Psychology for Training and Competition

Original version in Russian by A. W. Rodionow (Editor). German version translated by Professor Lothar Pickenhain. Published 1982 by Sportverlag Berlin.

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In the foreword to this, the German translation of this book, Paul Kunath suggests that in certain respects Psychology for Training and Competition can be looked upon as a psychological training manual for trainers, athletes, and sports administrators. The book gives us a glimpse of the Soviet approach to the social psychological guidance of teams and to the psychological fundamentals of training and tactics. Psychological preparation for competition and behavioral regulation in competition are considered important—not the least in publicizing the newest and most distinctive developments in Soviet sport science. Kunath concludes that this is an important book in that it fills some of the gaps in the empirical knowledge base.

The book comprises six sections on different aspects of the application of psychology to sport. Section 1 deals with the psychological fundamentals of sports activity; Section 2 deals with methods of psychological research in sport; the third section focuses upon the psychological factors of personality formation among athletes; Section 4 discusses the psychological bases of training; Section 5 examines psychological preparation for athletic competition, and the final section deals with self-regulation in sport. The book is compiled by A. W. Rodionow and colleagues at the Institute of Physical Culture in Moscow.

In the introduction, by Rodionow, one begins to see subtle differences in underlying philosophies of sport and of the athlete between the Soviet model of sport psychology and the one most familiar to us here in North America. Elite sport is looked upon in this book as both a means of developing human potential and as an important factor in international relations. Further, elite sport provides the opportunity for developing physical, moral, psychological, and social excellence. I was continually impressed by the breadth of the approach to the psychological treatment of the athlete. He/she is looked upon existentially, morally, politically, psychologically, socially, and somatically. It seemed that the goal in Soviet sport psychology, as exemplified in this book, was to mobilize resources that would help in the athlete’s development at these levels—at once an integrated and complete approach.

Sport is put forth as a means of improving cultural and social values; in fact I got the distinct impression that the underlying value of sport revolves little around intrinsic enjoyment but rather around those values and characteristics that could be developed in sport and used in other domains of life. Victory in sport as a means of enhancing the reputation of the socialist system is mentioned.

Section 2 examines various aspects of psychological research methods in sport. The preferred methods of diagnosis/assessment mentioned are observa-
tion, controlled experiment, analysis of text, projective testing, and psychophysiological measurement. Usually a combination of these methods is used. It was interesting to note that the phenomenology of the athlete received a lot of attention, but there was less mention of the use of objective tests. The key question concerns the best combination of methods that could be used to give the most complete diagnosis of the athlete/team.

The third section is noteworthy for its emphasis on examining the social aspects of the athletic situation and the athlete’s immediate relations. The overall diagnostic model put forth here can be schematized by concentric circles representing spheres of the athlete’s life. The outside circle represents the social makeup and influences on the person, and the innermost circle represents the person’s physical, physiological, and psychological processes. It seemed to me a very systematic and comprehensive encapsulation of the person. This is very much in keeping with the philosophy of the person that pervades this book: Personality is taken to include the person’s historically defined system of social relations and his/her activity in the formation of surrounding relations—at once a social, phenomenological, and cognitive interpretation of the person.

Section 4 examines the psychological bases of training and seems to suggest that psychological training is much more a part of daily training in the U.S.S.R. than in North America. The development of psychological skills goes hand in hand with the physical demands of training. Additionally, tactical and technical training are distinguished and integrated into the athlete’s daily training regimen. Tactics are succinctly put forth as the means for using one’s technical ability in light of the competitive task while taking into account the opponent’s weaknesses. It is suggested that tactics training be individualized to suit the character of the athlete. Tactical scenarios are developed to suit each athlete. One athlete may require a strict, well-defined tactical plan with no individual choice while another may need to choose his/her own tactics as the situation develops. The psychological faculties that need to be developed in this respect are rational and independent thinking and initiative.

The chief task of Soviet elite sport, according to this book, consists in demonstrating that the Soviet system of physical culture and sport is the most progressive and advanced. Individuality is put aside for the sake of the team. Again and again the team and the reputation of the homeland is held up as the primary motivation. Winning for the greater glory of oneself is considered too “primitive.” Sport is said to have a great deal of aesthetic, moral, and educational value and potential.

The logical description of a sport in terms of “acts” and “operations” that we see in this book offers a useful and precise way for classifying a sport environment/game. After the activity has been thus logically characterized, then the overall game as well as the acts/operations within it are examined in terms of the psychological and psychomotor requirements. Thus a profile of the ideal participant in a particular sport is arrived at. Such profiles are different for various sports. There are similarities to the between-sport trait research of the late 1960s.

Section 5 deals with psychological preparation for the actual competition, as distinct from training. This requires the development of general skills necessary for all competition and those skills required for the actual game at hand. General psychological preparation involves the development of self-regulation strategies, concentration and attentional skills and, interestingly, will-power and