



Can coaching focusing on an athlete's strengths increase wellbeing and retention?

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Introduction and Aims

Positive Psychology aims to expand the focus of psychology from the preoccupation with repairing the negatives in life to also extending the positive (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

The application of positive psychology to sport advocates "a focus on strengths and flourishing rather than the weaknesses of athletes, coaches and individuals" (Association for Applied Sports Psychology).

The emphasis in sport on peak performance, athlete resilience and team flow makes sport an interesting field for the application of positive psychology. A number of influential studies show a significant relationship between sporting performance and optimism (Gordan & Kane, 2002, Seligman, Nolen-Hoeksema, Thorton & Thorton 1990).

Sport is a well-accepted avenue towards a healthy body, a healthy mind and positive social connection. Much research has been conducted on athletes, but comparatively less research has been conducted on the effects of coaching sport on one's wellbeing. Positive sports psychology focuses on strengths of athletes, coaches, and individuals.

This poster will describe mid-intervention qualitative interview results from a study that examines the effect of a strength based sports coaching intervention on the wellbeing and retention of school aged athletes. The intervention involves 24 sporting teams, 24 coaches and over 150 student athletes from Bunbury Cathedral Grammar School.



Bunbury Cathedral Grammar School

Bunbury Cathedral Grammar School (BCGS) is an co-educational, independent, Anglican, day and boarding school with approximately 1000 students and 175 staff members located in a rural setting in the South-West of Australia.

Method

A within-sample pre-test/post test design was used to assess changes in positive affect, negative affect and coaching confidence. Prior to the intervention all coaches and athletes were asked to complete the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (Watson, Clark and Tellegen 1988) (PANAS) as well as a short survey. In addition, coaches were asked to complete the Coaching Efficacy Scale (CES) (Myers, N.D., Wolfe, E.W., Maier, K.S., Feltz, D.L., & Reckase, M.D. (2006)

24 teams were involved in the study (15 boys teams, 9 girls teams) with 13 teams acting as control groups (representing approximately 80 student athletes). The other 11 teams' Coaches (representing 70 student athletes) were then trained to focus more on their athletes strengths using Positive Sports Coaching model. All coaches and athletes are to complete the same surveys at the end of the sports season. This data will be presented upon the completion of the sporting season.

Mid way through this intervention qualitative interviews with a sample of the "Strength Based" coaches were undertaken to gain a preliminary understanding of the effectiveness of the intervention. This paper will examine the results of this qualitative data.

The Positive Sports Coaching model has given our coaches a simple framework to use with their teams that has assisted in building their confidence and helped them to more effectively employ all those great teachable moments that arise in sport. The wellbeing of both the coaches and the students has undoubtedly improved through the use of several simple, yet powerful strategies"

Head of Psychology and Positive Education

Positive Sports Coaching

The Positive Sports Coaching program was developed by Mr Matthew Scholes, a researcher, sports administrator and sports coach, in 2011. The Positive Sports Coaching (PSC) program is an innovative, strength based way of coaching teams and individuals built around the science of positive psychology.

The program is built around the science of optimism, positive feedback and process praise and has the dual aims of:

- 1) assisting with performance and
- 2) to promote wellbeing.

Results—Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative data was collected via interviews of 'strength based coaches'.

Deductive thematic analysis identified 3 key themes.

Theme 1 Increased athlete engagement

"I could tell that in a situation when they would previously have given up, they persevered. It was most exciting"

"The team are really enjoying coming to games and training – they even chose to train yesterday in the rain, whilst the A grade team stayed dry in the gym"

"No matter what the result, it helped us to leave games feeling more positive and that flowed in to subsequent trainings and games"

"Leaving the game remembering what had gone well, rather than the few things that hadn't just made it more fun for everyone, and I think, led to much higher numbers at training the next week."

Theme 2 Athletes exhibited greater resilience

"By supporting the students to identify strengths in each other games, I think we ended up with a much more accurate perspective on how the game had actually unfolded"

"Deliberately focussing on the positives in the messages I gave transformed the culture in our team – and the way students communicated with each other on the field quickly followed suit – to a more encouraging and supportive style. This helped enormously, especially when things weren't going our way on the field"

Theme 3 Greater understanding of athletes abilities

"The PSC model helped realign the messages I was giving to athletes. It made me realise that I was focussing more on weaknesses than I had intended"

"It was interesting to see how sometimes I focus more on how certain players are stronger than others rather than seeing what my 'less skilled' players bring to the table"

Discussion

This initial mid-intervention qualitative evaluation suggests that a strength based approach to sports coaching improves the engagement of the student athletes. Further analysis of the wellbeing data upon the completion of the sporting season will be conducted and presented in a separate paper.

My team has gone from U14 B Grade to A Grade and since employing the PSC techniques they haven't lost a game and now sit second on the A Grade ladder beating teams who were originally created to be, and graded as, A Grade teams

Basketball Coach



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