

The mental aspects of performance:

What the swim coach needs to teach and the swimmer needs to learn



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Presentation Outline

- Introduction.
- The scope of every training and competitive program in order to function meaningfully and successfully.
- Fundamental or basic content that needs to be delivered educationally to enhance performance.
- Importance of mental preparation for successful performance.
- A simple mental model that the coach and swimmer need to follow for performance excellence and success.
- Some practical implications for the swim coach to consider.

Introduction

As a former competitor –

How important was the mental and emotional aspect of performance to you personally?

How much time do you devote to it as a coach now?

Mental skills = psychological abilities that facilitate personal development and successful performance.

Mental training = the use of behavioural strategies and techniques to enhance mental skills especially confidence, concentration, motivation, and coping with pressure.

Mental aspects of performance: A model

3 key features for a mental training model:

1. **Systematic:**

Order, developmental needs, clear steps to learning progressively

2. **Interactive:**

Requires patient and regular coach-athlete dialogue/communication

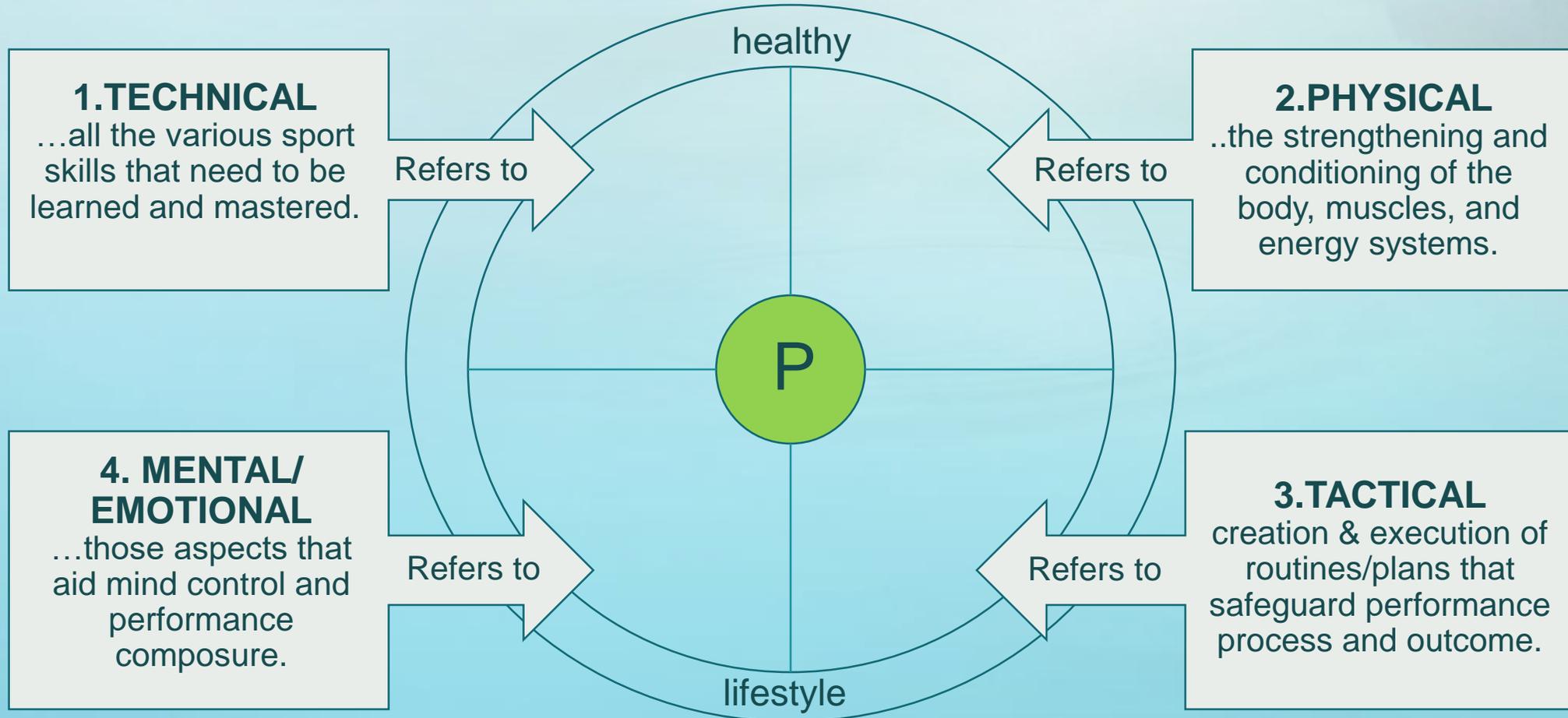
3. **Cognitive-behavioural:**

Thoughts → Feelings → Behaviours

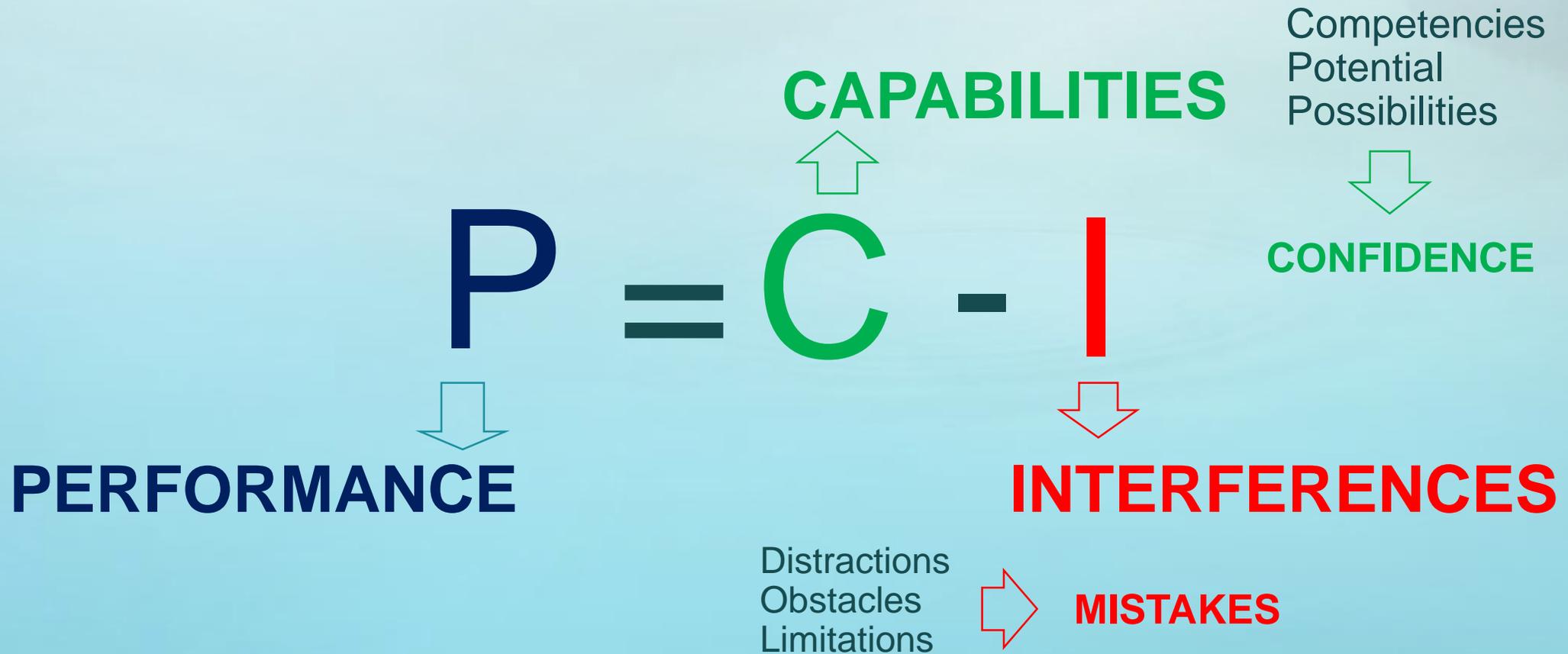


SUCCESS

The scope of performance – 4 components



Performance formula



Successful athletes think differently – more purposefully, more productively, especially in terms of their possibilities or capabilities – compared to less successful athletes.



Successful athletes are able to harness and optimize their psychological or mental energies for successful performance.

