The Perspectives of Unconscious Winning Myths in Sports Coaching

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to identify and critically discussed the ten pre-eminent unconscious winning myths that seldom realized by coaches, which are that: 1) The power and knowledge of coaches is all; 2) Experience is everything; 3) The motivator is the one we want; 4) Media representations are taken out of all proportion; 5) Physical and tactical skills are more than enough; 6) Winning is not everything but the only thing; 7) A good player is a good coach; 8) The champions are always right; 9) I know who I am; and 10) This is our culture and we don’t need to change anything. Perhaps by understanding the affect of these myths will helps sports coaches understand that to win athletes need to change their mindset into more positive ways.

Keywords: Sports myths, positive attitude, behavioral change

INTRODUCTION

Myths play an important role in people’s engagement with sport although most participants seldom realized this since they are usually unconscious of the fact or they do not understand or are not concerned about the cognitive processes involve. Indeed, participants’ tacit assumption about their chosen way of going about things is the right way and the only way. What actually make people belief that what they did really the right way? Perhaps their obligations towards culture, habitual, and personal factors have a great impact of why they belief that were supposed to be a myth. If people keep making a same mistake with tacit assumption over and over again with the myths that they though to be true, at the end of the day they will realize that they were wrong and at that moment much destru-...
and favorable, the idea of ‘powerful coach’ was not considered now than before. Athletes these days will empower their mental, emotion, maturity, and cognitively knowledgeable when dealing with sport, therefore, the role of coaches should be changed. According to Hogg (2003), the factor that affecting performance was not just focus on physical, technical, and tactical but also involves mental and emotions. These four factors play a considerable amount of effort to ensure a better performance to athletes. However, do coaches really have time to digest all the four factors during training? In most Asia countries, what usually happen in a sport team the physical and techniques will be trained by assistant coach. While the head coach will took the responsibility of tactical, as well as verbal motivation to ‘psych-up’ their athletes. Do what the coaches did for mental and emotion stability among athletes really works? Do they really have a psychological skill to involve with human behavior, mental and emotions? And do they really have time to monitor the mental stability of the athletes? If Malaysian really want to produce a ‘world class athletes’ in the future we should start to introduce a full time sport psychology for each team. The role of sport psychologist will determine (with advise of head coaches) of the program deliver, content deliver, availability of contact, counseling and interventions skills, monitoring progress, and profiling of each athletes. The idea is not to overtake the coach’s responsibility, but to assist him in emotional stability. Moreover, Smoll and Smith (1998) have also suggested that a good sport psychologist should; 1) Never to imply their psychological skills to protect athletes from coaches; 2) Never give impression to athletes that what coaches have been doing was incorrect; 3) always have respect for coaches and athletes with an approachable ways.

2) Experience is everything

As long as we are still considering ‘experienced’ as major criteria for coaching job; we will not getting a good coach to assist our National teams to the international level. Just because you have experienced coaching before, it does not mean that you are great if you have don’t have latest knowledge of coaching, no interest of learning, no interest of teaching, and no interest of developing innovative way of coaching. Opportunity to prove that an individual are able to coach and bring up national team to International level should be wide opened, even he had only a level 1 coaching certificate. This is because if you wait for him to get a higher coaching certificate it might take him ten years to get it. And by that time, he/she who was capable and motivated to bring our country to the world class standing earlier were already burn out. As I said, experienced alone don’t make an individual capable of getting the job done for International level and we have to look for other opportunities and challenges. On the other hand, what makes thing worst is that the so called ‘experience people’ always like to talk about their success and their capable of doing a good thing even it is not ‘so good.’ They always ignore the ‘bad’ experience and suffering they have had before. Therefore, it creates more problems when they ‘act’ as though their experience was good but actually not as good as what they told others. Thus, the reversed scenario will happen when we are saying that if you are only 17-year-old and don’t have experience, you must played at junior team. I believe that elite level, if he had a potential for senior team, then developed him and make him a star. Thus, if you have to drop the experienced player because he is not performing then do so. Both of this example is applicable if no ‘personal interest’ involve such as he is a good friend, pity of their family, their life depends on it etc. In Eastern culture firing players seldom happens, and perhaps in order to create this new scenario an incentives should be given to them and let them ‘be fired with honors.’ Lastly, “Just because you have experienced coaching before, it does not mean that you are great if you have don’t have latest knowledge of coaching, no interest of learning, no interest of teaching, and no interest of developing innovative way of coaching.”
3) The Motivator is the One We Want

