

Course Name: Sports Psychology

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Becoming a sport psychologist: lessons from the field an introduction to field of Sports Psychology

Hello everyone, welcome to the week 1 of the sports psychology program. I am Priyanka and I am excited to talk to you all about what you are going to learn in this week 1. So we are going to talk about becoming a sports psychologist and lessons from the field. In this particular week you are going to be learning about the introduction to the field of sports psychology. Sport is a very dynamic field, athletes have to be on top of their sports game all the time. They need to know how to handle pressure and manage themselves. We are also going to be learning about the mental health in athletes.

Sports psychology is a part of sport science. So it is important and necessary that we also learn and understand how sports psychology can be interconnected to other sports science disciplines. We will also be talking to sports psychologists and learn about what kind of challenges they actually face and we will be working with the coaches and we will talk to them about their experiences of working with sports psychologists and where exactly the mental skills training program will come in. In this particular section we are going to be talking about the definition of sports psychology, the history of sports psychology and roles of a sports psychologist.

Before we move forward ,I would like to talk to you all about my journey as a sports psychologist. In the year 2014 I had the opportunity to work as a sports psychologist at one of the premier institutes in the country. I worked at Sports Authority of India as a sports psychologist and there I had the amazing experience of working with you know multiple sport disciplines. I had the opportunity to work with the national hockey team both the men and women's team as their team psychologist. You know I worked with athletes of various disciplines for their Asian games, for their commonwealth games and also for the Olympics.

My expertise and experience became so vast and varied because I got to work with athletes from the grassroots level to the elite level and I am extremely grateful about my experience.

Let's talk about the approach I use as a sports psychologist. When an athlete comes to me for the session you know they may say that I do not really deserve to win or they may say that you know I am not good enough, I am feeling that the opponent is going to beat me. I do not think that I will be able to get my previous timing of the race. So, when they come with these issues these are my typically used approaches.

One is I may either work on changing their thinking and help them to focus on their performance or I make them aware of their emotions and what are they actually going through and help them come back and be kind to themselves or I can also I use a person centered approach in my work. Apart from that I also did a certificate course in family systems therapy and it was amazing. Most of us just think that it is just about athletes and their particular performance, but honestly speaking athletes do not just come with their individual selves on the field. They come with their families, they come with their ancestry and all those issues that happens at home has a huge influence on the way they play and perform. Moving forward the family systems therapy helped me so much I ended up doing level 1 and level 2 program in the systemic and family constellation as a facilitator. I would say that I learned so much about how our families and our ancestries really has a influence on the way we work.

Family constellations was introduced by Bert Hellinger. Bert Hellinger was a psychotherapist, he was a family therapist and he used the systems family approach in his development of family constellation. And I was extremely grateful that I was able to do this particular program at Spanda Asia and Ochre Ireland. I am grateful that Annie Cariappa and Colette Green have also supervised in the way I use some of the principles of family constellation. You will be seeing me use figures in this particular course and I was able to do this under their supervision.

What I also want to talk about family constellation is that there are hidden dynamics, there are unconscious laws which actually govern the way we are actually performing as athletes. So, it makes those unconscious things more conscious. So, let me talk to you all about using a particular case study. So here, you can see that there was this particular athlete the reason she reached out to the psychologist was because she was not able to perform to very large extent. She was a very successful performer, she was doing exceptionally well. However, what happened was she started feeling that she cannot win the games anymore. This was because her sister was also in the same sport. Every time the athlete performed better, it felt that her sister is not going to be recognized because her performing well meant that her sister will be ridiculed. There was always comparison that look at your younger sister, she is performing so much better than you are. So she loved her sister so much that she felt that I have to sacrifice her dreams and needs. That was the reason she was not really able to go out there and perform.

In this particular situation, what we worked on was how the athlete can remember that she loves her sister yet her needs, her goals have to be important as well. She does not have to sacrifice to show her love for her sister. And by doing this, I think the athlete felt extremely empowered and this is something that systemic constellation does because it makes athletes aware of their own inner power and also it brings the family system back in the order and also gives individuals the power to move forward. So now talking about my current work, I work as a guest faculty at multiple places that is I work at Jain University as a guest faculty, I work at Sports Authority of India and also I work at Nudge Sports as a private consultant. I also work as a guest faculty for SportsNext Educational Institution.

Now before we move forward, let us just take a minute. I want you to just take a minute and think of something that makes you happy. Just breathe in, take a deep breath, think of a happy memory, just observe how your body is feeling. The body must be feeling light, the body generally feels extremely relaxed. So by thinking of a happy memory, if you are feeling so relaxed, so you can also imagine what the power is of our thoughts.

