Obstacles (22%):

These Olympians reported various mental obstacles, such as low confidence, perfectionism, and dealing with pressure.

6. Lack of Training/Competition Opportunities (20%):

Again, just as the availability of training opportunities and facilities were viewed as influencing success, the lack of such opportunities and facilities presented an obstacle to success.

7. Medical Problems (20%):

Injuries, illness, and other medical issues, as would be expected, were perceived as an obstacle to athletic success.

8. Lack of Social Support (11%):

Family, friends and peers who provided little or no support and at times even discouraged athletic pursuits were perceived as obstacles to success.

9. Physical Limitations (8%):

Identified limitations included characteristics such as height, weight, strength and endurance. Interestingly, of the 59 athletes who identified this as an obstacle, 24 were medallists.

10. Failure (6%):

Fear of failure and learning to deal with failure was an obstacle to success.

Pulling it Together

Coaches, Coaches, Coaches.

It probably cannot be emphasized enough that coaches are important—*more specifically, effective, excellent coaches are the most important*—to athletes and their successful development. Based on the Olympians' identification of success factors and obstacles, it can be seen that great coaches were a prominent factor in athlete success and, conversely, a lack of great coaches was a deterrent to success. What makes a coach excellent? Olympians valued the coach's expertise and

knowledge, support, motivational influence, and commitment, to name a few of the qualities. While the notion that coaches are of value isn't a surprise, the strength of the finding makes it critical that this factor is addressed. Not only did the athletes identify coaches as critical in the open-ended questions, but in another section of the survey as well.

Specifically, athletes were asked to rate the importance of coaching as it related to their ultimate success at various stages of development. Across all phases of development, the majority of Olympians gave coaching the highest rating possible. To add further support to the importance of coaches, we can look to research conducted by Bloom (1985) on the development of talent. In studying talent development in various fields, he identified three key phases of development. A coach/master teacher is found to play a critical role in each of these phases of development. This echoes what our Olympians told us about the importance of great coaches.

It is no easy task ensuring that great coaches are coaching our developing athletes and future Olympians. Certainly, we need to look at how coaches are being trained and developed. Tapping into the numerous avenues by which coaches can gain the knowledge and skills to enhance their effectiveness as a coach could reap great benefits. We also need to take a look at the coaching pipeline to ensure continuity and consistency for the athletes as they develop. Additionally, we need to find ways to keep good coaches around longer. Coaches leave coaching for a variety of reasons, including pay and the difficult, travel-heavy lifestyle. Coaches are also typically expected to orchestrate travel on a shoestring budget, which can exacerbate the stress level.

Money, Money, Money

Over 50 percent of the Olympians surveyed identified this topic as a significant obstacle to success. On the other hand, financial support received from others was viewed as a factor contributing to success, although only identified by 12 percent of the Olympians. Lack of finances is viewed as a huge obstacle to performance success.

In another section of the survey, athletes were asked to identify if they received any financial support from NGBs, the USOC, and sponsors at various phases of their development. Interestingly, during the national and international competitive phase of their development, respectively, 31 percent and 58 percent

reported receiving funding from their NGB; 20 percent and 49 percent of respondents reported receiving funding from the USOC and 24 percent and 38 percent of respondents reported receiving funding from their sponsors. This funding was allocated to training/coaching, equipment, competitions, and supplemental stipends. Furthermore, by the time these athletes reached the international competition phase, Olympians reported that external sources financed close to 50 percent of their expenses. So, it is not the case that athletes are not receiving financial support. In fact, many would argue that quite a large percentage of expenses are being funded by either their NGB or the USOC.

However, these athletes perceive that the level of financial support they are receiving is not enough. The obstacle to success undoubtedly ties into another obstacle mentioned by the Olympians, “Conflict with Roles in Life.” Many athletes mentioned having to work as an obstacle assumably to shore up their financial resources and balance that with training and competition.

To effectively address this obstacle, it would be of value to understand what athletes had to do without because of lack of finances. Additionally, it would be of value to know the resources that are most needed so efforts can be made to target these expenses, as it is probably unrealistic to expect to finance all expenses.

Individual Characteristics

Success can be directly attributed to the athlete. Dedication and persistence, love of the sport, competitiveness, focus, and strong work ethic were factors identified by athletes as having influenced their success. These individual characteristics occupied five of the top ten factors that the Olympians felt positively influenced their success. So, while we see some of the success factors and obstacles as being somewhat outside of the control of the athletes, it is important to recognize that several of the factors influencing success are in the athlete’s control. This notion of the individual strongly influencing his own success is further supported by responses to another question in the questionnaire. Specifically, when asked to rank the impact of various factors on long-term performance progression, the top ranked factor was “dedication and persistence.” This finding supports some of the work by Gould who has put forth a Pyramid Model of Peak Athletic Performance (Olympic Coach, Fall

2000). In the model, he identified “personality and motivational factors” such as high motivation, optimism, and passion about what one is doing as having a major influence on peak performance. In fact, they are viewed as critical building blocks for peak performance.

