

Sport Psychology: Self-Talk

Sometimes the mental aspect of sports is just as important as the physical aspect. Yet despite its importance, it is often neglected. What do these components look like? Studies have shown that athletes who dream about their success, talk to themselves, and imagine success in their brains will perform better on the court, field, or whatever skill they are involved in. Many doubters have become believers in sport psychology. "From doubt came confidence. From distraction came focus. From anxiety came intensity. From timidity came aggressiveness. From inconsistency came consistency. And, most importantly, from decent results came outstanding results" (Taylor, 2012).

These techniques such as mental imagery, goal setting, self-talk, and others have been empirically shown to help an athlete succeed. This month we will discuss the technique of self-talk. Self-talk is defined as the verbalization or statements athletes repeat to themselves prior to or during skill execution (Begley, 2012). Performing these techniques can improve focus and slow the brain down, giving it the ability to devote more "power" to the specific task at hand. The goal of self-talk is to replace negative thinking with more positive messages. For instance, a basketball player preparing to shoot free throws should never tell him or herself, "I'm not going to make this shot." If they do, they need to consider how self-talk can help them. Another example is the 5k runner who is past by another runner should not be discouraged, rather they should turn to a mental statement, "I can catch them. I've done this before."



Some quick tips for developing self-talk are:

- 1. Choose a phrase.** It can be as simple as "I'm running strong," or "Relax, relax, relax." Repeat your phrase over and over either during or leading up to your specific task.
- 2. Practice your phrase at a deeper level.** Once you've successfully utilized your phrase, use it more specifically. For the basketball player, "I've made this shot before, and it's doable," or the runner coming into the last mile of their race, "I'm in great shape, finish strong." Never give up. The power of the mind is strong. Practicing these components of self-talk can decrease anxiety and increase overall performance.

References:

Begley, K. (2012). Attentional focus and self-talk. Retrieved from <http://www.sportpsychologytoday.com/sport-psychology-for-coaches/attentional-focus-and-self-talk/>
Taylor, J. (2012). Sport imagery: Athletes' most powerful mental tool. Retrieved from <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-power-prime/201211/sport-imagery-athletes-most-powerful-mental-tool>

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