2.2 The coach's role

Introduction

Throughout an athlete's career there will be different actors or protagonists who accompany the subject through their development. Each one fulfills a specific and key role. It is important to highlight the following people: parents, teachers, trainers, friends and partners.

Throughout the next unit, we will focus on the role that the sports coach must play as a motivational agent.

The importance of the coach for the athlete's professional development and, above all, as the agent responsible for maintaining a subject's adequate motivational levels, has been the focus of research in the field of psychology applied to sport.

The importance of the coach for both athletes and spectators does not go unnoticed in the area of training.

There are two noteworthy theoretical areas that have studied the importance of the coach in the initiation stages. In the field of psychology, these areas of development were studied (Cumming, Smith, and Smoll, 2006, Duda and Balaguer 1999) to measure the impact of the leader on athletes.

Leadership models

One example of a leadership model is Smoll and Smith's (1984) mediational model. Initially, this model was oriented towards the study of behavior however with time and further research it has been oriented towards a more cognitive-social style.

This model analyzes the way in which a coach's comments influence her athletes. The impact of a coach's spontaneous and unexpected behaviors during training and competitions is measured. Thus, they try to define leadership styles or communication profiles that will generate appropriate behavior on the part of the athlete, avoiding a lower level of motivation.

Another model is Chelladurai's (1993) multidimensional model of leadership. It is based on the understanding that positive results in terms of athletes' performance will be related to: coherence in the leader's behavior, her adaptation to what the athlete prefers and the use of behavior adapted to the context. These behaviors are evaluated using three scales:

- The leadership style that the athlete prefers
- The coach's self-perception regarding her behavior
- The leadership as perceived by the athlete

The climate that the coach generates in the group when scheduling workloads and tasks are important to increase the team's motivation. For this, different variables must be applied such as: authority style, rewards management, differentiated work groups, time management.

In a study conducted with soccer players, it was shown that coaches with credibility (Janssen and Dale, 2002) generate higher levels of commitment from players in terms of their involvement with the task. This is the product of a communication style based on emotional support and clear instructions. Coaches with these types of characteristics report that athletes are less prone to abandon and also enjoy participating in activities more, which leads them to have greater interest and external motivation for the sport.

Coach profiles

Authors such as Duda and Balaguer (1999) differentiate between two types of coaches. Firstly, those with a high degree of involvement in the task, making reference to coaches with communication styles that match the player and have an approach that is supportive. These coaches lead the athlete to experience the activity with high levels of motivation, lower anxiety levels and with the important component of 'fun'. Secondly, there are those coaches whose ego is strongly implicated, where their most relevant characteristics are punishment and a lack of support for the athlete.

Coaches whose ego is highly implicated generate increased chances of sports abandonment and one of the most outstanding reasons is a loss of motivation. On the contrary, coaches that focus on the task are able to generate greater athlete adherence to the sport in question.

Janssen and Dale (2002) refer to coach credibility for those coaches who interpret sporting success in a different way, going beyond winning or losing. This coach profile encourages the athlete to be more self-determined and self-regulated, which favors the development of intrinsic motivation.

The coach's role generates levels of motivation in the athlete which are related to adherence or non-adherence to the sport. Sports psychologists should pay particular attention when working with athletes on issues related to motivation and the numerous variables used to analyze it. Low levels of motivation are not always only related to the athlete.

The variables that the coach should generate in athletes are summarized below:

- Promote positive feedback.
- Develop process-orientated goals.
- Promote less difficult goals in the beginning.
- Leave the possibility of choice open to the subject.
- Establish the objectives for each task.
- Stimulate social connections.
- Stimulate interest in learning.
- Use of feedback.

Motivational techniques in sport

This is a theme of interest and concern for sports coaches. One a coach's objectives is to find the necessary tools that allow the athlete to maintain optimal levels of motivation, without elevating emotional states of anxiety. The questions to be asked at this moment are: Is it possible to increase an athlete's level of motivation? Can motivation be trained?

There are multiple strategies to work on motivation, both directly and indirectly.

We will begin by reviewing some of those which are most used in the field of sports.

The technique to formulate objectives, inspired by the work of Charles A. Garfield (1987) is a mental training program for the achievement of maximum athletic performance:

TIME: 30 - 40 minute session.

ADVANTAGES: defines the objectives and studies the benefits of reaching these objectives.

1) Long-term objectives. Describe in as much detail as possible the concrete actions to be achieved (result of each match, number of matches pending, league promotion, goals/baskets, final date for achievement).
2) Medium-term objectives. Description of the actions and timing of the evaluation to determine if the objective has been achieved.
3) Description of the short-term objectives, to evaluate the capabilities and with this identify whether the long-term objectives are being achieved.