Importance of mental preparation for performance

- It is about:

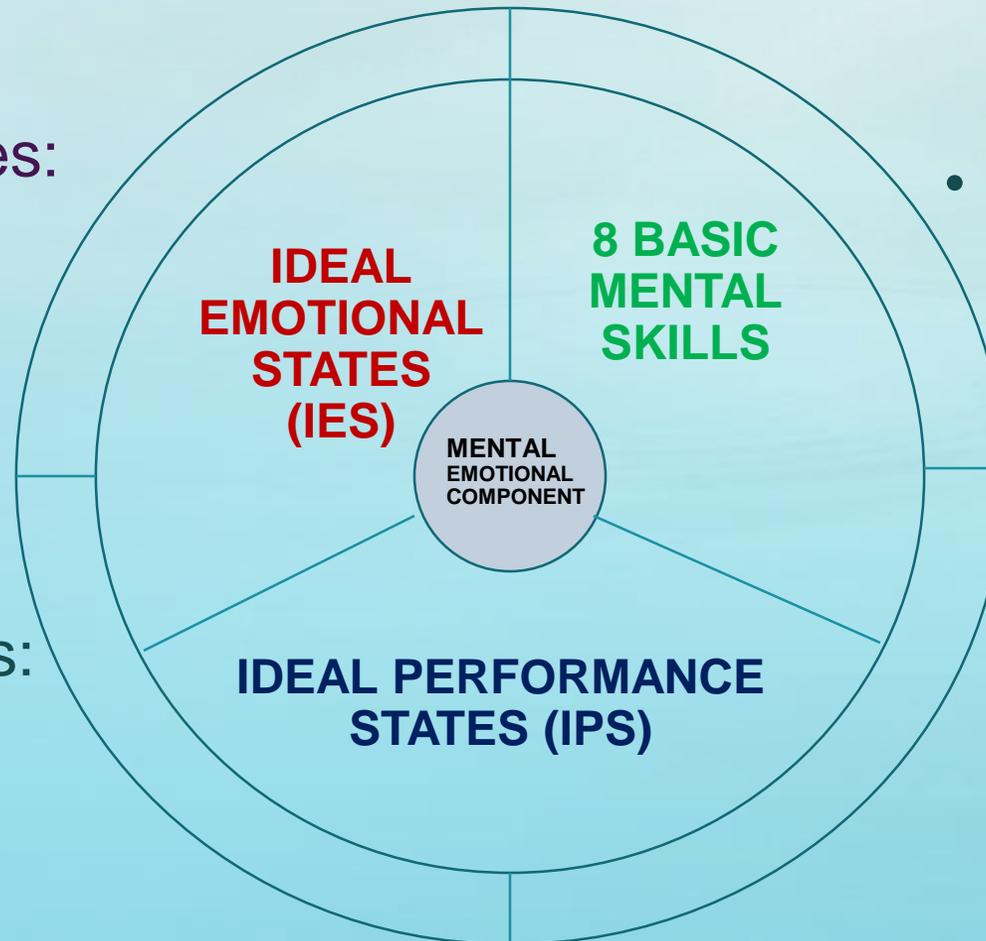
- Mapping out a meaningful journey to a successful performance.
- Utilizing basic mental skills to create and maintain Ideal Performance and Emotional States.
- Being prepared for all eventualities in the performance settings.
- Performing to your best with consistency and control.
- Making the necessary mind-body connection harmoniously no matter the conditions.
- Adjusting and adapting knowledge to other aspects of one's life.

Many athletes go through the motions of mental training, but fail to trust it enough in competition.

The mental and emotional aspects of performance

- 2 model themes:
 - ✓ Excellence
 - ✓ Inner peace

- 3 content areas:



- 4 psychological constructs
 - Anxiety
 - Confidence
 - Concentration
 - Motivation



8 fundamental mental skills

TEAM HARMONY: is the ability to work together in the pursuit of common goals ensuring team success.

ATTENTIONAL CONTROL: is the ability to attend to, concentrate on, to focus and refocus on the task in the present moment.

CREATIVE IMAGERY: is the ability to picture the skilled performance flawlessly and in detail.

POSITIVE SELF-TALK: is the ability to dialogue with yourself and others in a constructive way.



SELF-AWARENESS: the ability to know, understand, and express what you are thinking, feeling, and doing (mindfulness).

GOAL SETTING: is the ability to create a sense of purpose, direction, and measurement of your sport involvement.

