Original Article

Constructing personality profile of charismatic hockey player Dhanraj Pillay

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Abstract

In today's fiercely competitive and highly commercialized sporting arena, physical prowess is no more the only deciding factor to influence sports outcome. Those who reach the top have some unique physical abilities, psychological and emotional attributes. This study was undertaken to explore the life history, philosophy and the sporting career of legendary Indian hockey player Dhanraj Pillay by constructing his personality profile. Data/Information for the present investigations were derived both from the primary as well as the secondary sources. Interviews of Dhanraj Pillay, his family members, his coaches, former Indian Hockey team captains and prominent Indian and international hockey players were conducted. Published material on the life and the achievements of Dhanraj Pillay such as the books, pamphlets, newspaper accounts were studied. To investigate his personality profile and the psychological makeup, Mental Toughness Inventory, Sevenfold Emotional Intelligence Scale, Self Esteem Inventory, and Sports Personality Scale were administered to Dhanraj Pillay. It has emerged that he is not only a fitness freak and has a good physique, but also possesses unique qualities and attributes such as patience and persistence, displays positive attitude, has leadership qualities and has the ability to face problems and obstacles. It has come out that he is a mentally tough, emotionally intelligent, and self-efficacious individual with a well-developed sports personality. The findings of this investigation will be helpful in developing a broad framework of the appropriate personality characteristics and the specific attributes so as to identify and groom talented and skilled sportspersons.

Keywords: Personality profile, mental toughness, emotional intelligence, self-esteem, Sports personality

Introduction

The area of human endeavor called 'sports' has involved great numbers of people, both participants and spectators, in almost all the nations and civilizations of the world. Last few decades have witnessed tremendous change in the attitude of world towards competitive sports. Society at large is becoming highly concerned for the performance of their athletes and players at national and international levels, thereby transforming sports competition into a highly exciting and challenging enterprise (Brar et al 2010). In today's competitive scenario, the sportspersons, coaches, trainers and all other concerned with sports cannot depend on physical and physiological fitness alone, they have to identify, recognize and understand socio-psychological attributes which equally affect the performance. Dobersek and Bartling (2008) mention that there are numerous factors that are responsible for the performance of a sportsman as it depends not only on his or her suppleness, skill, and training, but also on various other factors of psychological and biochemical nature including his or her personality type. Rathee and Salh (2010) also identified cognitive style and emotional maturity as indispensable attributes of high level performers.

Normally, in country like India, a person starts taking part in a game or event without any proper guidance or determination of his specific sporting potential. No sincere efforts are made from any quarter to identify and tap his hidden talent for any particular or specific game or event. It is by sheer chance that one gets to participate in a particular sport that is suitable to his inherent capabilities and personality attributes. In such circumstances, failure is just but inevitable.

Hockey, India's national game, has provided the nation with many proud occasions. Unmatched excellence and incomparable virtuosity brought India laurels at international level as well as a string of Olympic gold medals. But in the recent decade, Indian hockey has witnessed only constant decline, except few sporadic spots of excellence here and there. This has been the sad story of India hockey in spite of having produced players like Dhayan Chand, Balbir Singh and many others who had mesmerized the world of hockey with their 'magical skills'. In this list of outstanding players, out of the present day hockey players, the name that can be

very conveniently added is that of Dhanraj Pillay. Successful players like Dhanraj Pillay form a class apart in sporting arena as they carve out a distinct spot for themselves through sheer hard work and sincere devotion.

