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COUN6215/7415 Applied Sport Psychology

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Case Study 1 - Roller Coaster Confidence

Developing Optimal Confidence to Attain Performance Capabilities. Riley was a hockey player with immense potential. However, something always seemed to be holding him back and keeping him from playing consistent high-level hockey. Riley had been given a number of competitive opportunities throughout his career that helped him develop, and he had shown the flashes of brilliance that many had predicted for him.

Unfortunately, Riley's performance was very inconsistent--sometimes awful, other times brilliant, and often lackluster. Coach Crosby suspected that Riley's confidence was a problem because Riley never demonstrated that cocky confidence that had been a trademark of other outstanding athletes he'd coached. When Riley's confidence was high, he often performed extremely well, executing automatically and playing with a great feel for the game. When his confidence was low, Riley's play got tentative and predictable and he lost the instinctive qualities that made him great. Often confidence was moderate, and Riley would alternate between moments of brilliance and lapses in concentration and dumb mistakes. Most importantly, Riley seemed at his worst during "crunch time" when he often played some of his worst hockey. Instead of being a "go-to the guy," he was often a player that you didn't want on the ice.

1. Do you think Riley's confidence is contributing to his problems?

It seems that Riley has a wide range of self-confidence and it can be contributing to his problems. He has moments of brilliancy when his confidence is high, and when his confidence is low, he loses instinctive qualities. Also, in pressure times, he plays his worst hockey. As self-confidence increases to an optimal level, performance improves, but when self-confidence exceeds this optimal level, performance deteriorates (Burton & Raedeke, 2008).

It is worth considering if Riley is basing his goals on performance or outcomes. It seems to be Riley establishing his goals on outcomes rather than performing. When he knows he will win, he appears to be confident. On the other hand, when he has to play in decisive situations, which most probably happens against opponents of equal abilities, his confidence level was at his worst during "crunch time" when he often played some of his worst hockey. Athletes who base their

confidence on outcome criteria, such as winning or not disappoint, may be overconfident against a weak opponent and may be under confident when matched up with an opponent of approximately equal ability (Burton & Raedeke, 2008).

2. Why is his confidence so inconsistent across situations?

There are three aspects to consider first, if Riley feels competent and well prepared, as it is the principle of optimal confidence. Second, if Riley accounts with abilities to control arousals, motivation, and concentration. And most importantly, if his goals are based on performance or on outcomes.

If an athlete has not prepared, their confidence will fluctuate (Burton & Raedeke, 2008). If Riley is experiencing self-doubts and worries, interpreting arousals negatively does not pursue continuous improvements and gets easily distracted, saying that Riley is experiencing the opposite of optimal confidence. Lastly, athletes who base their confidence on outcome criteria (winning) may be overconfident when facing a weak opponent, diffident when facing a superior rival, and optimally confident when matched up with an opponent of approximately equal ability (Burton & Raedeke, 2008). This last reason may be the most important as it encloses why the athlete is doing what they are doing.

3. Describe the 3 major types of confidence. Based on your answer to question 1, explain what factors prompt Riley to display each of these 3 types of confidence and the types of situations that would be most likely to elicit each type of confidence.

There are three major types of confidence: optimal confidence, overconfidence, and diffidence.

Optimal confidence is competent and well prepared. However, in optimal confidence, athletes recognize that self-confidence does not give them immunity against making errors. When the athlete is unrealistically confident, meaning the confidence is greater than the athletes' competencies and abilities, the athlete is overconfident. On the other hand, the athlete who underestimates their skills and preparation is experiencing diffidence (underconfidence) (Burton & Raedeke, 2008).

The description of the case study strictly points out how Riley would fluctuate from times of high confidence and low confidence. Riley may raise or lower his confidence depending on the perceptions of possible achievements.

