A model for psychological skills training in table tennis
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The introduction of psychological skills training to the England National Squad was a gradual process, involving observation, interview, psychological testing, education and individualized program creation, which resulted in a model being explicated. This paper describes the development and operation of that model in elite table tennis.

Observation of the structure, operation, constraints and pressures of training and competition environments provided a context for the introduction of psychological skills training. This was complemented by in depth interviews with individual players covering biography and using the critical incident technique to examine success and failure experiences, giving further insight into their perceptions and feelings. Motivation, stress management, concentration and success leading to enhanced confidence were issues which regularly emerged from these sessions.

The research on psychological correlates of peak performance (e.g., Mahoney & Aven生态系统 1977, Highlen & Bennett 1979) then informed thinking and a range of tests was administered to enrich the picture of individual players' psychological strengths and weaknesses. The Test of Attentional and Interpersonal Style, the Sport Competition Anxiety Test, the Competitive State Anxiety Inventory 2 and several tests of mental imagery were completed by the players. Individual profiles revealed a similar picture to the interviews and to previous work. Individuals varied immensely, but common issues revolved around stress management, self-confidence and concentration or attention.

On the basis of the information collected feedback was presented to each player individually and comments elicited, leading to the informal presentation of the individual's proposed program and reactions to it, which typically were favorable. This commitment was enhanced by inclusion of psychological skills training in a goal-setting exercise for the season, which then took place.

The ensuing months involved a psychological skills training period. Typically, relaxation was introduced first and once this was established work on imagery began. A self-affirmation exercise elicited statements designed to enhance self-confidence and these were included in regular training along with relaxation and imagery.

It became clear that structures were needed for the introduction of psychological skills into the competition environment. Analysis of competitive table tennis suggested the need for four types of psychological skills routine. These are for pre-competition preparation, re-focusing following substantial between match breaks, regular within match monitoring of mental state, and finally, coping with specific negative situations during play. These routines need to be tested in practice situations, simulating match play as closely as possible, and then in minor competitions, before being applied in major events. Once applied, feedback and evaluation are essential, leading to modification of problematic elements.

Thus a five-stage model has been developed where the first stage of assessment and individualized program development leads into the psychological skills training phase. In stage three routines are developed to prepare that performer to cope with competition. These routines are applied in stage four and evaluation, with possible modification, occurs in the final recursive phase. This model has implications for long-term involvement by the sport psychologist. It also demonstrates the need to consider individuals and sport-specific demands in developing effective psychological skills training.