In the realm of sports performance, it is well recognized that psychological makeup of the athletes plays a very significant role in producing successful performance outcomes (Singh, 2004). The elite sportspersons in most sports share a common physiology, most suited to their sport, as well as the best of equipment, coaching, strength, conditioning, and nutrition. What then remains to make the difference between success and failure on a given day is often their mental skills. Elite athletes are able to shift their attention to the critical cues in the environment as the situation demands. They are highly self confident and possess a high degree of self efficacy, a conviction that they can successfully perform the skills to yield the desired outcomes. High expectations for success contribute to their achievements (Wuest and Fisette, 2011). Hence, it becomes imperative to develop personal socio-psychological profiles of outstanding and great sportspersons; to find out their specific personality traits, and attributes, systematically analyze the same, and then, filter out the medal winning formula. Cox (2007) mentions that world class athletes can be correctly differentiated from less skilled athletes by their psychological profile 70% of the time. Personality profiles that include situational measures of psychological states have been shown to be the most accurate in predicting level of athletic performance. Anshel (1997) suggests that psychological dispositions (i.e. broad, pervasive ways of relating to people and to situation) may be more helpful in studying athlete's psychological characteristics. The present study was undertaken to trace out the unique characteristics, abilities, traits and qualities of Sh. Dhanraj Pillay's personality makeup and construct the personality profile of this legendary hockey player.

Method & Procedure

In the present study historical, biographical, analytical and interpretive methods have been utilized to obtain the information. Data and information for the present investigations were derived both from the primary as well as secondary sources. The original material and information were collected from the primary sources such as official records from offices and places where Sh. Pillay had worked and is at present employed; official records like reports of committees, meetings, annual reports, and related published material etc. Personal records pertaining to Sh. Dhanraj Pillay were also perused by the investigators and desired information/facts were derived for analysis purposes. Investigators personally contacted Sh. Dhanraj Pillay and conducted well structured recorded interviews with him. He was also administered Mental Toughness Inventory (Middleton et al, 2005), Sevenfold Emotional Intelligence Scale (Khera et al, 2002), Self Esteem Inventory (Prasad and Thakur, 1988), and Sports Personality Scale (Bala, 2003). As secondary sources of information, prominent hockey coaches, outstanding sportspersons, Indian hockey Olympians, foreign hockey players, members of general public as well as Dhanraj Pillay's family members were interviewed to obtain valuable data regarding Dhanraj Pillay's life history, philosophy, contributions and achievements during his sports career spanning over two decades, his personality attributes, and leadership qualities. Published material on the life and achievements of Dhanraj Pillay such as books, magazines, newspaper accounts etc. were also studied and information was derived for the present investigation. For the purpose of analysis & interpretation, data collected through primary & secondary sources were analyzed qualitatively which was facilitated through the use of external & internal criticism. Data collected by using opinion rating questionnaires was subjected to quantitative analysis for drawing statistical inferences.

Results & Discussion

His early life and sports involvement

Dhanraj Pillay, born on July 15, 1966 to a poor family in Khadki in Pune, India, was the youngest child of a migrant laborer from Tamil Nadu state. He was given the name, Dhanraj (wealthy) as his family was struggling to make both ends meet. He was a thin, not that much toughly built, but was very active and agile in his childhood. Athleticism was God-gifted to him. His father worked as a grounds man in the ordinance factory. He had three elder brothers who used to play hockey. In fact, it was one of the elder brothers, Ramesh, who initiated Dhanraj Pillay into the game and became his first coach. Following the footsteps of his elder brothers, he started to play hockey from his early childhood. He would play hockey whenever he "could lay his hands on a few broken sticks and then with a few friends pasted them up with gum and gunny-sack strings" (Misra, 2007). Dhanraj says, "Hockey was in my family's blood but we didn't have money to buy sticks. So my brother and I used to play with broken sticks after tying them with rope". He gives all the credit for his achievements to his mother, who encouraged all her four sons to play hockey despite leading a hand-to-mouth existence. It was at Ramesh's insistence that Dhanraj moved to Bombay in 1988. He honed his skills playing for Rashtriya Chemicals and Fertilizers in the Bombay Hockey Association league. The former International player Joaquim Carvalho recognized Dhanraj's potential and coaxed him to join hockey club of Mahindra and Mahindra, an industrial concern. He first caught the eye of the selectors during 1989 Gwalior Nationals, which Bombay team won. He made his debut for the country in the Asia Cup held at Delhi in December, 1989. After entering the