Riley may raise his confidence and find optimal confidence when executing automatically, having a great feel, which means that the athlete is playing within himself. Athletes' on the optimal levels of confidence perform at the upper limits of their current capabilities and don't worry about achieving goals (Burton & Raedeke, 2008)

Riley's times of overconfidence can be linked to inflated confidence as it is expressed that Riley was a player of immense potential. When an athlete fulfills the competence from compliments rather than preparation, their confidence can be threatened when facing a challenge. Athletes with inflated confidence are often very good or extraordinary, who believe that they have great abilities so they become complacent. This confidence is easily shaken when the athlete realizes that has not prepared well or when facing obstacles, adversity, or failure (Burton & Raedeke, 2008)

Lastly, Riley may reflect underconfidence in crunch times, as he sees himself as not up to the challenge already self-defeat before even trying. Diffidence athlete see themselves as losers and begin to behave accordingly (Burton & Raedeke, 2008)

4. What is the impact of each of the 3 major types of confidence on performance, both the overall level and consistency of performance?

Optimal confidence reflects the mindset of believing one can improve. Confidence is not in doubt; the athlete feels free to correct errors in a constructive way and dares to try as it is the price to be paid to get better (Burton & Raedeke, 2008). This confidence can help performances move on from mistakes to mistakes and learn from them, rather than relying on frustrations or self-doubts.

On the lower end of confidence, diffidence is the most brutal for performance. Diffident athletes underestimate their preparation and competence, therefore expect to fail, which inevitably leads to feeling under-confident, which contributes to actual failure (Burton & Raedeke, 2008)

On the unrealistic confidence side, an athlete with inflated confidence struggles when performing against adversity, as they are not the ones who believe in their abilities. An athlete who has false confidence on the other side they may try to avoid failure in performance in order to protect their fragile ego (Burton & Raedeke, 2008).

5. What is the most important thing Coach Crosby can do to enhance and stabilize Riley's self-confidence so he can perform up to his capabilities? Identify at least 3 other specific strategies Coach Crosby can also use to enhance Riley's confidence.

Coach Crosby could start by teaching Riley about confidence as it is the first step toward helping an athlete become more self-confident (Burton & Raedeke, 2008).

Coach Crosby could use three strategies: building a history of performance accomplishments, providing verbal persuasion, and help Riley control his arousal levels.

Coach Crosby can help build a history of performance accomplishments by helping set clear short and long-term goals. Riley will be able to keep track and measure the quality and quantity of his performance accomplishments. As mentioned in question 1, goals must be process and performance-related rather than outcome.

The second strategy involves the coach offer positive feedback, as it helps boost the athlete confidence when one helps them understand that they're performing a skill correctly (Burton & Raedeke, 2008)

The last strategy involves helping Riley in arousal control. Riley can benefit from learning about the Optimal Energy Zone, as it is the psychological state that helps athletes perform at their best (Burton & Raedeke, 2008). Riley will then discover that when arousal levels are too high or too low, the optimal performance can be disrupted, which might be one reason his performance has been inconsistent. Riley can learn how to use relaxation and energization techniques to begin learning how to lower or boost his arousals to set them in the optimal zone (Burton & Raedeke, 2008)

6. What is the self-fulfilling prophecy, and how might it also influence Riley's confidence?

The self-fulfilling prophecy theory refers to the expectations coaches form about the level of achievement each athlete will ultimately reach (William & Krane, 2020). In this case, there is one misconception that may be reflecting in Riley's confidence. The misconception from the coach explaining the lack of high-level consistency was due to Riley's lack of "cockie" confidence. This relates to common misconceptions of confidence such as "either you have it or you don't" and "confidence equals outspoken arrogance." (Williams & Krane, 2020)

Case Study 3 - Helping Christy Experience Flow

Promoting Passion. Last season Christy had a basketball game where she was in the zone. Everything she did worked, and her performance was effortless and automatic. Every shot she took went in. She played great defense, including 5 steals because she seemed to know what the other team was going to do before they did it. Finally, she had 11 assists because she saw the floor so well, anticipated what her teammates and opponents would do and stayed calm and poised under pressure.

Christy has since found out that she was experiencing Flow, a peak performance experience that has greatly enhanced her passion for basketball. Christy wants to experience Flow again, as often

as possible for as long as possible. She has become obsessed with basketball and with trying to experience Flow whenever she practices and competes. It has become the major reason she plays the game.

Answer the following 5 questions about Flow. Explain your rationale for your answers in detail. Your rationale is equally important to your actual response.

