Chapter 2: Personality and Sport
Personality and Its Structure

• Personality: The characteristics or blend of characteristics that make a person unique

• The structure of personality:
  – Psychological core
  – Typical responses
  – Role-related behavior
Figure 2.1

Adapted by permission from Martens 1975.
Psychological Core

- The most basic and deepest attitudes, values, interests, motives, and self-worth of a person—the “real” person
- Example: A person’s religious values
Typical Responses

• The way one typically adjusts or responds to the environment

• Example: Being happy-go-lucky, shy
Role-Related Behavior

• How one acts in a particular social situation
• Example: Behavior as a student, parent, or friend
Approaches to Understanding Personality

- Psychodynamic approach
- Trait approach
- Situational approach
- Interactional approach
- Phenomenological approach
Psychodynamic Approach

• Behavior is determined by several unconscious, constantly changing factors that often conflict with one another.

• Emphasis is placed on understanding the person as a whole rather than identifying isolated traits.
Trait Approach

• Behavior is determined by relatively stable traits that are fundamental units of personality.
• These traits predispose one to act in a certain way, regardless of the situation.
Perfectionism

• Perfectionism has been one of the most widely studied personality characteristics in sport psychology in recent years.

• Perfectionism is a multidimensional construct that consists of various components, including setting high standards, feeling concern over mistakes, and being highly organized.

(continued)
Perfectionism (continued)

- Depending on the specific components characterizing one’s perfectionistic personality, perfectionism can lead to both highly positive and extremely negative consequences (maladaptive versus adaptive perfectionism).
Situational Approach

• Behavior is determined largely by the situation or environment.
• The situation is a more important determinant of behavior than particular personality traits.
• The situational approach is not as widely embraced by most sport psychologists.
Interactional Approach

• Behavior is determined by both the person and the situational factors as well as by their interaction.

• The majority of contemporary sport and exercise psychologists favor the interactional approach.
Phenomenological Approach

- Behavior is best determined by accounting for situational and personal characteristics.
- A person’s understanding and interpretation of one’s self and environment are critical.
- The phenomenological view is often stressed by today’s sport psychologists.
Measuring Personality: Traits and States

• Measure both traits and states.
• A trait is a typical style of behavior.
• State is the situation’s effect on behavior—a “right now” feeling that can change from moment to moment.
Measuring Personality

• There are general versus situation-specific (sport-specific) measures.

• Situation-specific trait tests predict behavior more accurately than do general trait measures.
Measuring Personality (continued)

• It is often more effective to compare personality test scores to a person’s own previous test results than to group norms.
Dos and Don’ts in Personality Testing

• DO inform participants about the purpose of the personality test and exactly how it will be used.

• DO allow only qualified individuals who have an understanding of testing principles and measurement error to give personality tests.

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Dos and Don’ts in Personality Testing (continued)

- DO integrate personality test results with other information obtained about the participant.
- DO use sport- and exercise-specific tests whenever possible, giving them in consultation with a sport psychologist.
- DO use both state and trait measures of personality.
Dos and Don’ts in Personality Testing (continued)

• DO provide participants with specific feedback concerning the results of the test.

• DO compare individuals against their own baseline levels rather than against normative information.
Dos and Don’ts in Personality Testing (continued)

• DON’T use clinical personality tests that focus on abnormality to study an average population of sport and exercise participants.

• DON’T use personality tests to decide who makes a team or program and who doesn’t.
Dos and Don’ts in Personality Testing (continued)

• DON’T give or interpret personality tests unless you are qualified to do so by the APA or another certifying organization.

• DON’T use personality tests to predict behavior in sport and exercise settings without considering other sources of information.
Fake It Until You Make It

- Athletes that can ‘act as if’ they are what they hope they will be have a much better chance of performing at or near their best than those who allow themselves to fall into the trap of acting how they feel.

- Another way of looking at this is it’s much easier for athletes to talk themselves into feeling than it is for them to feel themselves into action.
Selected Findings in Personality Research

• Some relationship exists between personality traits and states and sport performance, but it is far from perfect or precise.

• No single definitive personality profile has been found that consistently distinguishes athletes from nonathletes.
Selected Findings in Personality Research (continued)

• Few personality differences are evident between male and female athletes, particularly at the elite level.

• Morgan’s (1980) mental health model shows that successful athletes exhibit greater positive mental health than do less successful athletes. However, precise predictions have not been achieved and should not be used for team selection.
Cognitive Strategies and Athletic Success

- Cognitive strategies and mental strategies are among the skills and behaviors that athletes use in competition.
- Although they’re not personality traits in the traditional sense, cognitive strategies reflect the behavior aspect of personality and interact with personality characteristics.
Cognitive Strategies and Athletic Success (continued)

• Both quantitative and qualitative cognitive strategy measures have been shown to differentiate between more and less successful athletes.

• Overachieving high school athletes scored higher on coachability, concentration, coping with adversity, and total cognitive strategy than average and underachieving athletes.
Cognitive Strategies and Athletic Success (continued)

- Cognitive strategies have been shown to be related to superior performance in elite sport.
- Elite athletes show superior ability to cope with adversity and mentally prepare compared to non-elite athletes.
Cognitive Strategies and Athletic Success *(continued)*

- Olympic medal-winning wrestlers more often used positive self-talk, had a narrower and more immediate focus of attention, and were better prepared mentally for unforeseen negative events.

- Mental preparation and planning are critical components of athletic success.
Cognitive Strategies and Athletic Success: Guidelines for Practice

• Enhance confidence and practice specific plans to deal with adversity during competition.

• Practice routines to deal with unusual circumstances and distractions before and during competition.

• Concentrate wholly on the upcoming performance and block out irrelevant events and thoughts.

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Sample Hitting Routine
Cognitive Strategies and Athletic Success: Guidelines for Practice (continued)

• Use several mental rehearsals before competition.
• Don’t worry about other competitors before a competition; instead, focus on what you can control.
• Develop detailed competition plans.
• Learn to regulate arousal and anxiety.
Mental Preparation Routines

• A primary goal of the mental game is to play with confidence.

• Believing you will succeed is the most important factor in determining how well you perform.

• Preparation is one of the most powerful means of gaining confidence: the more prepared you feel the more confident you feel.
Routines

- Habits and routines lead to familiarity
- Familiarity leads to confidence
- Any coach or player knows how critical confidence is to success
- Routines are the life jacket of peak performance
- We are a product of our routines, unfortunately many coaches and athletes don’t know how to best structure productive routines.
Your Role in Understanding Personality

• Consider both personality traits and situations.
• Be an informed consumer.
• Be a good communicator.
• Be a good observer.
• Be knowledgeable about mental strategies.