How can these psychological attributes be developed in athletes? How can we teach our athletes to focus more on the factors that they can influence and worry less about those factors that may be outside of their control?

Support From Others

While individual characteristics and attributes greatly influence success, other individuals can also be influential in many ways. We already noted the importance of great coaches to success and the important influence of family and friends. Fifty-two percent of the Olympians identified family and friends as providing different types of support (i.e., emotional, financial, technical), which positively impacted success. Conversely, some respondents viewed lack of support from family and friends as an obstacle to success. Given this, effort should be put forth to integrate these critical individuals into the system and educate them as to how they can be more effective in providing support to the athlete. USOC sport psychologists have collaborated with researchers to examine these effects at major competitions such as the Olympics; their findings have been consolidated into several brochures that are distributed to athletes heading to the Olympics. These brochures suggest ways that athletes can help maximize the positive influences of family and friends, while minimizing them as distractions. It may be worthwhile to extend this kind of effort into the realm of training as well.

Final Thoughts

As reported in the initial report from the *TID Questionnaire*, the average length of development of U. S. Olympians from the time they first participate in their sport until they make their first Olympic team is 12 years. We know from the results of this study and research from Bloom (1985) that this developmental course is complex and involves many factors. Bloom interviewed 120 people who had achieved excellence in such diverse fields as art, athletics (Olympic swimmers and tennis champions), music, and academics. The results of the study indicated that successful individuals had very similar learning and development phases. In

his book, "Developing Talent in Young People," Bloom divided development of expertise into three phases: early, middle, and late.

Play, exploration, and fun characterizes the early phase when children learn fundamental skills and develop a love for their chosen field. The most effective coaches and teachers of this first phase were skilled in instilling a love of the activity for their students. Bloom's subjects came from child-oriented families who taught their children the value of hard work. Parents in these families would often say to their children, "If it is worth doing, then it is worth doing well." Parents encouraged their children to be self-disciplined and responsible.

During the middle phase, increasingly systematic learning takes place and a master teacher or coach promotes long-term development and instills technical skills. This phase typically lasts four to six years and is the typical period in which young musicians and athletes underwent systematic training to prepare them for international performance. It is during this phase that athletes reported making the transition from "playing tennis to tennis player."

During the late phase, an individual continues to study with a master teacher or coach and train many hours a day. Often, athletes lived and trained with others who shared the same goals and commitment to sport and music. Each individual was able to translate training and technical skills into personalized, optimal performance.

Based on this model, we can view the success factors and obstacles of U. S. Olympians in a comprehensive picture of development that includes all phases. Graduation from one phase prepares the athlete for the challenges and demands of the next phase. For instance, in the early phase of development, Bloom's research and results from the initial report suggests that significant, supportive others are critical for optimal performance progress. In sport, this would suggest that coaches and parents make their biggest impact upon athletes early in the process, and are important for instilling a love of sport and a work ethic in athletes that is critical for success in later phases. Results from the initial report suggests that as the athlete moves up the development ladder additional factors become significant such as strong financial support and excellent training and competition opportunities. Bloom goes on to suggest that as the athlete moves up the performance ladder merely supportive coaches are not

enough, they also need to be increasingly competent in the technical aspects of the athlete's sport.

Any strategy to encourage the development of success factors or to remove obstacles should keep this whole picture of development in focus. By doing so, the most effective long-term development of U.S. Olympians takes place.

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COACHING

PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL BENCHMARK

by
Peter Davis
Ph.D.



Director —
USOC
Coaching
and
Sport
Sciences

WHAT SORT OF JOB ARE YOU DOING?

You're a coach, right? You train athletes every day to get better. They test themselves in every competition to see if what they are doing and if your training plan, is working. When they don't achieve their desired result, you analyze what you are doing as a coach and what your athletes are doing. That's how it works, right? Training programs are evaluated everyday whether you like it or not. Workouts get easier (until they are stepped up), skills become easier to accomplish, and strategies and tactics become (more) automatic. Performance appraisal happens every day in the athletic world.

That's for athletes—measured every day in training and competition...but what about you as a coach? How do you determine when you are getting better, that you are making a difference, that you are improving your skills? What is your performance appraisal benchmark?

There are lots of ways to look at this—more than just the win loss record. You can establish a formalized performance appraisal system with your management, co-coaching staff, support staff and athletes. You can create an environment for “informal” appraisal opportunities with staff and athletes and/or you can create your own system of self-appraisal to

allow you to self-reflect on your coaching behavior, job execution and style.

What system you employ and how you do it depends on your coaching situation. If you were a paid full-time coach, it would make sense to have a formal performance appraisal system in place, just as any other professional would have. If you are a volunteer or an unpaid, part-time coach, you might employ anything from a formalized process to a low-key post-season and/or post-tournament review of how things went.

