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DEVELOPING A CHAMPION MINDSET: TOOLS TO AID COMPETITIVE MINDSET

Hello everyone, today we are going to be looking at what is a Champion Mindset. So I want you to bring to mind who is a champion to you, who according, what would be their traits or qualities, right? And what we are going to explore is how does one become, you know, how does one develop a champion mindset, right? So I am going to read this little poem which is an apt metaphor for the journey. I am guessing quite a few of you would have heard of this. It is called 'The Road Not Taken' by Robert Frost. "Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, And sorry I could not travel both, And be one traveller, long I stood. And looked down one as far as I could, To where it bent in the undergrowth; Then took the other, as just as fair, And having perhaps the better claim, Because it was grassy and wanted wear; I shall be telling this with a sigh. Somewhere ages and ages hence: Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—I took the one less travelled by, And that has made all the difference. "

I am guessing quite a few of us would have heard of this. So what is coming to you? And I want you to take a look at this image as well, right? There are various paths that each of us face, right, every individual. And especially when we are looking at how a champion is made, how is a champion bred, what would be the right qualities, like it is like growing a plant, right? You have to give it the right nutrients. And the reason I wanted to start off with this is, if you look at the journey of a lot of athletes, it is akin to a hero's journey.

If look at, you know, Virat Kohli, you look at MS Dhoni, you look at Neeraj Chopra, anyone, you know, P T Usha, all are sporting icons, right? When was the seed sown? Much before they made it to the world stage. And in fact, I remember reading about Rishabh Pant, when he would watch, Sachin, when he would watch the Indian team, playing and he would go, I want to go there, I want to win the match for India.

And of course, before his injury he has performed, especially look at what he achieved in the Australian tour. So a champion chooses the road less travelled. One does not become a champion in the limelight and does not just, it just does not happen. So I wanted to start with this. I want you all to hold this metaphor.

Now, if you see this image there, notice there is a peak, there is a mountain, there is a water body and there is a reflection, and this is what we call an iceberg profile. So, what do we mean by an iceberg profile? What you see on the top, take any of your icons, take any of your heroes, what you are seeing is what is obvious and visible to us as outsiders. But if you look deeper at this image, it is just not the peak over there. What you are also looking at is the reflection, and this reflection is what needs to be worked upon. So, that is where you see the hero, the little icon over there, he has to manoeuvre through this path.

So, identifying this individual's influencers, I like to call them the influencers, what are their beliefs, especially everyone, every single athlete, says "I want to win, I want to perform this." In my 20 years career, till date, I have never met, not met a single athlete who said "I want to lose". Everyone's intention is, "I want to perform", but then what does the focus go on? So how has this individual been brought up? And this is where the beliefs become very important and if you remember even the previous slide, what is the story that is running in the head? Not the story that we tell outside to people, but that inner story that we keep playing, day in, day out, this is what keeps playing. So this is where as a psychologist, as a coach, as someone supporting the individual and the team, what we are looking for are these, what are the beliefs of this individual? Especially for me, I am like, what is my athlete telling me here? He or she might be saying one thing, but what is that story behind it? So this is where we look at, try to understand their beliefs, their thinking pattern, their attitude and their personality.

It is very, very important to understand and that is why I personally believe there is no one formula which works. And remember when we did the IZOF as well, we looked at what is the individual zone of optimal functioning. And I like to call this the hero's journey because you have a wish, there are going to be trials, you learn the lessons and then you conquer. It's like how most of our movies are made, what our mythology is. And I want to narrate one anecdote

from my own personal life and this is what we call the concept of Amen or Tathastu which I heard from my maternal grandmother.

Growing up I would hear my grandmother say, oh, there is an excess of say for example rice, so can you please get more rice grains? So this is a dialogue which would go on. And then one day I heard this urgency, I have been telling you there is an excess of, let's say ghee, why didn't you get it? So as a young child I would go, okay, why do you need more when it is already there? And that is when my grandmother sat me down and that is why I give her the credit as my first psychologist. She said, what you focus on grows. So if you keep saying I do not have this, I do not have this, the gods who bless what we say the 'asthu devata', may say 'tathastu' at any point of time. So what are you focusing upon? I was very influenced and this is what we do as psychologists.

