

TABLE 3.1

Using the Four Mental Training Tools to Develop Athletes' Mental Skills

GOAL SETTING
Setting realistic but challenging short-term goals provides a sense of direction, thereby increasing motivation as reflected in increased effort and persistence.
Challenging, realistic goals help athletes get into their optimal energy zone and direct that energy to the task at hand.
Effective goals direct athletes' attention to what they need to focus on to succeed.
Although striving to win is important, focusing on winning can create excessive stress . When athletes perceive the challenge not as winning but as achieving their own realistically set performance goals, the challenge will always be near the athlete's present skill level and will create an optimal skill-challenge balance.
Consistent goal attainment raises self-confidence .
IMAGERY
Teaching athletes to imagine themselves attaining their goals can help raise their motivation .
By imagining previous strong performances, athletes can identify their optimal energy levels and strategies for getting into an effective energy zone prior to performing.
Using imagery effectively requires the ability to focus on desired images and thus can be used to develop attentional skills .
Imagery can be used to help athletes manage competitive stress . Athletes are less likely to experience elevated stress if they have imagined themselves dealing effectively with obstacles and unanticipated events that create stress.
Visualizing oneself succeeding can raise self-confidence .
RELAXATION AND ENERGIZATION
Learning to energize when feeling flat, and developing the ability to relax when overaroused, can help build motivation .
Relaxation and energization techniques can help athletes consistently enter and stay in their optimal energy zone , which is crucial to performing consistently at their peak.
Being either over- or underaroused hurts athletes' ability to direct their attention to the task at hand. Relaxation and energization techniques help athletes improve their concentration skills.
Learning to purposefully relax when experiencing stress can help athletes manage their emotions. And energizing techniques can be used when athletes feel that low-level stress is preventing them from getting into their ideal mental state for performing.
By learning to control their energy levels through relaxation and energizing, athletes will develop a sense of control, which in turn enhances self-confidence .
SELF-TALK
Athletes can use self-talk to help motivate themselves.
Self-talk can either raise or lower energy . Athletes can use effective self-talk strategies to reach their ideal mental state before competing.
Focusing on task-relevant cue words can help athletes focus their attention , or regain focus if they are momentarily distracted.
Stress level is strongly influenced by athletes' perceptions and interpretations of events that happen before and during competition. Athletes can use self-talk to develop a positive outlook on events that normally result in elevated stress.
Positive self-talk can be used to raise self-confidence , whereas negative self-talk can lower it.