Thoughts are very powerful, imagine what kind of impact it has on our body. Before actually talking and introducing to you all about what is sport and exercise psychology, I think I want to first talk to you all about what is psychology. Psychology is known as the scientific study of human behavior. So if psychology is the study of human behavior, sport and exercise psychology is the scientific study of people and their behaviors in sports and exercise context and the practical application of that knowledge. In simple terms, what is it that we want to study in sports psychology? What kind of behaviors in athletes are we really interested to study? We may study what is the body language of the particular athlete. We may also study in terms of what kind of relationship do people have on the team? What kind of communication is present on the team? How quickly does an individual's mood changes based on his level of performance? So these are some of the areas that we are really interested to study in as sports psychologists.

Now what we are going to do is understand the objectives. Remember we did this particular exercise where I asked you to think about a positive memory and you know and how it felt in your body. The objective of sports psychology is this, to help us understand how psychological factors affect an individual's physical performance and to understand how participation in sport and exercise affects a psychological development and well-being. Basically what they mean to say is how you know your thinking has a huge influence on your body.

If you are confident, how are you going to go out there and perform? And if you are let us say that the second point says that you know if you have an injury, what kind of thoughts do you have? So that means that the body and mind is connected and they both have a

huge influence on each other. Let us listen to Ms Nivedita Rajan on importance of mental training.

Hi, I am Nivedita Rajan and I am a consultant sports psychologist. On being asked what is the importance of mental training today, sports has seen a tremendous change in the way it is viewed in the last two decades. The dynamic nature of the sports has a tremendous impact on the athlete. This can be seen in the excessive demands that is placed on the athlete by way of competitions, the tight training schedules, the changing formats of the game, the stress and anxiety that they face and also the very competitive nature of the sport.

Research also says that more emphasis has to be given to mental training as compared to the physical training. Let us take an example of a 200 metre sprinter with exceptional running ability, powerful stride and trust in her sprinting and also had a successful record in her sprints. There comes a long challenge for her where she sees other athletes match stride to stride in the next lanes. Here is where the mental aspect of the athlete plays more importance because she already has the physical ability. What the athlete needs is great concentration, self-confidence and a powerful mindset in order to outclass her competitors.

I strongly recommend that all athletes in playing at the competitive level, right from the sub-junior level onwards, must have mental training practice or be educated about mental training because there is a very powerful phrase that is said that you can train all you want with your body but if you don't train your mind then you will never be successful at it.

And that was a wonderful talk from Miss Nivedita Rajan. So now let us come to a quiz. I think let us take some time you know and understand this particular question. Who was the first Indian woman to win an Olympic medal? Was it Saina Nairwal, Deepika Kumari, Deepika Palikal or Karanamaleshwari? Take a moment, I think we all know the answer.

It was such a proud moment for everybody in India. The correct answer is Karanamaleshwari. So now since we have been speaking about the first, it is also so important for you to learn about the history of sport psychology.

So in the 1890s, sport psychology developed quite a bit in North America. There was a psychologist named Norman Triplett who was also a bicycle enthusiast. He did a lot of experiments and he really wanted to see and understand how cyclists actually perform when they are cycling alone and how are they actually performing when they are cycling together in groups of 2s and 3s. What he found was that when they are cycling alone and when they are actually cycling in groups there was a lot of difference. They were performing, they were competing when they are actually in groups. That was a huge contribution to the development of sport psychology.

And then we had Coleman Griffith. Coleman Griffith is known as the father of American sport psychology. So Griffith was the first one to start a sport psychology laboratory at the University of Illinois and he also wrote psychology of coaching and psychology of athletics. In fact, the history of sport psychology in India and across the world has a lot to do with the development of physical education. So physical education started becoming a separate discipline and then in India we had a lot of courses which were being offered in the physical education domain and education psychology principles were being used.

And in the 1960s we saw that physical education had become a separate academic discipline and sports psychology also became a separate discipline. So one of the things that I really want to talk about is the role of sports medicine also as an important factor in the development of the development of sport psychology in India. So what happened was in the year 1970 there was an international course on sports medicine which was held in Athens. Three people from India also participated you know in this course and they formed the Indian Association of Sports Medicine. And during the 7th annual conference, they formed the Indian Association of Sports Psychology. Unfortunately this sports psychology association did not move forward because it had lack of resources.