Yes like let us say for example even an athlete who has had let us say a not so good tournament or you know they are just recovering. We do not undermine that recovery as such, okay. We do not undermine what has gone wrong. But we learn what the lesson is and then we move forward. When India, remember that debacle of 36, they wore it as a badge in Australia and then went on to win the series. This is what we are talking about. So you know my question becomes, you ask an athlete what do you want and then they will say, "oh I want," let us say there is a state meet coming, a national meet or an international meet, "I want to do this." And then you notice their body language, you know are they enjoying, are challenging themselves, are they looking forward, are they not looking forward, what are they dwelling upon? And that will give you an idea of - okay what needs to be worked upon. Now this is something that we are talking about is, when you work with an athlete. But, when someone has come to you fresh, it is a little more difficult because you are kind of going, you do not want too much, you do not want to mess too much with their system. There is a particular way in which an individual goes. And that is why for me to know the athlete and understanding an athlete in aiding, in building a champion. I am always looking at India. I remember the youngest athlete I had seen was I think 8, he was a chess player and I am always looking at India. So you do not know what their potential is. Our role is to aid them to their best potential where they go on and peak. So some of the key areas that we look at and we try to aid and empower an athlete really is peak performance.

When an athlete comes to you, if someone just says I want to do well, so I keep saying what does well mean? It can mean so many things to so many people. So understanding why you are doing what you are doing becomes very, very important. Then comes what is their motivation? Is it very extrinsically driven, which is perfectly fine, it is okay. Remember the Milka Singh movie, it is okay to be driven externally and then it becomes internally. So identify what works, what are my triggers? Recall the IZOF that we did when we were looking at the flow state. How and what aids me to focus? So you know you have a tournament, you have a match, how do you zoom in and how do you zoom out? It becomes very, very important knowing what works and what does not work. I will give you this example.

It was one of the cricketers and I think he was at 96 or 97 in his 90s. This was against Pakistan, so they were giving their best, he said “you know they were giving me a lot of sledging and then he said I got carried away and I started giving it back. But in the interim what happened? I got out because I got distracted.” So what did he do there? He actually gave his wicket away on a golden platter. Worse, he missed out his century which was just a couple of runs. So that is the lesson knowing that, when do I need to give back and when do I not? For example, you know I think the Pakistan team and the Australian team especially would say do not sledge Sachin or do not sledge Virat because they get more charged up. Or if you remember Yuvraj’s 6, he got charged up and what happened? He got 6, 6’s. So knowing what works for you and what doesn’t becomes very, very important.

Stress. When and how much is my stress level is very, very different. Is it all the time before a tournament? Is it at a particular point in the tournament, in the match? So, understanding the state and trait. What is me? What am I? And not comparing that, “oh this one is so chilled out.” We don’t know just because someone’s looking chilled out, does not mean they are. And then every day is not going to be a great day. I remember one of the Olympic marathoners, he said, “my shoelace came out and that ticked me off”, and this is as we were going into the Olympics, one of the tournaments. So, you’re kind of going okay, something like that which probably is very important for him needs to be worked through. If not what happens, the mind starts dwelling on what you don’t want. Remember why I spoke about the Amen or the Tatasthu? What do I want? And that is why we always even as psychologists go what is your intention? It becomes very, very important. And then affirmations are, am I stroking myself, talking to myself

in an empowering way or not? For example, I heard this one of the women's cricketers recently say, "I want to make it to the league. You know I missed out last time due to surgery or due to an injury" and I said "make it? Is that enough? Do you want to just make it or do you want to become an integral part of this and contribute to the team?" So, what is it that I am telling is going to keep building and that is what we see that is going to keep happening. So, this is why I always say my role is to hold the mirror.

Hold the mirror, help them to their best potential and also to identify what are the triggers. This also is very essential for a champion. Because it is remember, it is how a plant grows. You sow the seed and then you just do not keep digging it out every day to see if it is growing. But you keep nurturing it, you keep building it and that is very essential. That is a beautiful image of our own Virat Kohli and I want to bring in this quote from Karate Kid. The quote says, "if you want to know the difference," and of course this is Jackie Chan talking to the little Xiao-Dre. So he says, "if you know you want to know the difference between a master and a beginner. The master has failed more times than the beginner has even tried." And if we recall the movie, that is what Kung Fu is, he teaches in Kung Fu is a way of life. What you do every day, remember the number of times he had to take out his jacket, put it on take out but there was a reason it was done, And this is what we are saying that how and what are you building every day? What are you challenging yourself with every day? That becomes very very important because then again it is a question of remember the mountain, you know the journey.

