

ANCIENT ATHLETES EMPLOYED PSYCHOLOGY IN TRAINING EFFORTS

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ABSTRACT

Ancient athletes understood the critical necessity of mental preparation and used advanced psychological procedures to boost their performance. Techniques for mentally preparing imagery and concentration elites athletes from the East and Greece utilised cutting-edge mental training methods, such as visualisation techniques, to psychologically prepare for events and approaches to mindfulness that enhance attention and concentration—strategies for optimising performance through goal-setting. Conceptual groundwork integrating mental and physical development, the ancient Greeks saw athletic training as a holistic pursuit of perfection. Plato and Aristotle were among several philosophers who stressed the need to cultivate one's intellect and physique simultaneously. Cultural perspectives on mindfulness training traditions from the East the Japanese Samurai practised "Mushin" (no-mind), a condition of apparent, distraction-free concentration; the Chinese martial arts combined mental focus with physical strength and the Indian yoga practices aimed to harmonise the mind, body, and spirit. Greek mental health methods Pneuma, an ethereal substance comparable to Chinese chi, was used in breathing control procedures by ancient Greek athletes as part of their mental preparation. Other approaches included self-talk strategies and emotional regulation techniques. Principles of Psychology Numerous thinkers and educators have acknowledged the existence of distinct psychological temperaments. Philostratus advised that it was believed that melancholic athletes were not fit for competition, phlegmatic sportsmen needed inspiration, and choleric athletes needed to exercise restraint. In a completely integrated learning setting, gymnasia was a place of learning as much as physical exercise. Libraries and lecture halls were prominent features, reflecting the Greek belief in the interconnectedness of mental and physical development. Recognising that mental toughness was just as important as physical skill in reaching athletic greatness, the ancient method of sports psychology was astonishingly sophisticated.

Keywords: Techniques, physical, mental, health, performance.

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Ancient athletes employed advanced psychological training efforts to perform and understood that getting mentally prepared was very important. Mental training is essential for athletes as it helps to build other attributes necessary for success, such as cognitive toughness, focus, and resilience. Mental preparation is refined mental skills and strategies that empower athletes to deliver their best performance, develop resilience, discipline, self-confidence, focus, and transcend barriers. (Alderman RB.,1974, p.27) As sports performance increasingly involves the integration of mental and physical factors.

Multiple advantages to mental preparation are as follows:

1. *Confidence*: Mentally being well-prepared increases confidence.
2. *Mental Focus Techniques*: Game activation aspect.
3. *Less Fear and Anxiety*: Physical preparation decreases fear and anxiety before and during competition.
4. *Consistency*: It starts with coming into every game with a consistent mindset.
5. *Enhanced Performance*: Mental conditioning primes the brain to keep mind and body.

The different types of mental skills improved using various mental techniques, including self-talk, imagery, goal setting, physical relaxation, biofeedback, mindfulness training, and yoga-based mental and cognitive training. Cognitive preparation may include pre-performance, performance, and coping plans. Another psychological tool that ancient athletes used was goal-setting in a specific, measurable manner. This method ensured they kept their focus and passion alive between training cycles. An important part of their training was combining mental preparation with physical training. Ideas in sports psychology have their roots in ancient philosophical traditions. Athletes' mental preparation is crucial, as philosophers have long acknowledged—important responsibilities of philosophy. The link between the intellect and the body was a central theme among ancient thinkers like Plato and Aristotle; the latter even went so far as to say that physical education should come first. Plato included physical activities in his society as a means of education and training. They believed that physical training aided spiritual development. *Kalokagathia*, the harmony between spiritual and physical growth, was considered fundamental to a happy existence. (Cox RC. 1998, p19) Education and the quest for *arete*, the path to human happiness, was facilitated by sports. According to the ancient Greeks, sports could benefit more than just physical health; they might also improve character. Possessing practical knowledge was associated with an exceptional character. The character was thought to be strengthened by physical development. The ancient Greeks believed that regular exercise helped bring one's mind and soul into harmony with one another.

