Inside Sport Psychology.

By Costas I. Karageorghis and Peter C. Terry. Copyright 2011 by Human Kinetics, P.O. Box 5076, Champaign, Il 61825-5076 ($23.95, 235 pp.).

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In the past 20 years there has been a multitude of applied sport psychology books published. Some of these books approach sport psychology from a general application perspective and leave it to the reader to translate the content to their own individual situation (e.g., The winning mind: A guide to achieving success and overcoming failure, 1996; Your performing edge: The complete mind-body guide for excellence in sports, 2002; and Embracing your potential, 1998). Other applied sport psychology books use a more situation-specific approach whereby sport psychology principles are translated into specific performance situations for the reader (e.g., Going low: How to break your individual goal scoring barrier by thinking like a pro, 2001; Focused for soccer, 2001; and Heads-up baseball: Playing the game one pitch at a time, 1995). Inside Sport Psychology falls into the first category, meaning that general sport psychology concepts and principles are discussed, and it is up to the reader to translate and apply that information to their own specific performance situation.

This book is written for athletes, coaches, team managers, parents, and students of sport psychology who recognize the importance of mental training but lack an understanding of how psychology and performance blend. As stated by Paul Dickenson (foreword author), “I celebrate this [book] as a real breakthrough in understanding, simplifying, and truly getting inside sport psychology”. The authors provide a structured and straightforward approach to understand how psychological skills can be used to enhance performance. This is accomplished by simplifying sport psychology theory and principles into an easily understood format, along with practical exercises to aid in the application of that content into specific performance situations.

There are eight chapters included in the book, six of which are typically found in most applied sport psychology books (i.e., motivation, self-confidence, anxiety, mood and emotion, concentration, and visualization and self-hypnosis). The other two chapters cover relatively new and innovative topics in applied sport psychology. More specifically, the first chapter of the book entitled, Sport Psychology Applications, provides a typical explanation of the definition, importance, and history of applied sport psychology. However, it also integrates an innovative discussion on the psychology of performance skill acquisition. This novel discussion links performance consistency to physical conditioning, skill level, and psychological readiness. It provides an excellent integration of the psychology of motor skill development that is especially meaningful from a coaching perspective. The second chapter I found truly exciting and innovative was the eighth chapter entitled, The Power of
Sound. This chapter centers on a comprehensive illumination of the relationship between music and sport performance or exercise. Music is discussed in terms of its facilitative effects on motivation, mood, arousal, and skill learning as well as its detrimental effects in relationship to the earlier stages of learning, complexity of the skill, and safety concerns. These two chapters offer fascinating up-to-date information typically not addressed in applied sport psychology books.

The authors’ adopt an approach that views sport psychology not merely a science but also an art. Art is described as identifying and putting together intervention strategies to facilitate performance. Each chapter is formatted identically with topic definitions, a discussion of principles and theories along with key findings from the research, problem areas, intervention strategies and exercises, and a summary. This consistency in presentation aids the reader in comprehending multifaceted complex concepts.

I found three main strengths of the book. First is the inclusion of up-to-date anecdotes and examples to thoroughly explain concepts and principles (e.g., David Beckham 2004 European Championship anecdote, p. 89). These stories provide evidence of how elite level athletes have used these principles and concepts to achieve high levels of performance. The second strength of the book is the numerous hands-on exercises for readers to assist with the translation of the principles and concepts to their own individual performance situations (e.g., Exploring Novel Practice Routines, p. 13; Self-Motivation Test, p. 31; Coping with Adversity, p. 116). The final strength is the novelty of the information and application exercises used throughout the book, especially in Chapters 1 and 8 as they offer unique psychological insights into how skill acquisition and use of music can be used to enhance performance.

I also found two problem areas with the book. First was the lack of reference information. In reading through the book, I often found myself wanting to explore a mentioned study more thoroughly but was not able to because of the lack of reference information (e.g., mood and emotion gender differences, p. 128; demotivation and slumps, p. 40). While this may not be problematic for most lay readers, it could definitely hinder the usefulness of the book for “students of sport psychology”. This intended target group would have benefited from reference citations to further delve into the research discussed. The second limitation was the use of unfamiliar athletes as examples throughout the book. This problem was acknowledged in the preface and most likely only a problem for North American readers. However, not being familiar with many of the athletes discussed made the anecdotes less meaningful because I was unable to relate to the athletes’ stories.

While these two problems are trivial within the scope of the entire book, overall I think the book was an interesting and appealing read. It provides a variety of tools and exercises not only to understand the mental side of performance, but also to apply these principles to individualized performance situations. The strengths of the book far outweigh the weaknesses, and I would recommend the book for two basic reasons. First for its innovative discussions on the psychology of skill acquisition and the use of music to enhance performance; and second for the numerous application exercises that can be used by most readers regardless of skill level and sport. I definitely concur with a statement in the preface that concludes this book can help “bridge the gap” between sport potential and sport performance.