RELAXATION: is the ability to cope successfully with the physical and mental tensions surrounding sport.

ENERGIZING: is the ability to motivate yourself to the right level of activation and intensity for success.

The importance of using basic mental skills:

Mental skills are:

- Life skills to help cope with performance consistency and control and to solve life's problems.
- Effective tools, techniques, strategies to help create and maintain IPS and IES.
- Required by athletes to safeguard mental preparations and to build psychological character in the face of stress or pressure.
- Necessary to execute the performance successfully – no matter the conditions.
- To be used discriminately as part of a mental training plan.

The mantra for successful mental training is:

“Start small – stay simple – follow through”



Two mistakes are common:

1. Information overload: Focus on one skill at a time using all available tools to improve the skill.
2. Failure to continue with mental strategies throughout the season.



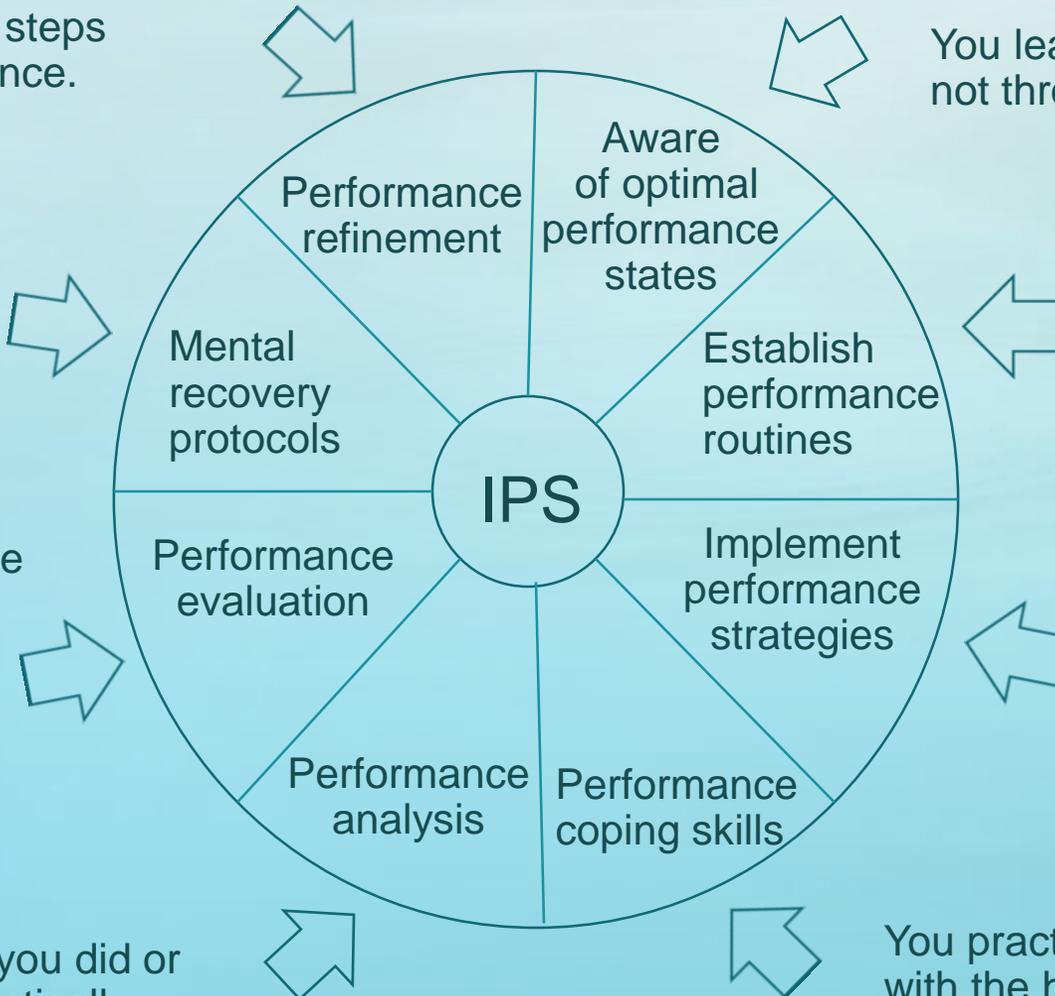
Ideal performance states for optimal functioning

You determine what positive steps to take for the next performance.