Whatever level you coach, one thing is for certain; if you want to get better at what you do you should use some system to get feedback from the key stakeholders and develop strategies to enhance your strengths and develop your weaknesses.

STAKEHOLDERS

So, who are the stakeholders? Obviously, there is yourself, the athletes and in some cases assistant coaches. However, in some cases, for example some of our Olympic or professional teams, there are also medical and scientific support staffs, National Governing Body (NGB) management staff and sponsors. And let's not forget the parents for some teams and athletes.

SETTING THE TABLE

What is the biggest problem with performance appraisals — either giving them or receiving them? Most people are scared to hear negative feedback and some people are reluctant to give feedback; usually negative feedback because they don't want to offend — but sometimes positive feedback as well. People are sometimes scared of the “consequences.” If you get a negative appraisal, does it mean you will be fired, demoted, or have a cut in salary?

Therefore, one of the first things that must be done is to introduce the concept of performance appraisals as a means of learning and growing, and to place it in the context as part of an overall culture of excellence and high performance. It is a tool to enhance performance and enable you to do a better coaching job — and ultimately, for your athletes to perform better. You need to establish with staff, athletes and management, that it is a routine part of your function as a coach to seek feedback, to learn what works and what doesn't work. Your task is to understand what your athletes need to succeed and what the coaching staff and support staff can add to help you, and the collective team to achieve the overall goals.

What does this mean? It means starting from the very beginning with your athletes or team and you should outline your philosophy of how and why you coach. How will you communicate with the players? What style will you use? What attitudes and efforts will you expect from the players, staff, and from yourself? What is your substitution policy, late policy, practice policy? It extends to setting performance and behavior standards and policy for the whole team — athletes, coaches and support staff.

Before you launch into a performance appraisal of how well you have performed, you need to establish your personal, team or athlete performance and behavior goals. If the team, or you and the athlete, haven't agreed on how and what you want to accomplish, it is difficult to evaluate how well you did— whatever you did. So once again, before you hand out a post-competition or post-season appraisal you need to “set the table.”

Once the “pre-appraisal” work is done (i.e., clearly identifying the philosophy, goals and expectations), the next phase might be creating a learning environment with the team(s). This refers to both the “athlete”

team and the “support” team. The coach creates an environment where people feel comfortable voicing their opinion about what is working or not working — at the right time. You probably don't want an athlete at half-time questioning whether the offensive strategy is the best choice, or whether you should have made that last substitution, or whether your practice sessions are effective. There is a right place and a right time for everything. As a coach you do need to create an environment where questions can be safely asked without retribution, where honest feedback is given, where confidentiality is maintained where necessary, and where people are taught how to effectively give constructive positive and negative feedback.

PERFORMING THE APPRAISAL

Now that you have done the “pre-appraisal” work can you jump to the appraisal? Should you get a form from somewhere and give it to the athletes and say “here, fill this out and hand it back to me before next practice.” Probably not!

Again, you need to determine what aspects of your coaching should be appraised, when an appraisal should and will be done, and what format or tool you will use.

Set the stage before the season, camp or tournament, so that athletes and/or staff are not surprised when they are asked to participate in your performance appraisal. If they know that every aspect of your performance as a coach (and theirs as athletes and support staff) will be evaluated with a view to improving performance then it won't be a shock.

You can then decide to use a standardized form, so that all coaches are evaluated equally or one on one consultations. Standardized forms have an advantage in that they can be scored and evaluated against each other. Open-ended forms have advantages in that they allow for more creative and thoughtful responses. A combination of both formats in a tool would seem to be a good compromise.

A critical element of a successful evaluation, (where useful information will be generated to help you improve as a coach), is timing. What sort of responses do you think you will get if you give out a performance appraisal tool on the bus home after a tough loss or on the last day of your worst season on record, or

immediately after your most thrilling victory? Obviously timing is everything, and you need to put some space between emotional events so that all stakeholders can think and respond objectively.

S E L F - A S S E S S M E N T

Another form of performance appraisal is self-assessment. This is an important part of evaluating how well you are doing as a coach. It complements the formal appraisals completed by staff and athletes and can provide information about how well you are doing your job.

You must set the stage for self-assessment, just as you would for formal appraisals. You need to identify the skills, characteristics and behaviors that you want to exhibit as a coach, and at appropriate times you need to self reflect as to how you are achieving them. You should think about evaluating such things as how you communicate and interact with athletes and staff at practice and during competition. Do you look them in the eye when you talk to them? Do you provide appropriate amounts of positive feedback and/or inappropriate amounts of negative feedback? What information do you communicate during time-outs (e.g. is it all negative, all motivational, all instructional or combinations of them all)? How much preparation time do you spend before practice or competition? Are you late for practice or meetings? There are a large number of things you can use to evaluate yourself. It helps to make a checklist and measure yourself from time to time. Your checklist should not only include the list of skills and behaviors that you plan to evaluate, but also space for a score or comments as well as space for an action plan to improve if necessary.

