

## MENTAL FACTORS AND TEAM SUCCESS

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#### Introduction

In the modern professional world of sport, there is often a very fine line between winning and losing. The importance of being in good physical shape, technically strong, tactically advanced and looking after the nutritional aspects is probably more important than ever. If the aforementioned aspects are seen as the fundamental building blocks to success, psychology can be seen as the cement holding these blocks together. In most high pressure situations, it is not the lack of preparation, skill or ability which has the greatest impact on performance; mostly the inability to apply these skills under pressure appears to be affecting performance.

#### Interacting sub-systems: Environment, Team, Individual

The mental factors in team success are not one dimensional – it is a complex interaction between various sub-systems. It is about the physical environment within which the team has to operate on a daily basis; it is about dealing with external expectations; it is about the team culture and communication, but it is also about how each individual function within the team. It is therefore important to follow a comprehensive approach to cover all aspects of mental performance from an environmental, team and individual perspective. Specifically, it is important to look after the entire spectrum of skills affecting individual performance within the team.

#### Neuropsychology of performance under pressure

For an individual to perform optimally within a team there has to be an element of individual wellbeing. Sports people are not immune to developing problems such as anxiety or depression, which will indirectly affect their performance. However, a high level of wellbeing does not automatically lead to better on-field performance. Modern science allow us to get a better understanding of individual reactions during critical moments, by looking at the neuropsychology of performance under pressure, helping us to understand why some players cope better with pressure than others. Ultimately, one has to look after both the performance skills, and wellbeing of each individual player, to facilitate team performance: 'Better people – better performance'.

#### The clinical sport psychologist

The role of the modern clinical sport psychologist is to act as a high performance consultant that can support the integration between these systems, while still working with the management and players on an individual level to facilitate the best possible performance.

The clinical sport psychology model looks at:

- Foundation skills: the basic individual skills
- Facilitative skills: Better People
  - o Clinical sport psychology
  - o Team cohesion and group dynamics
- Performance skills: Better Performance
  - o Team performance: The Shared Mental Model
  - o Individual performance: The neuropsychology of performance under pressure