

Course Name: Sports Psychology
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Institute Name: IIT-M
Week: 04
Lecture: 05

DISCUSSION ON GOAL SETTING AND IMAGERY IN SPORTS

In this session, which is the last of the sessions where we will be concluding with the PST skills training, which is the goal setting and the imagery. We have two eminent sports psychologists, who will give us practical knowledge and their perspective about how they have applied these skills into their working with their athletes. So, Priyanka, one of the renowned sports psychologists, who is also gone with the Indian team as their sports psychologist, thank you for being here. So, my first question to you would be psychological skills training or mental skills training is a very important concept in sports. Today there has been a trend into many things like technology based exercise and technology based training. You as a psychologist have worked on these platforms.

Can you explain or give your insight into how these programs work, the technology based programs? Right. So, basically I mean, I really like the fact that we are able to use technology in order to teach and train our athletes on various psychological skills. So, be it like I have used relaxation, using technology, be it using biofeedback or sometimes I have also used certain eye tracking tools and techniques so that attention and focus of the athletes can be at the predominant level. And apart from that, you know, even to help athletes with their reaction times which are so essential and very important for the sport, right?

So, be it training their hand reaction time or the foot reaction time. So, you know, using technology has been extremely important and essential and also these days, one of the biggest benefits of using technology is also that you can apply it in a very multicultural setup. Because also what happens is especially when we are working with athletes where the language becomes a barrier. Right, right.

You know, assessments of certain kinds cannot be used. Right, that is right. Language is a big barrier. Yes. So, basically I think we are also fortunate to have multiple technology based assessments which the athletes can definitely use and train.

Right. So, one of the essential features is that, you know, I mean even if you want to train athletes on how to manage your stress, it is in a very animated way or it is in a very game. Right, right. Yeah. The players get involved in it.

Yeah. So, they have fun when they actually engage. It is very engaging when you use technology. Right, right. Yeah.

So there it is like a virtual kind of reality for them. Yes, yes. They get to interact, they actually see the performance and it is not like these assessments that I have particularly used, they are not actually talking about, it is all skill based. Right. Like skill training based. Right, right.

It is not like, you know, you are bad or you are poor, it is basically like, okay, you are at this level, now you can focus on becoming at this next level. Okay, improving yourself to the next level. Yes, yes, all the time. Okay. And be it even focus or attention, it says that, yeah, this is currently your skill.

And basically, you know, in the next few sessions you will see them improving from that particular level. Okay. And also what happens is the same thing is translated into the sports and performance on the field to a large extent. Right, right. So, what they are seeing through the technology can be transferred into their training and the real life training.

Yes, yes. Okay. How accessible are these new technology based learnings for athletes? Like, you know, if an individual, if you are a psychologist, like, you need to acquire them.

So. Yeah, first of all, I think that it's pretty expensive and the organization can definitely afford to. Yes, organization. Have these. Yeah, yeah. Equipment, but otherwise, you know, individually for psychologists really wants to, you know, procure them, it becomes a very; it is an expensive affair. Yeah. It is quite expensive. So, then that becomes a drawback.

Right, right. Yeah. I know. So, maybe like, when you have access with respect to the organizations or private clinics, some of them.

They tend to have it. Yeah. But with the private consultant, psychologists having access to them is extremely limited. I think biofeedback some of the clinics etcetera have where you can have access to them.

Yeah, yeah. Okay. So, now moving on to goal setting, right? I mean, nothing happens, no performance happens without goals, right? Yeah. And you have worked with the teams and when we talk about a team, we are always looking at a team goal. So, can you give some examples of where you have worked with individual goals, with individual players on their goals and also with the team? Any example could be highlighted or some case you could give us? Yeah, definitely. So, basically when we actually look at working with individuals on their goals, somewhere I have seen that, even when I am working with individual, let us say that they want to say that, you know, what I want to be more confident when there is an audience.

Right. So, if I have the goal, somewhere it also gives me an insight towards how the support system and communication on the team. Right. So, any individual's issue for me, I look at it like, okay, what in the team is actually happening, you know, that this particular individual is going through something like this. Right. So, it gives me an opportunity to work through the individual's issues even and look at it systemically and work with the team.

