

PSYCHOLOGICAL SKILLS FOR ATHLETES: VISUALISATION & MENTAL REHEARSAL



THE POWER OF VISUAL REPRESENTATION

“One picture speaks a thousand words”

2 groups:

1. Picture which contains a lot of detail
2. Detailed, written description of picture.

The visual representation of the picture has a far greater impact. Ss understand it, ‘see’ it, remember it.



WHAT IS VISUALISATION?

We have the ability to create a mental representation or picture in our mind

Perception without sensation

The perception is simulated



VISUALISATION IS A MULTISENSORY EVENT

We can experience a number of sensory events:

Auditory

Kinaesthetic

Visual

Smell

Taste



VISUALISATION



The ability to use one's imagination shown to be of importance in sport.

The use of visualisation has been shown to enhance sporting performance.

Many athletes use visualisation whilst in training, and to prepare for competition.

THE NEURAL PATHWAY

“Riding a bike, once you have learned it, you never forget”.



Cycling= a physical skill, that needs to be practiced in order to master it. Turn the pedals, balance on two wheels, process visual info coming from ahead, steer a direction, vary the speed etc etc.

Once learned, there is a “cycling neural pathway” in our brain, a “cognition”, which can be tapped into when required.

THE NEURAL PATHWAY

We can tap into a given neural pathway by:

- 1) Performing an action.
- 2) Visualising ourselves performing that action.



Neuro-imagery research suggests that visualisation is functionally equivalent to performance of the action.

Visualisation can be a substitute for a particular activity.

USING VISUALISATION

Choose the skill you wish to improve/practice

1. Visualise the **perfect** execution of that skill
2. **Feel** yourself perform the activity
3. **See** yourself perform the activity
4. Experience a successful performance of that skill by replaying it in your mind over and over again until it is automatic
5. Relax your body and mind
6. Make your visualisation as vivid as you can...add details.

USING VISUALISATION

With a coach, sports psychologist or sports professional **SCRIPT** your visualisation.

- **See** yourself perform the skill perfectly, watch yourself: Slowly, Smoothly, Correctly
- **Feel** yourself perform the skill, perfectly: Correctly.

Imagine the scene vividly.

What else do you see?

What else do you hear?

What else do you feel or experience?



The greater the detail, the greater the impact of the visualisation.

USING VISUALISATION

CASE STUDY

400 metre runner.

Script the perfect 400 metres

Divide into 4 x 100m segments

First 100m: **PUSH**

Second 100m: **PACE**

Third 100m: **PREPARE**

Fourth 100m: **SPRINT**



WHAT DO ATHLETES USE VISUALISATION FOR?

Learn/practice sports skills

Control arousal

Formulating a strategy

Self confidence

Focussing attention

Error correction



USING VISUALISATION

LEARN/PRACTICE/CORRECT SKILLS

Using visualisation to imagine the perfect execution of a skill, or to correct an error.

All of this uses the neural pathway, adds to the cognitions.

CONTROLLING COMPETITION DAY ANXIETY.

Many athletes use visualisation to imagine themselves, confident, in control, focussed, ready.

USING VISUALISATION

RACE PLANS & STRATEGIES

In events such as 800m, 1500m etc athletes may have a race plan.

Use visualisation around the race plan.

AND also have additional pre-prepared responses fully visualised, so that if the race plan cannot be used, you are prepared.

Vivid imagery helps an athlete to prepare mentally, to prepare for **any** scenario.

USING VISUALISATION

Tiger Woods, Andy Murray, Jessica Ennis-Hill, Jonny Wilkinson, Wayne Rooney.

Mike Atherton

Former batsman and captain of the English Cricket team: “ *I do the visualisation stuff – what’s going to come, who’s going to bowl. What tactics they will use.....so that nothing will come as a surprise*”.

Jessica Ennis Hill

“*I use visualisation to think about the perfect technique. If I can get that perfect image in my head, then hopefully it’ll affect my physical performance.*”



USING VISUALISATION

Andy Murray on visualisation and mental prep:

“I have sat on Centre Court with no one there and thought a bit about the court, the matches I have played there. I want to make sure I feel as good as possible so I have a good tournament.”



USING VISUALISATION

Wayne Rooney.

“I lie in bed the night before the game and visualise myself scoring goals or doing well. You're trying to put yourself in that moment and trying to prepare yourself, to have a 'memory' before the game. I've always done it, my whole life.”



VISUALISATION CONCLUSIONS

RESEARCH SHOWS:

Athletes using mental practice & physical practice shown to improve skilled performance to a greater degree than those who used physical practice alone.

Visualisation is effective in patients undergoing stroke rehabilitation; those who employ physio & visualisation shown to recover more quickly.