

IMPROVING SPORTS PERFORMANCE THROUGHOUT THE MANAGEMENT OF EMOTIONS

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Abstract

Psychologists claim that success is a sum of two components: academic intelligence which includes the ability to put into practice the theoretical aspect, and emotional intelligence, with its focus on human relationships. Therefore, when talking about people adapting to their environment, one can also add non-cognitive aspects of intelligence such as the affective, social, and personal factors, all of which contribute to success in life. Emotional intelligence involves self-awareness, self-discipline, and empathy, and is in charge of controlling our impulses and feelings. Attitude and behavior in favor of physical activity and sports will produce important beneficial effects, both in physical and psychological well-being, which constitute a gain for a healthy life.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, empathy, self-control, sport performance

JEL Classification: I10; I12; I19

DOI: 10.24818/mrt. 22.14.02.04

1. Introduction

In psychology, an idea was formulated and supported about rationality being situated in the cortical system, contrary to emotion which is situated in the limbic system. The first is primarily objective, while the latter is predominantly subjective. As a result, affective structures do not overcome or identify with consciousness, but become part of the unconsciousness.

P.P. Neveanu (1978) showed that moods have different degrees of complexity, with emotional manifestations and reactions situated at different biological and cultural levels. A determining role in the resilience and stimulus/booster of knowledge for each individual is held by passion and feelings when they are aligned to the cultural level. We could conclude that emotions are appreciations, evaluations we make about whatever is around us, everything being reported to the culture and personality of each individual.

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2. Management of emotions in sport

As we have previously mentioned, the limbic system is considered the hub of emotional life (the amygdala nucleus), or the “emotional center”, according to D. Goleman.

The person whose amygdala nucleus was removed had become disinterested in people and even though they could still talk, they could not form relationships with other people. In other words, they have lost their own resources “to feel”, as Le Doux mentioned in 1992. He considered the amygdala nucleus a “psychic sentinel”, which activates in crisis situations, triggers the alarm system at brain level and prompts an adequate response.

The hippocampus, a part of the limbic system, is in charge of affective states expressed in front of things, people, and situations. The existence of the so-called autonomy of the limbic system from the neocortex can trigger a response before knowing the situation (“emotional and impulse hijacking”) in situations with a strong emotional impact.

After numerous studies, Daniel Goleman proves that the students’ emotional development is decisive for their success in life and not just for the results in the educational system. He also claims that an individual’s capacity to recognize and manage emotions leads to great school performances and interhuman relationships.

After studying the adaptive role of affectivity, it has been observed that subjects with a high intelligence quotient (IQ) do not cope as well in everyday life, and those with a smaller IQ than the first category are more resourceful in practice.

Sternberg (1988) has reached the conclusion that those who manage to overcome the everyday obstacles of life have the ability to understand and establish relationships with those around them, a proof of social intelligence. H. Gardner (1993) considers that teachers, politicians, spiritual leaders are those who have a higher degree of interpersonal intelligence because they have the ability to understand, discover, and know what motivates those around them, how they work and how one can cooperate and work together with them. And last, but not least, interpersonal intelligence is the ability to open up and introspect, in such a way as to create a strict model of yourself, which can be used to act appropriately in life.

Many psychologists’ conclusion is that success in life is given by a cumulative academic intelligence which includes the ability to put into practice the theoretical aspect and emotional intelligence, with its focus on human relationships. Therefore, when talking about people adapting to their environment, one can also add non-cognitive aspects of intelligence such as the affective, social, personal factors, all of which contribute to success in life.

Emotional intelligence involves self-awareness, self-discipline, and empathy, and it is in charge of controlling our impulses and feelings. Emotional intelligence can be improved. Childhood is the ideal time to develop emotional intelligence; however, it can also be successfully developed at adulthood. Nowadays, emotional intelligence has become a milestone in employment criteria or career



advancement, and educational programs built on it have become a starting point in social politics for preventing illnesses or criminality.

The main neural circuits which are at the base of emotional intelligence: self-evaluation and identification of self, self-control, and empathy represent abilities which facilitate the efficiency of human interactions and relationships.

Richard Davidson, an expert in neuroscience from the University of Wisconsin, claims that depending on our mood, the brain activity is intensified and localized differently, as follows: a positive and optimistic state of spirit when one is full of energy and enthusiastic by one's purpose intensifies the brain activity on the left side, behind the forehead. Such a state of spirit offers the possibility of functioning at maximum potential.

One can notice an increased activity on the right side when we are depressed, without energy and motivation, stressed, and predisposed to mistakes. Each of us wants to succeed in life! Academic intelligence is not the only ability that differentiates those who want to succeed from others. One should also consider initiative, interpersonal efficiency, and ambition.

A method through which children can increase their chances of success and thus have a better life would be for social and emotional intelligence to become part of each school's curriculum. Data shows that children who systematically learn social and emotional intelligence tactics such as managing emotions, using empathy, and collaboration, have more success. They have less problems connected to violence and abuse of harmful substances, it is quite the opposite: they like school more, are more careful during class and have grades which are 11% better.

Empathy is considered one of the most significant dimensions of emotional intelligence. It is defined by S Marcus (1987) as "a psychic phenomenon of reliving the other's states, thoughts and actions, attained through the psychological transposition of self into an objective model of human behaviour, which helps with understanding the way in which the other interprets the world" (pp. 38).

Empathy is built on the capacity to infer and feel the other's emotions, as well as the ability to read and decipher the information provided in non-verbal communication, this representing at least 60% of interhuman communication.