4) Associate rewards with the set objectives and establish the order of importance: feel better, be stronger, win, learn, share.
5) Establish a start date to commence the work to achieve the proposed objectives.
6) Set the date to evaluate achievements.
7) Visualize the experiences you will feel if you reach the established objectives: how you will feel, in what place, in what area of the playing field.

OBSERVATIONS: The clearer and better defined these objectives are in the short-, medium- and long-term, the better the athlete will be able to tolerate frustrations and distractions, as they can be included in the action plan.

Numerous authors over the last few years have dedicated themselves to studying techniques aimed at improving motivation. In this case, we will analyze the contributions of Weinberg (1994), who discusses different types of techniques.

1) During training, the coach should focus the activities on athletes successfully achieving tasks. The intention here is that subjects experience triumph or success.

2) Provide athletes with the opportunity to take control of the workload in some circumstances. The athlete must assume responsibilities at controlled times.

3) Coaches must provide positive reinforcement with words of encouragement to their athletes. This is also valid for all teammates.

4) Plan considering potentially simple objectives for the athlete to achieve.

5) Offer variability in training practices. Routines impinge on motivation.

6) Ensure fluid communication styles. Dialog between peers should not be problematic.

7) Recognize the individual contributions of each of the athletes. Make sure they feel that their contributions have positive effects.

Rejeski and Kenney (1988) borrow different motivational techniques from the theory of learning, which can be transferred to sport.

1) Work on the athlete's awareness levels regarding the benefits of sports practice.

2) Educate athletes about the objectives to be achieved. It is not just about sporting achievements.

3) Provide resources for managing negative thoughts.

4) Offer clear information regarding progress in training and achievements.

Motivation is energy directed to the achievement of a goal or objective. Some authors such as Garfield (1984) relate motivation directly with an athlete's willpower. This idea establishes that an objective is achieved through resolution and obsession. Willpower itself is not easy to control, the aim is to know how to direct this energy towards achieving objectives.

The athlete often fails to connect their sporting achievements with willpower and does not discover the direct link between these two variables. This means that during an impulse of instantaneous energy that leads her to achieve an objective, this impulse is not related to voluntary intentions of action on the part of the subject.

Many athletes manage to identify, through self-knowledge, their ability to manage their own willpower and other athletes, through training and experience, achieve this also. These athletes achieve better sporting results by managing this variable. They are considered to have optimal levels of maturity and self-realization.

Authors such as Charles Garfield (1984) argue that is possible to raise athletes' levels of motivation through the use of mental training techniques.

Next, we will look at some exercises to train willpower and thus increase the motivational levels of athletes.

Willpower is a variable that is powered by energy, so the strategies that are proposed are based on recovering past memories related to sports success or memories of emotional moments that have occurred during competition.

The technique used to train this resource is called grouping. It consists of a free association of ideas, where the objective is to free the mind and write down everything that the athlete imagines.

Three phases can be used to train willpower, which are divided into: Identify willpower - evaluate willpower and outline the objective.

Training strategies: First phase.

- Recall at least three moments of sporting success. Briefly describe them in one line.
- Review potentially positive experiences and write them down, describing the emotions related to that situation, highlighting the most significant words.
- Write down actions performed on certain occasions and how they have been influential in success. Highlight the most representative of these actions.

Through this process, the athlete will be able to understand how she is able to increase her willpower at certain times. This allows the athlete to better discover her abilities, increasing her self-awareness.

By revisiting memories, the athlete discovers her potential capabilities. It is essential to find out what the athlete likes to do by differentiating their personal tastes. Through these activities, the subject discovers their potential that can then be used during training or competitions to achieve improvements in results.

Now, with the information previously collected, it is possible to advance to a second kind of training. With these registered actions, the athlete can measure how each action impacts her from the volitional point and thus mark each word with an impact level. The levels can be: high, medium, low.

We then move on to the second phase of evaluating willpower:

- Be an active referent in competitions and training.
- Place yourself in the role of observer and analyze other athletes in training and competition.
- Use past experiences related to success.
- Be able to imagine results using mental imagery about the future.
- Create mental images associated with feelings of well-being.
- Project the ability to set a record in a competition.
- Enter with intentions to beat personal records without competing with peers.
- Exchange opinions with both coaches and teammates. Exchange information as a way to understand how others view the world.

Third phase, objective profile:

Here the athlete must generate images about training based on experiences and these images will serve as a motor for willpower.

Use the data obtained during the previous two phases so the athlete has a written account that serves as a source of information to create their training programs based on achievable realities.

- The athlete must write down an objective to be reached, expressing feelings of desire about what she intends to achieve. This should be highlighted on a sheet of paper. Then, as in the second phase, the athlete must note down what has been generated in terms of willpower from what she has written. Then she will think about the possible objective as if living it in reality and note the sensations that are generated.

