

World's first sport psychology encyclopaedia addresses athlete burnout

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Why athletes suffer 'burnout' to better understanding how sport builds character and addressing the notorious golfers' 'yips' are just some of the subjects tackled in the world's first encyclopaedia of sport psychology.

University of Stirling Professor Robert Eklund has spent the past three years compiling the Encyclopaedia of Sport and Exercise Psychology, an 880-page tome penned by the world's leading sport psychologists.

Together with Dr Gershon Tenenbaum of Florida State University, Professor Eklund created the two volume text which contains more than 300 terms.

"As the title of the encyclopaedia states, it concerns both exercise and sport psychology, which are intimately related," said Eklund, a former Canadian collegiate wrestling champion.

"It looks at both the notion of enhancing athletic performance and the effect of sport and exercise participation on psychological factors. We all accept, for example, that sport builds character, develops leadership skills and so on - all of the things Lord Wellington was alleged to have attributed to 'the playing fields of Eton' after defeating Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo.

"Of course, the truth is much more complex. Sport and exercise has all sorts of psychological benefits, but throwing a ball clearly does not simply make you a better person."

The encyclopaedia considers puzzling problems such as athlete burnout and Yips – involuntary movements golfers experience when chipping and putting – to identifying the latest trends and technological developments which can enhance an athlete's performance.

These include biofeedback - using technology to detail an athlete's physiological state such as heart rate and blood pressure - and studying eye movement and examining how visual perception can affect performance.

Contributions from experts across the globe include Michigan State University Applied Sport Psychology Professor Dan Gould, who has worked with multiple USA Olympic teams and Russian sport psychologist Yuri Hanin, a leader in the relationship between emotion and performance.

Professor Eklund, Editor of the Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology, added: "There is no magic pill for an athlete where you get a sport psychologist in and they fix you, but there is a positive purpose behind it– helping people who already perform well and making them function even better.

"Sport psychology has changed immensely since I was an athlete in the 70s and 80s. There used to be something superstitious about it then, but it is now seen as one of the sports sciences athletes require if they want to perform to their optimum at the desired moment.

"Often the jargon can be complicated, but through the encyclopaedia we've aimed to make sport psychology accessible. Hopefully it will help to demystify sport psychology – to show people that it is logical common sense, grounded in research."

Provided by University of Stirling

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