It is known that words can describe just a small group of emotions and feelings, however, through empathy one can build the overall picture, with a high importance of non-verbal information: actions, mimic and movement, tone of voice. Affective states are expressed 90% through non-verbal methods.

The message transmitted by someone almost always gains or loses importance depending on the mode it was relayed: tonality, intensity, accompanying gestures, state of mind, all of them shape the emotions the interlocutor wants to communicate, since all of these elements define "how" one says more than "what" he says.

One can delimit and differentiate academic intelligence (which is defined through logical thought, acquired in schools, and evaluated through the intellectual



quotient) from emotional intelligence (the way in which one opens up to others' feelings, evaluated through the emotional quotient) in terms accessible to everyone: "the voice of the heart and the voice of reason".

The control and management of emotions, as well as predicting the others' emotions, will help educate, improve, and perfect emotional intelligence. On a personal level, one can focus on the correct identification, management, and control over negative emotions, which are also destructive (rage, anger, depression, anxiety).

Identifying and managing one's emotions is the path to the discovery of your own self, by recognizing the feelings you experience. The first step in the process of managing and juggling emotions for your own benefit is when you succeed in identifying them in such a way that you can position yourself in the best and most advantageous situations or instances. Those who succeed in becoming aware of their own emotions have the possibility of eliminating negative emotions and actively participating in their management. Those who do not succeed to identify their emotions or are overwhelmed by them will be helpless, will not be able to get rid of those feelings, will not know how to confront them, and moreover, they will not be able to confront something they do not know it exists. They will always live under the impetus of emotions, not being able to confront them, or overcome crisis situations, a conflict which will become an often occurrence, without a way of solving it.

Goleman (1995, p. 56) mentioned Aristoteles who observed that emotions need to be in accordance to the situation, or proportionate with it: he considered that a life without passion would be boring and lacking in colour as "the ups and downs" of life have the role to spice it up, add colour to it.

Researchers who studied the moods of hundreds of women and men have concluded that their subjects do not want to avoid negative feelings, they want to change their impetuosity and uncontrollable nature.

To succeed in life, each of us, sportspeople, must learn to estimate the main dimensions of emotional intelligence. Our own sportive performances will be improved only by discovering and managing our own emotions, finding out the cause that provoked their appearance, but especially, our internal capacity to recognize the fine difference between feelings and actions.

Knowing our own self will help with the management of emotions: stopping wrath and rage; tolerating and overcoming our own frustrations by tempering them; avoiding aggression and violence; transforming violent feelings and stress during competitions and practice into constructive efforts, encouragements, and self-respect for the coach/teacher, family, teammates. Personal motivation through increasing accountability (self-responsibility), concentration-focus on one task only, and perseverance to accomplish it, avoiding impulsivity, and obtaining good results by stimulating creativity to obtain solutions and new ideas.

Incredible results will be obtained (especially for team sports) after raising the empathy level of each sportsperson, in such a way that they could read other



people's emotions, see their perspective, listen and empathize with them by echoing their sensitivity and emotions.

A good collaboration between coach-sportsperson, but also sportsperson-sportsperson (among teammates) can be realised through the development of the ability to analyse and understand interpersonal relationships, solving conflicts, and negotiating misunderstandings.

There are a series of characteristics which are modelled in time and contribute to a better interpersonal relationship, an element without which team work would not function at a higher level such as: openness, friendliness, involvement, tactical, attentiveness, politeness, ambition, balance, cooperation, trustful, encouraging.

The specific training of each sportsperson will include, besides tactical information and strategies, a specific psychological training: gaining self-control, managing emotions before and during competition, maintaining a psychic tone, being level-headed in critical situations, under pressure; interacting with others, their teammates, or adversaries (in the case of team sports) by recognising and understanding the emotions and feelings of those around them during competitions and capitalising on the adversaries' mistakes which happened as a result their impossibility of using emotional management to gain personal or team advantages. This strategy requires time and a good preparation of the coach/psychologist who has to cultivate this education and apply it at the right moment.

Developing and educating the children's emotional abilities will not only influence sport performance, but also their daily life, and will lead to great academic results and in their interaction with people. In numerous cases, it has been proven that those who practice performance sport or in a controlled environment are more balanced, empathetic, disciplined, have a winner's spirit, are creative, popular and are good leaders. Therefore, a special task is given to their families, parents, and school.

The cultivation of all of the aforementioned feelings, as well as identifying them in their own self and also in their peers' self, developing the ability to listen and empathise with the others to succeed in resonating together, to take advantage of all positive initiatives, constructive for achieving superior results are pathways we should all follow and encourage.

Conclusions

Obtaining outstanding sport performances is possible only through the participation of the entire team, both of sportspeople and specialised staff: coach, psychologist, doctor, physical trainer, administrator, etc.

Emotional health is vital for a creative, balanced, and active mind. A balanced emotional state will be reached if one succeeds in recognising their feelings, where they come from, and what their connection is to the mind and body.



The emotions one feels and the way one acts directed by them can determine our success or failure. It is important to manage negative emotions, if one does not know how to organize or eliminate them, the body weakens, immunity is lowered and localised at organ level – vulnerable, affected, and exacerbating the deterioration. Negative emotions are considered toxins or emotional garbage that must be eliminated from one's body.

That is the reason why one needs to find and exploit all existing methods and means to reduce stress and negative emotions: laughter, being in a good mood, physical activity, all are comforting, relaxing, and recharge your body with positivity.

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