People always misunderstand between the role of sport psychologist and ‘public motivator.’ In some Asia countries, it is sort of like a trend that if someone who can talk gives a good logical reason publicly, can create mood in his speech and appears on a TV, his idea is good and should be followed. It seems that Asian still could not understand which is counselor and which is not; which is sport psychologist and which is not. We always assumed that those who is motivator can be a good sport psychologist even though his knowledge and training was not a psychologist. This myths in a long run will demoralized our athletes because they though that they were monitored correctly but actually it was not. A well trained sport psychologist will able to understand athlete’s emotional stabilities during the process of counseling. According to Petitpas (2000), the followings were the approach to athletic counseling; The quality of the client-counselor relationship, however, is the only variable that has consistently been shown to relate to successful counseling outcomes…. In general, my work with athletes follows a traditional counseling framework: (a) build rapport, (b) define the problem, (c) set goals, (d) learn new skills, (e) test these skill in vivo, (f) evaluate level of goal attainment, and (g) end the relationship. Although there is a logical sequence to these components, they are not discreet stages and they frequently occur concurrently. I believe that this counseling framework outlines what I hope to do with clients (pg 34).

In other words, the monitoring should be conducted not only during a stressful situation, but also during normal training life. One thing that we should consider is ‘do not asked’ a problem athlete to immediately seek sport psychologist because it will create a negative perception that sport psychologist is for those who have problems. What we want is to ensure that each athletes been monitoring all the time regardless of their mood and emotions.

4) Media Representation are Taken Out of all Proportion

Most Asian has show interest in reading which was good. Normally, it was three type of reading; 1) simple and easy (e.g., newspaper, magazine); 2) Moderate reading (e.g., easy reading book, novel, fiction and bibliography); and heavy reading (e.g., academic book and journal). These three level of reading materials have its own specification, and thus, the heavy reading level was difficult and have had been reviewed by academician before it was published. But, the most favorite reading materials selected by most citizens were the first level. For example, in one of the leading English newspaper the sport pages had covered 12 pages (Seven pages of international sport news; five pages of local sport news), and this show that people are looking forward to read on sports. Thus, this show that most of us not a ‘reading culture’ because they easily ‘believe’ what was written in newspaper and magazine. Criticism about some of the reporters was reported by McPherson, Curtis, and Loy (1989); Reporters see themselves as representatives of the paying public, who have a right to demand that competent athletes perform their potential. Often these stories are written to hasten the departure (i.e., firing) of an athlete, coach, or general manager; sometimes the strategy is successful. They may also written to increase newspaper sales in cities or regions where the newspaper is competing with one or two other daily….They should resist, as well, pressure from their superiors to engage in muckraking or vendettas to increase sales. Finally, reporters are the gate keepers of information that could flow between the back regions of sport and the public. They have a social responsibility to judge what appropriate and necessary news is, and what is smut or irrelevant information (pg 162 & 163).

A part from that, the issues identified by the media can be used as research problems in an academic. But to prove whether it was true, one has to conduct systematic empirical research. The reason
behind it was that it was not refereed and was written to increase newspaper sales. What make it worst, many of us will make it a big issue out of a report by newspaper, which make people negatively ‘psych-up’ and make people believe into something that yet to be true. If a country always relies on newspaper as a source of knowledge, then our research and development (R & D) of sport will be far behind from others. Why a ‘sport writers award’ were given each year, don’t you feel that ‘the best sport research award (R & D)’ should be a prioritized since we are moving towards world class athletes? Therefore, it is suggested that the more research grant and incentives programs should be implemented.

5) Physical and tactical are more than enough

Coaches and teachers believed that physical and tactical in training are more than enough. In sports, it was true that both physical and tactical were important but the mental and emotional stability should be emphasized too. The psychological input will help athletes perform without feeling stress, scare, anxiety and nervous. During competition all athletes have almost the same physical strength and skills, and what made athletes different from the others is their ability to overcome competition pressure. This was identified by Bull (1996); It is important that athletes focus their attention on those things in sport which they can control. Prior to her 400m hurdles victory in Seoul Olympics, Australian Debbie Flintoff-King said, “I just forget about everyone else. I’m only in control of my lane, so that’s where I focus (pg 93).”