It is common practice nowadays at most levels of sports to video athlete performances. Some coaches video training sessions, and most coaches' video competition. You look for correct technique, proper execution of strategy and/or scout the opposition. How many coaches turn the camera on themselves? Have you ever filmed yourself in a training session? Do you ever watch the game film (or maybe have someone film you specifically during a competition) and watch how you coach? How many verbal contacts did you have with certain players? How many positive comments did you make? How many negative comments did you make? Did you lose your temper? What is your body language like? Are you supportive and positive or sarcastic? If you think it's important



to film your athletes' performance, don't underrate the need to film your own performance.

O U T C O M E S

At the end of all this, don't lose sight of the outcomes or the purpose of performance appraisals. If you have created the right environment, it will all flow together. You have goals, benchmarks, evaluations and directions for improvement. The whole purpose of performance appraisals is to identify your strengths and weaknesses and what's working and what's not. It's not meant to be a score sheet in and of itself. Whatever tool and process you use, it should be directed to constructive action items of what needs to occur — by you, the athletes, the staff or the management to improve the culture and the environment.

This is much more complicated than most people think so caution is recommended. Don't just give a survey without warning or preparation. Do the preparation beforehand and create a positive learning culture on the team. That way everyone benefits.

The USOC Coaching and Sport Sciences Division has created a Coach Evaluation Tool that is available from the division by contacting the coaching staff at the numbers on the back of the journal. This is not meant to be a "one size fits all" appraisal. You should examine your team or NGB culture, or your individual athlete relationships, and set the stage for effective performance appraisals and then modify our tool (or any other tool) to better suit your unique situation.

CRITICAL COACHING BEHAVIORS That An Olympic Coach Must do to PERFORM WELL At The GAMES

Be Stable

Do planning, then plan again, then modify the plan

Be positive before being negative

Be consistent in behavior, communication and preparation

Always finish positive with the athlete when giving corrections

Be reliable/dependable, even if you are tired and overworked

Be confident, act confident

Be committed; follow through, even if it hurts

Be diplomatic, control your outbursts

Be a good psychologist: listen to what your athletes need

Communicate and delegate

Adapt to sudden changes in the contest

Be adaptable to schedule and other changes

Be trustworthy; give fair and equal treatment to staff and athletes

**Be an example. Act like a champion, with class, passion,
and professionalism**

Be inspirational and motivational

Listen to athletes/officials/staff/coaches, even if you are tired

**No matter how much pressure you feel,
don't stop caring about people**

Be competent

Show self-discipline, in all areas

Laugh! Keep your sense of humor. Your athletes need it.

De-escalate crisis

Detailed plan- sell it

Set up your own time

Control yourself

Be consistent

Be physically and mentally ready

Be mentally tough

Be self-motivated

Always listen well

RELAX!

Plan for the unexpected

Focus on the controllable

BELIEVE in your athletes

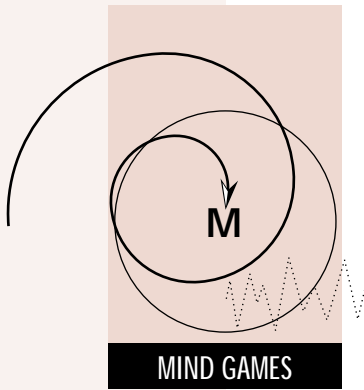
Believe in yourself!

Deal with staff issues early

COMMUNICATE!

Keep your personal life in order

(1996-98 Olympic Coaches)



What Is Your Coaching Personality, And How Does It Impact The Job You Do

by Sean McCann

Ph.D.

USOC Coaching and Sport Sciences

As you read the following three quotes from three different Olympians about their coaches, consider how their coach's personality might work for and against them:

"It took me a couple of years to realize that if I was going to make any changes, I had to suggest them, because my Coach hates changing stuff. He needs to see data before making any new changes, and if I don't change, how can I get any new data? We finally talked about it, and I learned Coach doesn't like changing anything in his life! It was helpful to realize it wasn't just me. I went ahead and changed technique and it worked better than I had hoped."

"We all know Coach is a control freak. It is kind of a team joke. We end up having to sneak around a lot to save her worrying. She's a great coach, but she wants to run everything we do, from what we eat, to when we sleep, to whom we date. It's just better if we don't tell her about our lives, because otherwise, she starts giving advice."

"My last coach was like a big teddy bear. He was always doing stuff to keep people happy and friendly, which is hard to pull off with this team. My new

coach is completely different. I thought he hated me for six months, but then I realized, he is unemotional with everyone. He is brilliant, and knows more about our sport than anyone, but if you want compliments, forget it. The nicest compliment I have gotten so far was the comment, "that is how the best do it", after I won a medal at Worlds. It has been a pretty tough adjustment for the team to go from a really warm environment to one that is much more cool."