Indian hockey team, he has never looked back and became a regular member of Indian hockey team for the next almost two decades. In March 1990, he played the first of his four World Cups in Lahore. In the 1994 World Cup at Sydney, Pillay was at his scintillating best and was chosen as one of the 16 best players of the world. Dhanraj Pillay, a mercurial center-forward, has changed the face of India's national game hockey. In 1998 he became Captain of Indian Hockey team for the first time. It was his finest hour. He top-scored with 11 goals in the 1998 Bangkok Asian Games. His performance and leadership enabled India to win the Asiad Gold after 32 years. Since 2000 he has played more as a provider for strikers Gagan Ajit Singh and Deepak Thakur. Cedric D'Souza, Indian coach at the Atlanta Olympics, uses the word "genius" for him. Indian captain Ramandeep Singh calls Pillay the "spearhead" of the team, and to the Asian Games coach M.K. Kaushik he is a "leader" who can carry 10 men. Ajitpal Singh, who led India to World Cup hockey victory in 1975, rates him among the greatest Indian centre forwards of the modern era. India won gold medal during 1998 Asian Games and Asia Cup in 2003 under his captaincy. During the 1994 World Cup held at Sydney he was the only Indian player to figure in the World Eleven side. When groping for comparisons for him, experts come up with the names of Shahbaz Ahmed, the dazzling Pakistani forward considered the best hockey player of his generation, and Diego Maradona of Argentina (Ugra, 2000).

Awards & Unique Distinctions

He became the only hockey player in India to have been awarded almost all the highest national civil awards such as Arjuna Award (1995), Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratan Award (1995), K.K. Birla Foundation Award (1998-99) and Padam Shree Award (2001). Another unique distinction earned by him is that he is the only Indian Hockey player to have participated in four Olympics (1992, 1996, 2000, and 2004), four World Cups (1990, 1994, 1998, and 2002), four Champions Trophies (1995, 1995, 2002 and 2003) and four Asian Games (1990, 1994, 1998 and 2002). He has many achievements to his credit, and it is not possible all of them in this paper.

Dhanraj Pillay as a Sportsperson

With regard to characteristics as a sportsperson, his skills and talent as a hockey player have been acknowledged and appreciated by all. His ability to set realistic aspirations and the fact that he is technically a very sound player has drawn almost unanimous consensus. He is very particular about his practice schedule and never displays laxity and laziness not only during the competition but during training sessions as well. He has demonstrated extra ordinary playing abilities and even his opponents too hold him in high esteem regarding his playing skills and techniques. In fact, a majority of the persons surveyed for this study have agreed that he deserves to be called a modern wizard of the hockey.

As opined by Balbir Singh, a former hockey Olympian and coach of Indian hockey team, "having the required skill, speed and strength, he was one of the best hockey players India has produced". Former Olympian, Captain of Indian Hockey Team and Director of Punjab Sports Pargat Singh says "Dhanraj is the one who had the capability to motivate the whole new generation to play hockey". As put by Ric Charlesworth, Famous Australian hockey player, "As an outstanding player of his generation, Dhanraj had most of the qualities of a champion – speed, wonderful movement and fluency, quick and deceptive stick-work, play-reading ability, courage and intense passion for the game". The findings of this study find support with those of Harmison (2006) who confirmed that peak performance at the elite level involves physical, technical and psychological components. An unwavering self-belief and resiliency that allows them to focus on the task at hand is what separated them from the rest, allowing athlete athletes to consistently produce top class performance (Williams and Krane, 2001).