Right. So, you know, somewhere if an individual is feeling scared of having an audience, it also shows and talks about the team having the same sort of fear. So, as a team if I address it and also work with the individual.

It can benefit both ways. Right. You know, it could be something like, whose feedback are you going to take? You know, whose opinion is important because some of these players also get information and messages on their social media saying that, you did not play well, you did not do this. So, it becomes extremely challenging, for them to manage everybody's expectations.

Right. So, when you work with a team, are the players all involved in developing the team goal or is it just the coach who does it? Like as a psychologist how do you intervene or? This is a very interesting question because I feel that, sometimes the coach gives the way and says that this is the goal that we can envision moving forward. Right. And then the individuals make it their own.

Right. Internalizing. Yeah, they internalize it and they believe that, okay, this is our team goal, this is our vision, this is what we need to have. Right. And also they have tangible goals like, for example, we made so many errors last time. So, we need to focus on reducing the number of fouls or probably we need to look at scoring more goals or basically the goal.

Reducing missed passes. Yeah. So, statistically they are all available to the players. So, those are some of the goals that they look at and apart from that even mentally they look at how we can build more confidence, how we can communicate more on the team. So, they become the goals.

Yeah, right. And these are some things which we practice on the field and then go execute them in the competition. Yeah. So, these are very important in teams, communication, and coordination. That also becomes a goal, because sometimes you miss passing to a crucial player.

Or you take an attempt or vice versa can happen. Correct. So, when we were working with this one particular coach because we found out that communication was a huge barrier in that particular team, W]what we did was, you know, during their practice sessions it was no more just passing.

You know, without talking. Everybody had to, whenever they were passing they had to say a particular thing.

Word or a phrase. Yeah. Yeah. When they are receiving they have to say certain things.

And then that really helped them. It can't be a silent game, right? Yeah. It has to be like make some noise kind of a thing. And that is something that was very helpful for the players.

I think it is fun working with a team and also playing as a part of a team, right?

Yeah. It is a lot of fun. Yeah. Yeah. So, also I think psychologists really have to make it fun for the players because sport is very dynamic. So, as much as we make psychology fun for them, make it more activity based for them, they will really enjoy it and apply.

Yeah. Yeah. So, the whole application of all the principles that we have learnt. Needs to be made more practical.

That is right. There is a lot of difference between theory and practical, right? Yeah. Though we use the theory to integrate it into the practical, it has to be made a lot of fun.

Yeah. Yeah. So, we look at the next skill that we have been discussing now in the last module is about imagery. I mean imagery is now the cognitive tool that is used all over. Yes. Yes.

So, you have some incidents about how you have worked? See there are two things involved when we look at a team. You have the team doing imagery together and an individual also working on certain specific skills. So, can you give some examples of where you use team imagery for the team and you know where it has benefited them.

Yeah, sure. Yeah. So, I think even at a team, you know, when I have worked with the team, I have worked on individual players' imagery building skills. So, for example, there was a study which we did on one of the group of players. Wherein, you know, we developed the script by working with the coach.

Right. So, that we understand, for example, let us say we took volleyball. So, for every position what was the skill required.

Right. You know, what are the skills? Like a setter or libero. Yeah. All, yeah. Every single position wise we got the script made and in the same way even let us say for hockey.

Right. So, the midfielder, goalkeeper, they all had different scripts. So, that was something

that, you know, we would ensure that they are relaxed and then we would read out the imagery script and at the same time, you know, initially it was about guided imagery. Right.

Wherein we would speak about it and then they would imagine. Later it was more about, you know, what are you watching, what are you observing. So, what are you seeing? Yeah.

What are you seeing in your head? Right. And then they would look at their eyes and probably talk about what are the things that they are actually imagining and then how vivid and how clear is the image? Can they change the image? Can they control that? Control the image. Yeah. So. Because they learnt it in theory, about vividness and controllability.

Yeah, absolutely. So, it becomes that are you able to see the color of the jersey that you actually wear. Yeah, true, very true. All those skills become extremely important and the next thing that we also do with respect to the team is, let us say we are having a group session. You know, having a common imagery that they can actually practice for the competition.