Coaches often talk to the USOC Sport Psychology staff about the personality of their athletes. As good coaches, they know that to get the most out of any athlete, you need to understand their likes, dislikes, preferences, and needs, in other words, you need to understand their personality. Given that, I am frequently surprised at the blind spots coaches can have about their own personalities. I have worked with coaches perfectly willing to call an athlete "sloppy," but unwilling to call themselves obsessively neat. Conversely, I have worked with coaches who will characterize their athletes as tightly wound and irritable about tiny competition day details, but unable to recognize that it is their own characteristic chaotic organization that triggers the athlete's nervous behavior.

Most excellent coaches understand that personality issues with athletes are ALWAYS a two-way street. The very best coaches are aware of their own needs, preferences, and the impression they create upon others. A brief column cannot begin to summarize the incredibly complex area of personality, but there are a few simple and practical applications of the science of personality to coaching. This column will focus on the role of the coach's personality in shaping the way coaches interact with their athletes.

How does personality impact coaching behavior?

Personality has been broken down into various factors, as measured by countless different personality tests. The following four different coaching types are derived from a combination of subscales of one of the most frequently used measures of "personality" in team and business settings. If you feel you are strongly in

one of these four categories, it may have a significant impact on your coaching behavior:

Four Coaching Types:

The Stabilizer—Very good at seeing and understanding the facts of the situation. Has a need to see evidence before changing. Likes the tried and true, because it has the numbers to back it up. Keeps the ship on course.

The Troubleshooter—Excellent observer of details and technique. Likes to try new things. Willing to adopt new training approaches, and enjoys making changes, then closely measuring the impact of the changes. Great at fixing.

The Visionary—Big picture coach. Enjoys thinking and acting in new and creative ways. Admires breakthroughs in coaching. Can revolutionize coaching technique in their sport.

The Catalyst—Creative, energetic, gets athletes excited about a vision. Has a contagious intensity and passion for their sport. Can be a great motivational speaker or simply have a powerful impact on one athlete.

Do any of these types describe you well? If not, you may have more of a blend of types of personality. Regardless, read the description and ask yourself what each of these coaches might do under very great pressure (such as Olympic Games). Any strong personality is like a double-edged sword, it cuts both ways, and never more so than when under pressure.

The Stabilizer coach, so good at keeping things on course, can become rigid and inflexible under pressure, unwilling to change even though it is obvious to everyone around them that a change is necessary.

The Troubleshooter coach, so good at fixing things, may keep on fiddling and changing things in response to pressure. It may not be broken, but the troubleshooter sometimes can't resist the urge to fix it anyway.

The Visionary coach, so good with the big picture, may be unable to accomplish critical little things that matter at big competitions. Under pressure, the visionary may be seen as a dreamer, not grounded in the details, which can erode athletes' confidence.

The Catalyst coach, so good at energizing others and building passion, may become overly emotional under pressure, when cool and calm is called for. The

Catalyst can get pulled into people issues, when staying focused on the competition would be more useful.

Simple strategies for maximizing coaching personality strengths and minimizing weaknesses.

- 1. Increase self-awareness:** It is impossible to be too self-aware. Whether you take personality tests, ask your coaching staff and athletes for feedback, bring in a consultant, or simply reflect upon your past relationships, increasing self awareness will help you make better decisions.
 - a. If you do have other coaching peers who have seen you under pressure, it is especially useful to get a perspective on how your personality changes when you are stressed.
 - b. The USOC Coaching & Sport Sciences Division has developed a coaching evaluation form that you can distribute to athletes or other coaches to assess aspects of your performance and leadership.
 - c. Formal personality tests (such as the commonly used MBTI-Myers Briggs Trait Indicator, and the FIRO-B), can provide a great deal of information as well as strategies for using your personality most effectively.
- 2. Build a complementary team:** Some of the most effective leaders have found the easiest way to compensate for extreme personality traits is to hire-on staff that have an opposing or complementary style. Many very successful Olympic teams have staffs composed of creative types, practical types, and warm energetic types. Athletes go to the coach they need for the current issue. If the head coach has a strong enough ego not to be threatened by this approach, it can work very efficiently.
- 3. Use, but don't overuse, your personality strengths:** Having a strong and extreme coaching personality is like having a great hammer. It is great for its purpose, but you need to be careful not to mistake everything for a nail. With increased self-awareness, you learn to recognize when you may need to bring in someone else to help work with a particular athlete who can't handle the hammering. If you don't have the luxury of bringing in other resources, you will need to build a more flexible coaching personality. This is hard but rewarding work, best done with a consultant or coach who can give you feedback.



ACSM Outreach: Training for Speed, Agility and Quickness

by Lee E. Brown,

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Associate Professor,
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Fullerton Division of Kinesiology
and Health Promotion

Speed, agility and quickness (SAQ) training has become a popular way to train athletes. Any athlete from school children on a soccer field to professionals can benefit from SAQ training. This method has been around for several years, but is not used by all athletes primarily due to a lack of education regarding the drills. SAQ training may be used to increase speed/strength, or the ability to exert maximal force during high-speed movements. It manipulates and capitalizes on the stretch-shortening cycle while bridging the gap between traditional resistance training and functional specific movements. Some benefits of

SAQ training include increases in muscular power in linear, lateral, horizontal, and multi-planar movements; brain signal efficiency; kinesthetic or body spatial awareness; motor skills; and reaction force and time.