%age of opinion regarding outstanding qualities of Dhanraj Pillay as a Sportsperson

<u>Category of persons</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>
Outstanding Sportspersons	78.01	21.50	0.49	--
Indian Hockey Olympians	63.40	34.20	1.60	0.80
Foreign Hockey Players	61.66	33.67	4.00	0.67
General Public	58.25	37.25	4.25	0.25
Family Members	94.50	05.50	--	--
Overall Average	71.16	26.42	2.07	0.34

Dhanraj Pillay as a Trainee

His coaches also hold very high opinion about him as a trainee. They agree that he was very regular and punctual in his training schedule, was physically very fit and a very skilful and talented player. It has been opined that he has the ability to overcome obstacles and never felt disheartened during competitions. They have agreed that he was an intelligent trainee who was a self disciplined and self-dependent person.

%age of opinion regarding outstanding qualities of Dhanraj Pillay as a Trainee

<u>Category of persons</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>
Coaches	49.75	31.25	16.00	3.00

The fact that he possessed strong mental dispositions and has ability to think rationally in all game situations has found favor with all the coaches surveyed. It has been accepted by them that he never becomes selfish during game for his personal benefits/recognition. He has been found to have the ability to manage stress and anxiety during the game. He is eager to learn new things, sets realistic goals and is a mentally mature player. The ability to deal with the stress of top level sport, from overcoming injuries to deal with last minute nerves, is what separates elite athletes from the rest (Cockerill (2002). Success among elite athletes is related more to the efficiency of technique and mental toughness Abdelbaky (2012). All of the coaches surveyed have agreed that it is always a privilege for a coach to have a trainee like Dhanraj Pillay. As stated by Joqueem Carvalho (Former coach of Indian Hockey team) "He is an inspiration and role model for the present generation of hockey players with his superb physical fitness. He is God's gift to Indian hockey." Cedric D'Souza, Indian coach at the Atlanta Olympics, uses the word "genius" for him, and to the Asian Games coach M.K. Kaushik he is a "leader" who can carry 10 men.

Dhanraj Pillay's Personality

The analysis of the information/data has revealed significant information regarding Sh. Dhanraj Pillay's personality characteristics. All the outstanding sportspersons, hockey Olympians, foreign hockey players, members from general public and members of his family who were surveyed have overwhelmingly agreed that Sh. Dhanraj Pillay possesses certain unique and distinct personality characteristics. A vast majority of the surveyed population has agreed that Dhanraj Pillay has very impressive personality. It has emerged that he is a fitness freak, has good physique, possesses patience and persistence, displays positive attitude, has leadership qualities, and has the ability to face problems and obstacles. There is consensus that he has a very helping nature, supports and guides others, stands with his friends in time of needs, is a role model for the many and is a source of inspiration for others.

Commenting on sports participation, Saima (2008) states "Sports and games develop the leadership qualities and maintain the body and mind coordination in individuals. A sportsman always is vital and stands out of the crowd, prominent and healthy, both mentally as well as physically. Sporting environment always develop one's personality, as a person grows, matures, and reacts to the thousands of environmental stimuli that surround him. The learning of social values, and particularly sportsmanship, must be a part of the purpose of the individual".

%age of opinion regarding outstanding qualities of Dhanraj Pillay's Personality

<u>Category of persons</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>
Outstanding Sportspersons	61.00	35.24	3.00	0.16
Indian Hockey Olympians	57.80	36.40	5.20	0.60
Foreign Hockey Players	55.33	39.67	4.33	0.67
General Public	46.50	47.25	5.50	0.75
Family Members	97.00	3.00	--	--
Overall Average	63.53	32.31	3.60	0.43