You engage in a meaningful appraisal protocol to debrief Your performance.

You assess your performance process and outcome accurately and honestly.

You examine critically what you did or did not do technically and tactically following each performance.



You learn to know what your IPS is or is not through experience.

You create and apply routines that assist your control in the performance settings.

You create and apply a variety of strategies that safeguard the consistency of your performance.

You practice mental skills that help you cope with the hazards of performing successfully.

The importance of creating and maintaining IPS

Athletes create an optimal balance between all 4 performance components so that they function in harmony and at the right level of intensity.

The application of learned strategies – e.g. focus plans, routines, cue words, check listing etc., can maintain IPS in a very personalized manner.

IPS requires sufficient time for specific preparedness with athletes engaging in quality training - if they are to meet realistic expectations.

IPS demands appropriate states of readiness – activation or intensity levels that are appropriate for the demands of the competition.

IPS can be affected by feelings of confidence, assertiveness, patience, positivism, persistence...

Athletes can create their own personalized optimal energy zones (ZOF) by identifying the types and intensities of pleasant versus unpleasant feeling states that enhance or restrict performance outcomes



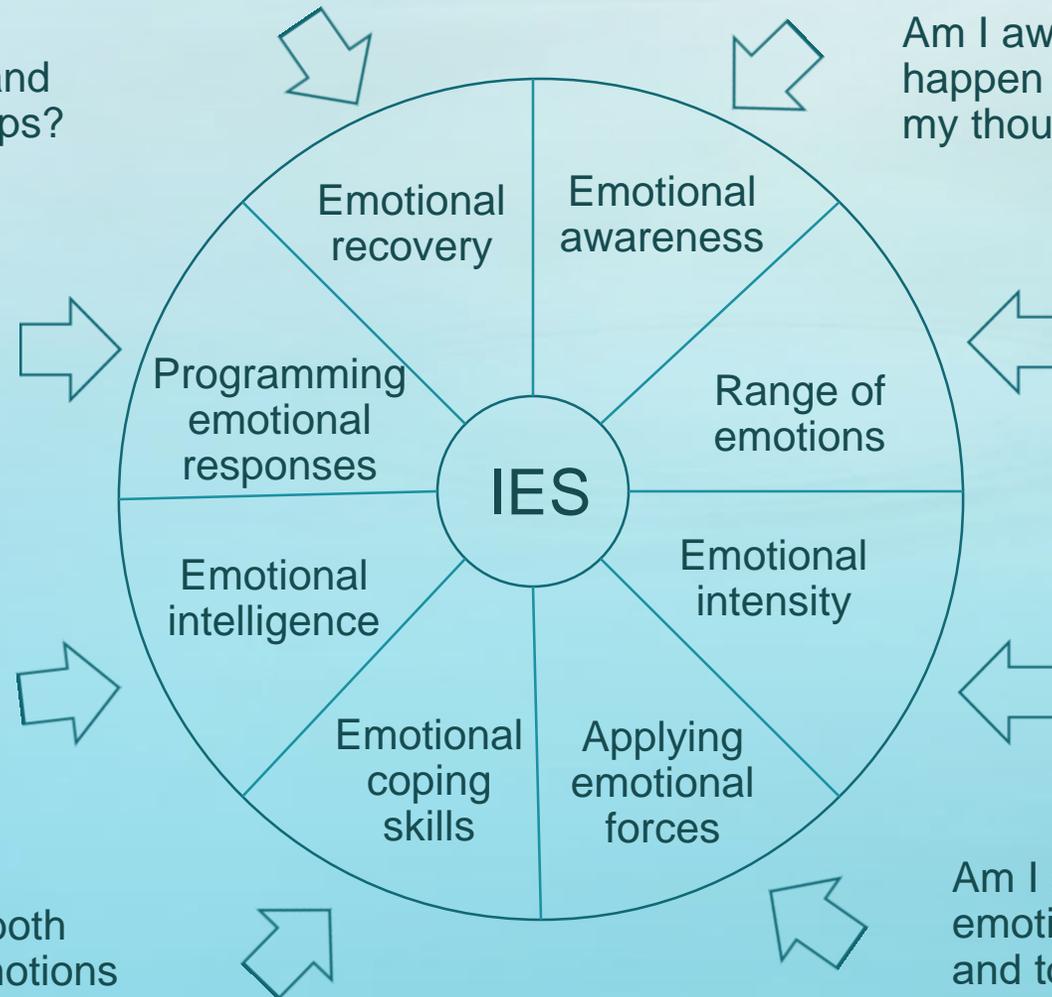
Ideal emotional states for optimal functioning

Am I able to quickly recover from all negative emotions and get a firm grip on relationships?