1. Review the major characteristics that define Flow for Christy? Explain each one.

Christy's flow was characterized by a proficient effortless and automatic performance, staying calm and poised under pressure. It is clear that she had a great balance of arousal levels and felt the action more than thinking about it. Athletes in flow are completely focused and absorbed in their performance, and their heightened focus makes them aware of everything going around them that relates to their performances (Burton & Raedeke, 2008).

2. What strategies can Christy use to increase her chances to experience Flow? Why?

Christy can get started by reflecting on her flow experiences. Biswas-Diener shares that the first step is to reach self-actualization and understand when she experiences flow and its associated feelings. If Christy wants to increase her chances of experiencing flow, she should developmental skills training, as mentally tough athletes experience flow more often (Burton & Raedeke, 2008).

The first step for Christy can be to find her optimal energy zones when experiencing flow, as it is when the athlete reaches its ideal arousal range that they experience flow and perform their best (Burton & Raedeke, 2008).

Nonetheless, when performing, it would be necessary for Christy to continue focusing on the task at hand and her absorption of the game rather than searching for flow. Generally, flow happens only when athletes let it happen rather than trying to make it happen (Burton & Raedeke, 2008)

3. What strategies can Christy's coach employ to help her experience Flow more often and longer? What strategies should her coach avoid that may inhibit Flow? Why?

Christy's coach could use mental skills training. As an example, goal-setting in practice would be a great one to get started. He could recreate situations in which Christy tends to experience flow. These are typically challenging and realistic goals to get her in her optimal energy zone and direct the energy to the task at hand (Burton & Raedeke, 2008). The purpose of these goals would be to push Christy's ability to experience flow.

The coach will have to pay attention to providing positive feedback and an appropriate focus. Flow depends on having an appropriate focus, optimal mental and physical preparation, and positive feedback. If the athlete has inappropriate focus, receives negative feedback, and the challenges suppose the top of Christy's abilities, then he potentially prevents flow to happen (Williams & Krane, 2020).

4. Pick another sport and identify strategies to promote Flow for athletes in that sport. What is the rationale for each suggestion?

In tennis, it is very important to learn the skill of relaxation and energization. One must turn arousal up when performing and down in between shots (Burton & Raedeke, 2008). A tennis player can use energization to control arousal, enhance concentration, and confidence, before a point gets started, and can use rapid relaxation to reduce any muscular tension or arousals raised in the last point played.

5. What other strategies do you find helpful to promote Flow? Why?

One can use imagery and picture good performances and feelings in practice. Visualizing oneself succeeding can raise self-confidence (Burton & Raedeke, 2008). Complementarily, it can help keep a journal log in which she can write down the good sensations and learnings every time after practice and matches. Here the athlete describes what they imagine, the session's goal, the vividness and controllability of the image, and the effectiveness of the session (Burton & Raedeke, 2008)

Case Study 4 - Patrick's Mental Skills' Dilemma

You Have It or You Don't. Patrick is a promising offensive lineman who wants to play in the NFL. Consider these two options - one where he has a physical problem and the other a mental issue.

Option 1 --At 6'7" and over 300 pounds, he had the frame pro scouts want, along with good feet and exceptional lateral quickness and agility. His technique was good on both run and pass blocking, and he is an intelligent student who plays smart on the field. However, the pro scouts feel he lacks the upper body strength to play in the League, so they recommend a variety of strategies to enhance his upper body strength and flexibility that will help him reach his goal of playing at the next level. They project him as a 5th or 6th round draft pick.

Option 2- Although pro scouts generally like Patrick's physical skills, they have real questions about his mental toughness. He gets frustrated against smaller, quicker players and often loses focus and gets holding penalties. Against big physical defenders, Patrick's lack of upper body strength is a major liability, and he often gets easily frustrated when he gets overpowered and may give up on the next play. Although his physical strength problem is correctable, scouts see Patrick's lack of mental toughness as a big problem that will hurt his consistency, attitude and resilience. The scouts suggest that Patrick does not have the mental toughness to make it in the NFL, and they believe he won't be drafted or picked up as a free agent.