Athletes, according to philosophers, need to have qualities like moderation and self-control. It was believed that mastering one's physiological demands and feelings was the key to victory. Like caring for one's soul without also tending to one's bodily health was inadequate, ancient thinkers believed that physical education alone was inadequate. Philosophers in antiquity accomplished more than only theory; they really led philosophical lives.

Several Ancient Civilisations made use of Psychology in training efforts:

Greco-Roman Period: The people in ancient Greece believed that the best spiritual development was the refined cohabitation of ethics, physical virtue and mental virtue. Likewise, they had an agonistic view of life that led to the struggle to be the best as a necessary component of their lifestyle. Athletes employed techniques such as goal-setting, positive self-talk, and visualisation to enhance their performance, while Greek philosophers recognised the importance of mental factors in athletic achievement.

The ancient Greek athletes incorporated methods of mental preparation to harmonise body and mind, improve focus and develop resilience. Among these techniques were:

By the ancient Greeks, it was considered some sort of knowledge akin to the creative arts, philosophy, mathematics, or astronomy to keep the scales of the brain and the body sport. They believed the mind and body should be cultivated in tandem. Regarding knowing the temperament, Philostratus advised that choleric sportsmen required control but that phlegmatic athletes desired encouragement. He also advised that understanding individual temperaments mattered more. His view was that depressed people should not be into sports. It was said that in the interest of preserving an ethereal element known as *pneuma*, influential in fortitude, men and women alike should avoid sexual encounters altogether.

The gymnasium of ancient Greece was conceived as a public institution that would provide young men with the opportunity for physical training. In Greek culture, there was a significant emphasis on the connection between sports, education, and health, and the gymnasium served more than just as an athletic facility but as an environment for social and intellectual endeavours. In addition to providing a well-rounded education, time is spent on mental training and instilling Greek values. A lifestyle was predicated on the idea that "mind, body and spirit" are indivisible. Structured training is a systematic approach that considers the mental condition of the athlete. Other Greek philosophers recognised the importance of mental components in athletic achievement and promoted athletic training as a complete pursuit of perfection. Many philosophers, including Plato and Aristotle, emphasised that a physique's genesis must complement an intellect's genesis. They underlined the role of mental factors in athletic achievement. Plato's ideal of balance involved physical exercise and developing the mind, while Aristotle asserted the important role willpower and self-discipline play in being excellent. According to Diem (1966), the knowledge of heredity, personality and anthropometry was the basis of training programs introduced in Ancient Greece. The importance placed on genetics (in the modern sense) is especially relevant to our situation. This is because genetics is recognised today as the essential substrate that, together with training, is needed to achieve high-performance levels. (Diem, 1966, p. 17).

Even the ancient Greeks created the groundwork that would develop into the sport psychology of today. These practices are something they understood well, contributing foundationally to all ranges of power and conditioning. These techniques continue to shape the way athletes today mentally prepare for competition.

Japan: In feudal Japan, Samurai warriors employed mental training techniques inspired by Zen Buddhism that parallel contemporary sport psychology. Samurai believed in "Mushin" or "no-mind," where the mind was free and alert without distraction, training themselves in martial arts and meditation to develop mental discipline, concentration and mindfulness. So, it only makes sense for these techniques to help them and allow

them to peak in combat situations and recognise the psychological aspects of performance under pressure.

