Analysis on the Role of Psychological Skill Training to Middle-Long-Distance Race Athletes during the Game

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Abstract: With the development of competitive sports, psychological skill training is becoming more and more important in the game. Middle distance running requires a high level of strength and endurance, thus it is common for athletes during the competition to encounter a variety of psychological problems. By means of literature review, interviews and analysis on other psychological problems during the game, the research findings show that middle distance runner in the race easily experience anxiety, complacency, over excitement and other emotions, so the training of psychological skills in the game is particularly important.

Introduction
With the continuous progress of athletic sports development, and the constant upgrading and innovations of sports technique and tactical training methods, differences among athletes on the physical level have become smaller and smaller. Therefore, psychological skill training has gradually become an access to the breakthrough of athletes’ performance. Psychological skill training is a coaching process which helps athletes to purposefully and consciously grasp psychological controlling skills through a series of approaches, and enables them to develop personal psychological competence, and adjust their mental states. Among all the track and field sports items, middle-long-distance race requires high speed and high level of endurance. In the duration of competitions and trainings, due to the long distance and repetitive motions, it is easy for athletes to experience exercise fatigue, and emotions with negative psychological characteristics. They are prone to be nervous, depressed, or frustrated. Therefore, an adoption of positive and effective psychological skill training plays an important role in the breakthrough of the bottlenecks in middle-long-distance race athletes' performance. It facilitates athletes to adjust their mental states during the games, and makes it possible to obtain excellent result.

Mental States of Middle-Long-Distance Race Athletes during the Game

Pre-Competition State
Pre-competition training is the professional practice in which athletes engage before a series of games, in order to achieve good performance. Generally, the training performance level during pre-competition period has a decisive significance on the results of the competition. With the continuous improvement of the development of competitive sports, coaches begin to attach great importance to psychological training in pre-match training. The followings are the main psychological problems that athletes may experience in pre-competition training.

Anxiety
Weinberg defines anxiety as a kind of negative emotional state which associates with physical activation or arousal, mainly shown as mental stress, worry, concern or fear, etc. Pre-competition anxiety is a common phenomenon existing in athletes’ performance in sports. If it is not effectively controlled and solved, it will have a directly influence on the athletes' performance. Endler in his study of anxiety status summarized that the state of pre-competition anxiety consists of five main
factors: fear of failure, fear of negative social evaluation, fear of injury, situation uncertainties, and routine being changed.

Middle-long-distance race requires athletes to generate high speed and endurance. The given practice intensity and the energy-consuming training bring both physical and mental fatigue to athletes. The main pre-competition psychological performance of athletes in middle-long-distance race training includes fear of failure, and fear of injuries in games. Fear of failure before games presents itself as an urgent sense of duty, which causes great pressure to athletes concerning their perspective ranks in the coming race. As a result, anxiety and tension make it harder to achieve great outcome. Fear of failure is reflected in athletes’ low self-esteem, lack of experience and passion for the game, and low level of performance in the game. Fear of injuries in the game is another important factor leading to pre-competition anxiety in middle-long-distance race athletes training. Athletes with injury experiences in the long period of training may suffer from certain trauma after their physical recovery. In addition, special training methods adopted in middle-long-distance race training, such as the arrangement of pre-competition interval running and varied pace running, may turned out to be boring and dull to some athletes and bring boredom, fidget, and anxiety to these runners.

Excitement

Over-excitement mental state before competition will seriously impact on the performance of middle-long-distance race athletes in the game. State of excitement is also called psychomotor excitement. The main symptoms players may have before games are shown as being hysteric, agitated, action and speech increase, along with impulse of motion and low quality of sleep.

In middle-long-distance race, the main cause of pre-competition over-excitement lies in the following points. First, over-attachment of importance to the game. Some players were so eager to demonstrate their competence in the game that they had been in a state of excitement all the time before the game, and had already reached their peak state, therefore their competition state went downhill when the real game began. Second, lack of competition experience. Underestimation of difficulties and complexity of the game which leads to unrealistic optimism may also be the cause of runners’ over-excitement state.

In-Competition State

Middle-long-distance requires high level of performance in terms of competition intensity, distance, and time. All kinds of situations may emerge during the game. Psychologically, during the game period athletes can be influenced by certain athletic tactics, their anxiety or other sudden factors. It mainly includes the following aspects.

Abandonment

In middle-long-distance races, it is common to see athletes withdraw before the game is over, and lose their competition results. Other than injury factors, psychological factor is another cause to this phenomenon. Psychological causes that affect athletes to abandon the race are mainly reflected in three ways: first, with professional specialty, high-intensity repetition of the same motion, middle-long-distance race training may engender a sense of boredom in runners. Athletic ability gaps among different runners make it hard for the disadvantaged athletes to surpass their rivals, and therefore they will be depressed, and withdraw from the game with no persistence. Second, if the athletic ability gap is too wide to bridge, athletes prone to give up. In middle-long-distance run it is common to see a front runner “steal a lap”, and this is mostly found in long-distance races. For those runners who have been left far behind by the front runners will be bothered by the idea of abandonment due to their low levels of athletic performance. Third, if athletes have a fear of the track, and are concerned about being unable to fish the game or lose the game, they will consider the option of giving up.
Mental State Disturbed by External Factors

Generally, middle-long-distance races take place in outdoor tracks, which makes athletes vulnerable to the interference of the external environment in the game, and brings psychological distortion to athletes. One of the external factors is the uncertainty of weather conditions, such as wind, rain and other unfavorable conditions. Bad weather will cause a decline or failure in athletes’ competitive performance and bring psychological imbalance to athletes. Another factor is usage of equipment and facilities. Athletes may not be accustomed to the new track and this will impact their performance and cause psychological problems. Thus for athletes, only when they overcome the interference of all the external factors, can they achieve excellent results in the game.

