



## Psychology gives sports a new slant

**L**et's say you've had a rotten day on the golf course. You've hit some slices, a duck hook or two, you've blown a couple of big putts and lost \$10 to a 20-handicapper. Or maybe you've had the tennis miseries. Your ground strokes are awful, you can't get your second serve in and your doubles partner isn't speaking to you.

What to do? A logical move is to go immediately to the pro shop and sign up for a lesson. But what if the lessons don't help much? Then what? Well, maybe you'd like to try sports psychology and work on the mental part of your game.

Sports psychology is a relatively new field in the United States, although the Russians and East Germans have made extensive use of it to improve the performances of their athletes. Sports psychologists in this country are dealing almost entirely with the highly skilled athlete, but their work also has applications for the recreational athlete, according to Dr. Andrew Jacobs, a clinical psychologist who specializes in sports psychology.

Dr. Jacobs, who practices here, is working with the U.S. Junior Cycling Team at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colo., and the men's and women's track teams at the University of Kansas. He estimates there are no more than 200 accredited sports psychologists in the United States. He has worked closely with Dr. Robert Nideffer, widely recognized as the leading sports psychologist in this country.

Dr. Jacobs believes the mental aspects of athletic competition have been neglected and offer an exciting approach to improvement in athletic performances.

"In the 1950s and '60s, sports psychology was limited mostly to a study of personality traits," Dr. Jacobs said. "The Olympic team gave tests but only for research. The athletes were not told of the results. Applied clinical sports psychology was not done here until the mid 1970s."

Dr. Jacobs tests athletes for attitudinal and interpersonal styles. He discusses the results of the test with the athlete and develops an individualized program that will help develop ways to concentrate, relax and cope with stress and problems.

"When you get to the upper levels in athletics, almost everyone is equal in physical skills," Dr. Jacobs said. "At that point sports is 80 to 90 percent mental."

Obviously the recreational athlete cannot afford to drop in on his sports psychologist every time he has a bad day at the bowling alley or strikes out four times in slow-pitch softball, but Dr. Jacobs offers some general advice.

First, the recreational athlete must define his problem, determine why it is happening and decide whether it is truly a sports problem or perhaps the extenuation of a personal problem. The next step is to decide what to do about it. In Dr. Jacobs' view, confidence and visualization are essential to any reasonable degree of success in sports and confidence can be built up by visualizing ourselves at a time when we were successful.

Dealing successfully with stress is important for all athletes, but stress increases at higher levels of competition.

"We need some stress to be able to compete successfully," Dr. Jacobs said, "but there is a tension peak and after you reach that you get too tight. You see basketball players exhale before shooting a free throw. That's to get the tension out and think positive."

"If you're having trouble receiving a serve in tennis, you should exhale as the ball is being served and visualize that exhale as a beam of light focusing on the ball. When you get distracted, you're not watching the ball."

"I saw John McEnroe in his exhibition here and every point he lost came when he did not focus on the ball. His temper tantrums are a ventilation. He's letting things out. When Willie Wilson was striking out so often in the World Series, there was no way he could hit the ball he was so tense. He went up there thinking he was going to strike out and he did. He needed to visualize the way he was swinging earlier in the season when he was successful."

Change comes slowly to sports, but in Dr. Jacobs' view the day will come when the sports psychologist will be an accepted part of every athletic team.