And in 1985 the Sports Psychology Association of India was established and it has played an important role in the development of sports psychology in India. Another major contributor also was that journal publications came in and physical educators and sports coaches also realized that it was important that we start recognizing sports psychology and coaches and athletes also felt that what athletes have to really give importance to mental training. And in India Netaji Subash National Institute of Sports, NIS established and since its inception I think it has focused on developing athletes for international competitions and also focused on conducting research training programs for sports sciences.

And of course there were a lot of other things which happened wherein Asian Games in 1982 led to the separate ministry of sports by the government of India and of course there was a lot of funding which came in the field of sport and government also took a lot of interest and activity for the development of sport. With the growth of sports, sports psychology developed to a large extent. Today I would say that sports psychology has developed to is developing to a great extent. You can see sports psychologists at multiple places they have started working in academies, they have started working with multiple teams, national teams, grass root level to a large extent and this is something that has happened because of the growth and development in the sports sector. And also I would like to say that currently there are number of things that is happening like for example we also have academic programs which have come in for the field of sports psychology and journals and colleges have started offering sports psychology programs.

The Indian Sports Psychologist Association that is INSPA also has started and it is an association for sports psychologists and it is a huge movement for us with respect to the history of sports psychology in the country.

Now before we move to the next section I have this question to ask you all.

Who won the football World Cup in 2022? And the correct answer is Argentina. We all saw that match it was such an amazing match between Argentina and France.

So now let us take a minute and then move to the next section because it is a very interesting section on what are the roles of a sports psychologist. So as a sports psychologist we play multiple roles. We work as consultants, we teach and we also do research. I play all these three roles. I work as a consultant where I do assessments, I do counseling and I also teach at colleges and some of the universities and I also engage in research. So this is what sports psychologists do and they can do much more you know than their preferred role. Each of the sports psychologists has their own preference and they can choose what they want to do accordingly.

Now let us understand why are athletes actually referred to sports psychologists.

There are two main reasons. One is either there is an issue that is the coaches or the parents or the athletes themselves feel that- I am performing very well in practice but the same is not getting delivered in competition. I really do not understand what is the issue. I am not able to communicate and express to my teammates what I am feeling. I feel that I am not able to achieve my target and goals. These are some of the issues that athletes really reach out to sports psychologists. And the second one is because people or the coaches may feel that you know the athletes have potential. I really see he or this particular athlete or you know she is going to do exceptionally well and I want her to engage in mental training program. So this is the second reason. So now let us look at what ways are we going to support athletes.

One is we of course do assessments. In my consulting role I said that we do assessments, we provide counseling services, we do psychological skills training program. Assessments are of different kinds in sports psychology. It can be a questionnaire based assessment where an athlete looks at the question and fills in the answers or it can be interview based, it can be equipment based or it can be field observation. So what are the aspects of assessment? What are we going to get to know through these assessments? Just like when you have an issue and you go to the doctor and the doctor assesses before giving you the medicine. In the same way what we do is we try to understand what the issue is and then develop the psychological skills accordingly in athletes.

We work on their mental skills. So basically let us say that athletes through assessment we

get to know certain things. Like for example, an athlete may say that I am feeling extremely anxious, my palms are sweating, my body is feeling extremely uncomfortable during the matches or they may say certain things that what I want to become mentally tough. I do not know where I am right now but I really want to be able to feel extremely tough. I want to be able to bounce back every time I make a mistake. I want to be able to control my emotions and frustration level better on the field.

It is good to get information from questionnaires and interviews. I would say it is always good to get all types of information from the athletes, coaches and the parents because it helps us in helping the athlete to a large extent. So basically through interviews you know some of the players we may not be able to get that information through questionnaire but through interviews athlete may say that you know what my training program has become so stressful. I am feeling exhausted most of the days. Or basically we may hear coaches say that you know what the athletes energy level is amazing but I do not know what really happens to them sometimes they all zone out.

So when we can get information like this and this is very useful information for us to work with athletes. Moving forward we also undertake field observation. Field observation is an integral part of what we do as sports psychologists because when we hear some information and when we actually observe athletes on the field we get wide variety of information. We can observe the body language, we can observe you know how is the athlete feeling when he makes mistakes and multiple things. So now I am going to talk to you all about an athlete.

This particular athlete you know he was referred because he was performing exceptionally well in the practice but in competition he was not able to do the same. And this athlete also basically spoke about how he was getting affected when his parents came to see him perform. So this particular athlete is in a competition currently and the parents have come to watch him. So let us take a minute and see how he feels.

