

UNDERSTANDING OPTIMAL PERFORMANCE
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Introduction

Helping athletes become their best is a constant challenge for all coaches. Having a model or blueprint for teaching skills and correcting errors is essential for quality coaching. Coaches, in numerous ways, are constantly trying to improve their athletes' skill performance and confidence while building connections and fostering character development. An athletes' performance is certainly improved through practice and repetitions as improved consistency in performance leads to confidence, and confidence leads to trust. Mental toughness in athletes is a difficult concept to explain but essential for long-term success in sport. Fostering mental toughness requires both physical and mental challenges. In sport, this is most often executed during practice sessions. Optimal performance in sport occurs when athletes are able to focus their attention on relevant information, processes, and behaviors; while at the same time, blocking out distracting or irrelevant cues.

Methods

This workshop will focus on helping coaches and instructors better understand the factors of optimal performance (see diagram below). Specifically, the concepts of learning, the DP2 model of teaching sport skills, understanding controllable and uncontrollable parts of sport, strategies for coaches to foster mentally tough athletes, and suggestions for preparing athletes to perform at their best during competition will be presented.

Significance

To be the best version of themselves, and reach optimal levels of performance, athletes must train their mind and body to work for themselves, rather than against themselves. Maintaining concentration is critical to performing at one's best, yet figuring out what to focus on, and maintaining the correct attentional focus during performance is not easy. Athletes must become self-aware of the controllable and uncontrollable aspects of their particular sport. Mental toughness is a concept that is much talked about in athletics but is not very well understood. Some coaches preach to their athletes that being mentally tough is the only way to succeed in their sport and in the rest of their lives, but how one explains and teaches mental toughness can be a determining factor in athletes' ability to build their skillset. With the consistency that comes from DP2 practice, athletes become confident they have the physical and mental skills to perform the challenge at hand. With confidence, athletes trust their instincts and unconsciously and effortlessly perform the skill.