Like for example, you know, imagine yourself being very confident, imagine yourself like, you know, you have all the power and you are going out there and competing. Right. So, these are some of the ways.

Like doing a victory lap or you know scoring a goal. Yeah, yeah. Like it is a team effort when you score a goal, right? Yes. Yeah. So, when you are adding those emotions, you know, to the imagery, the body feels extremely good. Right.

And the players know how they feel and what they would want to achieve. Right. From the imagery. Right, very true. That is very true. So, in your experience, do most of the players and the, you know, athletes and all, do they prefer guided imagery more compared to doing the imagery like doing it on their own? What is your experience?

I think that guided imagery is something that they would prefer initially. Right. Yeah. Because if they are not, if they do not know, I think some of them have come across people who say that they do practice imagery.

Okay. But they do not do it in a very specific manner or, you know, stepwise. Right, right. Like the way we guide them through it. Yeah. But once they work with us, they know, okay, this is the way I need to go through the imagery.

Right, right. Like to create an opening and then introduce the skill rather than just go to the skill areas. Yeah, yeah. So, we talk in terms of, you know, taking the whole time. Like let us say if you are working with a high jumper or, you know, any particular sportsperson, we make sure that the same time they take they are to work with it.

Right, real time, the real time, right? Not in slow motion or anything. Yeah. So, take the same amount of time to finish it or be a swimmer for that matter. How much time are you taking to finish the lap? Right, right. So, we do the imagery for that particular length. Okay. So, this now, you know, the question that I would like to ask you is, is everybody fluent about imagery, right? I mean, are all players able to image? Like I am sure you would have, you know, some athletes or players who would find it difficult.

So, how would you deal with these people? I would say that not everybody, you know, will be able to imagine very clearly. Some people do struggle with it and they say that, you know, I cannot imagine, I struggle with it.

Right. So, I think understanding what is the best way that they learn. Right. Becomes important because I remember this one particular player that we were actually working with as a sports psychology team. Right. And, you know, no matter what was done, he was not able to imagine and he was the only person on the team who was not able to execute the skills and the coach was able to actually see that everybody else performed exceptionally well. Right. So, you know, but then, the one who was actually supervising me, the psychologist.

Right. She actually told me that maybe it is important, let us look into his learning style. Right. So, basically when we actually saw the learning style, we saw that, you know, it was not visual or auditory, his learning style was read-write.

Oh, okay. So, for him, you know, then we asked him to start writing. Oh, okay. Every single thing. That he, about his skill or whatever, right? Yeah, yeah, yeah. What we found

was he was very good at math.

Okay. Yeah, and he said that it is because I used to keep practicing math. Right. And that is how I got better. Right. And then the more he ended up writing what he does with his sports specific skill. Right. You know, it was extraordinary because he was able to pick things very easily even for his sport.

Oh, right. And the coach was extremely surprised that, you know, what actually happened because two weeks back he was at a certain level and right now. Now he has elevated himself. Yeah. And these skills have improved. Yeah, so I think for us to know exactly what the reason is for, you know, probably some people not being able to use a certain skill.

Right. I think understanding the root cause becomes extremely important. Yeah. And it is very different for different people. Yeah. So, this helps us understand that there are a lot of individual differences when we talk about players, right? Just like how all the five fingers in the hand are not the same.

Similarly, a group of players in a team will not be the same. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, as sports psychologists I think we need to be particularly, you know, mindful of this that, you know, each player is different. So, whether you are designing a goal setting program or an imagery program it should be custom made to them. Absolutely. Yeah. So, we have had a very great discussion with Priyanka and she has given us so many insights because she has worked with so many teams and so many players.

So, thank you so much Priyanka. Thank you, Ma'am. And for all your inputs. Thank you. And welcome to this session. In the previous session we had psychologist Priyanka talk to us and now we have renowned psychologist Dr. Chaitanya.

Chaitanya, thank you. Thank you so much, Ma'am. Thank you. Yeah, yeah. So, Dr. Chaitanya needs no introduction, has been working with teams and individual athletes at a very, very elite level. So, in the previous sessions that we have had we have discussed a lot about the theoretical concepts about goal setting and about imagery. So, we would like to hear from you about the practical applications and what are the challenges and the advantages of working with teams. Yes, yes. So, my very first question would be about goal

setting like your work with teams and when we look at a team we look at like probably like a goal that we have to win.