The objective of these tools is to keep the athlete's energy levels active so that they generate the willpower to work with a consequent activation in motivation. To the extent that the athlete discovers her resources and find ways to enhance them, she can access optimal levels of motivation for determining moments.

To summarize the above, we can highlight two relevant issues to consider:

- Motivation, generally, tends to be seen as a stable feature and not as a process. Here we have differentiated the levels of motivation with which an athlete begins her activity from the levels of motivation with which she continues throughout her sports career. Motivational levels oscillate throughout a career and thus we want to consider understanding motivation as a dynamic process and not as a concrete stable situation.
- Research oriented to improve motivational processes must take into account the role of cognition. Cognitive processes generate changes in the desired direction.

Motivational climate

Next we will examine the possible orientations of a motivational climate that can be developed in sports practice.

Firstly, we have the *refinement climate*, which in turn is related to positive reinforcement that the coach uses with athletes when: they work intensively, they show progress, they help others to learn through cooperation, when there is mutual collaboration between the players. When these variables are manifested, players receive stimuli from the coach, which creates a positive motivational climate.

Secondly we have the *competitive climate,* where athletes feel that: they can be punished if their performance diminishes or their performance falls,

athletes with more skills will receive more recognition and attention, whereby the coach stimulates competition among team members.

> *The climate generated by a coach is decisive in terms of improving an athlete's intrinsic motivation and self-confidence.*

Authors such as Treasure (1995) propose that, if motivational climates of refinement are generated by the coach, this can increase levels of intrinsic motivation and improved self-confidence, especially in young athletes.

This means that, if environmental stimuli are manipulated, motivational climates can be generated towards developing intrinsic motivation.

The conditions to be taken into account by the coaches for the development of said climate are the following:

- Tasks: in this case the task must be characterized by the variety of exercises. This keeps athletes interested, entertains them and motivates them.
- Activities: the athlete must be involved in the decision-making processes related to the activities to be undertaken. Ensure they have an active role in this process.
- Rewards: issues related to self-improvement and achievements towards this should be rewarded. Avoid comparisons with other athletes which can generate negative competition.
- The group: the learning environment must be cooperative and the tasks must be aimed at enhancing individual capacities.
- Evaluation: in this case, self-evaluation should be applied where the athlete has access to data about her personal progress and the rewards for her effort.
- Time: temporal organization is a determinant for how variables interact.

When generating motivational climates aimed at improvement, athletes experience issues related to competencies whereby these competencies are perceived in a positive way. They find greater satisfaction in their tasks, they are less bored, they have an increased perception of the skills they have without generating violence, they work harder, their self-esteem improves and they have more fun.

Authors such as Reinboth and Duda (2004) explain the relationship between motivational climate and an increase in perceived abilities, and how these two variables improve the athlete's self-esteem.

Ames (1992) proposes two types of motivational climates. The first climate is where the focus is on the task whereby the athlete is motivated by individual improvement as a result of promoting effort. The second climate is the ego-oriented or victory climate, where the athlete is compared to others and her achievements depend on how much she surpasses others and not herself.

In the first case, the athlete feels more satisfied with the results obtained and personal progress, while the second climate is related to exceeding normative skills.

Both climates coexist in an integrated manner. Generally, in any particular situation there are moments of both motivational climates. The agents in the context determine the direction of the climate.

It is understood that the task-oriented motivational climate generates greater levels of motivation in the athlete and a high sense of belonging with respect to sport. Which leads to the fact that if this type of motivational climate is stimulated by coaches, athletes will spend more years dedicated to their sport.

Authors such as Hart (1989) argue that in addition to the coach, the athletes' parents are a determinant to generate a positive motivational climate. Parents generate positive affect in the subjects by generating a climate oriented to the task, more than if this climate were oriented to the ego.

In terms of commitment, some authors such as Scanlan, Russell, Magyar, Scanlan (2009) introduce the concept of persistence as a determinant for committed behavior on the part of the athlete. This term refers to a psychological profile related to interest in continuing to develop a desired activity. Commitment is closely related to an athlete's level of enjoyment, with the opportunities the sport creates in terms of social interactions and the discovery of their possibilities and limitations.

With this information, sports psychologists will be able to create a context according to a subject's reality and, thus, propose intervention strategies to increase motivational levels. The intention is to find optimal balance in terms of the degrees of motivation that the athlete experiences.

The coach and group of psychologists are responsible for directing both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. It is important to remember that levels of intrinsic motivation generate the highest levels of adherence for the athlete in terms of persistence in sport. Product of which, from their own interests, the subject will understand whether they are motivated or not in their sport.

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