

The Effect of Positive Psychology on the Wellbeing of Sports Coaches

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POSITIVE SPORTS COACHING

Sports Performance & Athlete Wellbeing

...using the science of positive psychology



Introduction

Positive Psychology is a relatively new branch of psychology that conducts scientific inquiry into the factors that help individuals, communities and organisations thrive by building on their strengths and virtues (Gable & Haidt, 2005). 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. The current study conducted a positive psychology sports coaching intervention with 27 coaches across 7 sports: Badminton, Cricket Rowing, Tennis, Track & Field, Volleyball and Waterpolo at St Peter's College, Adelaide.

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, evidenced 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.

A pilot study of 37 student athletes (Waters, Scholes White 2011) found that Positive Sports Coaching® program assisted the well-being of student athletes.

One of the key tools in the Positive Sports Coaching® program is the Positive Sports Coaching Wheel® which enables coaches to frame their feedback in consistent manner. The focus is on looking for the positives while dealing with the negatives using an optimistic mindset.



Evaluation of Positive Sports Coaching

Does it improve coach wellbeing and confidence?

A within-sample pre-test/post-test design was used to assess changes in positive affect, negative affect and coaching confidence. Prior to the training, coaches were asked to complete the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (Watson, Clark & Tellegen 1988) (PANAS) as well as the Coaching Efficacy Scale (CES) (Myers, N.D., Wolfe, E.W., Maier, K.S., Feltz, D.L., & Reckase, M.D. (2006).) and again 5 week after the training was completed.

The PANAS asks the participants to rate how they feel across 20 emotions of which 10 are positive and 10 are negative. A five point scale was used (1 – only minimally, 5 – Extremely).

The CES is a 25 questions scale that looks at the extent to which coaches believe they have the capacity to affect the learning and performance of their athletes. A seven point scale was used (0 – not at all confident, 7 Extremely confident).

Sport	No. Coaches Trained
Badminton	3
Cricket	6
Rowing	3
Tennis	4
Track & Field	3
Volleyball	3
Waterpolo	5

Results

T-test analyses revealed significant increases in positive affect and coaching confidence at the end of the intervention. There were no significant shifts in negative affect between pre-intervention and post-intervention

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
CES Pre test	28	6.73	1.12
CES Post test	16	7.44	0.53
PANAS Positive Pre test	28	3.66	0.64
PANAS Positive Post test	16	3.79	0.68
PANAS Negative Pre test	28	1.31	0.55
PANAS Negative Post test	16	1.36	0.57

	Levene's Test	T-Test					
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.	95% CI	
CES	Equal variances not assumed	5.06	0.03	-2.85	40.93	0.01	-1.21 -0.21
PANAS Positive	Equal variances assumed	0.00	0.99	-0.61	42.00	0.54	-0.54 0.29
PANAS Negative	Equal variances assumed	0.02	0.89	-0.30	42.00	0.77	-0.40 0.30

Qualitative Analysis

How has the PSC Coaching program helped your coaching?

Qualitative data was also collected one month after the intervention. Deductive Thematic Analysis identified 5 key themes:

Theme 1: Better communication

- "PSC program gave a specific model to use."
- "PSC program made it easier for me to communicate messages and instructions."
- "Made me think more carefully before speaking."
- "PSC program helped me with conversations with other coaches and parents."

Theme 2: Improved feedback, coaching confidence

- "Given me skills to feel confident in the way I coach and manage my team."
- "More conscious of focusing on the "good" things boys are doing."
- "Provided me with a range of tools and techniques to better manage and encourage my players."
- "More praise for players, framing feedback positively."
- "Built my self-esteem, have confidence in my own abilities as a coach."

Theme 3: Heightened awareness of coaching

- "Encouraged me to look more closely at my coaching."
- "Deeper reflection of impact of structure of training on students' psychology and well-being."
- "Confirm and strengthen my coaching with a consistent structure to follow."

References

Association for Applied Sports Psychology: <http://www.appliedsportspsych.org/>
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What did you learn from the PSC Coaching training?

Theme 4: Emphasising the positives

- "Boys respond / improve better when I focus on what they are already good at compared to their weaknesses."
- "Reinforce the positives, use examples of good plays, enjoy the game."
- "Focus on positives instead of focusing on mistakes."
- "Always accentuate the positives, focus on what's already working."

Theme 5: Improve coaching techniques

- "Being specific in targeting areas of growth / things to remember."
- "Techniques to improve coaching / playing experience for all students."
- "Skills to motivate students."
- "Positive sports coaching wheel provided a useful mechanism to regularly follow, also the positive athlete interaction diamond."

Discussion

This initial evaluation of the Positive Sports Coaching program suggests that positive psychology is beneficial to assisting the wellbeing and confidence of coaches across a broad range of sports (both individual and team sports).

Given that a previous study (Waters, Scholes, White 2011) suggests that the program is also beneficial to improving the wellbeing of the athletes there is a strong case for implementing this program across a range of sports settings. Further examination and research of this program will look at linking the wellbeing outcomes to performance outcomes.

Further Information

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