These pro scouts obviously see Patrick's mental and physical problems differently.

Answer the following three questions about mental skills. Explain your rationale for you answers in detail because it is as important as your actual response.

1. What is the reason for this differential view of mental and physical skills? Is there a flaw in the scouts' logic? If so, what?

In the first option, the scouts see Patrick's limitations on physical conditioning and praise his game IQ. The scouts see the limitation on Patrick's mental toughness in the second option, and the physical strengths as something correctable.

The scouts see Patrick perform under their supervision. Patrick is a promising offensive linebacker who wants to play in the NFL; the impression given in practice can influence the opinion of the scouts, therefore the chances of getting drafted. The scouts may be neglecting the fact that this may be a stressful situation. Patrick may be experiencing a competitive demand as the uncertainty of achieving one of his most important goals depend on how he performs in front of the scouts (Burton & Raedeke, 2008)

Some of the most common stress symptoms are muscular tension, muscle twitching, increased negativity, inability to concentrate, among others (Burton & Raedeke, 2008). In the first scenario, the scouts think Patrick has exceptional quickness and agility, while in the second scenario, Patrick seems to struggle against somebody perceived as quick. Furthermore, in the first scenario, the scouts believe that Patrick needed more strength and flexibility. The scouts could benefit from knowing that when an athlete is stressed creates muscle tension in antagonistic muscles leading to a reduced range of motion and rhythm (Burton & Raedeke, 2008)

2. Name at least 2 other myths about mental training. What are the flaws in logic for each of these myths?

The first myth is strictly related to the scouts suggesting Patrick would not make it because of his mental toughness. The classic either you have it, or you don't. The second myth relates to the quick fix that some coaches believe mental skills training provides. The myths underestimate the role mental skills play in performance as well as how long it takes to master these skills.

Myth 1: Mental skills are innate. This myth expresses the idea that an athlete is born with mental toughness. Those who show to be weak lack resiliency because they don't have the ability to be mentally strong. The truth is that mental skills can be taught and learned through the experience of through mental skill training (Burton & Raedeke, 2008)

Myth 2: Mental Skills Training Provides a Quick Fix. This myth suggests that some coaches believe in working on mental skills just before a competition to get mentally ready. The truth is that mental skills take time to develop as introducing new skills usually take time to master (Burton & Raedeke, 2008)

3. What are the similarities in mental and physical training? How does each impact performance?

Mental and physical training take countless hours of practice to develop. Similar to physical skills, mental skills training begins by building fundamentals and then work to practice and apply them in competitive settings (Burton & Raedeke, 2008).

Each of them impact performance in endurance and resiliency. Performance success is determined by the level of physical conditioning, skills, preparation, and psychological factors such as confidence, motivation, concentration, and emotional control (Burton & Raedeke, 2008). Optimal confidence comes from great feelings of competence and preparation. If an athlete does not feel in shape or with abilities, then the confidence may not be enough. Suppose there is confidence, but there is lack of preparation (overconfidence). In that case, the performance can be threatened as in times of adversity; the athlete may experience self-doubt or worries (Burton & Raedeke, 2008).

In summary, athletes must practice their physical and mental skills to the best of their abilities to achieve consistent optimal performance.

Case Study 6 - What You See Is What You Get

Hitting an Ace. Mary is a collegiate tennis player who has been struggling with her serving. Whenever she tries not to double fault, she seems to always hit the ball into the net or too deep. Mary's coach, Bill Mitchell, wants her to try imagery as a "feed forward" strategy (i.e., get information before performing to enhance success) to help her serve better. Mary has never used imagery before to enhance her sport performance, and she is skeptical about its effectiveness.

Mary tried using imagery to improve her serving after practice, but she couldn't seem to get a clear image of what she wanted to do and imagery seemed to make her serving worse rather than better.

Based on your knowledge of imagery, answer the following five questions that relate to what Coach Mitchell can tell Mary about imagery to sell her on trying imagery as a tool to enhance her serving and to help her use imagery in ways that will maximize its effectiveness. Explain the rationale for your answers thoroughly, citing important information from the book and lectures. Your rationale will count as much as your actual response.