Of course, every team wants to win. Right, right. So, how challenging is it to set a team goal and how do you work on setting individual goals for the players? Yeah, thank you that is a great question to start with. Okay. So, something that I do especially with teams is, you know my first basis, I try to get to know each individual player because it is the entire group of them which constitutes the team. Yes, yes.

And then you know with the leadership group we decide on the let us say a culture session. Yeah, right. Because by then I have also built some rapport with them and then we go let us say, whether that is a national team, whether that is a state or it is a league. This season where are we and what is it that we are looking at? Right, right. Like it is for example, if it is a new team coming in right?

To set something like okay we are going to go win that is like too big, too huge. Yeah, I know right.

If you win that is great. Yeah. But the point is. You want to know where you stand actually. Exactly. And then also we do not want to shake them up by going okay like the aim is to win, which I think, that is where you will see teams crumbling. Right. And you know to understand and also I always look at like: is this leadership team, at least at this point of time, are they open?

Right. Because you know then your job is half done. Right. Right. And then I will give you this example. It was one of the national teams. It was a major event. It was actually during qualifiers, Olympic qualifiers and previously we had not done so well and the team came together. We had some conflict, we had a lot of things.

But it really came together because what we built up was qualifiers. Right. Right like to really qualify. And it was a team on fire just the way, you know? We played till then was insane, you know, immensely wonderful.

Right. Full coordination and the team. Brilliant. Yeah. Working as a team. Team and

came together and that was the first part okay? So we did really well, we qualified and then I think somewhere after that the team slacked a little.

Okay. Right. Yeah. But the point is, what I am trying to establish is, what is it that we set in the beginning and also it becomes very important to go to the next milestone. Right. So then of course thankfully we were able to like recognize and come back.

Right. But you could see this distinct way in which they played. So what was sitting with qualifiers.

Right. And then we had to redefine the goals. So I think that becomes paramount. Right. Because also you are working with such elite levels right?

It is like the importance they attach to that event. Yeah I am playing Olympic qualifiers or I am going for the world championship. So that has its you know stigma. Oh definitely. And you know to come to what happened during Rio right, like I was not working with any of the teams I was more with the individual. But the Rio Olympics you know the more we saw athletes, what you are saying I am trying to connect was I am going to go for gold.

Right. And I am like and you know I was like oh god. Yeah I know. And since Sakshi broke that jinx we did really badly right. And I remember Mr. Prakash Padukone actually said what is really happening, why are players not psychologically prepared. Right. And that is I think a very important aspect to look into is because a lot of players just go: okay fine you know I am training training training.

Right. But the Olympics, Asian games. Yeah. You also know that there is a preparation which is needed here. Yeah right right. And I think it is a different mindset to be playing at that elite level.

Yeah. Yeah I know. I have quoted Bindra a few times but I think he is very very important example. Because I also feel like emulating someone, having someone as a role model is very good when you are training.

Yeah. And going closer to competition. Right. This is your opponent. Yeah right. And he

is the same. So that is something I do ma'am in imagery.

Right. As you know, like then you cut off, you know this person is xyz. Right. He or she is just like any other. Right. And you deserve to be there. Right.

You know you did not jump from being let us say a club level player or a state level to a international.

Right. You worked your way. Yeah. And you deserve it. Something which is very very important. Yeah true. Very very very true. Yeah. Yeah. So since you have brought up the topic of imagery.

One of my favorites. Yeah. And I know that you have been working on the champion mindset and the flow state. You know I heard you in the conferences. So how does one actually develop an imagery script for having a champion mindset?

Yeah. Is there any mantra or something? I wish. I really wish. I want to give this example. This is a swimmer who is doing very well. And I have known this athlete for a while like even when he started.

So it is a beautiful example of imagery. So I think it is your self-talk and your narrative becomes very important. Right. Right. So this was a guy, the state tournament right. And with the younger ones I use a little bit of art and you know.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And sometimes it is also good because when you let them just do freehand like you also tap into their unconscious. Right. Because if not consciously what they tell you is just the tip of the iceberg. Very limited. Yeah. And he drew exactly you know there was a pool he is swimming and then there is the podium and he is standing.