I always say, if this is the mountain, right? For a second, let me just go back. If this is your mountain, And you know the end. The peak is whatever that you want to achieve. Like of course over here we are talking about sport. But then you are not going to just jump from base to the top. The journey is going to take time, correct? So you are going to face challenges, you are going to probably have some bad matches, bad tournaments, body with elite sport taking care of your body, and then life challenges becomes very important. But what I always say is but hold this image. Because when you do feel low, when you know things are not going, you rest, you recoup, you look at what are my influences, who are my support group, who can help me pull me out, right? I will give this very small example of you know my journey so that you know you all can relate it to your journey.

This was a trip that we went to Vaishno Devi, okay? And me and my best friend were celebrating so we went unprepared. So when someone said it might take a whole day, I started with, “Bhaya kitna dur hai, how far?” And the answer I get is, “oh you have just started, it is really far, it is really far, okay?” And then every time I would hear that I would go “oh my God.” And then my friend, I think she was a better psychologist at that point of time, she said “I am going to beat you up if you ask this one more time”. , And then we started the process, what I was talking about.

The process is so important because what we see is we started noticing people, elderly people with sticks, there are people with drums, there is this food, there is khana, there is people chanting, we rest in between and then we opened up to that journey. And then there was this path very honestly like how we started this section was, we did not know where to go. So again, I asked someone what is the way? And they said “oh here, the temple has just arrived.” So that is what I am trying to say. I think one of my favourite athletes has really always been Rahul Dravid. And I always say and I believe, concur with what he says, it is you know focus on excellence. Better yourself, challenge yourself and you will see the outcome. It's perfectly fine to want to be an Arjuna Awardee, to want to be xyz, but what am I every day? That is going to be very very crucial in this journey. And I want to conclude this section with you know this was, I gave this interview for Times of India and this was prior to when Sachin Tendulkar was retiring, there was a little up and down in his career, in his game.

But then I said he is Sachin, you know he has seen so much. So what we are really going to be seeing is him coming back. We all hit a low, right? Every individual, every athlete, we saw what happened with Virat as well. So, but the thing is you know they will bounce back and that is one of the essential ingredients of a champion is, keep climbing on the mountain. You might go down a few steps, it is okay. Rest, again take support if needed and then start climbing up.

Yes, so that is really, this is why I really felt the metaphor of a mountain is really apt. I want you all to start looking at “what is it that I want from life?” What is the one challenge that I am ready to take?

And now we move to the final segment of this unit, the first unit we move to the final segment of competition mindset. So a lot of people ask, especially the first timers, right? They will ask you, oh what should I do? Should I do this or shouldn't I do that? Or you know you will have parents going, can you motivate my child? And the best thing is when you hear first timers come in and they say "I have really tried psychology" and you ask them, "okay so what do you do? I can do it, I can do it". And then you look at them, their body language is really tight like the eyes are wide open. You know it is a state of stress, they are really stressed.

So kind of go, do you really believe? Because the brain is really, really smart. So it is not just saying I can do it. I remember this young swimmer, so he had the potential to break one of the records. So I think it was 1.29, if I am not wrong. And so I said, "So what are you doing?" And again, it was very last minute, the coach said, "no, you know what this boy is very good and just couple of days before" and I was kind of feeling this boy is doing, this athlete is doing so well, should I really you know interfere in his ritual? But then I said okay fine let me just see and I saw him, he just looks so stressed. Even when you have the potential and people go on and on and on with "okay you can break it." It is like what Simone Biles said before Tokyo when she pulled out. In one of the finals, the number of people tweeting and tweeting you, going on telling you- you can do it, you can perform, actually causes lot of pressure.

So he said "I am going on repeating 1.29, 1.29." And I said "please do not do that because you are really stressing yourself out. What you need is to calm yourself, you worked for that, right? And now give yourself that chance to go out and perform." And this is why you know, this is one of my favourite quotes which is - that there is a perfect shot waiting for you, all you need to do is get yourself out of the way. And talk about being embodied, talk about body language.

This is of course our Olympian, Maana Patel, and look at her body language. So you know there is this nice case study, nice anecdote about Virendra Sehwag. So apparently when he was playing in I think it was the second or third IPL, he was having a lean patch and you know their mentor, right? Told him "project the image of a lion."

