

Strategies for Attaining and Sustaining Peak Performance in Sports and Games

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Introduction

The importance of sports is recognized as a diplomatic weapon which every country try to use for the promotion of national and international peace, love and unity. It is for this reason that sports is given all attention and all it takes to keep the youth busy. It is sometimes used as a diversionary measure especially when it is to be used as an undertaker with the sole mission of serving as the communion for the teaming population of the youth.

Integration through sports activities and indeed its (sports) contribution to the national development coupled with how it also serves as an indispensable link in the social chain cannot be underestimated. Every athlete looks forward to attaining sports excellence. This expectation by the athlete is of great concern to both the coaches, sport administrators, sport psychologists and the parents whose children or wards are involved especially in competitive sports. For an athlete to excel his preparation must be preceded by good planning and effective management which are the soul responsibilities of the sport administrators.

Sport Administrator

Attaining peak performance becomes a night mare if there is no adequate planning being one of the corner stone upon which success depends. Planning is a means to an end while the goal is the end of any organized sporting activity regardless of whatever level the activity is taking place. Planning as drawn and implemented by the sports administrator must take cognizance of provision for adequate facilities and equipment with which the athlete should participate. Provision of adequate facilities is to ensure free participation at all times as this will enhance skill acquisition and perfection.

Majority of the athletes striving to attain peak performance are from schools where inadequate sporting facilities have been a source of worry, Nwogu (2011) quote Ojeme as saying that there is grossly inadequate provision of sporting facilities in schools and Nigerian Universities in particular. He lamented further that if facilities are not available no matter the beauty of these policies on sports participation they are likely to fail.

Administration and management of both time and resources is very vital to the success of an athlete strategizing to attain peak performance and therefore it is paramount that an efficient, focused and proactive steps highly desirable for achieving the set goal must be put in place to facilitate the performance of the athlete. It is the responsibility of the Sports Administrator to make available the training facilities, equipment, adequate medical care/attention and cover as well as advice for post active sporting life such as acquiring education, trade, and self employment.

The Coach

The Coach is a father figure and also a consultant to an athlete aiming at achieving success in his chosen sport. A good coach does not rest on his oars as he/she is continuously searching for opportunities for his/her athletes to improve on their previous levels of performance believing that change is the motivating environment for excellence. Coaches who perform at their personal best must have believed that assignment placed before them requires full use of skills and talents.

Sometimes the coaches have a running battle with sport administrators as they (coaches) focus on how to tackle the problems regarding the provision of adequate facilities as well as how to improve the quality of performance of their athletes. Only successful coaches produce champion athletes and for him/her to attain that level of success in the chosen career the fact remains that there is no substitute for knowing well the technique, rules and strategies of the sports he/she coaches. Lack of adequate knowledge in coaching the skills and in a proper sequence risks injury and frustration from repeated failures by the athletes. At times the coach may have all it takes to be successful ranging from acquisition of knowledge and skills but without motivation may not be successful in the pursuance of his/her chosen career. Again the coach may have the motivation but lacks time for doing the things necessary to make him/her successful.

Challenges of Nigerian Coach

An average Nigerian Coach does not believe in risk taking at the expense of his/her job forgetting that challenging opportunities often brings forth skills and abilities which are hitherto unknown to them as part of qualities they possess. Aliyu (2011) said fear and apprehensions are greater barriers to success than the actual difficulty or danger of the experiment itself. It should be noted that great things are achieved through careful planning and calculated risk taking.

Producing champion athletes can be guaranteed if qualified and skilled coaches are employed to train them. Unless right caliber of coaches of proven integrity, experience and sound knowledge are appointed and given free hand to operate, the quality of sports performance especially at competitions shall remain very poor or continue to dwindle. For the athletes to attain peak performance in sports especially team events the coach should always strive to emphasis cooperation among the players rather than on competition in addition to developing the spirit of working together rather than individually. The coach should from time to time evaluate the training component and modify them where and when necessary so as to maintain the interest of retaining an enjoyable environment for

players. Competition is a source of motivation which is best achieved when the teams have opportunity to win (Goldberg 2014). Coaches should therefore create opportunities for teams to compete even during training so as to find success in addition to discovering their weaknesses and strength in skill display. No coach however possess the monopoly of technical know how to solve all the challenges facing the athletes in the field of play but rather require the support of other stake holders in sports to tackle the problems.

The Sports Psychologist

While the Coach works on the physical skills of an athlete, the sports psychologist works on the psychological aspect of the athlete such as ability to focus on achieving the set target and determination to win. The role of sports psychologist is to ensure high quality performance of athletes under pressure even at competition. The sports psychologist does this according to Ikulayo (2003) by direct application of various psychological skill or principles to the athletes before, during and after competitions. A team aiming at attaining peak performance must build team harmony both during training and competition. The sports psychologist can help the team acquire skills in wining, relaxation, consistency and task accomplishment focuses. Sports psychologist according to Ikulayo (1990) must help athletes to develop strong mental attitude towards determination, will power, commitment, perservance and dedication. Sports psychologist uses his/her knowledge to nurture and conditioned athletes in order to improve their sports performance. Orlick (1990) was of the view that state of the mind is very crucial if the athlete is to attain success and subsequently peak performance in sports.

The sport psychologists needs operational plan if they are to assist athletes solve their problems, discover their weaknesses and strength in addition to exploring new grounds for reaching out to difficult goals and tackle their external threats. The real essence of a sports psychologist in a team is about service delivery and to enhance high quality performance of the sports men and women and not to take over the job of the coach or technical adviser. The best legacy the coach and sports psychologist can bequeath is the measure of how much contribution they have been able to make to better the lot of the athletes performance and improvement in the field of sports and games.

