



## ***The Sport Psych Handbook***

Review provided by Kinda Lenberg for USAV Coaching Education Department

Shane Murphy, Ph.D., Editor

Shane Murphy, Ph.D., should be a household name to millions of coaches and athletes across the country. He has appeared on ABC, CBS, MSNBC, CNN and can be heard on the radio nationally on NPR. He was at the helm of the sport psychology department at the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) and was also named the associate director of its sport science and technology division. In addition, Murphy has had articles including or referring to his work in *USA Today*, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times* and *Newsweek*.

Yet, as he laments in the preface to his latest work *The Sport Psych Handbook*, he is surprised at how little most people – even athletes of the highest caliber – know about and utilize sport psychology. Don't feel badly if you don't recognize his name – or some of the other sport psychology gurus who contributed to the publication.

*The Sport Psych Handbook*, published by Human Kinetics (2005), is an incredible resource for coaches and athletes. It includes chapters written by 21 of the most storied experts in the field of sport psychology, including Mitch Abrams, Psy.D., Mark Anshel, Ph.D., Gloria Balague, Ph.D., Kevin L. Burke, Ph.D., R. Kelly Crace, Ph.D., Jim Loehr, Sean McCann, Ph.D., and Kirsten Peterson, Ph.D.

Don't recognize some of these names, either? Once you have read *The Sport Psych Handbook*, you will want to know even more about these incredible contributors.

*The Sport Psych Handbook* is 350 pages full of mental training techniques that a coach or athlete – in any sport and at any level – simply cannot be without. And, according to Murphy, "Sport psychology is a vibrant and stimulating field to work in, and tremendous progress has been made in research and application during the past 25 years. But for too many coaches and athletes, sport psychology is a mystery, and the relationship between the mind and athletic performance is not well understood. A big problem for sport psychology is that research has not been widely disseminated. Original research is hard to read and new theories are often difficult to understand" (p. vii).

Fortunately, *The Sport Psych Handbook* will change all that.

There are five sections to the book, and each section boasts several chapters covering the particular topic in-depth.

Part I of *The Sport Psych Handbook* is titled "Inner Drive." Through four chapters in this section, "Inner Drive" concentrates on the issues that are necessary for success on the field or court, including motivation and the need to achieve, goal-setting, the competitive



drive inherent in positive rivalries and balancing practice and performance without overtraining.

Part II “deals with the fundamental psychological processes that determine success and failure in competition. One of the great contributions of sport psychology in the past 20 years has been the increased understanding of how thoughts and emotions govern sport behaviors. Emotions, such as anxiety and anger, and cognitive processes, such as concentration and imagery, are vital parts of the competitive experience for every athlete. The role these issues play in sports competition is explored thoroughly in part II” (p. viii).

Aptly titled “Emotional and Mental Control,” part II of *The Sport Psych Handbook* offers four chapters, including “Anxiety: From Pumped to Panicked” (Chapter 5), “Anger: How to Moderate Hot Buttons” (Chapter 6), “Concentration: Focus Under Pressure” (Chapter 7), and “Imagery: Inner Theater Becomes Reality” (Chapter 8).

Murphy, author of Chapter 7, insists that imagery, or visualization, is perhaps the most crucial of the mental skills required for winning “the mind game” in sports. He goes on to explain in the opening paragraph of the chapter, “In my work with athletes over the years I have seen no other mental skill so often misapplied or wasted. But I have also seen imagery used with tremendous effectiveness by many athletes who understood its power. Athletes need a clear guide to imagery in sport, one that explains what it is and how to use it. This chapter demystifies imagery so that we can learn how to use it in practical ways to successfully manage sport performance” (p. 127).

In the chapter, Murphy explores concepts such as the imagery advantage, terms used in the study of imagery, as well as imagery uses in training and competition and improving your imagery ability.

Murphy ends his chapter with the following: “This chapter summarizes a large body of knowledge about sports imagery gained from research and application and outlines a comprehensive approach to using imagery to manage sport performance. As access improves, coaches and athletes will be in a better position to choose, develop and apply an effective program to their specific sport situation and to understand the problems they might encounter. In the years ahead, imagery training will be widely used as a fundamental aspect of athletic skill development and competition preparation” (p. 151).

Part III of *The Sport Psych Handbook* titled “Interactive Skills” deals with the social aspects of sport. Leadership, teamwork and coaching are all delved into deeply via three engaging chapters.

Part IV is “Potential Pitfalls.” According to Murphy, “One of the fundamental themes of *The Sport Psych Handbook* is that athletic success comes only when individuals balance all aspects of their lives, not just their sport participation. Anyone who has been involved in high-level sports competition knows that a variety of problems complicate the lives of



many athletes and can make success difficult to obtain. These life problems are the focus of part IV” (p. viii).

Injuries, eating disorders and substance abuse are all dealt with in the fourth section.

In the fifth and final section, “The Educated Consumer,” Murphy and the authors provide some very practical advice to help coaches, athletes and parents learn how to find a good sport psychologist and how to work with him or her.

Chapter 15, “Roles: The Sport Psychologist,” is expertly written by Sean McCann, Ph.D., the head of the USOC sport psychology department. He states, “The nitty-gritty of the workings of sport psychology is a mystery to most coaches and athletes. This chapter focuses on the practical aspects of how sport psychologists work with athletes or teams and outlines the nature of their work” (p. 279). He offers information on team and individual consulting, athlete performance feedback, clinical and counseling issues, as well as future directions.

In Chapter 16, “Qualifications: Education and Experience,” Bradley Hack, Ph.D., the director of sport psychology for the department of athletics at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, delves into the differences between sport psychologists and sport psychology consultants, as well as deciding on a practitioner.

David Tod and Mark Anderson, Ph.D., finish off the section with Chapter 17, “Success in Sport Psych: Effective Sport Psychologists.” The authors look into characteristics and techniques of proven consultants, as well as admonishing against the inherent problems found with ineffective sport psychologists.

*The Sport Psych Handbook* is a critical key component for the library of any coach or athlete. It provides practical, easy-to-understand advice regarding the often-misunderstood world of sport psychology.

“Sport psychology is about winning, because it focuses on understanding how athletes succeed and assisting athletes and coaches in achieving their best performance. But it is about much more than that. It is about learning how good you are and discovering how far you can go; it is about the joys of teamwork and striving for a team goal that is greater than any individual goal; it is about enjoying each moment because neither success nor failure is permanent, so if the journey isn’t worthwhile, the destination isn’t worth reaching” (p. xv).