1. What is "imagery" and why is it a better performance enhancement strategy for Mary to use than "visualization?"

Imagery includes all senses, while visualization pays attention only to visual cues.

Visualization is picturing or seeing yourself, but imagery can involve multiple senses such as sight, feel, touch, sound, smell, and taste, as well as it may include the emotions associated with the experience being imagined (Burton & Raedake, 2008).

What the coach is asking involves touch. The fine motor skill that feels how the strings of the racket caress or grasp the ball creates a spin that allows the ball to go over the net and drop in the box. Something similar to the curveball or fastball in Baseball.

2. What is the scientific explanation for why imagery would help Mary improve her serving? Is Mary's initial experience with imagery unusual? Why or why not?

Imagery is a human capacity and a mental training tool that most of us have not developed to the fullest extent possible (Burton and Raedeke, 2008). I would ask Mary if she can recall a time right before sleeping if she imagined an opponent hitting a drop shot. The chances are that she may have tickled her legs as reacting to the drop shop. Imagery works because, in many ways, the mind cannot distinguish an image from the real thing (Burton & Raedeke, 2008). Imagery can help her put specific skills together to achieve a consistent serve. For imagery to work the athlete has to recall and reconstruct pieces of information that contribute to the imagery. (Burton & Raedeke, 2008). Mary can improve her serve if she can use imagery and sensations to recreate the feeling she gets to a loading position and the racket flow. She can visualize the ball's trajectory and spins and imagine the feeling of the touch of the spin when striking the ball.

Mary's initial experience with imagery is not unusual as many athletes recreate fuzzy, unfocused images when they first use imagery. At the same time, there is a small group of people that experiences vividness (Burton & Raedeke, 2008 p.71).

3. What is the difference between an internal and external imagery perspective? Which should Mary use to enhance her serving?

In an internal perspective, the athlete experiences the event, seeing it through their own eyes and feeling the movements as if performing the skill. The external perspective is when they see themselves playing, but on a screen (Burton & Raedeke, 2008) Mary and Mary's coach should decide which perspective to use. If mary is looking for a more kinesthetic feel, then she should decide for internal perspective, while if there is a micro-adjustment in the form needed, then external perspective would work better (Burton & Raedeke, 2008)

Given that Mary is a collegiate player, I would assume she has advanced strokes and skills. Given that I consider touch as important in her ability to improve her serve, then the internal perspective is the one I would suggest.

4. Does Mary's imagery skill impact the performance enhancement effectiveness of imagery for her? Why? What 2 imagery dimensions does Mary need to develop to enhance her imagery skill? Explain each and give an example of a drill to develop each imagery dimension.

Imagery skill impacts the effectiveness of imagery as vividness and image control are important for the optimal use of imagery. This is why the first step in developing imagery skills is to assess the athlete's current ability using an imagery test (Burton & Raedeke, 2008).

The two dimensions that I would share that need to develop are the kinesthetic senses, as I believe she needs touch and visuals to what she wants to produce. A drill will be to first gain the feeling of touch by bouncing the ball. After gaining a feel, she can imagine how the touch feels and visualize the desired outcome.

5. List three strategies that will help Mary enhance her imagery ability and explain why each is important.

As most athletes may not have the ability to recreate the vividness of imagery, Mary could benefit from learning to involve all the senses. Mary should be encouraged to not only see herself but also create the feel of the movement in her mind, including other senses (Burton & Raedeke, 2008) The sound of the racket hitting the ball, the feeling of explosiveness, the touch of the spin, and the sight of the ball are all important in the flow and proficiency of the stroke she is working on.

Mary could play the game "Stop-Proceed" in which the coach stops her at certain parts of the serving mechanic to determine the motion.

She could also use vivid cues that can help her experience what it looks and feels to perform a skill (Burton & Raedeke, 2008). She can imagine how it feels to put spin on the ball and how it looks when the action is produced.

Lastly, she could use partial movements. Mary may benefit from making the motion of the serve as she has her eyes closed, as it may help her feel the kinesthesia of the swing as well as help her create a vivid image (Burton & Raedeke, 2008)

References:

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