In ancient Eastern civilisations, a combination of mindfulness and martial arts played an imperative role in society. For example, mindfulness practices have allowed martial artists (for example, the Samurai of Japan) to reach an altered state of focus, increase awareness, and have coordination and control over their bodies. So, physical strength was built, and mental toughness was strengthened, helping them endure brutal training and carry adversity gracefully. Athletes are explicitly trained to assist them with their mental focus, toughness, and visualisation due to the game's religious and ceremonial significance. (Johnson N C G, 2012, p 62- 78)

Central and South America Mesoamerican: Athletes trained to improve their focus, mental toughness, and visualisation skills because of the religious and ceremonial importance of the game. They used community experiences, rituals, and ceremonies to strengthen team unity and psychological preparedness since they knew mental components were crucial to winning the game. For instance, the Mesoamerican ballgame was more than simply a sport; it was a combination of sport and theology that had significant repercussions for the eventual demise of civilizations. Utilizing ancient knowledge and reflecting Mesoamerican cosmology, the result of the game had a great deal of significance. (Jeffrey P. Blomster and Víctor E. Salazar Chávez, 2020,p.5-9)

Indian: Ancient Indian Athletes employed various psychological techniques in their training efforts, integrating mental disciplines with physical training to enhance performance. This had strong roots in the culture and philosophy of India in the form of Ayurveda, yoga and martial arts. Martial art is rooted in ancient times in India. (Selvarajan Yesudian, 1980, p.35.) Several references concerning these subjects, such as Mahabharata and Ramayana, are also mirrored in Vedic and epic literature. The significance of physical fighting abilities and strategic warfare is emphasised in these ancient writings, which also emphasise the need for hard training and discipline. The descriptions of the types of battles and the techniques that the legendary soldiers employed are mentioned in the two epic books, Mahabharata and Ramayana. These texts emphasise ideas of honour, responsibility, and integrity—the discipline of body and mind. Ancient Indian athletes and warriors had to go through so much mental and physical preparation. They also had to practice with their weapons. (Saha R L, Joshi B K, Joshi G, 2002)

Dhanurveda: Ancient Indian martial arts Dhanurveda was not just about physical training but psychological. Dhanurveda was a comprehensive system containing both forms of training. The exercises themselves were known as Vyayama, and through these, the physical prowess and mental discipline necessary for warriors were developed and honed. (Kulrestha R.C.1988)

Martial arts instruction in earlier India was deeply rooted in philosophy and ethics and, hence, was well established. Attributes such as courage, self-control, humility, and respect are emphasised. The concept of human development is holistic, and within its framework, sport and physical education is a service that is not only separately considered but is also an enduring aspect of everyday life, giving way to the self-realisation of a person. (Mac Munn G. 1933)

Meditation and Mindfulness: The historical origins of mindfulness may be traced back to ancient Eastern traditions such as Buddhism, Yoga, Taoism, and Stoicism. Mindfulness is an essential part of the Noble Eightfold Path in Buddhism. Part of the Buddhist Eightfold Path is mindfulness. This road includes the practice of

the correct concentration in addition to appropriate mindfulness. The main dependency of mindfulness in different customs is on the advancement of present-moment mindfulness, the perception of considerations and sensations without judgment, and the advancement of actual information on the self and reality. It is a form of mindfulness practice. Martial artists, like the Samurai of Japan and the Shaolin monks of China, have practised mindfulness as part of training to achieve greater levels of focus, self-awareness, and control over their bodies. Meditation formed an integral part of the training regimens. Athletes who used mindfulness improved their focus, anxiety decreased, and mental resilience improved. Mindfulness has historical roots in Indian traditions, from yoga and meditation to moment-to-moment awareness. Mindfulness and meditation have worked as super weapons for athletes since ancient times. Guru-Shishya Parampara, meaning the student-teacher bond, is often held as being thousands of years old, honouring a historical relationship that is traced back to pre-modern times in India. (Saha R L, Joshi B K, Joshi G, 2002)

The sports played in homes of ancient times were designed not just for fun but for mental development. The importance of physical fitness was stressed — especially by higher social-class monarchs and soldiers. However, even though modern sports Psychology in India is a relatively new discipline following evermore foreign exposure and the establishment of organisations such as the Sports Authority of India (SAI), the basic principles of mental and physical discipline can still be seen even in ancient traditions.

