

INTRODUCTION TO SPORT PSYCHOLOGY AND FOOTBALL



By Paul Russell

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Exercise Sciences*



Sport science is gaining an increasingly higher profile within sport, and in particular football. Sport science involves the application of scientific principles to help players and coaches improve the individual's, or teams' performance. The main areas of sport science support that can be used to improve performance are:

- Strength and Conditioning
- Nutrition
- Biomechanics
- Physiology
- Performance Analysis
- Sport Psychology

Most Premiership football clubs, and many other professional football clubs, recognise the important role that sport science has in professional sport, and employ some staff who specialise in these different disciplines to help maximise the performance of their players, and team.

The area of sport science that is often most neglected is sport psychology. Sport psychologists, at football clubs, are often confused with a psychiatrist, and players think that sport psychologists are men in white coats who deal with "mad" people, and want to know what happened when you didn't get the bike you wanted for Christmas as a child! This couldn't be further from the truth about the role of sport psychology, and how sport psychologists should work to help maximise performance.

Some managers and teams; England, Manchester United, Bolton Wanderers, Middlesborough, Manchester City, Aston Villa, and Everton for example are some clubs who have realised that sport psychology has an important role to play in maximising performance and have used a sport psychologist with their players.

Sport psychology has been defined as the scientific study of people and their behaviours in sport and exercise activities and the practical application of that knowledge.

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When I have been employed at football clubs as a sport psychologist I have been responsible for helping the players with a large number of different issues that the manager, or player has identified as something that is affecting their performance on the pitch. Some typical issues where sport psychology can help in football are:

- A centre forward who has lost their confidence when they aren't scoring
- A defender that loses concentration at set-pieces
- A team that are constantly arguing with each other
- A player who loses his temper
- A player who gets really nervous when about to take an important penalty
- A star player who likes to do their own thing
- A team with no "leaders"
- An injured player who becomes depressed
- A team on a losing streak who can't see where their next win will come from
- A team who panic when they go a goal down
- A player who tells themselves that they going to miss a penalty, just before they take it
- A player who lacks motivation
- A team that is "mentally weak"

Once you have read this list, write down 2 or three examples of players, or situations, that you have experienced which relate to each issue. Try to write down next to each one, in as much detail as possible, how this affected the player, and team. Once you have done this write down how the team, and player, would benefit if these particular issues had been resolved.

Over this series of articles I am going to look at different aspects of football psychology, and I will show you how as coaches you can use simple techniques that will impact on your players to help improve their performance. I will also show you how football psychology can be used by coaches to improve your own coaching style.

If you want to know more about sport psychology then there are a couple of good web sites that you might want to visit:

<http://www.bases.org.uk>

http://www.bps.org.uk/spex/spex_home.cfm

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