REFLECTION AS A FACTOR TO IMPROVE PERFORMANCE IN SPORTS

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ABSTRACT

The change of views in sport psychology is related to the perception of athletes as personalities who have certain social motives and attitudes, due to that in the forefront comes the ability of athletes to reflect their own activity. The research aim is: the use of reflection as a method of forming the necessary internal qualities of a top-level athlete. A special questionnaire with 4 main and 15 clarifying questions was developed for studying the reflection. The questionnaire has allowed to define the athlete's attitude to a sports activity, to reveal an assessment of his or her own opportunities, the purpose of sports activity, readiness for the solution of those problems and difficulties which appear in the process of sports activity during the preparation and performance in the highest level competitions. The obtained data made it possible to prepare a plan and a program of the goals achievement. The experiment showed that the athletes in the experimental group achieved or came close to the planned results - in 66 % of cases, but the control group (without using reflection) - in 32% of cases. Thus, reflection is an important factor of increasing efficiency in sport.

Key words: athlete's reflection , sport, success, athlete's attitude

INTRODUCTION

The practice of sports shows that that success in sports involves various factors: technical, physical and psychological preparation of the athlete (Platonov, 2015; Nikitushkin, Suslov, 2017).

Concerning the first two factors, science defines accurately enough which direction one should take to improve these indicators. As for the psychological preparation of the athlete, sports psychology has not yet completely solved the challenge of preparing athletes psychologically for competitions. Thus, one of the problems facing sports psychology is how to integrate it into the practice of athletic training.

Currently, one of the main directions of action which is extensively used in the psychological preparation of athletes is to consider their certain psycho-physiological traits (anxiety level, strength of the nervous system, extraversion-introversion, etc.) which largely determine the athlete's psychological condition during preparation and participation in a competition. In fact, the performance of the athlete in a competition depends to a great extent on his/her psychological condition (Gissen, 1973; Gorbunov, 2006; Sopov, 2005). Practice has shown that this approach often fails, especially in contexts of high competition stress (Gissen, 1973; Rodionov, 1979).

This may be explained by the fact that an athlete participates in a competition as an integral personality with his/her motives, attitudes and goals which regulate the athlete's psychological condition rather than as a carrier of separate psycho-physiological traits mentioned above. So where competitive stress factors (importance of the competition, risk of losing status or material well-being, etc.) prove to be excessive, these psycho-physiological mechanisms fail to regulate the athlete's psychological condition (Nayenko, 1976; Suvorova, 2003) resulting in their impaired functioning and, thus, decreased performance.

In this connection, psychological preparation of athletes should aim to develop an subject of sports activities, an autonomous and responsible personality capable of adequate self-determination (Deci, Ryan, 2000; Rubinstein, 2004) because it is the personality that is the regulator of the athlete's performance (Gorbunov, 2006; Malkin, Rogaleva, 2015; Bertollo et al., 2019; Poczwadowski et al., 2019; Rogaleva et al., 2019).

This approach is largely based on the ability of the athlete to be aware of his/her attitude towards sports. Such awareness becomes possible by involving reflection into the sport process.

A person (athlete) who is capable of reflection is more resistant to stress and is able to set and achieve

goals independently, define long- and short-term goals, make effort to achieve them, and evaluate objectively his/her successes and failures (Bertolo et al., 2019; Poczwadowski et al., 2019; Malkin, Rogaleva, 2015).

All this helps gain confidence that the goal can be achieved and, in case of failure, allows the athlete to identify the objective causes of the failure in order to avoid them in the future.

The goal of this study was to explore the potential for including reflection into the psychological preparation of high-level athletes. The study involved athletes from the national rock-climbing team, and from a futsal team and a basketball team participating in Russia's national cups.

METHODS

We developed a test of reflection which included four questions: What do I want to achieve in sports? What can I achieve in sports? What should I do to achieve success in sports? How much of myself am I prepared to give to sports to achieve success? Each question was provided with 4-5 answers for athletes to choose from allowing for their attitude to sports. To answer these questions the athlete had to be aware of his/her attitude to sports, assess his/her potentialities to achieve a certain result, have willingness to overcome difficulties which may arise before the athlete in achieving the goal, and determine how much time they are prepared to give to sports.

The respondents' answers have enabled us to understand the place of sports in the athletes' lives, willingness to overcome barriers which may appear on the way towards their goals, ability to adequately perceive success and failure, and readiness to assume responsibility for performance.

