

Overtime

Brawn needs brain balance, says Botterill

By LISA TIMPF

IF YOGI BERRA IS TO BE believed, sport at the elite level is "50% physical and 90% mental."

While one may quibble with Yogi's grasp of statistics, the message that the mind can play a major role in sport is right on the mark, according to University of Winnipeg's Cal Botterill.

Botterill, a sport psychologist, believes that the mental aspects of the game aren't just important for elite athletes.

"The more I work with elite athletes, the more applications I pick up for young and beginning athletes," he told a mixed audience of physical education and recreation students and professors, and varsity athletes and coaches, at a seminar on Friday at the Dalplex.

"In Sweden, they're working on mental imagery at the elementary school age," he said. "We need to introduce mental skills at an early age."

Mental toughness, an attribute coaches look for in athletes, is in reality a combination of mental skills, according to Botterill. The nice thing about these skills is that they can be carried over into other aspects of life.

However, these mental skills need to be developed and practised. Ultimately, the aim is for the athlete to be in charge and in control of him/herself, his/her level of attention, and his/her emotional state.

Botterill outlined eleven areas that are crucial mental aspects of athletics. Briefly stated, they include:

Energizing: This is the ability to achieve a level of emotional readiness to play, a feeling of energy and intensity. Different athletes might raise their energy levels by music, mental rehearsal, or quiet meditation before a match. The crucial thing is for each individual to find the method that works best for him/herself and use it in pre-game preparation.

Relaxing: Although he/she has to be "ready", the athlete has to make sure he/she isn't too tense. Relaxing includes the ability to eliminate negative thoughts, and to push worries, problems, and anxiety out of mind.

Reading and reacting: The athlete must be able to "scan" or "read" what is going on in the game and cue in to what is relevant.

Parking: Athletes must learn to be able to "park" distracting or negative thoughts, and narrow their focus to the task at hand.

Decision making: Athletes can't afford to get too analytical in the middle of a contest. They have to be able to make rapid decisions and avoid what Botterill referred to as "analysis to the point of paralysis".

Staying confident: Athletes who focus on the positive are best able to maximize their potential.

Different people have different levels of self-esteem. Sometimes people have to be taught to think more positively about themselves, Botterill suggested.

Staying assertive: "Athletes must be able to 'go after it,'" said Botterill. "You have to be approaching success, not avoiding failure."

Staying expressive: Communication with teammates is crucial. Athletes must be able to retain contact with other team members and not become too internalized.

Time management: Prioritizing, and knowing when to do what, whether at practise, in games, or in pre-game warmup, is another crucial aspect. How does the athlete use his/her time when he/she is on the bench? asked Botterill. "You can sit and let negative thoughts creep in, or you can use that time to learn, perhaps by visualizing what you would do in the same situations as the player you will be replacing finds him/herself in," he suggested. "It's a matter of choosing to use time productively."

Relationship management: How does the athlete contribute to his/her relationships with coaches and teammates? "Basically there are three choices if you're having a problem with someone," said Botterill. "You can let something bother you, you can 'park it' and put it out of your mind, or you can do something about it—say what's on your mind, suggest a solution, and get on with the task."

Development/preparation management: This final skill involves goal-setting—something every athlete "should do a little of every day," said Botterill.

Developing mental skills is not something that happens overnight.

The first step for the athlete who wants to work on mental skills is to assess where he/she is at now. One way of doing this is to use the Test of Attentional and Interpersonal Style (TAIS Test). But even a simple checklist like the one above allows for some degree of self-analysis.

The next step is to pick out one or two things at a time to work on, suggested Botterill. To attempt to work on everything at once would be to invite information overload.

While some athletes find the physical aspect of sport preparation enough of a time drain, it seems that some attention to the mental aspects as well is essential. The benefits will be well worth the time invested. That is, if you can learn to manage the time...

Recommended further reading: Terry Orlick's *In Pursuit of Excellence*, and also CAC Level III Coaching Theory Manual



The Dal men's volleyball team finished the season with a perfect 18-0 record. Photo: Bill Jensen, Dal Photo.

Dalhousie finishes season with perfect record

By MARK ALBERSTAT

THE DALHOUSIE MEN'S volleyball team took to the court twice this weekend in their final home games of the season, both against UNB. These two matches left Dalhousie with a record of 18 wins and 0 losses in league play.

The Dal squad won Friday night's contest 9-15, 15-6, 15-2, and 15-3, and triumphed on Saturday by 15-7, 15-5, and 15-10 tallies.

These games were not only the last home games for the team this season, but they were also the last games for Peter Hickman, Jeff Bredin, and Jamie Fraser to put on the Tiger colors. All three players received gifts after the final match, with Jeff Bredin receiving an extra award for being named Dalhousie Athlete of the Week twice since Christmas.

The UNB Rebels won Friday night's opening coin flip and decided to serve. They got the subsequent point and ran up the score to 7-1 when Dal took a time out. Dal made a comeback but it was too little, too late as the UNB squad went on to win the game 15-9.

The second game was a see-saw battle in the early going, although as the 15-6 score indicates the Tigers exploded and easily took the game. Reid Umlah had an ace serve as the 14th point and also put up the winning point.

The third game was even more lopsided for Dal as they took this game 15-2.

The fourth game took almost no time at all as it looked like Dal would have a rare volleyball shutout. The Rebels took the shutout hopes away after Dal's 11th point. Dal went on to take the game and

thus the match with a 15-3 score. The Coke Player of the Match was Chris Lohnes with 15 kills and two blocking stuffs.

Saturday's games saw the Tigers have little trouble as they dispatched the visitors in three games straight.

The first game had Dal get off to a sluggish start as they let UNB get four points on them at the 5-1 mark. The Tigers rallied to 5-5, then went on to win.

The third game had several ties through the early going. The Tigers went up to 12, then the Rebels rallied back to ten. Ron McGillvray served up the winning point ending the match.

The Coke Player of the Match was Jamie Fraser with nine kills. Jeff Bredin had three kills and three stuffs, and Peter Hickman had one kill, two aces, and one stuff.