Portrayal of Dhanraj Pillay's Personality Profile

From the facts emerging in this study, it is evident that he is blessed with certain distinct and outstanding abilities, extra ordinary attributes and peculiar traits. He had scored 272/288 on Mental Toughness Inventory, 279/340 on Emotional Intelligence Scale, for self-esteem, he scored 144 on personally perceived and 144 on socially perceived self-esteem, and on Sports Personality Scale he had scored 159/185. The overall information derived for the purpose of this study has brought out the fact that Sh. Dhanraj Pillay is a mentally tough, emotionally intelligent, self efficacious and physically fit sportsperson. He has a pleasing and impressive personality, is a highly talented, intelligent and skilled sportsperson, self-disciplined and self-determined trainee, dedicated and committed team mate. He also possesses dynamic leadership qualities, is a role model and source of inspiration for future generation of hockey players. On the whole, it emerges that he possesses a well developed sports personality. Highly skilled athletes, as pointed out by Anshel (1997) score relatively low in tension, depression, fatigue and confusion. They tend to score very high in self confidence, self concept, self esteem, vigor, need achievement, self sufficiency, mental toughness, stability and sociability. A composite of the psychological profiles of elite athletes reveals a person who is mentally healthy, physically and psychologically mature, and committed to excellence. The elite athletes are a rare combination of talent, hard work and the right psychological profile. Very often the difference between a good and an elite athlete is the mental qualities they possess. The elite athletes have the ability to maintain focus, control emotions and perform under pressure, which often makes the difference between winning and losing (Harmison, 2006; Rathee & Salh, 2012).

Dhanraj Pillay's views pertaining to Indian hockey

He, in his usual straight forward manner, says that the problems that the Indian sportspersons have to encounter in the path towards excellence are plenty, and only the people who can get into the depth would be able to find out the same. He said that many of our sports stars come from rural and lower income background, with no financial support available to them; they are unable to get quality coaching and proper scientific training. Mass scale programs to tap the talent at the grass root level are not being implemented seriously. Young players in villages should be given equal opportunity, and efforts are required to be made to groom their talent. Csikszentmihalyi et al (1993) also subscribe to the view that "talent must be viewed as a developmental process and cannot be developed unless it is valued by society and recognized and nurtured by all".

Conclusions

For a person with such rich international exposure and experience, Dhanraj has a lot to offer for the Indian hockey and young hockey players. He has astounding achievements at national as well as at international levels to his credit and has made tremendous contribution in the field of hockey. He has given generously and unsparingly of himself and his talents to the sports arena whenever the occasion demanded - most particularly in contributing to India reaching the zenith of Indian Hockey. As a player, he has been found to possess outstanding playing abilities and even his opponents hold him in high esteem regarding his playing skills. All the coaches who were surveyed for this study have agreed that he was an intelligent trainee, a self-disciplined and self-dependent person, and was very friendly and cooperative. Thyagarajan, Deputy Sports Editor, The Hindu (a prominent sports newspaper) says that Dhanraj is a character who cannot easily be put in and showcased in a straight-jacket. "He is beyond definition, complex, controversial, inexplicably humane on occasions, clearly confounding admirers and critics alike. But in whatever way you look at it, Dhanraj's life and time offer a fascinating insight".

It has been found that Sh. Dhanraj Pillay possesses unique characteristics, outstanding abilities, extraordinary traits and excellent qualities. His personality profile has revealed that he possess a dynamic and charismatic personality. He has been found: (i) to have higher level of mental toughness and possess strong mental dispositions. He exhibits the ability to manage stress, anxiety, remain cool and in control even when facing difficult situations and overcoming obstacles; (ii) to have a high level of emotional intelligence, has the

ability to comprehend the situation and solve the problems. He is a mentally mature player and remains emotionally stable even when facing adversities; (iii) to have higher levels of both personally perceived and socially perceived self-esteem. He has the ability to set realistic aspirations and maintain good relationships with his fellow players. In fact, he has been found to possess positive self esteem; and (iv) to have higher level of all the attributes and characteristics associated with sports personality. The present investigation has far reaching implications as this study will be a source of information and inspiration for all those who are concerned with the upliftment and promotion of sports and games by enabling them to tap the hidden talent. Further, the findings of this study will help the coaches and sports administrators to develop a suitable personality profile for identifying, selecting and training the talented sportspersons. This study will also encourage and motivate future generation of hockey players.

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