

SPORT PSYCHOLOGY AND INJURY MANAGEMENT

Mental Training for the Injured Athlete

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Goal Setting:

From the instant that an athlete suffers an injury, he or she becomes highly dependent on our modern medical technology for assistance. This dependency generates a sense of loss of control on the part of the athlete over a variety of areas in their life including their schedule, their ability to do daily routines, and their capacity to enjoy their sport. By utilizing the goal setting process, injured athletes can begin to regain a sense of control over their lives. A thorough goal setting program would include establishing weekly goals in four areas: Physical Therapy, Mental Training, Work Activities, and Recreational Activities. In this way an athlete becomes more involved in setting a direction and course for his activities during the rehabilitation process.

Relaxation Training

During the process of rehabilitating, an athlete can utilize time that would otherwise be spent in sport participation to train their mind and body to relax using a variety of techniques. The application of such well known procedures as Progressive Muscle Relaxation, Controlled Breathing, Goal Setting, and Imagery can be utilized. In training the injured athlete in these skills emphasis is placed on the value of relaxation in reducing pain associated with the injury. Once learned, relaxation can be used as a vehicle for introducing the athlete to the process of mental imagery.

Mental Imagery

Injured athletes can employ mental imagery skills to assist them in three areas: Healing, Coping, and Mental Rehearsal. First, an athlete is provided with information in the form of pictures and description regarding the purpose and intent of the rehabilitation regiment. In this way the healing process can be imaged as it actually occurs within the body. This healing imagery is conducted in such a way as to utilize all the creative ideas and visualizations the athlete can develop.

The second form of Mental Imagery deals with preparing the injured athlete for difficulties he or she will encounter in the recovery process as well as in their return to play. Here the athlete is asked to imagine a possible problem, then create images of themselves overcoming this problem in some way. Finally, the athlete images a successful resolution and continuation of the recovery process.

In the third application of Mental Imagery the injured athlete is encouraged to use these newly acquired imagery skills to mentally rehearse their athletic performance in practice or competition. This allows the injured athlete to prepare for their upcoming return to action.