Post-Competition States

Pride and Complacency

After the race, middle-long-distance runners often evaluate their athletic level according to the results of the competition, which also causes a certain psychological burden and impact to them. Basically, athletes with mental state of pride and complacency are the ones who have performed outstandingly in the race and have been immersed in the excitement and joy. Puffed up with pride, these athletes may not treat regular trainings seriously and result in performance decline.

Depression

Athletes with mental state of depression are just opposite to the ones discussed above. They experience failure or low performance in the race and therefore become depressed and melancholy. Some begin to doubt their athletic level and their self-confidence get impacted, and even forfeit all the trainings and competitions.

Strategies of Psychological Skill Training to Middle-Long-Distance Race Athletes

To Formulate Scientific Psychological Training Methods

Scientific training method is the precondition of good results in athletic competition. It helps athletes to play at the highest level in the game. Psychological skill training to middle-long-distance race athletes includes autosuggestion, focus variation, training environment diversification, game simulation, and visualization. Autosuggestion is an approach to influence one’s psychological activity by using words, thoughts or facial expressions. It is especially effective in the process of training before games when the training methods, such as varied pace running, interval running, repetition running, are relatively boring to the runners. So athletes in training can undertake self-suggestion, and set short-range goals. Once they achieve every small goal, the sense of boredom will disappear. Focus variation means to let athletes shift their focus and attract their attention to arouse their interest and enthusiasm in running. For example, in pre-match training, athletes can focus on overtaking other runners or glancing the outside environment. This can effectively help them avoid the feeling of boredom. Training environment diversification refers to the changes of pre-game training venues, shifting from tracks to highways or parks. This can effectively avoid athletes’ mental fatigue. Quiet environment and fresh air can help runners to have joyful and happy mood, and improve their training performance level. Game simulation refers to the practice athletes take in which the environment is close to the actual situation, and the runners can learn to handle the aroused psychological problems. This method can effectively improve the athlete's ability to adapt to the environment, and help them cope with psychological problems that may occur in real situations. Scientific training methods help improve the runners' athletic achievements, monitor and adjust a series of possible psychological problems, allowing athletes to get good results in the race.
To Improve Athletes’ Psychological Competence, and Clarify Goals

Motivation adjustment is an important factor in the improvement of athletes’ psychological quality. Runners in middle-long-distance race inevitably experience high level of motion intensity and heavy load on their bodies in training and competitions. This requires athletes to have a powerful mindset. Good psychological quality contains strong willpower and good mentality in the game. The ascension of willpower is an important process in training and competition. It is essential for athletes to form a good habit of training. They should follow strictly the training plans arranged by their coaches. In addition, athletes in training should actively overcome the mind state of “laziness”. To experience the pain of body in training enables them to understand the value training. Besides, coaches should guide athletes to realize “The work of a diligence fool doubles that of a lazy wit”, and what they need is the quality of perseverance. In training and competition, coaches should also be strict with athletes, and appropriately arrange exercises to strengthen athletes’ endurance, so as to improve the athletes’ fortitude.

To set clear goals is an important task that middle-long-distance race athletes must fulfill in training and competition. Training without goals will lead athletes to nowhere, and therefore it is difficult to improve their performance. In the same way, goals beyond reach can also affect athletes’ mindset. Thus, it is important for athletes to set goals according to their physical conditions, to transform their goals into motivation, and to make psychological adjustment, so that they will make progress constantly. Meanwhile, coaches should provide effective supervision and evaluation to the goals and plans set by athletes. Encourage or motivate athletes to set goals in trainings, and adjust their mentality, so that they can engage actively in training and competition.

To Attaches Great Importance to the Enthusiasm and Team Spirit Cultivation among Athletes

Enthusiasm is mainly reflected in athletes’ engagement in sports training. It is proved that the enthusiasm of athletes plays a positive role in the persistence and endurance of athletes in training, which enables them to gain excellent results in the long-term training. In the following paragraphs, two ways are suggested from the emotional aspects to develop the enthusiasm of athletes.

First, pay attention to the interest of athletes in middle-long-distance race. Interest is the most solid guarantee to the positivity of athletes in trainings. One of the three ways of arousing enthusiasm in athletes is to provide verbal encouragement. Coaches can make arrangements for the athletes to watch the competition of top level athletes, or show videos of fierce competition to stimulate their enthusiasm for the game. Coaches should be sensitive towards the emotional changes of athletes, especially when the athletes are depressed. Use simple words to encourage them, or adopt simple training methods to make the athletes confident and enthusiastic. The second way is to be changeable in training methods. Simplex training method will gradually wore out the enthusiasm of the athletes. Thus, more appropriate training methods should be applied to athlete training. The change of training environment and the difference in training methods will keep the training zeal of athletes and help them keep a stable state of mind.

Second, pay attention to cultivate team spirit among athletes. Excellent team work plays an important role in the enthusiasm of athletes, and it helps generate healthy competition. So coaches should actively promote the understanding and connections among team members, and advocate cooperation and friendly competition with each other.

Conclusion

The cultivation of the athlete's psychological skill training is an important component of competitive sports. Only when the mental attitude of middle-long-distance race athletes are fully excavated and improved, can their inner motivation be effectively aroused, so as to be active in the training, and finally obtain excellent results in competitions.
References:

