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# **Winning the Mind Game**

## **Using Hypnosis in Sport Psychology**

- A step-by-step guide for working with athletes
- Working with teams
- Transcripts of successful interventions
- Complete case studies
- Tips on marketing your sports psychology practice

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## *Introduction*

This book elucidates our ideas as practicing sport psychologists and clinicians who became greatly enamored with the ways in which current developments in Ericksonian clinical hypnosis could be used with athletes. After years of employing these state-of-the-art techniques with a wide range of amateur and professional sport clients, we realized the promise that hypnotic interventions held for the field of sport psychology. It became rapidly apparent that our work was very different from how other sport psychologists were practicing. Other sport psychologists, both academicians and clinicians, were mired in an unrelenting and redundant emphasis on visualization and relaxation. To the extent that they were using hypnosis, they would often be making direct suggestions for perfect performance ... "you will be stronger, you will run faster and faster each and every time you race," etc.

We began to recognize that we had developed a very special model of sport psychology that took full advantage of the current developments in the field of clinical hypnosis. The time was ripe for a book on hypnotic sport psychology that would teach clinicians already versed in hypnosis how to apply their skills to this new population. Although we both teach and offer workshops on this topic, we know of no book that deals with brief strategic and Ericksonian interventions in hypnotic sport psychology.

This book is written for the clinician who knows the basics of hypnosis but who is either not working with athletes yet or not working with them in these sophisticated ways. The reader will be taught assessment and intervention techniques with both adolescent and adult athletes at all levels of competition from serious recreational to professional. Both individual and team performance is addressed.

Many clinicians have been fascinated with sport psychology but have not known how to get started. They either have had few

ideas about conceptualizing the problem and an appropriate treatment or intervention, or been handcuffed by traditional notions of imagery and relaxation. If they employ those techniques, they wind up feeling bored or ineffective and athletes often find the techniques superficial. This book provides specific strategies that will enable clinicians already using hypnosis to begin practicing sport psychology in a way that will be satisfying to them and to their clients. Therapists who are looking for ways to expand their private practices and see new clients will find this new population rather exciting. Athletes as patients are extremely dedicated to improving their performance and thus are open to techniques that may cause resistance from other clients. This book may very well create for you a new and exciting client base that will both challenge and reward you at the same time.

We hope you enjoy the read.

*John and Tim*

# *Chapter Three*

## *Using Hypnotic Skills in Sport Psychology: A New Model*

As we have seen, the traditional model of clinical sport psychology is based on two primary interventions: having the athlete practice being relaxed while engaged in sports; and having that same athlete imagine performing perfectly. The problems and limitations of that approach have been dealt with; this chapter will describe what our new model entails and provide a step-by-step guide to its implementation. The chapter will also summarize the step-by-step approach to implementation, as well as reveal the various decisions that need to be made at different junctures in each and every case.

### *The four elements of the new model*

Our model consists of four elements:

1. The athlete, if need be, is taught how to develop a proper mental *stance* or psychological attitude toward performance.
2. The athlete, if appropriate, is taught various cognitive and psychological *skills* that can be brought to bear in any performance situation, as needed.
3. The athlete is taught *hypnosis* and perhaps self-hypnosis—again, if appropriate—to enhance performance (in lieu of imagining).
4. As needed, the athlete is assisted in accessing *resources* that he or she has lost touch with from the past.

## ***The step-by-step implementation***

These four elements—stance, skill building, hypnosis, and resource retrieval, or SSHR—are the foundation blocks of our approach. The SSHR model can be implemented step by step.

First, the clinician needs to get over certain disabling assumptions about sport psychology. These assumptions handicap the clinician in such a way as to dissuade him from even entering the field of sport psychology. The first assumption is that sport psychology is a highly-specialized field and anyone who doesn't have extensive training in it should not engage in it. It is this type of logic that made a lot of highly capable and talented clinicians unnecessarily abandon the field of substance and alcohol abuse and leave it to specialists. It also led capable clinicians who are fully adept at helping people with bereavement to abandon that area and refer clients to "grief counselors" instead. We believe well trained clinicians in most instances can apply their professional ability to the diagnosis and treatment of a multitude of problems.

It is important not to let yourself be intimidated by the athlete who is consulting you. This is a greater challenge when the athlete is a star in your favorite sport. Hero worship simply won't work when it comes to providing a useful clinical consultation to an athlete. Don't ask for autographs or tickets to games.

You may not realize that most athletes, when they go for a consultation, fear being used by the psychologist as an advertisement for their services. So don't ask for testimonials, and always assure the athlete that the consultation is confidential. Like clients whom you have helped to stop smoking with hypnosis, the athlete may at a later date, after being cured, boast to friends, family, and media that you and your hypnosis get the credit for the change. But that is entirely the athlete's choice.

If you do feel awed by the star client, you need to deal with it quickly so that you can get on with treatment. Use the resources that you have already cultivated as a clinician to accomplish that. By this we mean deal with these feelings as you would deal with clinical situations that you've already had. For example, handle

them as you would when working with the CEO of a Fortune 500 company who, you speculate, could open innumerable doors for you.

As a practicing therapist, you have a long history of managing those issues so that they don't compromise therapy. A very similar process takes place for you when you are working with an athlete you admire. Rather than be intimidated, allow yourself to be more motivated. Don't try *too* hard. Remember also that the athlete comes to you not with her great expertise in her sport but with a problem or an issue that she has little or no expertise to solve. You do, and as such have every right to be the professional, the expert, and the one with the special knowledge, that allows you to sit face to face with any elite athlete.

In implementing the SSHR model you should also remain aware of the misconceptions we discussed in the first chapter, so that you don't inadvertently fall prey to them. If you do fall prey, your effectiveness might be severely compromised.

These steps to using the SSHR model highlight the fact that most of the barriers to practicing clinical sport psychology are psychological and cognitive rather than having anything to do with not having enough information or specialized skills.

Now that, as clinical sport psychologist, your "head" is in the right place, it is time to look at the practical issues. The next step involves doing an in-depth assessment of the athlete who is requesting services from you. This is covered in depth in Chapter Four. However, for now, know that the trick to doing the assessment with athletes is to think of their problem as you would any other symptom with any other client. People, athletes included, come to you wishing to overcome *something*. If you consider the athlete's need for change as being typical rather than as a specialized need that you know nothing about, then you will find that you can use what you already know in assessing and later treating her.

Having completed your assessment, you are ready for the next step, which entails developing your treatment plan. This plan should be replete with interventions appropriate for the requested

*Chapter Seven*  
*Hypnotic Phenomena for*  
*Intervention in Sport*  
*Psychology*

Hypnotic phenomena are cognitive talents that, while evident in everyday life, can most easily be accessed and developed using hypnosis. They have a myriad applications for the athlete. Now we will describe each of the hypnotic phenomena and give some sample applications to illustrate the range of possibilities in sports.

*Memory functions*

*Amnesia*

There are three different memory functions that can be used and elicited as hypnotic phenomena to help the athlete change. These are amnesia, hypermnesia and posthypnotic suggestions.

Sport contains a multitude of opportunities to utilize amnesia to help the athlete to perform better. One example would be the athlete who has a horrible game and then, of course, must go and play more games. So many athletes are haunted by a bad game and it continues to stick in their craw in such a way that one bad game becomes a multitude of bad games. Having a negative expectation can really sink a player. We are reminded here of Debbie Thomas's coach, who, prior to her figure-skating performance in the Olympics, cautioned her on her need to do better than her adversary, Katarina Witt. He said, "One mistake, Debbie, and it's all over." Debbie, of course, went onto the ice and made many, many more mistakes than just one! Setting up a negative

expectation or carrying one with you in your mind invariably sets the stage for more problems.

So, for the athlete who has had a bad game and doesn't want to be haunted by it, if you elicit amnesia in hypnosis and then point it straight at that terrible event, the athlete will be able to move forward unencumbered.

It's important, whenever you elicit amnesia, first of all to have the person learn any important lesson that needs to be derived from the problematic experience, so that it can be precluded in the future and the person can become a better athlete because of it. Once the lesson has been learned and is remembered subconsciously, the person can afford to forget the catastrophe.

Another example of when we have used amnesia for intervention in sports psychology was when one of our associates came to us for supervision so he could help a school for which he was a consultant to shoot better foul shots. The school had an ongoing history of doing very poorly at the foul line. In his group induction, he emphasized the notion of a fresh start, suggesting that the start of every game could allow the team to forget about all prior games and especially anything having to do with foul shooting. In sports, it is sometimes quite convenient to have a "short memory" on demand.

An interesting example of the use of amnesia in a type of self-hypnosis—or at least a type of self-suggestion—occurred when an American football free safety was being interviewed on a major sports channel. Now bear in mind that free safeties need an unending amount of bravado in order to continue to play at their best. So they can ill afford to remember having been beaten on a pass play because it would deflate them and compromise their performance in the future. This particular free safety kept insisting that he had never ever been beaten. The interviewer knew that he was only half serious but played with him by showing some film of times when a receiver had beaten him long. The free safety merely smiled and said incredulously that someone had stolen his uniform and was impersonating him and insisted again that he had never been beaten!

I (JHE) worked with a golfer once who would feel a tremendous amount of pressure as the game went on, regardless of whether he was doing well or poorly. If he was doing well, he would begin to think about how well he could do and how he could win. If he was doing poorly, he would put too much pressure on himself to get back into the game. It was a case of “damned if you do, damned if you don’t” for him psychologically and he was rarely at peace. I used amnesia in hypnosis with this athlete so that, every time that he placed the ball on the tee to tee off, he would instantaneously develop an amnesia for all prior holes. His scorecard, while on his person, was forgotten for the time being. This example also illustrates how amnesia can be combined with posthypnotic suggestion to kick in at just the right time.

We saw in Chapter Six how Milton Erickson once used amnesia with biathletes so that they could allow each and every shot to trigger an amnesia for every prior shot. He therefore eloquently removed any pressure from them because every shot was the “first” shot and they could always make one out of one without feeling any kind of pressure to go for ten out of ten.

### *Hypermnesia*

Hypermnesia is the hypnotic phenomenon that creates perfect recall—the so-called photographic memory. Hypermnesia is an invaluable resource for athletes who either generate it easily or can be taught to generate it. One example of the use of hypermnesia in sport psychology occurs when athletes are helped to remember vividly the moments of a peak performance. These peak performances serve as reference experiences that the athlete can go back to again and again. Being a recreational equestrian, I (JHE) made a point of flash-freezing moments of near-perfect performance in my mind from all of the years in which I have trained. So they form a collage of sorts that, taken as a whole, gives me a very real and vivid reference point for what I want to attain on a given day. So much of riding involves a “feel” and a combination of different factors. To have these in a composite form in one’s mind enables one intuitively, and from a very deep and heartfelt level, to intend a certain result and allow the mind and body to rally that cause.

Hypnosis is an invaluable tool that can quickly and effectively influence the subconscious mind and promote lasting change in athletes. This book contains a wide range of hypnotic interventions and therapeutic techniques and includes:

- A step-by-step guide for working with athletes
- Working with teams
- Transcripts of successful interventions
- Complete case studies
- Theoretical considerations
- Tips on marketing your sports psychology practice

This is an outstanding resource for anyone currently working with athletes from any level who wish to use hypnosis to improve performance, as well as everyone currently using hypnotherapy techniques in their clinical practice wishing to expand into sport psychology.

“The importance of sport psychology in training became apparent to me decades ago ... I have been incorporating it into my work since, and encourage the same of anybody working with athletes to enhance performance. Winning the Mind Game is a terrific tool for helping them do exactly that.”

George H. Morris, Prior co-Chief de Equip (coach)  
for the USA Olympic Show Jumping Team

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