Student Name

Independent Research, 3rd

October 23, 2011

Research Proposal

Title: Get Your Head in the Game: The Performance Benefits of Psychological Training

Project Overview/Objectives:

This research will address the application of sports psychology, specifically in high school sports. I am proposing to survey student athletes at Reservoir High School to find out the extend of awareness about sports psychology. Then, I am interested in creating a media outlet with which students could inform themselves about sports psychology techniques. This media outlet would be in the form of a pamphlet. This product will act as a guide for athletes trying to develop their sports psychology skills. In order to distribute this product to an audience who could use the information, I will contact the coaches at Reservoir High School and find a staff member interested in using my product.

Background and History of the Issue:

Before the 1970s, the field of sports psychology was not recognized as a real science. It was considered somewhat of a fruitless science, with no real proof that mentality could affect performance. However, the field has evolved very much over the past 40 years. In its beginnings, sports psychology's primary focus was to identify the characteristics of superior athletes by assessing their mental habits and overall characteristics. Now, the study has evolved into something called modern sports psychology, or the science of winning which is focused on the mental exercises and methods to help turn the mind into a tool used to make a more effective athlete. Clinical sports psychology is starting to become more and more popular, especially among athletes at the top levels of competition. At the Olympic level, where the competitors are on such an elite level of intensity and training, the margin for winning is usually very small; a psychological advantage can make or break athletes. In one study, two Olympic bobsled teams were part of a trial. One of the teams was given psychological training, the other was not given the mental training. The team with the sports psychology training was improving so rapidly the experiment was called off by the coach, insisting that both teams receive mental training (Mack).

There are various techniques that have been proven to help make an athlete perform at a top level of competition. Among these methods include visualization, focus, self talk, stress management, goal setting, and even methods such as breathing and relaxation. Visualization is the process by which an athlete imagines themselves performing at a peak level of performance to help instill confidence and allow the athlete to feel comfortable in pressure situations. Self talk is a procedure where competitors constantly talk to themselves, delivering positive feedback to help keep focus and an optimistic attitude. Goal setting helps athletes stay motivated by giving them something to work towards. Breathing and relaxation can be used to help keep an athlete calm during pressure situations in competition.

Rationale:

The application of sports psychology could benefit athletes of all levels. High school athletes should be aware of prospective psychological resources that could be used to improve athletics. The use of sports psychology in high schools could create higher levels of competition, creating stronger athletes with more potential to continue their athletic careers into college. In addition, implementing sports psychology awareness at Reservoir could improve all our athletic teams, creating a more dominant school on the competition field with a reputation for a strong athletic program, adding to our sense of community and pride.

Research Methodology:

Research Question and Hypothesis:

* Are high school athletes actively aware of core sports psychology techniques that could help improve the mental and physical performance of competitors?
* Using sport psychology techniques such as visualization, Ideal Competitive State training, and concentration methods can improve high school athletes’ confidence during athletic competition.

Basis of Hypothesis:

My hypothesis is focused on high school athletes. All the resources I have found have been supporting the view that sports psychology is beneficial to athletes. However, I have only found examples of sports psychology implemented at the collegiate, professional, or Olympic level. There has been a lack of information about high school sports psychology. I want to know how many high school athletes are aware of this resource, and I want to make resources available to those looking to learn more about sports psychology. Sports psychology is proven to work for athletes, but research seems to have over looked high school athlete awareness. I am looking to find out the level of awareness, and then improve the amount of resource on easy access so that high school athletes can maximize their talents.

Research Design:

I will be conducting descriptive research. I plan on using surveys to learn more about high school athletes’ opinions. Using this information, I will be able to determine if high school athletes are using sports psychology consciously. If they are using sports psychology consciously, I want to know what techniques they use, and how they feel it affects their performance in competition. If they are not using sports psychology, I want to know how exposed they have been to the topics and methods that are in the field of sports psychology. In addition, I plan on interviewing high school coaches, successful athletes, and those who train high school competitors to find out their opinion on sports psychology.

Operational Definitions:

Visualization- The process which one attempts to see themselves competing at his or her top ability. This can mean visualizing a specific event or opponent, or general competition.

Positive Self Talk- The method of talking to oneself to keep a positive attitude and instill confidence during difficult athletic competition.

Focus- the sports psychology technique where one is actively involved and concentrated on the task at hand. Eliminates all distractions when done properly.

Confidence- an athlete’s feeling that he or she is prepared for a competition

Logistical Considerations-

The major logistical concerns will involve creation and distribution of the media outlet. The pamphlet would require a large amount of printing to have a sizable enough resource to distribute to a large audience. This would cost money, and take a significant amount of time. It will be necessary to find an organization or service that could help by creating the final product. Hopefully, organizations would provide these services at a discount if they are aware of the nature of the project. The permission of coaches must be obtained before the final product is distributed to any athletes. By the end of February, I hope to have the survey completed and distributed. I hope to tally the surveys by mid-March. I would like to have the final project model by the end of March and I would also like to have a coach committed to using my final project. By mid-April, I will have the final project created in the appropriate volume necessary. At the end of April I would like to distribute my project to the appropriate audience.