He has made mistakes. He has missed a goal. He has missed giving passes to his fellow athlete. How do you think the parents are actually feeling? He is afraid to look back at them. If he looks back at them he can just sense disappointment and anger and now when he goes back and plays he cannot give his best. He is feeling extremely lonely.

This is something that we observe and look at it. And what we also do is how can we actually support this athlete? How can we support the parents in supporting this athlete? What can the parents communicate and tell him that will make him feel better? What kind of words of encouragement, what kind of words of support and love can really help him? And when this support is received from the parents he may feel much better and he will be

able to go out there and perform much better. So this is something that we observe and also support athletes with. I would like to give you all another example. In terms of team observation this is something that we do.

Here is an athlete. He is a team. Here is a team of athletes. So you can actually see from this particular team in the field observation what we can observe is who is the hero of the team? Who is the one who is given a lot of attention and importance in the team? And what is it that is giving him that particular attention? And why do certain people become small and not really express themselves comfortably? This is also something that we get to observe. And we also see that who has what dynamic? Are these two extremely close? How is it actually impacting the rest of them on the team? Are they only giving passes to each other? What kind of communication is present? And let us say if somebody wants to communicate certain things to the other people are they given a choice to express? So these are some of the things that we can actually notice and observe in the field of observation and we work with coaches in order to help the team become a team and also help them support. So now there are also equipment based tests which are really used in the field of sport psychology. I would also say to a large extent that we get to assess most of these equipment based tests can be computerized.

So the results are pretty accurate. You get to see what the reaction time is like. You also get to see how the athlete is making decisions, attention ability. And at the same time right now the equipment's testing is used to a large extent even for the on the field performance in sport psychology. So it is something that we can really look forward to using to a large extent with athletes. Moving forward I would say that based on our assessments with the athletes there are a number of things that we can use the assessment as a baseline we also develop certain training programs like we also see what is the mental toughness level of the athlete.

We work on the motivation level, the anxiety levels, emotional regulation, team building and many more areas. So skill is basically seeing where they are at and what kind of skills can help them in order to go out there and perform the best.

As sports psychologists we are also in the teaching role that is we undertake academic courses, we do certificate programs, we do diploma, PGD diploma programs that is postgraduate degree programs for sports psychology. So sports psychologists are also involved in teaching the younger and enthusiastic students who really want to pursue sports psychology. And right now we also have two of these students who have pursued their masters in psychology and one of them is also pursuing her postgraduate diploma in sports psychology.

You know they have actually given their views on what sports psychology has helped them with. So let us listen to them. Let us listen to Dharthi.

“While I was pursuing my masters I had a paper on sports psychology and I found it very interesting. I got to understand athletes behavior in different perspective through various theories that we learnt that helps us understand different factors that affect athletes performances and how sports psychologists can help these athletes to overcome or handle and cope with these adversities. So according to me it is very much important to include sports psychology in academics as it helps budding sports psychologists to develop skills that is required for the field”.

And we can also listen to Dhruthi. “During my bachelors and masters I learnt about sports psychology and that is when I got to know more about this field. This subject helped me gain more insight and understanding about athletic behavior. And being an athlete I could relate to most of these aspects which helped me gain a positive perspective about how I could handle situations, how I can look at situations in a positive perspective.”

Now I would also like to tell you all that in the field of sports psychology research is used to a very large extent. Now there was a research which we did on understanding whether there is a difference in the competitive anxiety levels of Taekwondo players and Judo players.

Both of them are in the combat sport. What we actually found was there was Taekwondo players had more anxiety than Judo players in our research study. And at the same time it was interesting to also find out some of the reasons for that anxiety level. Some of the Taekwondo players said that it is because Taekwondo is more aggressive as a sport. It can also be because you know some of them use loud voices, they may scream, and that would really have an impact on their performance and that could be one of the reasons for having more anxiety is what they said in our study. So there are multiple researchers which is carried out by sports psychologists across the world and right now it is all multidisciplinary approach where we are collaborating and working with different sports science disciplines and helping the athlete with his best performance.

I would say that we have come to the end of the session here and I would say that in this particular domain we have covered the definition of sports psychology, we have looked at what are the objectives of sports psychology and we have looked at the history and the importance that you know the sports psychology developing in India to a large extent and we have also looked at the roles that sports psychologists play like for example consulting role, teaching roles and you know research roles. So this is what we have learnt. So I hope you had a wonderful time learning about sports psychology and yeah. So in the next section we are going to be learning about the mental health in athletes. Thank you so much.