If athletes don’t have the capability to maintain their self-confidence and concentration, then they will unable to perform at their very best. In other words, the way of conducting a training session should not only focus on physical and tactical but should include the psychology. According to Bull, Albinson, Shamrock (1996) and Hogg (2003), the followings were the main topics that one have to learn in order to improving their mental skills; self-awareness, self-confidence, goal setting, anxiety and worry management, relaxation ability, self-talk, imagery ability, concentration ability, Ideal performance state, emotional coping, and motivation. These eleven sub topics if monitor by a sport psychologist it will help athletes to be more positive towards their games. If for example a performance decrement and negative thought of an athlete happens, a coach unable to give full concentration on her problems because of other commitments with other players. Thus, a sport psychologist should be responsible. Perry and Marsh (2000) had shared their experience with the following story; Colleen, a 19-year-old swimmer who has represented her country at major international competitions (world championships, Olympic games), has come to see the sport psychologist, with whom she has a two-year history of on-again/off-again performance enhancement work. Generally, Colleen has been a successful swimmer, but of late she has been disappointed with her results. Medical and physiological test have not revealed any evidence of overtraining to explain her performance decrement. Her coach claims that she is perfectionist (in his mind a desirable trait) but at times she is unrealistic about her performances. Colleen has become more and more critical of her and others and is quite self-deprecating in her words and actions. Her self-talk is substantially negative and appears almost apologetic to others in regard to her performances (“I can’t believe I’m swimming badly,” :What’s wrong with me?,” “You were swimming better as an age-grouper!”). She has come to see the sport psychologist to learn some positive self-talk strategies, as her coach has stated that he is “sick of her negativity (pg. 68).”

The above example shows that the inconsistencies and mental block about tournaments and competition cannot be avoided with a proper counseling. In other words, psychology is as important as the physical and tactical.
6) Winning is not everything but the only thing

If you read the first four words of the 6th myth, you found nothing serious about winning, but later winning is a serious issue. Is winning the only thing for sport? As a coach or administrator you should not identify winning as the main reason for training, but if you do so, I am sure you still can produce a champion. That is, a champion at only National level or Asia level, but not at Olympic level. Therefore, in order for athletes to successfully perform at International level, they should focus more on the process and performance outcome rather than the end result. By emphasizing on the process and performance outcome, the athletes will increase their motivation, confidence, and concentration during training and competition. They will ensure that they can achieve their individual goals successfully. For example, if you are a midfielder in a football team you should setting a goal of a performance outcome such as your passing accuracy of 80%, overtaking opponents by 65%, and manage to attack opponents in their ‘goal area’ for 60% of during a competition. If they can successfully execute these performance goals, I believe our players will perform better. But the idea of statistical analysis of each individual player’s movement was not implemented yet in our country, and thus, will damage our aim of analyzing our performance ability. To ensure that we will used a process and performance output goal in football, we should do a statistical analysis of each movements showed by each players. From the statistical results, coaches and players will work together to evaluate whether that 80% of passing accuracy, 65% over taking opponents, and 60% attacking should or should not be the main strategies for the next game. Moreover, coaches should have the opponent statistical results in order to manipulate their strategies in the next game. The best thing about this process output is that each individual will feel that they are as important as other players and the responsibility given is as important as others. When personal improvement had developed, athletes their ability, motivation, and confidence will increase. We should think about ‘process and performance output’ rather than ‘outcome goals alone’ so that we are not emotionally depressed when losing at International level in the long term. On the other hand, a good goal setting strategies should be enforce so that our focus not totally focus on winning. In developing an effective goal setting, Cox (2002) had suggested the followings:

• Make goals specific, measurable and observable
• Clearly identify time constraints
• Use moderately difficult goals; they are superior to neither easy or very difficult goals
• Write goals down and regularly monitor progress
• Use of a mix process, performance, and outcome goals
• Use short-range goals to achieve long-range goals
• Set team as well as individual performance goal
• Set practice as well as competition goals
• Make sure goals are internalized by athlete
• Consider personality and individual differences in goal setting (pg 93)

