The Development of Sport Psychological Research in India

M.L. Kamlesh
Punjab Government College of Physical Education

Jitendra Mohan
Panjab University

Sport psychology is a relatively new sport science in India (Bhattacharya, 1987). Certain psychological principles have been taught in physical education since the opening of the YMCA College of Physical Education in Madras in 1920. But the principles were derived from educational psychology, not sport psychology. It was the publication of sport psychology studies in journals of sports medicine, physical education, and sport psychology that reached India from abroad during the 1960s and 1970s that stimulated research interest in sport psychology in India. This led to a few research studies being conducted there in the 1960s, and to a large growth of research studies in the 1970s. Sport psychology is now a firmly established sport science in the curriculum of most colleges of physical education. And in 1986 the first annual meeting of the Sport Psychology Association of India was held.1 Thus sport psychology has become an important facet of the sport sciences.

There are two other reasons for the development of sport psychology in India. First, there was a recognition by other sport scientists that psychological aspects were important in human performance. The science of exercise and sport physiology has become very firmly established in colleges of physical education in India. The exercise and sport physiologist has had a profound influence in training and teaching methodologies both in the gymnasium and on the playing field. But there came an awareness that knowledge of the physiological system was incomplete without some understanding of human behavior. Therefore our colleagues in exercise and sport physiology supported an interest in mental processes, as many scientists and practitioners realized that mental aspects were also important for high performance in sport.

Second, coaches and athletes began to recognize that mental training was essential in the international competitive sport arena. The decline of performance in such well-established Indian games as field hockey and cricket created a great deal of concern and hastened the acceptance of sport psychology as one area to aid the performance of athletes. Slogans such as “psych up sportsman” and

About the Authors: M.L. Kamlesh is with Punjab Government College of Physical Education in Patiala, India. Jitendra Mohan is with the Department of Psychology at Panjab University, Chandigarh, India.
"sports war" became popular in India as sport psychology grew in importance. Together, all these factors helped stimulate an interest in sport psychology.

The interest in sport psychology research began to manifest itself in the 1970s in universities, primarily at the master's degree level, then at the master of philosophy degree level, and gradually leading to the doctoral level. This work has been severely handicapped by a lack of resources, however, such as the lack of sophisticated equipment and the difficulty in financing such research. This and other constraints have hindered sport psychologists in India from conducting their research studies. The result has been a profusion of descriptive studies. However, sport psychology research is developing and promises to be a vital and important component of sport sciences in the future. Current research in sport psychology can be divided into four categories: (a) personality and athletes, (b) anxiety and arousal, (c) creativity and intelligence, and (d) other variables. Each will be discussed in turn.

Current Research

Athletic Personality

Most of the research on personality has been conducted with a view to determining the personality trait differences between athletes and nonathletes (Gupta, 1972; Kumar, Shukla, & Thakur, 1986), elite and nonelite athletes (Dey & Uppal, 1986; Kamlesh, 1982, 1983; Lakshmi & Reddy, 1973; Mohan, Mall, & Paul, 1979; Uppal & Gill, 1986; Uppal & Singh, 1984), individual and team sport athletes (Singh, 1986; Verma, 1983), and participants and nonparticipants (Mohan et al., 1979; Singh & Singh, 1986). The inventories employed have typically been the Cattell 16 PF inventory or the Eysenck personality inventory. Both scales have been used extensively and modified to certain populations as necessary. However, the results of these studies come under the same series of criticisms that have plagued sport personality research elsewhere (Gill, 1986; Martens, 1975; Morgan, 1980).

First, most of these studies have been descriptive, with a definition of athlete and nonathlete nonstandardized across studies. Second, few hypotheses have been presented about why certain sports may warrant particular personality profiles for success. Third, the inventories have not always been considered for their relevance to the population being studied. And fourth, the practical significance of these studies has not always been considered prior to the research being conducted. Thus one must be very cautious in drawing any meaningful conclusions from the many studies conducted.

Anxiety and Arousal

Research in anxiety and arousal has been very popular in India. High level athletics evokes a great deal of anxiety and/or emotional arousal, which may either help or impede performance (Gupta, Dhillon, & Singh, 1970; Kamlesh, 1984; Verma, 1986). Although the studies completed in India have yielded some interesting findings, not enough work has yet been completed on this important topic. Further, new research should probe not only the psychological issues inherent in anxiety and arousal but also the physiological and pathological issues as well.