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The Psychological Characteristics of Peak Performance in Taiwanese Olympic Athletes: A Qualitative Study

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Introduction

The peak performance of athletes has always been expected to appear frequently by coaches and players and to clearly understand the nature, appearance, and development control strategies. Gardner (2009) suggests that the studies of athletes' peak performance can help athletes to achieve and maintain the feeling of 'in the zone' and the state of idea performance. In the past, most of the research on the psychological state of peak performance's data was studied by athletes in Western countries. In addition, only few studies recruited Olympic athletes as participants. The psychological state of athletes peak performance might be affected by different competitive levels and cultures, so it is necessary to establish local data to understand the psychological state and characteristics of peak performance of elite athletes in Taiwan, and then provide a basis for subsequent assistance in athletes psychological skills training.

Method

The qualitative research method was used in this study. Participants were 16 Taiwanese elite athletes and 10 coaches who participated either 2016 Rio Olympic Games or 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games. Sixteen athletes won 1 silver medal and 4 bronze medals in Olympic Games. The data was collected through the semi-constructed interview. After received the informed consent, participants were interviewed around 50 to 60 minutes.

Results

The results of the study found that Taiwanese Olympic athletes and coaches reported the following consistent psychological characteristics when athletes experiencing peak performance: high self-confidence, maintaining a normal mindset, full focus and engaging, enjoy the competition, and relax. The important factors affecting the peak performance of elite athletes are: Adequate preparation, support of significant others, completely execute the pre-competition planning, and pre-competition routine.

Discussion

In accord with the previous sport psychology theoretical and empirical literature, this study has found self-confidence, normal mindset, focus, enjoyment, and relax are the crucial elements of peak performance for Taiwanese Olympic athletes. In addition, this study also found the important factors such as preparation, social support, execution of pre-competition plan, and pre-competition routine affect athletes' peak performance. The results provide evidence for the idea that the optimal state for peak performance requires a highly developed ability to identify and then self-regulate a range of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral factors relevant to the individual athlete and the requirements of the competition environment.

Gardner, F. L. (2009). Efficacy, mechanisms of change, and the scientific development of sport psychology. *Journal of Clinical Sports Psychology*, 3, 139–155.

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