



As humans, our brains are wired to perform in certain ways, but hormones also influence our emotions, motivation, and drive. These factors can make it difficult to perform at our best for long periods. Having some simple tips and tricks, or hacks, can help motivate you and take your game to the next level without requiring too much extra effort.

Jim Taylor, a renowned sports psychologist, triathlete, and Olympic skating champion, explains that athletes shouldn't rely solely on motivation to boost their performance. He compares motivation to the tides of the ocean—it ebbs and flows. You don't want your long-term performance goals to depend on something that comes and goes, like motivation. Instead, you should base your training on measurable variables that you can consistently track.

1. Visualization Techniques

Visualization techniques have had a significant impact in sports psychology over the past decade. It might seem strange to think that just imagining yourself doing something can make you a better netball player, but the mind works in mysterious ways. Think about positive psychology and affirmations. Affirmations focus on changing your thought patterns by combining cognitive psychology (the study of thought patterns) and behaviorism (the study of behaviors), where positive thoughts lead to positive actions.

In the same way, visualization helps with muscle memory and performance in sports. By spending time imagining your body positioning and hand movements when shooting and passing, you can train mentally off the court to improve your game. This technique can be used both offensively and defensively. Defenders can visualize different types of passes and consider where to position themselves for the best chances of interception. Players can think about the movements needed to get into advantageous defensive positions.

For instance, when attackers move closer to the hoop using midcourt players around the circle's edge, defenders may hesitate in taking up a better position. Visualizing the attacker's pivot and the immediate movement of the defender around the attacker to block a pass back into the circle can help. Repeating this visualization will help you remember it in real-game scenarios.

2. Making Notes of Training Sessions

So, how does this relate to the psychology of sport? Research shows that writing down goals and following through on a set plan strengthens the neural pathways in the brain. This means that when you create a recognizable pattern, you can achieve more consistent results based on what you practice.

Jim Taylor references a study by Dr. Gail Matthews in California that tested goal-setting and athletic performance. In this study, different groups were asked to work out consistently over several weeks. The first group was the control group, simply training as usual. The second group thought about their workout sessions beforehand, while the third group recorded their training sessions on paper using phrases like "Today I will work out" and "I am going to achieve XYZ in my session today." As expected, the last group performed up to 90% better than the first two groups, showing greater consistency and getting more out of their training sessions.

Setting and achieving goals activates the brain's reward system by releasing dopamine, a hormone often referred to as the "motivation chemical." This is why people say working out makes you feel good. More importantly, writing down "I will do this" convinces your brain that it's part of your plan. This reduces stress and boosts your confidence about your performance.

3. Using Music to Tap Into Motivation

Music can be a major motivator for many athletes. The type of music you listen to

can significantly enhance your performance. Studies suggest that listening to up-tempo music, with beats per minute (BPM) between 120 and 140, is particularly effective during training.

The auditory (hearing) and motor (movement) systems are connected. When your brain detects a rhythm, it automatically adjusts your movements to match it because rhythmic movement is easier to control. This is why you find yourself nodding your head or tapping your foot when you hear music—you don't even have to think about it!

It's a good idea to choose music that fits your workout style. For some, rap music works well during weightlifting because the intense lyrics elevate their heart rates, making them feel pumped to lift heavy weights. Others might prefer upbeat choruses in HIIT (High-Intensity Interval Training) workouts, where the refrain indicates lower-intensity exercises and the chorus signals higher-intensity efforts. This technique can be effective in various training sessions like indoor cycling, interval sprinting, or AMRAP (As Many Rounds As Possible). Or, if you're doing meditation or yoga, you might want calming music instead.

4. Using Motivational Phrases

Motivational phrases can be very helpful during training sessions. For example, planking requires a lot of mental strength to progress beyond your current ability. Saying things like "I can do this" or "I am going to succeed" can calm your brain, lower stress, and help you feel more in control, preventing panic or giving up when things get tough. Self-talk also blocks out distractions, keeping your focus sharp and making your exercises more effective.

In netball, there are specific phrases used to communicate and remind teammates of their tasks:

- "Up and In" reminds shooters to aim higher than the hoop.
- "Here if you need" is said by midcourt players supporting the shooter.
- "Turn one" is a call for defense to focus on making a turnover when trailing in the score.
- "Slow it down" advises attacking players to play the ball to shooters without rushing, minimizing mistakes.

Psychology teaches us that auditory processing (listening and interpreting) is

closely linked to the motor system (movement), meaning that hearing instructions while moving improves movement precision and coordination. This helps players execute plays more effectively and respond quickly to dynamic game situations.

Incorporating psychological strategies into your training can significantly enhance your performance and overall experience in sports like netball. By understanding how visualization, goal-setting, music, and motivational self-talk influence your mental and physical state, you can create a more focused and effective training environment. Remember that sports psychology isn't just about individual performance; it's also about fostering teamwork and communication on the court. By implementing these techniques, you not only improve your own skills but also contribute to a stronger, more cohesive team. As you continue to develop both mentally and physically, you'll find that the right mindset can be a game-changer, pushing you to reach new heights in your athletic journey.