

Team psychology

We all know the struggle of inconsistent performance. One day your team plays the game of their life, winning against the toughest opponent in the league. A week later you lose to the worst team after playing the worst game of your life, despite being “the better team”. But why is that? How can a team that is *better*, lose to a worse team?

The answer is not as simple as you might expect. There are many factors that play a role in the performance of a team. Lack of sleep, bad mentality, pressure, injuries, bad team chemistry etc. But is there anything we can do to avoid this? Is there some method to keep the team focused, and hold a consistent performance? Here are 4 things to keep in mind when creating a consistent team.

1. Mentality

A theory developed by Fred Crowell, founder of NBC basketball, states that the key to consistent performance, is a consistent mentality. *“Mentality is everything. It is what decides the outcome of every game” – Fred Crowell.* You will often experience that playing an “easy” game, will not have you worked up as much as an important final. For the final your mental state will be high, whereas in an easy match, it will be low. But the consequences of a high mentality will lead to mistakes. You will be too scared of failing, leading you to do exactly that. Failing. Whereas being too low, will make you sloppy. It is therefore important to find a place in between, and keeping that mentality throughout the entire game. The only way to accomplish this is through practice.

Something else to be aware of, is your cockiness. Imagine you just won a game. You feel on top of the world, and the next day you get schooled by a team worse than you. Why is this? Because you overestimated yourself. Winning doesn't make you the best, though it may feel like it does. It is therefore important to maintain the same mentality entering any game, as I mentioned earlier. Forget your last victory or loss as soon as you have learned what you could from the game. After that, you must focus only on your next game.



2. Team chemistry

If the team chemistry is not in order, neither will the game be. I cannot stress enough how important this is. Let's say the team barely knows each other. They have split themselves into groups, and only speak within these groups, not as a whole. When the time comes and you have to play the game, you will stray from passing people you do not know or trust. This will lead to misplays, and can have a huge impact on the game. It is therefore important to maintain the team chemistry. This can be done in many ways, doing things together. Bowling, laser tag, swimming, cooking etc. Anything that will help bring the team closer together.

A test has shown that when a team is upbeat, positive and in an overall good mood, this spirit is transferred to individual players. This is a good thing because other tests show that when the athletes are happier, they play better (see the work of **Peter Totterdell**). In conclusion, the only way to make a team positive is by having good team chemistry, which then leads to an overall better performance.



3. Physical Condition

This part is quite self explanatory. If the team has been up partying the night before, drinking themselves to sleep and waking up to play a game with 2 hours of sleep and a hangover, your playing wont be optional. It is therefor important to get enough rest, to ensure that you are in peak physical condition when starting the game. Test have shown that lack of sleep can reduce your performance by up to 30%. It is therefor important to get enough sleep, otherwise you are just setting yourself up to lose.



4. Pressure

We all know the feeling of pressure. You have to get a specific grade in school, or your parents will get mad. It is the same feeling when playing a game. Although the amount of pressure may vary. Playing an off-season game against an easy team? No pressure. Playing the NBA finals, having to score a 3 pointer in order to win with just 3 seconds left in front of millions of people who are expecting you to win. THAT is pressure. And buckling under to such pressure is a normal occurrence. You get to scared of failing, and by only thinking about failing, you end up failing. As Beilock and Carr explain it: *"Pressure raises self-consciousness and anxiety about performing correctly, which increases the attention paid to skill processes and their step-by-step control. Attention to execution at this step-by-step level is thought to disrupt well-learned or proceduralized performances."*



What this means is that you start doubting your own skills, leading to disruption of well-learned skills such as shooting free-throws. Being able to stay focused under big amounts of pressure is therefor an important ability to have. The only way to act well under pressure is by gaining experience. You have to get used to the feeling of pressure, and once you are used to it, performing normally will be much easier.

About the author

Lucas Rønne Wright is currently a student at Rungsted private Realskole. Lucas has been doing karate and basketball for over 7 years. In karate he holds titles such as 3 times Gold at the Danish Championships, bronze medal in the European championship and placed overall 6th place in the world. As of now, Basketball is his primary occupation, playing as team captain for Hørsholm Basketball Club.



Links:

Ussportcamps.com

<http://www.ussportcamps.com/tips/basketball/become-a-more-consistent-basketball-player>

inc.com

<https://www.inc.com/jeff-haden/how-to-be-graceful-under-pressure.html>

ncbi.nlm.nih.gov

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21075236>

psychologytoday.com

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/high-octane-women/201210/emotions-are-contagious-choose-your-company-wisely>

group.shef.ac.uk

http://eros.group.shef.ac.uk/index.php/people/researchers/peter_totterdell