Exactly what happened. State tournament. Oh very nice. Exactly. So being there even before competing. Yeah. Right. So the nationals we kind of went; can I also connect this to a little to goal setting? Yes please. Yeah. So you know and then the state and nationals I saw him and this is a guy who is with the younger players.

I love working because you do not have to do so much of unconditioning with them. Yeah. Yeah. Right. And with him he was someone who would clearly set his mind. Right.

And what happened was a couple of the events, like he hardly gave any difference. Like between your current goal and the target goal. Right. So I said, in terms of his timing. Timing right. Because this is where your goal setting and he comes together and then I said what is happening and then he said oh but I am going to be beating X's record.

Right. And that is where we went with so the narrative over here was like what we were talking about. Oh my God this is someone. Yeah I know. So we went with where your form is.

Right. And what do you want and then he went on to beat two of the national records. Amazing. Yeah. So I think understanding what my player is.

Right. And typically if we have got him or her earlier and what is the narrative becomes very important for me. Yeah that is true. That is very true. So then you build that into what would be the imagery that would actually help this individual.

Right. Yeah. Yeah because what one works for one does not work for the other right. Right. Yeah. So if you are doing let us say 10 minutes of imagery morning and night, the rest of the day if you are playing this catastrophe model in your head.

Right. You are actually imagining the worst. Right. So I think that also becomes very important to hold. Yeah. Yeah. That is true. Yeah. So like when we are talking about individual players, I am sure it is a lot of challenge to get the person to even visualize. Sometimes people are resistant to this kind of mental training. So can you highlight some challenges you face during working with, you know you can look at young athletes and also a little bit of sub elite and elite athletes, what are the challenges? Yeah I think see when you work, let us say with a team with, with an academy then you know or even like a parent till you know has you know referral has come.

So the individual has not come to you by themselves right? Right. So you first have to really make your way. Right. And something that I always ask is, I am like how can I help

you? Right.

You know that is my deal breaker. Yeah yeah. And then. Because nowadays kids pretty much know, right? What they want to work on. Yeah yeah. And also like you know like there was this one player and I think if I am not wrong they had previously gone to another person another maybe it was not a sports psychologist. Counselors or something. Yeah counselor and I think you know it is a little different ball game.

Yeah. So he was a little hesitant and then I said I prefer long term like at least 5 to 10 sessions. Of course. Of course magic happens sometimes you know in the first session but then if you want to go into the depths it really has to be.

Yeah. So I asked, "Are you ready to invest so much time? Yeah. To bring in, will you bring yourself for the 5 sessions?"

Right. Because if you do not then there is very little I can do. Absolutely absolutely. So you know I think honest communication really really matters. Yeah. Yeah I think that is very very vital. Yeah. So that is one example when it comes to teams, I like to actually first meet them for team building and team bonding.

Okay. And then you slowly introduce some concepts. Like let us say when you are working at a very elite level, there is "the who is who?"

Yeah. You cannot go talk about motivation and goal setting to them. Yeah yeah of course of course. They are very basic right? Yeah yeah. But then you also have like, I remember once I was working with one of these teams and this very senior player he said doc how are you going to do this group session because like he was in the field for so long. Yeah. And he said can you help me? Give me some ideas.

And I was like what do you think can help? What do you think this team needs?

So I actually rope in the senior players. Right right that is a good way right. Yeah. You get the culture of the team. Exactly. Their understanding that is. Yeah and also you know it is that trickle down effect. Right. If you identify who are the like influences.

They are going to be one or two who are very very informally influenced. Exactly. Yeah yeah yeah. So if you can bring them on board and then once I remember asking: I am like I want you guys to introduce and have some fun in the play in the beginning and then we will build it. So what happens oh you know what she is accepted. Right. Right so you know I think that is one but I also want to give an example at a very elite level this was a young player now he is doing very well I mean he is one of the younger players.

Okay. So he came from a place which probably had no psychology. Right right. He had not heard. Extremely resisting but he needed support. So what I would do there is, I would like look at what does this individual need? And without giving out details as such but you know like I would tell the coach, he was very fond of one of the coaches. I would say “coach this way, channel his energy in this, this will help him”.