SAQ training is not for beginners. It is an advanced form of training that should be introduced after a base of training has been established. Each athlete comes into a training program at somewhat different fitness levels, thus each athlete must

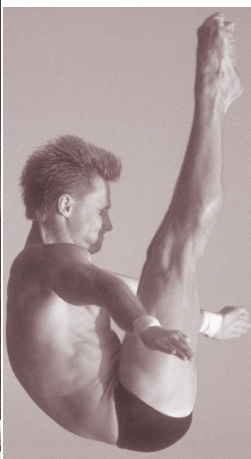
train at different intensity levels. This form of training is best described as moderate exercise and should only be implemented after a solid foundation of strength training and conditioning has been developed.

As mentioned earlier, elastic muscle torque is the stretch-shortening cycle and is described as the combination of eccentric (muscle lengthening) and concentric (muscle shortening) actions. An eccentric muscle action is performed when an athlete lowers a weight such as the down portion of the movement in a biceps curl or a squat exercise. A concentric muscle action is the upward motion or opposite movement during the above exercises. When an eccentric action precedes a concentric action, the resulting force output of the concentric action is increased. It works similar to a rubber band that is stretched and then snaps back together. This is the essence of the stretch-shortening cycle and SAQ training. Examples in sports are a baseball or golf swing where an individual precedes the intended motion with a wind-up or pre-stretch. Without the eccentric action, or if there is a pause between the two actions, the increased force output of the concentric phase of the exercise will not occur. The stretch-shortening cycle takes place during every day activities such as walking and running yet is intensified greatly during SAQ training.

Preparation

An appropriate warm-up session should precede every exercise session. Warm-up routines should begin with a general whole body activity such as cycling, walking or jogging at a low intensity. This will increase heat and blood flow to the muscles and tendons thereby preparing them for higher intensity workouts. This general warm-up should be followed by a specific warm-up that would consist of performing some of the session's exercises at a low intensity.

It is a common experience that when an athlete attempts a new exercise there may be an occurrence of muscle soreness. This soreness, or more specifically "delayed onset muscle soreness (DOMS)," usually peaks between 24 and 72 hours after the exercise session. The eccentric or lengthening portion of the exercise as described earlier primarily causes DOMS. Currently, the prevailing explanation for DOMS is micro muscle tears. The best-known way to reduce the development of DOMS is to "adapt" to the exercise stress. This requires repeated bouts over several weeks with sufficient rest between sessions. Since intense SAQ training involves eccentric exercise utilizing the stretch-shortening cycle, it is recommended that no more than two sessions per week separated by two or three days be employed with novice athletes.



Testing

A proper SAQ Needs Analysis involves two types of evaluation: the athlete's functional strength, and the specific metabolic demands of competition. The metabolic demands of competition must be addressed in training and testing. The specific conditioning needed to execute technical assignments at competitive effort levels is referred to as special endurance. It is a variation on the speed-endurance concept which originated in racing events: the ability to maintain running speed after one to two seconds at maximal velocity, or to achieve maximum acceleration or speed during repetitive sprints. The underlying strategy is to develop reciprocal physical and technical qualities needed to achieve a pre-determined effort distribution, or a target pace or series of paces, in competition. The training implications for sports other than race events are relatively straightforward, but infrequently applied.

In short, before an athlete begins with an intense SAQ training program they should be tested to determine any deficits in performance. Also, the exercise time and duration should match the sport activity in which the athlete is to be engaged.

Speed

Sport speed (for our intended purposes) refers to the ability to run at maximum or near maximum speed. This phenomenon will only last four-and-a-half to six seconds, even for world-class athletes. Most sports outside of track sprinting do not offer the platform to showcase maximum running speed, however sprint training does underlie the foundation of numerous sports activities. Just think of how many critical game situations in various sports are won or lost by the ability or lack thereof to shift into a "higher gear" when needed. Increasing maximum running speed has a direct correlation with increasing one's power output. The fastest runners are those athletes who spend less time on the ground, which is greatly determined by the athlete's strength and power in relation to their body composition.

SAQ training will prepare the athlete to run faster through drills designed to work the specific muscles involved in fast locomotion. There is a myriad of drills available to athletes and coaches. Choose the drills which best mimic the activity or sport in which the individual is undertaking. Drills for speed will involve arm mechanics and stepping velocity as well as hill running and over speed running with the use of rubber bands.

