

Upcoming Talks With
Partners:



Feb 25th
Blueskreak
Greenwich, CT
"Free Sport Psychology Talk"

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April 21, 2021

Northwell Hospital Wellness
Center

"Student-athlete: Achieving your
best by successfully navigating
competitive performance"



Which motivation style is more effective?

A young tennis player just hit a crashing forehand to win a championship match. Parents, relatives, and coach run to congratulate him. From the sidelines, we hear all sorts of complimentary comments: "you played so well," "you are a great player," "I knew you were going to beat him," your strategy for the game really paid off," and "what a super effort!"

Praising is often indicative of a strong motivating factor for young athletes to continue participating in their chosen sports. On the one hand, young athletes love to receive every ounce of positive attention. It makes them feel pumped up and ready to go again. On the other hand, praising the athlete vs. the effort are two very different things.

Ego Focus vs. Skill Focus



Ego focus occurs when an athlete's self-perception is primarily derived from his/her ability or natural talent over effort. A young basketball player, who is taller than his teammates, exudes confidence as he is better able to get rebounds, run faster, and steal more balls than his teammates. Winning over his competitors is used as his measure of competence. His talents

are verbally reinforced by the coach and parents, whose remarks focused on how great he is and what a fine future he will have. This young athlete completely embraces the well-intended praises as he continues to display strong, and often time flashy ball handling.

Even when the team loses, he hears that he is not responsible to carry the team all by himself and losing just happened as the team puts too much expectation on him. In essence, to be seen as a winner becomes the essential ingredient for an ego focused athlete.

Skill focused emphasizes on the incremental completion of tasks to achieve a greater level of competence. The same basketball player embraces his learned skills to achieve his best and uses constant valuable game and practice feedback to make adjustments and learn through the process. The game is used as an experiential laboratory where the learned experience is used to make constant improvements. Irrespective with the end result of the game this athlete, who also seeks to win, is praised by coaches and parents for his effort, ability to stay focused, and positive display of team cohesion. Consequently, the foundation to achieve best results is based on the constant improvement of skill development.

It is normal for athletes to embrace a combination of both skill and ego focus. It may well be that a tennis player is very determined to follow a program routine to enhance fitness and skills during practice, but becomes more ego focused when competing at a high-level championship final, having more visibility from college coaches, playing against a home town rival or competing for a scholarship. What's most important is that in a performance event, where an athlete may easily be tempted to be absorbed by his/her ego, a coach becomes a strong leader to help steer the focus toward regaining task-involving cues.

A comment like, "work hard at every point, hitting the ball deep into the back of the court just like you very well did during practice" helps an athlete to bring attention to what she has more control over and feels more confident about. On the other hand, had the coach said, "your ranking is better than hers, hence you will do great!" brings a very different message. The tennis player may feel pumped up at first, but, when feeling game pressure, anxiety creeps in and negative thoughts will follow. From that moment on, it becomes that much more difficult to mentally remain in the game.

In a recent interview, Rafael Nadal shared his mental approach toward practice. He said, "I do not go to practice unless I have a goal in mind to work on." Rafael is the perfect example of the athlete whose talk-focused approach has propelled him to win multiple

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grand slam titles. His work ethics span around the constant improvement of his tennis skills, the enhancement of his fitness levels, and placing careful attention to his nutrition and dietary needs.

Where do you measure your **Ego vs Task Focused orientation**? Take a look at the link below and do your own assessment.

<https://www.brianmac.co.uk/teosq.htm>

Ego or Task Focused?

Athletes will be well advised to shift their attention toward the development of a task focused mindset. The development of practice routines and learning from each playing experience are the essential skills that foster confidence and trust. An athlete that fully embraces his/her skills looks at challenges as an opportunity to grow rather than an invitation to avoid.



Alex Diaz, Ph.D.

Sports Mental Edge TM
Sports Psychology Consultant
Certified Performing Edge Coaching Professional
WWW.SPORTSMENTALEDGE.COM
68 Main Street, Suite 340
Tuckahoe, NY 10707
(914) 793-9719