7) A good player is a good coach

If in business setting you need to have a good networking in order to expand and making profit for your business. However in sport, it isn’t like business where to produce a good coach a networking shouldn’t be the first priority. In other words, if you are good you are good. If you are a good player, it does not mean that you will be a good coach if you don’t have the charismatic, personality, interest, innovative thinking strategies, good problem solver, ability to plan and execute, and coaching attitude. If
we are still insist by making the unwritten rules that only the National players will be a National coach, then our country is losing opportunities of having a good coach. This is because although one is a top National player, it does not mean that he has ‘coaching’ ability that can produce a great hero for our country. If our country wanted to produce an Olympic champion in twenty years time, we should make a ‘talent identification’ of prospective coaches regardless of their age and level of involvement. We should change a myth that only a good player is a good coach. However, if former athletes can perform and has ability to be a good coach it is welcome, but caution should be taken to ensure that those coaches can perceive their retirement as a natural transition rather than as a crisis that happens to all athletes. We don’t want to have a problematic former athletes to coach our National teams as McPherson et al., (1989) identified that; Interest in the process of withdrawal from sport has been stimulated by journalistic and anecdotal accounts of former professional or Olympic athletes who experienced difficulty adjusting to life away from sport. Accounts have tended to highlight such problems as poverty, alcoholism, marital breakdowns, unemployment or unemployables, criminal activity, isolation from friends, identity crises, and suicide. The reports have helped to create and perpetuate the belief that athletes are not prepared for retirement and experience trauma in adjusting to life outside the world of sport (pg 54).

8) The Champion is always right

In most of Asia countries, we always make a small thing to become big. We always want changes in our program and we also like to make improvement without conducting research about it first. And to make it worst, we like to follow what others did especially the champion. It is good to follow from a champion, but in it is not always right. We just like to follow them without analyzing it thoroughly. In other word, we are making changes without thinking of our ability, commitment, and physical skill. Some of the training is only good to some individuals but not appropriate to all. For example do you think that our athletes would train like what Lance Armstrong did during his childhood? In his bibliography he had mentioned; Swimming is a demanding sport for a 12-year-old, and the City of Plano Swim Club was particularly intense. I swim for a man named Chris MacCurdy, who remains one of the best coaches I ever worked with. Within a year, Chris transformed me; I was fourth in the state in the 1,500-meter freestyle. He trained our team seriously: we had workouts every morning 5:30 to 7. Once I got little older I began to ride my bike to practice, ten miles through semi-dark early morning streets. I would swim 4,000 meters of laps before school and go back for another two-hour workout in the afternoon—another 6,000 meters. That was six miles a day in the water, plus a 20-mile bike ride. My mother let me do it for two reasons: she didn’t have the option of driving me herself because she worked, and she knew that I needed to channel my temperament (pg. 22).

Should we follow what Armstrong had done, without knowing our athletes capability and circumstances? Another example, if American or Australian has a good program in sports, should we spend millions to follow their program? It does not mean that if their programs suitable to us. We should conduct research whether the proposed program applicable or not with our system. We should call our own expert in sports to create and invent coaching strategies that suitable to Asian. If English football emphasizing a 4-2-4, 5-3-2, or 4-4-2 system, should we follow them, even though that we already know that our players were not fast and agile enough to execute it? We should think forward by thinking of innovative strategies that suitable to player’s capability, ability, strength, and physical fitness that can produced a good ‘process output’? One and for all, a twenty years Research and Development (R & D) budget in sporting and coaching programs should be the next agendas of Ministry of sport in many developing countries.
9) I know who I am

Although most Asian always proud of themselves but the problems with it was that they not really know who they were. “I know who I am’ was what most of our athletes always assumed what they were, but in reality they were not aware of their own ability. If we asked our athletes, do they evaluate their ability, effort, decision making skill, thinking ability, fitness, strength, flexibility, agility, coordination and mental strength? I don’t think that their answer will be yes. This is because we don’t train our athletes to have a sense of awareness about them. They always rely on coaches and physical instructor to evaluate all those basic things about themselves. Perhaps some wouldn’t care to know about their ability because they don’t know what to do next. We always assumed that we know many things about ourselves but actually we don’t. Thus, a self-awareness program should be organized by sports administrator. This is important as Hogg (2002) evaluate self awareness as foundations for individuals to improve self image, self esteem, and self confidence. Those who aware of himself still need more work-out, this can be seen in Armstrong’s (2001) book; Although I was a world champion, I still had plenty of learning to do, and the next three years were a process of testing and refinement. I had other success, but life now on would be a matter of incremental improvements, of seeking the tiniest margin that might separate me from the other elite riders (pg 63)