Agility

Agility is the ability to decelerate, accelerate and

change direction quickly while maintaining good body control without decreasing speed. Agility is closely aligned with balance by requiring athletes to regulate shifts in the body's center of gravity while being subjected to postural deviation. Sports movements are generally not straight ahead, but require changes of direction in which lateral movements are used in the several planes of movement simultaneously. Sports are often played in short bursts of 30 feet or less before a change of direction is required. Because movements are often initiated from various body positions, athletes need to be able to react with strength, explosiveness and quickness from these different positions.

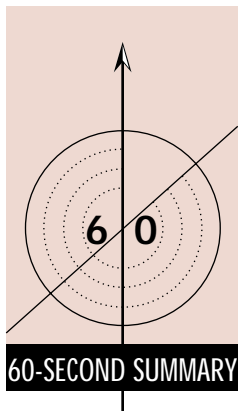
Drills for agility will involve change of direction movements and foot placement maneuvers that require the body to change planes of motion with a minimal loss of speed. Agility drills will also include stepping over obstacles and moving in and out of obstacles in and effort to teach the neuromuscular system to function as a unit for fast changes in direction.

Quickness

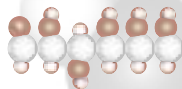
Speed, rapidity and instancy are all words that have been used in defining quickness. One common theme to all of these descriptions is "rate" or the measure of something to a fixed unit. In this case, that fixed unit is time. When an athlete performs a task or movement in a relatively brief period of time, he/she can be described as being quick. Quickness, in and of itself, seems simple. An athlete is neither born quick nor slow. Although it is true that genetic potential plays an important role in an athlete's physical abilities, many bio-motor skills that depend on quickness may be improved.

Quickness drills involve foot-striking maneuvers using a ladder or painted blocks on the ground. They also include partner reaction drills that train each individual to move at top speed as a consequence of some action by another athlete. Agility drills may also use resistance devices such as medicine balls to overload the system during training.

The needs analysis information described above is key when designing a program specifically for each athlete. Once the major and minor emphases of the training session have been identified, then the individual training sessions should reflect the building blocks for achievement of these goals. It is important to note that SAQ training is just one segment of the overall training plan that includes strength, balance, flexibility and core training. Each one of these may be an emphasis depending on where the athlete is in their training cycle.



Coaching the Athlete with Diabetes



by **Craig Stewart, Ph.D.**
Montana State University

Abstract

The incidence of obesity and diabetes are on the rise in the USA. It has been estimated that obesity in children has increased over 25 percent in the last decade. While Type 1 diabetes is more associated with children than Type 2, the number of athletes who are competing with some type of diabetes should follow the trend of an increase like obesity. When combined with the continued growth in youth participation in sport, it is imperative that all coaches be aware of issues related to care of athletes with diabetes.

Diabetes is a metabolic disorder in which the body either fails to produce insulin (Type 1) or the body is unable to utilize all or some of what is produced (Type 2). Insulin is a hormone that is produced in the pancreas and functions to regulate glucose (blood sugar) that is ingested into the intestine and absorbed into the blood. Glucose is the primary source of energy in the human organism, and if it is not all used, then it is stored as glycogen in the liver and, to some degree, in the muscles.

While the two types are different in many respects, the primary symptoms prior to diagnosis are the same. An individual with undiagnosed or untreated diabetes could exhibit frequent urination, excessive thirst, blurred vision, unusual fatigue, weight loss and slow healing of wounds (especially on the extremities). It is extremely important that coaches be aware of these symptoms and refer their concerns to either the parents or medical staff associated with the team. If undiagnosed, the athlete may suffer severe permanent organ damage.

Responsible coaches will be as knowledgeable as possible about the overall health of all their athletes. One can never assume that medical records and parent release forms are valid or current. Coaches must go to any length to ensure they know of any health issues of their athletes.

In the case of an athlete with diabetes, coaches must know:

- 1) What type of diabetes?
- 2) How is the athlete medicated?
- 3) Diet considerations, both in relationship day-to-day activities, and in case of drastic increases in caloric expenditures related to sport participation.
- 4) Other side effects.

One of the effects of diabetes that can have a direct effect on athletic participation are vision problems including sensitivity to bright sunlight. A coach of an athlete with diabetes should also be aware of the unique relationship between increased levels of stress and hormonal changes in the body. The sudden increase in hormones, due to stress, may work against the diabetic athlete.

There have been numerous athletes who have had successful, productive careers and dealt with their diabetic conditions. Coaches need to be aware of the potential of an increase in the number of athletes they might encounter and how to ensure safe and successful athletic careers.