The Parents

Life starts from home and for an athlete to excel he/she needs the support of the parents and siblings. The moral support and encouragement plus enabling environment provided by the home (parents) can make a difference as the athlete strives hard to attain peak performance. Presence of the parents in the arena on the day of the competition can motivate the athlete as not to let his/her parents down.

The Athlete

Striving to win is essential to enjoyable competition. Winning is important in sports and can be kept in perspective when athletes recognizes that the process of striving to win can bring out the best in their performance commitment in addition to their moral development. Athlete aiming at peak performance must as a matter of utmost importance be physically fit. Fitness in this scope is not mere absence of disease from the body system but a state of psychological well being, adequate vital capacity of the heart and blood vessels and stamina which is the ability to endure exertion and stressful physical activity. He/she should always think like a champion while trying to improve self confidence through mental training practice. Adeyeye (2005) was of the view that no matter how good an athlete is, he/she can always improve by way of becoming versed in performance enhancement techniques of which mental skill training is one.

Honest, hard work and commitment can pave way for athlete towards attaining peak performance winning to every athlete is the ultimate and mental game plays a very important role towards attaining the ultimate. Dorfman (2005) noted that whoever claims winning isn't everything obviously has not spoken with an athletic coach. He went further to say that coaching the mental game offers coaches of all sports a definitive volume of understanding an athlete's mental awareness which in turn helps drive success. Athlete aiming at peak and best performance especially during competition must learn how to keep calm and be composed. Situations, have unveiled athletes becoming nervous or getting too excited before or during competition which does not augur well as this may lead to lost of confidence which may adversely affect the athlete.

To stay cool, calm and composed Goldberg (2014) suggested seven steps that could assist the athlete in achieving the feat:

- (i) Keep the concentration in the "NOW"
- (ii) Recognize when your focus "Time Travels" and bring yourself back immediately.
- (iii) Keep your focus on you.
- (iv) Have fun
- (v) Leave other goals at home except that of participating and winning.
- (vi) Keep your mind undistracted before and after the games.
- (vii) Keeping your focus and concentration away from the uncontrollable.

Orlick (1986) noted that all athletes committed to high level performance should familiarize themselves with practical concepts and strategies for developing their mental as well as physical strength. They should also possess four basic human requirement for excellence namely talent, hard work, simulation and psych. The individuals commitment to attain excellence motivates hard work.

Guided by the goal(s) set, commitment and hard work on the parts of the coach and the athlete can enhance cost effectiveness of hard and regular training as the team or athlete(s) prepares for competition. Orlick (1990) observed that the pursuit of excellence begins with getting to know one's own pattern which is simply the process of becoming more aware of individuals capabilities, strength and weaknesses. The athlete planning to attain peak performance must set him/herself free from all sort of worries as these could

raise anxiety, drains energy and diminishes performance focus. It is also necessary to remain committed to the attainment of the goal coupled with developing self control to perform well under a variety of potentially stress-producing circumstances. As the athlete strive in an effort to attain peak performance he/she encounters some hard ships especially as he tries to work along the development plan which is a veritable tool for the attainment of set goal(s). The athlete, the coach and the sports administrator at a point will require psychological hardness to enable them cope with the risks and failures of innovation, experiment and challenges that may be brought about by change which are inevitable.

Strategies for attaining Peak Performance

When an athlete maps out the strategies for attaining peak performance, it should start with the development of:

1. The vision which will help to guide his/her performance.
2. The enquiry on the available resources and skills to be used in order to achieve the set target.
3. The innovation is a stage in the strategy will allows for creation of significant progress towards achieving the vision.
4. The hierarchy in terms of choice of what is to be done in order of magnitude i.e. first thing first.
5. Goal setting which does not only help in mobilizing effort but also causes the athlete to focus attention on the task and upon achieving goal relative to the task (Cox 1998). While setting the goal, the coach and the athlete must be guided by the following principles as identified by Williams (2001).

1. The goal must be specific
 2. It must be measurable
 3. The goal must be achievable
 4. It must be realistic
 5. It must be time bound
- = SMART =

Suggestions

There is always keen competition among various participants in sports and therefore it requires a lot of dedication, focus, mastery of skills coupled with provision of good facilities to enable the athlete withstand the challenges. The following suggestions are provided to enhance the athletes' performance towards attaining and sustaining the peak of his/her chosen career.

1. A more conducive environment devoid of any destruction should be created for the athlete to excel. This should be supported by the provision of updated equipment and facilities that will enhance performance.

2. Adequate and standard materials for both training and competition should be provided as these will serve as a source of motivation and encouragement to players.
3. Athletes should Endeavour to practice the skills outside the normal training time to enhance the usefulness of the techniques.
4. Coaches and sports psychologists should work together so as to complement each others effort all aiming at enhancing the athlete performance output.

Conclusion

The individuals commitment to attain excellence motivates hard work and once the coaches are doing the job as expected and the athletes are performing successfully to the expectation, the possibility sustaining the tempo of quality of performance becomes high. Strategies to win starts from the coach who must among other things possess the knowledge of the sport, motivation to be a good coach and empathy. One of the challenges on attaining high level performance is how to receive quality training from well qualified and motivated coaches with good facilities and infrastructures to facilitate the acquisition of sports skills.

In fostering unity and harmonious relationship among the stake holders in sports to ensure high quality performance and sustenance all (Athletes, Coaches, Sport Administrators, Sport Psychologists and Parents) must work in partnership and collaboration with one another within their areas of coverage for effective performance output on the part of the athlete. Progress as in sports performance comes with a price and does not come easy, thus as it gets better so also it gets tougher.

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