Am I able to program my emotions for performance consistency and recognize emotions in others?

Am I able to use my emotions intelligently – know what triggers my emotions?

Am I capable of controlling both pleasant and unpleasant emotions with appropriate coping skills?



Am I aware of my feelings as they happen and monitor how they influence my thoughts and actions?

Am I aware of my emotional spectrum and to what extent my emotions are functional or dysfunctional in the performance setting?

Am I in control of both the intensity and duration of my emotions - especially under stress?

Am I able to marshal the power of my emotions (motivation) to my advantage and to other's disadvantage?

The importance of creating and maintaining IES

- The emotions are heightened feelings (positive & negative) that are experienced and expressed in the performance settings.
- They can be both functional (composure) and dysfunctional (panic).
- They are forces that can be harnessed to advantage and to the opponent's disadvantage.
- There are skills to apply that facilitate emotional management.
- Coaches should expand the athlete's emotional intelligence in 5 main domains:

- ✓ Knowing one's emotions
- ✓ Managing the emotions
- ✓ Motivating oneself

- ✓ Recognizing emotions in others
- ✓ Handling relationships

Implications for the coach 1.

- Performance can never be totally successful or complete without due consideration for the mental and emotional aspects.
- Find the time to briefly explain the mental aspects of performance in an orderly fashion – develop a **mental training plan** using an educational approach.
- Map out what you feel to be significant **content** so that the 4 performance components are equally balanced and stressed.
- Adopt a systematic, interactive, and cognitive-behavioural approach that encourages **communication**.
- Adapt select program content – tailor-made to suit your novice, developmental, and elite level athletes.

Implications for the coach 2.

- Be sure to observe how much the emotions impact the reasoning powers of your athletes.
- Explain concepts carefully and indicate their specific significance for the sport.
- Carefully teach critical values – e.g. trust, mental toughness, effort, commitment, relentlessness persistence, courage, intuitiveness, respect, sportsmanship....
- Focus on one skill as a theme – e.g. goal mapping or confidence building and then use various tools to improve that skill.
- For the best results the coach should be directly involved in the mental training of their athletes.

Teaching implications: For the novice athlete

1. Understanding the need for a **balance** and harmony between all 4 performance components for success.



2. Understanding the significance of select fundamental **mental skills** and learning to apply them effectively.

3. Understanding the importance of systematic **mental preparation** for success in training and competition.

4. Understanding the need for **self-control** especially for managing thoughts and feelings under stress.

5. Understanding that mental skills are **tools** to improve psychological abilities and personal development.

At this level it is difficult to gauge a child's commitment to an activity or sport.

Implications: For the developmental athlete

1. Understanding and appreciating the bigger performance preparation & readiness picture – following a **mental model**.



2. Understanding the need for heightening **awareness** of thoughts, feelings, & behaviours & their consequences.
3. Understanding each of the 4 major **psychological constructs** and their powerful impact on performance.
4. Understanding a selection of learned **coping skills** and interventions to safeguard performance process/execution.
5. Understanding that improved **mental abilities** may enhance the chances of successful performance.

During the teenager years, athletes begin to see and grasp the bigger picture.

Implications: For the elite athlete

1. Understanding fully and handling efficiently one's mental and emotional **strengths** and limitations.



2. Understanding & applying basic mental skills to create & enhance Ideal performance (**IPS**) & emotional (**IES**) states.

3. Understanding and practicing effective interventions to safeguard performance **consistency** and **control**.

4. Understanding **critical incidents** that can enhance or debilitate performance efforts.

5. Understanding the wider application of mental skills to combat performance setbacks – e.g. injury, slumps, loss of commitment, burnout etc.

Always be prepared to put aside your priorities as a coach and hear your athletes out!

**Thank you for listening. Good luck with
your new swim season.**



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