(The complete article with sources can be found at: www.sportscoach-sci.com)

Hot off the Press

Below is a listing of some great websites for coaches:

United States Olympic Committee	www.usolympicteam.com/
International Society of Biomechanics in Sport	www.sportscoach-sci.com*
American College Medicine	www.acsm.org (fit society page)
Gatorade Sports Science Institute	www.gssiweb.com
Australian Sports Commission	www.ausport.gov.au/acc/
National Institute for Sports Science and Safety	www.niss.org
Canadian Sports	www.canadiansport.com

For coaches wanting information on Athens to assist in 2004 preparations:

Olympic Games LOC for 2004	www.athens2004.com*
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Local Government

Athens	www.cityofathens.gr*
Thessaloniki	www.thessalonikicity.gr

Environment

Hellenic Coasts	www.thalassa.gr
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Mass Media

Athens News Agency	www.ana.gr
Radio Flash 9.61	www.glash.gr (Greek only)

Culture

Ministry of Culture	www.culture.gr
The Hellenic Literary and Historical Archive	www.elia.org.gr
Megaron-Athens Concert Hall	www.megaron.gr

Tourism

Greek National Tourism Organization	www.gnto.gr*
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Other Sites

General Information	www.greece.gr*
	www.phantis.gr*
	www.flash.gr
	www.geocities.com/alexandrosworld/Greek/Home.html

Language

	www.travlang.com/languages/index.html*
(Has Greek spelling, English pronunciation and a native speaker)	

* Highly recommended that you visit

OLYMPIC COACH E-MAGAZINE

The U.S. Olympic Committee Coaching and Sport Sciences Division reminds you that our quarterly magazine, OLYMPIC COACH, is now available electronically as the OLYMPIC COACH E-MAGAZINE.

This quarterly publication designed for coaches at all levels can now come to you via e-mail. The quarterly e-mail provides a summary of each article in the magazine with a link that takes you directly to the full-length article. The E-magazine contains the same content as the print version of the magazine. The best news is that OLYMPIC COACH E-MAGAZINE is available to all coaches and other interested individuals free of charge. To receive your complimentary subscription, go to the web site at <http://coaching.usolympicteam.com/coaching/ksub.nsf>, and sign up. The subscription information that you provide will not be shared or sold to any other organization or corporation. Please share this opportunity with other individuals in the coaching community.

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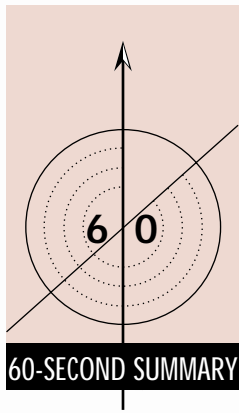
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ACSM Urges Young Athletes To Avoid Ephedra

*Education and caution vital for
parents, coaches and athletes*

Abstract

The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) urged increased awareness of how the use of ephedra can adversely affect the health of young athletes. Those in a position to influence the behavior of young athletes, such as parents, coaches and youth sports governing organizations, should be aware of the dangers of ephedra, the dietary supplement considered a factor in several deaths and adverse health events in athletes in recent years.

The consumption of ephedra, also known as “ma huang,” leads to increases in metabolism and in heart rate. People who exercise and/or train for competition in sporting events are exposed to risk because ephedra may impair the body’s ability to cool itself, thereby increasing the potential for heat-related illness during exercise. This fact only begins to address the dangers the supplement can pose to youth.

“Young people don’t sweat as much as adults, so they don’t have the same ability to naturally adjust their body temperatures while exercising,” said ACSM President Edward T. Howley, Ph.D., FACSM. “ACSM is particularly concerned that products containing ephedra are so readily available to children and adolescents who may not be aware of these dangers.”

Howley also notes young athletes often use ephedra for weight loss or to enhance athletic performance, and are placing a greater emphasis on peak performance at an earlier age. “There are many factors which may negatively influence a young athlete’s decision to use products containing ephedra,” he adds. “It is critical that we stress more appropriate methods of increasing physical fitness and gaining the competitive advantages they seek.”

ACSM joins other concerned organizations that have publicly cautioned against the use of ephedra. Concern centers on increased risk of heart irregularities, disturbances of the central nervous system, gastrointestinal problems, and stroke. Although some athletes may consume ephedra in an attempt to improve their athletic performance and reach physical goals, the risks far outweigh any potential benefits.

Young people can easily access products containing ephedra. Ephedra is not currently regulated as are other drugs which pose similar health threats. Ephedra, or its synthetic form ephedrine, can be found in a variety of over-the-counter asthma, cold, and allergy medications as a bronchodilator and decongestant. There is no federal age restriction for purchasing such products.

ACSM also points to the increased risk of health problems when caffeine and ephedra are used together. Some athletes will engage in the dangerous practice of “stacking,” or using ephedra and caffeine at the same time, possibly in combination with other supplements, to achieve enhanced athletic performance or weight loss. Also, the use of ephedra coupled with casual consumption of caffeine, like that found in soda, may enhance the dangers of the product.

“Young people may not be aware of the dangers of these substances, particularly when they are combined,” says ACSM spokesperson Gary Wadler, M.D., FACSM. “When ephedra and caffeine work hand-in-hand, heat production and the stimulatory effects will be that much greater, and so will the risk.” Also, the levels of the active chemicals in supplements can vary significantly from product-to-product and from batch-to-batch. This is a significant problem in light of the potential adverse side effects associated with ephedra-containing products.

(For the complete article: www.acsm-msse.org)

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