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Investigating the Optimal Psychological State for Peak Performance in Australian Elite Athletes

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**SUMMARIZATION:**

This journal article is based on a study that took 17 athletes and 6 coaches from Australia and established what attributes and comprehension it took to reach a state of peak performance. The athletes ranged from the age of 19 to 35 and the coaches ranged from 31 to 55. All the subjects either performed or coached in the Olympics or the World events throughout their professional career. The study was presented in an interview format to gain knowledge on attributes, experiences, and practices that contributed to peak performance. The study resulted in 5 charted results; the first was 'Description of the Peak Performance Experience' the interviewer charted the results and within the Athletic interviews that top 2 themes were "automatic execution of performance" and "present moment thinking". The coaches agree with present moment thinking and also tied in a few areas like "Focus", "effortless" and a few more. The second chart established, "Factors That Contribute to Achieving Peak Performance". Athletes believed that Physical and Psychological preparation is key. Coaches on the other hand feel it comes down to focus and management of emotions. Table 3 charted Psychological Strategies Used to Achieve Peak Performance, chart 4 focused on Barriers to Achieving the Optimal Psychological State for Peak Performance, and chart 5 shown results from Strategies to Regain the Optimal Psychological State During Performance. The conclusion resulted in the summary of all the results from the interviews, which stated that consistency and focus are essential to achieving peak performance.

**PROBLEM:**

I do not believe there was a clearly stated problem. I believe the researchers as stated in the journal article were only looking to establish an understanding of how someone make describe "Peak Performance" or where they are at mentally when they feel peak performance. Writers did formulate a question of whether there is a common state of mental and physical focus to achieve optimal performance status. Within the study they were only 10 gold medals won within two world-wide events. What someone claims to be peak performance in Australia may be sub-par to another athlete. The study itself is not as practical as it is opinionated for readers. Understanding what it takes for a rower or diver to reach peak performance may be completely different to another elite athlete in a different sport. The lack of variety amongst athletes minimized the impractical study.

The purpose of the study is clearly stated, which is to "investigate" what elite athletes in Australia feel it takes to reach peak performance. Gaining an understanding does not promote a valid study and legitimate results that can be concluded. The hypothesis is that between collegiate and professional levels of performance there is a state differential. Key terms are defined, and examples are given for what each table, which is the main focus of the study.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE:**

The sources in the study are pertinent, due to the published authors of the study. With that being stated, the article was published in 2014, a number of sources were cited from 1991. Psychological studies with athletes have risen and I feel that it could have been more up to date sources than there were. The advancement of the athlete let alone coaching has changed and therefore sources need to be used in the same decade. The research is definitely too narrow, the usage of 17 athletes and 6 coaches from 1 country is a small circle. The usage of 3 primary sports is definitely too narrow for the very broad analysis to physical application of the sports used compared to other sports. The fact that there was not an even number of male athletes to female athletes could have played a part in the results of the themed answers.

There is absolutely evidence used, the evidence is based off the response from the athletes and coaches. How athletes that are divers mentally prepare for competition compared to a basketball player is completely different. The person rowing a boat does not have to worry about the physical preparation of the competition like a football player may. This is why the narrow range of athlete's results are conclusive, but only to that particular sport. The preparation for a diver is more so an independent focus, as long as the diver has their poise and approach correct they are genuinely fine. In a sport like basketball, refs, coaches, defensive schemes, offensive fatigue, and more plays a role in the preparation for the game.

**DESIGN and PROCEDURES:**

The methodology of the study was not well thought out in my opinion. I believe that the

interviewer asking the questions could have played a part in the answers, the atmosphere of the interview environment, and the status of the athlete is unknown. The study was done as an interview based project. I do not think that is the best way to gain psychological knowledge, especially if the athlete pool is small. As a reader, we gain only how the athlete and coaches gave answers, but not how the interviewer gave the question. Just like a legal interview, were the questions leading, multiple choice, did some athletes feel that 45 minutes was too short. The measurement that was used keyed in on small words or the "theme" of the answer. It is too many opinionated factors that are given in this study. Which interviewer decides what the "theme" of an answer is? How were the instructions read? What is the intellectual level of the athlete? How much do we know they understood or gave an answer because how the question was read?

