

Positive Psychology—Achieving large scale impact across Olympic sports

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Matthew Scholes, La Trobe University, Australia



POSITIVE SPORTS COACHING

Sports Performance & Athlete Wellbeing

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Introduction

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). A number of influential studies show a significant relationship between sporting performance and optimism (Gordan & Kane, 2002, Seligman, Nolen-Hoeksema, Thornton & Thornton 1990).

In October 2014 the Oceania National Olympic Committees in partnership with Oceania Australia Foundation and the Organisation of Sports Federations of Oceania committed to supporting the wellbeing of athletes through a large scale positive psychology intervention. Coaches have been identified as critical influences in an athlete’s life and as such the intervention focus’ on reframing coach behaviour and feedback mechanisms via a free positive psychology online coaching program Positive Sports Coaching

This poster will describe the initial roll out of a free online sports coaching intervention across Olympic sports including an examination of the initial uptake data and the qualitative and quantitative feedback received from participant coaches.

An Introduction to Positive Sports Coaching

The “Introduction to Positive Sports Coaching” is a free 30 minute online course. The focus of the course is to build athletes’ long term wellbeing via coaches reframing their feedback to focus more on athletes’ strengths.



The course aims to educate coaches, athletes, administrators and parents about five main areas of and positive psychology: Amygdala Hijack, Negativity Bias, Neural Plasticity, Strengths & Optimism.

The course has been designed to be culturally sensitive and includes cartoon based visuals to support information which can be in audio or text format. This reduces the issues for people with limited literacy or hearing impairment. The online nature of the course enables even coaches from rural or remote communities the opportunity to participate.

Results

To date 366 coaches have completed the course across 49 sports (main sports are Triathlon 81, Athletics 32, Basketball 29, AFL 24, Softball 21, Netball 20 and Soccer 15) and 25 countries (main countries are Australia 288, Singapore 18, Great Britain 10, Canada 7, New Zealand 6, USA 6, Fiji 4, Ireland 2, Netherlands 2, Egypt 1,).

Region	Participants
Oceania	307
Europe	19
Asia	19
The Americas	15
Africa	1

Of the 366 coaches who have initially completed the program 86 completed the voluntary survey (23% response rate). Of the 86 respondents 66% were male, 34% female, 32% coaching at elite/sub elite level and 68% coaching at club/community level.

Initial feedback indicates the course is having a positive impact on participants understanding of the manner in which they feedback to athletes as well as their coaching confidence.

Please rate the following on a scale of 0-5, with 5 being a lot and 0 being not at all.

How much do you feel the course has helped you?	0	1	2	3	4	5
To understand the mental health challenges facing athletes?	0	1%	2%	26%	39%	32%
To understand how the way you coach can affect your players’ brain?	0%	0%	1%	10%	46%	43%
The importance of building the resilience and optimism of your athletes?	0%	0%	1%	7%	37%	55%
Be more aware of the importance of how you talk to your athletes?	0%	0%	1%	4%	39%	56%
To identify areas you could improve as a coach?	0%	1%	1%	12%	38%	48%
Have more confidence in your coaching?	1%	2%	1%	10%	45%	41%

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative data was collected as part of the voluntary survey. Deductive thematic analysis identified 5 key themes.

What Key Messages do you take away from the course?

Theme 1 – Greater focus on positives

“I need to focus more on positives – it has a real practical basis, not just philosophy”

“Positive change is possible using what is going right in addition to what is going wrong”

“Stay positive. My actions have a flow on effect to the athletes”

“Think positive, see positive and work on the positives to get more successful results”

“Correct framing of failures in a positive message builds resilience”

“Simple positive adjustments can make a huge difference”.

Theme 2 – Focus on Strengths

“To coach to my athletes strengths”

“Look for their strengths, not just overcoming weaknesses”

“Focus and build on strengths to increase wellbeing and positivity”

Theme 3 – Impact of Coaches on Athletes

“How I coach can impact the life of my athletes”

“Knowing you are a big part of the athletes lives and what you tell them to do should be for the betterment of the athlete”

“Coaching can effect/impact on all aspects of the athletes life”

“Your communications with your athletes need to be carefully considered and complete”.



How will this course assist you to improve as a coach?

Theme 4 – Self Awareness

“Improved my self-evaluation”

“Made me think about how I go about my coaching and therefore how I can improve some of my short comings”

“Making me think more about how I speak to and at athletes”.

“By reflecting back until my change becomes habitual”

“Helps me develop my understanding when teaching and educating young athletes”.

Theme 5 Communication

“Enable me to communicate better with my athletes and use positive coaching to improve their performance”

“I will change my language”

“Adjusting my language more positively - using more language rather than just ‘well done’.

“To better understand the individual and ensure the communications are going to have a positive impact on them.

“Better communication with athletes”.

Discussion

This initial evaluation of the Online Positive Sports Coaching intervention suggest the course is having a positive impact in the way coaches approach their coaching and communicate their messages.

It is hoped that over time the impact of changing sports coaches feedback delivery will have a positive impact on wellbeing data for athletes. A more detailed longitudinal study will take place once the target of 10,000 coaches have completed the course.

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