How does your body change? How do you feel? Then what happens the minute you pull? You pull yourself up, your body language shifts. Like how is it when I go like this and how is it when

I am like this? When I am shrinking into the chair and at the same time I am coming into myself. So that is very, very important. And what you see is her holding her hands on her waist. And if you see shoulders pulled back is what is called a power stance. She is really tapping into her own body, into the energy of her body and that influences. And to go back to Virendra Sehwal, so he said “I first was faking it, I was trying to walk in like a lion, but then the minute I pulled myself up, my body, my shoulders, my chin a little up, it started shifting and I started feeling more confident as well.” And he went on to actually go and perform. So that is where the quote fake it till you make it also comes, which is something we advise athletes you know to project the image of a fighter.

Remember again Karate Kid, the final scene where he, Xiao-Dre, you know the young kung fu player had mastered the mirroring act where you know the snake and the woman, if you go back to that scene. So you know there is this scene where the master, Jackie Chan takes him to a place, a temple where he learnt kung fu. And there is this point where there is a first outing, there is a snake and there is a woman and it looks like the woman is copying the snake. So and then he is obviously mesmerised and then he tells Jackie Chan, “oh my God! did you see that woman copying the snake?” And then he said “observe properly who is copying whom.” Who is mirroring? Because the woman was so still like a mirror. The snake was mimicking her. And this is where the concept of mirror neurons comes in. Because let us say for example, there is a head coach or let us say a psychologist or anyone of the support staff notices that on that day, on the competition day you notice one of the athletes or team members is not feeling that great. Now that is not the time to go, oh like a lot of times, I have heard support staff with very very good intentions go say, “are you okay? are you okay? you are looking dull.”

That does not help right? If you keep telling me oh my God I am looking, you are looking dull, you are looking dull, I am going to start playing that. So instead what to do? Oh wow know is happening? And you start putting it up. Go press his shoulders a little. You project what you want to see. And I remember Geet Sethi actually talks about this in a talk he was giving to Tanishq if I recall correctly. And he says his coach right, he would just come, he would sit right at the back and he would come just when you know the players had to go.

And he just comes to just massage, just massage the shoulder where the pressure really is held. And he is like, “come on” that was one word. And he said that was all what was needed. He is saying “come on”. And that is what I am trying to say that this is why the inner story becomes so important. What is the story I am playing every day? This athlete is better or that one is better will I make this mistake? Or am I looking at wow what is going to happen? Yes I know I am going to get challenges.

How is it going to be? What am I focusing on? That becomes extremely important because there is a part in our brain which is called the mirror neurons. So the experiment goes that there is a chimpanzee and there is an experimenter and it was totally unplanned. So the experiment one day, I mean, the first part was planned of course. So the experimenter peels the banana and then takes a bite and you see the chimpanzee doing the same. Then it is a break time and what happens is there is no banana with the chimpanzee. But what happens is he is eating, the experimenter is eating and what we see is the mirror neurons are getting flashed with the chimpanzee.

So this is where when we watch something which touches us, when we are with or we read something or we are with someone, we pick up that emotion that is because of the mirror neurons and of course because of the empathy quotient as well. So noticing what am I feeling or what is the other feeling and aiding. And this is why no matter how well an athlete has done, no matter how badly they have done we always begin with let us do an analysis of what went well, what could have gone better, what were the challenges and how are we going to face this going forward. So this is where, what is the ritual you follow, what is your routine? So you do not go boom bang change things. No, think about your own, maybe you had a very important presentation and you try to get everything in order and then sometimes it is like you try to sleep too early as well it does not work because your system is used to, your body, your mind there is a pattern. So please follow that. So that is what we tell athletes. Especially to get off social media. This is I think you all must have heard this in the discussion as well a few times.

It is very essential to go who is aiding me and who is not aiding me. At this point of time what brings me to my center? That becomes paramount okay? And I want to bring in this analogy of the Chinese bamboo. It is a beautiful analogy a lot of sports athletes use this. So the Chinese

bamboo there is nothing, I mean except a little sprouting which happens apparently for the first four years. And then the fifth year it shoots to a whopping 80 feet in about a few months. So what is the moral behind this? What is the rationale? What the storyline is, A lot of work is going to grow under, the roots are getting strong.

You look at the trees as well, It does not just sprout up. So there is a lot of hard work and if that work has gone in, not just the physical work a lot of them do but also challenging yourself also preparing yourself. If that has gone well then preparing yourself for competition the way Abhinav Bindra had prepared. Challenging yourself and also knowing okay what is my personality? Like am I the serious type? Is it exactly what I want? What is the ingredient that works for me? That is paramount and to keep in mind that yes, sometimes things may not go exactly as I plan. I recently was hearing an athlete saying, “it was a huge jet lag I got to know just one or two days before and I did not really perform” and I said “yes it happens but know that this is not the end right? Because growth underneath your tree is getting stronger and in the mountain you probably took one step down but we are still on the path and that is very very vital to remember.”