RESULTS

The survey provided the following results: The question "What do I want to achieve in sports": 78 % of the athletes answered they wanted to achieve a high level; among the higher-class athletes, 90 % chose this answer. This data suggests that the majority of the athletes had a sufficiently high motivation to achieve success in sports. Moreover, the higher the level of skill, the higher the percentage of athletes aiming to achieve even greater success. These answers may seem to be favorable for practicing

sports but, at the same time, they carry a certain threat to the athlete. If the motivation is too high, it can cause a considerable psychological pressure in a competition and, thus, impair the athlete's performance. The question "Can I achieve high results": here we identified two groups: 80 % of athletes who already had good performance results answered it in the affirmative; at the same time, among athletes who had not yet achieved good results, only 32 % answered this question positively while the others were doubtful about their abilities and readiness to achieve high results. Such lack of confidence may create considerable psychological difficulties for these athletes in achieving their goals. If their performance fails to improve, their motivation to keep training hard to achieve good results can decrease considerably. The solution to this problem could be an incremental program of performance improvement with milestones enabling the athlete to resolve consecutively one problem after another and creating a sense of success and confidence in the athlete that they can achieve the desired goal.

The third question "What should I do to achieve success": 70 % of the athletes believed they should do a training load that would allow them to hope for success.

It is important, however, that not only does the athlete understand this but is also ready to take on responsibility for training. However, only 14 % of the athletes answered they regarded it necessary to participate in the planning of the training regimen and training load. The others left planning to the coach.

The threat of this situation is that if the goal is not achieved as expected, the athlete may think that the problem is either the coach who is not sufficiently professional or he (athlete) himself does not have abilities needed to achieve success.

In this connection, the coach and the psychologist should involve the athlete in the training planning and programming process and show how they will be moving to the desired goal. In this case, the athlete would have to take on responsibility for performance.

The fourth question to be answered suggested that the athletes determine the time they were prepared to commit to sports in order to achieve the goal. Only 30 % of the respondents were ready to continue training even if they had trouble performing

as intended. These were mainly athletes who had already achieved a good level of performance. The others indicated a period of continued training of 1 or 2 years as a maximum.

These answers testify that these athletes were insufficiently committed to long-term hard work required to achieve good results. In this connection, it is for the coach and the psychologist to convince the athlete that a good result takes a sufficiently long time of training.

The next step of our study involved checking whether the engagement of reflection in the training process really improves performance. This evaluation was carried out 1 to 1.5 years after the start of the experiment.

During this period, 18% of athletes complete their sports careers (because of injuries, absence of improvements in performance, etc.). The other 82 % continued practicing. Among these athletes, those who had already achieved fairly good results (55 %) demonstrated greater improvements in performance. The others did not demonstrate much improvement although they continued training actively.

The reasons behind this picture were clarified by analyzing performance against the items of the questionnaire.

The analysis has shown that the majority of the athletes who did not show substantial improvements in performance did not participate in the development of the training program and plan for achieving a good result. 70 % of these athletes had periods of reduced activity in the training process for various objective (as they thought) reasons. Thirdly, they were not sufficiently persistent in fulfilling the points of the program that they thought were not important.

Thus, for instance, the training program and plan included mental training and ideomotor practice that demanded 10-15 minutes of daily independent work. None of the athletes who failed to demonstrate improved performance completed these items of the program.

At the same time, studies have shown that the use of mental training raises training effectiveness by

10-15 % improving the psychological stability and reliability of athletes, which has an undoubted effect on their performance.

CONCLUSION

The use of reflection to achieve success in sports has shown a sufficiently high effectiveness. This is particularly applicable to athletes who are already high-level performers. However, some of the athletes who were not yet performing on a high level also improved their results.

At the same time, a rather large number of athletes (up to 40 %) who participated in the experiment did not show any considerable changes in performance.

This data may be explained as follows: the athletes who considerably improved their performance had already reached a high level of skill, i.e. reflection to make them aware of their goals, objectives and required effort had already been ingrained in their previous years of training. This study has just confirmed that it is the right thing to do to engage reflection to make athletes aware that success is determined by their ability to take on responsibility for performance and to independently and adequately assess their potentialities, and by the willingness to use maxim effort for achieving the goal.

Athletes who have considerably improved performance over their previous level completed the program they developed to achieve desired results, i.e. they came to be aware of the need to apply willpower and be responsible for their performance. Athletes who have improved performance but slightly failed to realize that success in sports requires utmost effort and tried to combine training with other activities, which only allows one to maintain a certain level of skill.

Based on the study, we can be drawn the following conclusions.

1. The use of reflection is an important factor of increasing efficiency in sport.
2. The earlier reflection is included into the training process, the more chance there is to improve performance in sports.

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