Cultural Practices

Athletes have been psychologically prepared for sports since ancient times with cultural rituals. Competition as a religious form meant that there were a host of spiritual implications in sport, and sport was one way that the divine came near and made up for lack of raw human determination or top-down divine punishment. Sporting rituals are (nonverbal) behaviours that athletes perform before, during, or after a sporting event that are repetitive and symbolic. These seemingly small acts significantly impact their mental and emotional well-being and, in turn, their performance. Rituals are emotional anchors when linked with positive states of mind during certain activities or behaviours. It is beneficial for immensely stressful events, such as a grand tournament or match. Rituals are helpful in providing a sense of control, which results in a reduction of anxiety and increases the player's self-confidence. The mental preparation for the competition was sparked by rituals, and athletes of all religious and non-religious backgrounds used them to improve their concentration and mental fortitude during the competition. Faith gave athletes the mental fortitude and a feeling of security they needed to compete—motivational speeches from the coaches or mentors to inspire those athletes ahead of their competitions. (Payne P. 1961, p.10-17)

Visualisation: It is possible that athletes from the past mentally prepared themselves for their performances in ways that mirror. This helped them become more prepared for contests, as they were more confident and visualised themselves achieving their goals and aspirations.

Techniques of Psychological Analysis Used in Traditional Indian Training of Mind and Body

Mind-Body Connection: The training of ancient Indian warriors was focused on a mind-body connection, where a person considered his mind, body, and soul in sync with each other. This idea was mirrored by the principles of Ayurveda (which lobbied for mental clarity and emotional stability as integral components of physical prowess).

Ayurveda was a system of medicine that originated in India. Plato suggested in 387 BC that the brain is where mental processes occur. (Bartlett, F. C. 1937, p.97.)

In consequence, athletes engaged in mental preparation and techniques to optimise performance. Perfecting the mind and body together, integrating libraries and lecture halls. Athletic activity was considered a form of wisdom.

Gurukula System: Gurukulas is a work-schooling education system that places equal emphasis on academic and physical education. In the Gurukula system, this was true. This holistic nature of education still provides an excellent level of discipline and focus for students, making them mentally accustomed to challenges in sports and life. (Brown R.G. & J.F. Smith, 1977)

Implications for the Present

Even so, such archaic practices are so stubbornly entrenched here that they thwart the development of sports psychology in the country. These days, athletes are partnering with sports psychologists to hone their mental toughness, concentration and resilience. In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the role of mental health and performance in sports. This advancement has also reintroduced us to ancient India's holistic sports training concepts. Indian athletes from ancient times were adept at psychological powers that mixed mental and physical conditioning with physical exercise for optimum results. These methods highlighted the essential mental discipline required in acquiring athletic performance and laid the groundwork for modern sports psychology. Along with physical training, mental preparation was also important, which later laid the foundation for the separation of the study of sports psychology. Additionally, sports psychologists have historically handled each athlete's health. Many of the earliest practices contained glimmers of concepts that would become cornerstones of mental sports. (Griffith CR. 1928, p.2)

Upon reflection on the present status of sports psychology and sports therapy, it is clear that both areas are continuously changing practices that have existed for a long time. There has been a rising understanding of mental health's influence on athletic performance, which has led to the development of sports psychology. A growing awareness among athletes about the significance of mental training, and there is a movement toward establishing centralised access to services related to sports psychology. (Lane AM, Terry PC., 1999) The most significant contribution that contemporary science has made is the development of sports psychology as an applied branch of psychology. In this stage, within a very short period of time, sports psychology has made significant progress. An examination of the conduct of players both on and off the field is the focus of sports psychology. Psychology's effect on sports, athletic performance, exercise, and other forms of physical activity is the subject of research known as sports psychology. (Cox RC. (1998), A number of sports psychologists collaborate with professional athletes and coaches in order to enhance performance and boost motivation. The establishment of sports psychology as a separate academic field, with institutions serving as pioneers in research and providing opportunities for students to take classes that lay the framework for future developments.

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