To make a myth worst is most of us know about others more than knowing ourselves. We seldom want to talk about our ability showing what our ability so that we will be more confidence. Perhaps, it is because of our culture that if you talk about your ‘ability’ it always will interpret wrongly as ‘showing-off.’ Because of this, most Asia athletes don’t really want to talk about their ability because they don’t want to be marked as ‘a show off’ person. If they don’t want to talk about your ability and telling the truth about themselves, it creates problems for coaches in developing programs for them. On the other hand, some athlete would not like to talk about themselves because they felt that they already know about themselves, but actually they were not. In this case, many of our athletes were making mistake without realizing it. In the long run, we are will lose potential athletes because they did not know their capability were to becoming a world class athletes. Thus, with the help of sport psychologist our athletes should monitor their ‘awareness’ within themselves.

10) This is our culture and we don’t have to change anything

The final myth that we should consider is regarding our wrong doing culture that we don’t want to change it. If the behavior that we follow were positive, it will be beneficial for us, but if it was negative it will de-motivated us to move forward. For example, if culturally we felt that we were too small to compete, then we won’t. What make it worst was that all those negative thinking will de-motivate our athletes and coaches to move forward. In 2007, do you think that Asia football team will performed better than last year? Some will say yes, and many will say no. A good coach and athlete will not careless about what people said, what they do are developing program that focus on tactical, techniques, mental and emotional stability, and physical. As long as a coach is ‘charismatic’ and keep on learning all the strategies to improve the process and performance outcome for the players, I believe in the long run our National football team will achieve what they aim for. On the other hand, to become a better team, they have to change their negative habits and culture. Perhaps, our athletes should also be more positive in becoming top performers. Hogg (2002) had identified eight psychological qualities associated with top performers;
Enjoy higher levels of self-confidence and self-belief and less self-doubt.
Experience better levels of focus and concentration and are less likely to be distracted from goals.
Focus more on performance process and be less influenced by outcome
Be preoccupied with sport in a more positive way-more positive thoughts, imagery, and day dreams
Experience less anxious states immediately prior to and during competition and be able to obtain and sustain an ideal performing state
Be more capable of rebounding from mistakes and of drawing readily from previous experiences
Enjoy relaxed states and yet highly energized and in control when it really counts
Experience extraordinary awareness with all their sensations acting in harmony.

Psychologically, individuals have to think positively to be a top performer. To do that, the way of thinking, living and perception toward sport should be changed accordingly, so that they believe that they can be a champion. In other words, one should change to a more challenging zone.

Lastly, the ten myths identified in this paper was a list that should be considered by athletes and coaches in order to become an Olympic champion in the future. It is also believed that, in order for our coaches and athletes to change the myths into appropriate habits, locally we should be changed accordingly. One should not aspect that only the elite athletes should be given a mental training skills but it also should be started early so that when athletes become elite they can mentally manage themselves (Hogg, 2003). It is important to learn and understand our mental ability. According to Kauss (2001), your inner power of minds will help you to perform better; Until you are deeply familiar with your own Psych Skill Pack through extended practice, such immediate recall may seem impossible to you, but it isn’t. Your own experience can show you the power of your own mind to do this. For example, you very likely have a favorite movie, television show, book, place, shirt, or other object. You don’t go around thinking of that thing all the time. You’ve known moments and the emotions they conjure up in you. However, if you spend a few minutes letting your memory brush across your inner vision of one of those moments, or one of those favorite things, or one of your key Psych Skill Pack images, you’ll begin to see it clearly. You’ll be able to describe it in detail and to feel the emotions it evokes in you. Then, if you practice regularly and over the course of an athletic season, your ability to summon that image quickly and surely skyrocket. Then it is yours to use when you need it, at championship time. Then, instead of having to concentrate on the mechanics of trying to see the image or do the desired technique, you can perform such mental tasks without effort. Then you’re free to focus your attention where it belongs, on the competitive challenge facing you at any given moment (pg 239).

Although Kauss suggested that to improve mental ability we can practice ourselves, however it will be more effective when practice with a sport psychologist. With the help of sport psychologist we hope that our athletes will be monitored psychologically and coaches will understand their behavior. However, all the changes were for long-run results and not for immediate changes in the outcome.

REFERENCES