Right right right. And you know so that actually worked. Right. I mean for us we are part of the team. Right, I know. It does not matter whether it comes from us or me or.

Yeah. But the point is this individual getting helped. Right, I know. So he is getting help from someone who significantly he can influence or looks up to, right? Yeah. Through your you know via media like. Yeah yeah. But I like it, what you told Dr. Chaitanya, you know that having a person in a session like to work with them for a period of five to ten sessions is very important because as we have no magic pill, right?

Yeah right. There is so much training that is involved. How I wish we could give an ibuprofen and say tomorrow like you know you will be like. Yeah you are right. Yeah. Because that is what you hear a lot of times. I know you are a parent of sporting kids. But one thing you get a hear is: “motivate my child”. And sometimes trust me I depending on my mood I have really said sir I am not a motivator. I know many times people ask me I say your kid is just fine, the problem is with you, right? So yeah that is one of our challenges right? Like with the younger players especially. They are so overpowering and overbearing so you know I remember, I told Priyanka also, my younger one plays tennis and the coach used to always tell me, do not become a tennis mom.

Yeah it is like soccer mom right? Yeah soccer mom. Yes yes yes. Yeah I think one of the

things I tell it I mean I do not do that much of younger player work now but when I do is you know I like to get at least one if not both the parents and you really see what is the family dynamics and they are going like listen sometimes you have to with the best intention pull back or undo this or give this kid a little more responsibility.

Yeah yeah that is true. And you will really see them bloom. Yeah that is true. Yeah yeah definitely. So parenting itself is a big other discussion right? Oh yes I think so. Yeah yeah. So that also brings me to asking you one of the last questions is, how do you image to get into a flow state? I mean you helped a lot of athletes so I am sure all who are listening would want to know about the flow state like what kind of imagery can someone use? Yeah so I think you know I am also training to be a Jungian analyst and I work with elephants right? I will bring that in because I feel understanding your athlete and also you know is this person in a playful like you know, what to quote Dr. Winnicott, what he says is what you need in therapy and session is a playful attitude. Because you do not solve a problem by doing it the same way but it is play instinct and creativity and imagination.

So I actually play with my athletes. So when I say plays, I am quite playful in my sessions. So that does not mean that I do not do work or I am not serious. You are seriously playful. Yeah that is a nice way. So to actually go you know and it is tapping in one of the things I think which I have picked up in these whatever years is to look at when this person is describing. What is the story behind and also where is that little click? Where is that little shift in their body language? I will give you this young golfer's example which I think would be really good to probably wrap it up as well as this guy would always be in his head and you know like we said the Trishanku state.

So he would be in that and he was this oh I am scared of psychology. I am scared of everything and his body language also would be like that. One of the times I took him through his best performance and he starts off going on a tangent and then he says my best friend was caddying and he said you can do it and this guy did not know anything about his best friend. Caddy did not know anything except carry the stuff.

Yeah but he believed in this person and he said ma'am I had so much fun and then I went on to do well. And now that is a cue. So I am like how can you bring this? So what works for him is a playful attitude. So I am like this guy. I see him the next time and he is like ma'am

and I had this million dollar smile you know, he is like yeah I am not sitting on the fence. And that is when you know like the next tournament he was like he used to hymn songs and poems and I was doing all that.

I was in that place which flowed. So to really look at what brings me to my flow. But also that does not mean I push everyone to go like okay become playful. Someone might want to be very serious or very focused. I mean he was focused in a different way but his approach was different.

Exactly so that is the key. You know what is my athlete asking, like for example a lot of times what I see, there was this other young athlete who was extremely playful and she would get serious. So she was not performing and I know because you are not your natural sense. Exactly right. So stepping into that I think, that is one of the ingredients I have figured in bringing at least.

No, that is very insightful because it tells you to bring out your real self if you want to be in a flow state. Yeah exactly. Or if you want to be like you know just have a great time in your practice or in your match. Yes definitely yes. So thank you so much Chaitanya for being here and I think it was very insightful. I think all of you enjoyed it. Thank you. Thank you so much. Bye. Bye.