Designing the age range of the athletes and the age range of the coaches differs also. If I have been a coach for a variety of skills and have seen what works as my coaching style compared to what works as an athlete coaching style can range also. The design is too broad for me and it is too many unanswered variables that can contribute to how someone may answer a question.

### **Data Analysis and Presentation:**

The data was presented in a table chart manner. It was divided between how athletes themed their answers and how coaches themed their answers. For as detailed and cited this study was for the answers to be presented so simple is confusing. Answers themed with one word or few words simply marked with a tally. The charts are also confusing to read, not because the numbers are high, but because they do not total 17 or 6. The first table totals 48, which means athletes were allowed to answer more than once. Also, some athletes answered more than twice, on the coaches answers it is the same way. I am having a hard time finding the controlled answer variable within the charts. Every chart the number of athletes does not change, but the answer total does and that makes reviewing the charts indecisive on what is to be established to the reader.

The hypothesis compared to the problem, made the results answered. The broad analysis and the broad hypothesis made the charts easily answered by the interviewer. If the hypothesis and problem were narrowed, along with the elements of the study, it would have been more distinctive in whether or not the hypothesis was answered. According to this study, yes mental focus along with preparation does conclude that the studies hypothesis was correct.

### **Conclusion:**

The conclusion of the study determined that psychological readiness along with assisting mental factors can help establish a peak performance from elite athletes. I honestly do not believe the result will affect anyone. If I am mentally focused and have a consistent procedure establish routine in any aspect of life or career, I would think that peak performance would be concluded. A mailman can hit the same route, with the same recipients and learn where the dogs are or are not and can have a well-ordered

route. A new employee would not be as organized as a veteran, just like a new athletic competitor would not be as mentally focused as a competitor who has dived the same event, at the professional level, 5 years consistently. The implications of mindset and consistent practice were implied, which as stated before with any career is detrimental to a well-ordered performance.

**REFLECTION:**

As I began to read the journal article I was intrigued to understand the findings from the research. I initially believed that an athlete's psychological state is more important than the physical stature. Now, in that same aspect the physical stature can empower your psychological state, but overall it begins with the mentality of an athlete. The initial introduction established the problem and what the researchers were trying to understand and acknowledge the dilemma from a neutral state. The athletes they chose from Australia were "tested". What I mean by "tested" is they had competed in the Olympics and the World competitions. I naturally assumed they were track athletes from these results, but I do recall that these sports in the Olympics range from track to basketball to volleyball, so I was satisfied with the variables and athletes utilized. When I read through the article a second time I was upset to realize that the subjects for the study were rowers, swimmers, and divers. I believe this places a limit on the actual competitive variety within all the professional sports in the Olympics. As I read the procedures of the testing, I realized that the testing was based off interviews. Peak performance seemed to be more of a personal contemplation not a formula. I personally would not know a formula to compose that would establish peak performance to the third power and psychological peak performance to the fifth power. One of the interesting things I noticed about the data is that what coaches felt as descriptions of peak performance the athletes did not feel the same way. Now, when you look at the "Factors that contribute..." chart. Some of the top items expressed dealt with non-physical preparation. I was not surprised by the results from all the charts, as an athlete and someone who has played with some of the best athletes in the world, I knew what was needed to reach peak performance. Once I read the conclusion, I realized that this was not a "study" as much as it was a compilation of athletes and coach's beliefs on how to achieve peak performance. The conclusion stated that it was a recollection of experiences from athletes and coaches. I enjoyed reading through from an athletic point of view, but I feel that any upper echelon athlete would indicate the same results, whether if they were from Australia or the USA.