Coaching Mental Training – Part 2
In Part 1, helping young athletes develop their sport imagination was presented.
In this segment, fundamental anxiety and fear management is presented.
Too much anxiety and fear results in a constriction of blood vessels in the brain.
The more the vessels constrict the less oxygen reaches the brain cells.
The less oxygen to the brain cells, the more the athlete loses mental and physiological grounding.
Some symptoms may be observed as fast breathing, dispersed or diverted attention, change in the feelings of the legs, deportation from physical acuity, glazed eyes, excess pacing, feeling of loss of strength, increased rapidity of speech - In the extreme, panic attack.
The opposite end of this continuum is not enough anxiety, or rather suppression of adrenalin.
When there is too little anxiety, competitive intensity is reduced.
The loss of competitive intensity can lead to lethargy in technical applications and competitive effort.
Positive anxiety is when there is balance between oxygen to the brain, adrenaline, and affirmative self-dialogue.
Each athlete is different in discovering their way to positive anxiety.
A foundational step in helping an athlete learn to regulate his/her emotions is teaching the athlete how to breathe.
Proper technique breathing enhances the body’s ability to increase blood flow to the brain.
This in turn increases the oxygen intake in the brain’s cells, helping the anxious or fearful athlete stay in the core of grounding.
Trained singers and wind musicians are good examples of applying effective breathing.
One effective breathing exercise from the music industry is for the athlete to lay on his or her back, with a book placed on the stomach near the diaphragm. . . .
The athlete then breathes by causing the book to rise on inhale and lower on exhale, repeating slowly for about 15 seconds . . .
. . . The athlete then slowly rolls over and stands up.
Another exercise is for the athlete to stand up and pant very fast from the diaphragm for about 5 to 7 seconds.
On a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is panic attack and 1 is near total emotional and mental lethargy, usually the most effective range for positive anxiety is a rating of 3 or 4.
Depending on the athlete, a rating other than 3 or 4 is an invitation to engage in effective breathing.
Initially, when the rating is over 4, ask the athlete to take 2 deep effective breathes.
If the rating is less than 3, then 3 to 4 seconds of fast panting breaths.
Eventually the athlete learns to sense their effective breathing needs without using the rating system . . .
... And learn how many breaths (or how long to pant) are needed.
Not only is effective breathing a beneficial tool for sport, it is a skill that can apply to other areas of life, such as public speaking, taking exams, and job interviews. This helps the coach contribute in just another way to the athlete’s human development.
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