So I want to give this anecdote of this young athlete and I was there and it is really good because it kind of gives us an idea as to what are the factors that we have been discussing. You will probably get a glimpse of this. So this was a very young athlete, she was on the verge of a national medal and she was battling injury and also she was in the shadow of another well-known player. A very gentle athlete and hard working. So she surprises everyone and she is at the semis semi-finals and then what starts happening is so she starts off well it was the home crowd, it was in the place that she was training and what we started noticing is as the crowd started cheering louder and louder like her name started echoing slowly, we started seeing that she was getting a little defensive and sadly she ended up losing the bout. So this is the first part of the story but then what happens in the dugout is, the coach was, “I am not your coach.” So obviously she is feeling low and stuff and we thought okay the coach is angry. So you know it was but he kept saying that and he said you weren't looking at me and he just kept showing like, you were looking at the crowd kind of and later in the day I was telling one of the support staff that this is what the coach was saying.

And then she said yeah, she lost focus and she was looking at the crowd. My question is, is that all? Do you really think that was all? Just take a moment with what we've discussed about the journey, the resilience, the unconscious, the beliefs, the story, the inner story. What do you think was happening there? So what actually happened with her was she went into a typical fight-flight-freeze mode. This was not what she expected. Instead what happened was, we think home crowd advantage. Like, my PhD was on cricket and I remember asking a number of Indian cricketers going - oh so it must be home crowd advantage and they're like not necessarily and now I understand because it's so much, not just expectation, the focus needed and I've heard this a lot from Australians especially they're like how do you focus you can't even hear what's happening, the noise is insane.

So what looks great and aha unless an athlete knows how to tap into it, it can cause pressure and for her it was a first semis, first nationals. So somewhere that backfired. It was not that she consciously was paying attention to people calling her name. That was too much for her system, her nervous system and she was not prepared for it and I remember because I was there and then later not immediately, at that time you just look at settling the athlete down and help them process their emotions and she said I did my best, I played my best, I don't know why the coach was saying that and she wasn't aware she lost focus. Now this is where our role comes in and of course now she's doing extremely well at the international level as well. To aid the athlete very gradually to actually what happened and also in psychology we always say the right question gets you the right answer.

It's not just going on questioning, going on questioning but you know that reflective questions and when the athlete themselves knows or they say oh this thing like oh this is what happened and that's what you want at the end of the day. as they're the ones who are going to go and perform. So I really wanted to bring this in because this is very important for us, like a lot of athletes and if you remember the quote behind which is the number of times a master has failed. The point is to really look at what is it that aids me and what is it that triggers me. So to also look at how do I work around some of my triggers right. That is why I remember Michael Phelps' example that you prepare not just for a great swim but for all the challenges because sport is filled with uncertainty and that's exactly what it was when India went into a lockdown and Tokyo Olympics was postponed right.

So I think it was apt what he said. He said because athletes and it was quite sad because I know some of them had peaked so well and then it got postponed and we didn't know when it was going to happen. Of course it was hope for some of them who were just recouping from injury there was an opportunity. He said adapting to uncertainty is really the key because if you look at the last para it really sums it up. He says you can prepare at the highest level and do everything right but there will be some variable that will come into the equation at the very end and what athletes at the highest level do who are successful is adapt. And I think this is why for me it's paramount right that athletes challenge themselves.

So one of the activities I give is when you wake up is to imagine your mountain and then go, what is the one step I can take to challenge myself because every day you challenge yourself, the brain starts getting accustomed. You start getting accustomed to it and that is how you prepare for the challenges for what's to come. You know your higher tournaments are the important ones and I always tell athletes when they say oh my god but it's Asian games oh my god but you know this is not at national level. I always tell them after 8th standard, you go to 9th, you don't go back to 6th standard. Knowing that and maybe it's going to be a little difficult, 9th is going to be difficult but then you prepare yourself and that's exactly what we need, what we need to do in sport is prepare, work, build your muscle, physical and mental muscle, so that you can go and give yourself the best chance in the tournament and that is why understanding an athlete in their entirety is very very important.

So I bring this section to a close with this and by this we finish. Thank you so much.