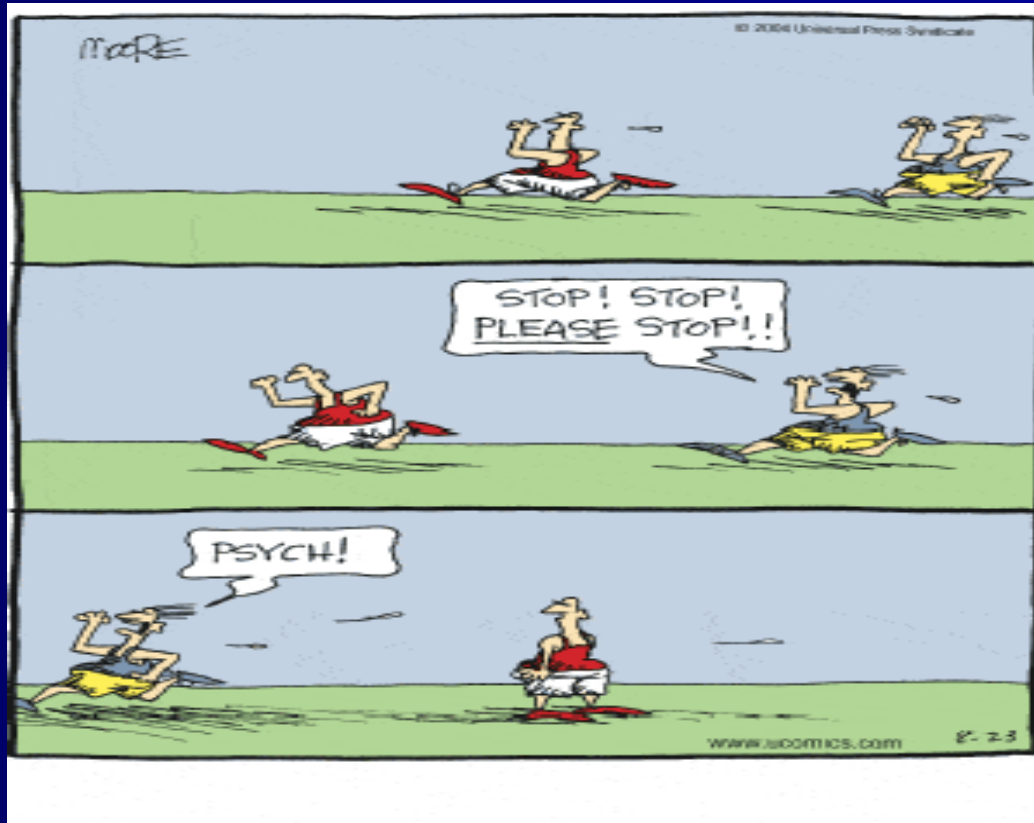


# It's all mental: Sport psychology for runners



Dr Paul Freeman

# Outline

- Introduction to psychological skills
  - What is it?
  - Why do people neglect it?
  - Some myths
  - The 4 basic psychological skills
- Imagery
  - What is it?
  - Who uses it?
  - Basic guidelines
  - Different uses

# Psychological skills training

systematic and consistent practice of  
mental or psychological skills

psychological skills should be  
practised like physical skills

# Why do people neglect PST?

- lack of knowledge
  - "you need to concentrate more"
  - "get psyched up"
- misunderstandings
  - champions are born, not made
- lack of time
  - no-one makes time, despite accepting the importance of the psychological side of sport

# Myths about PST

- PST is only for “problem” athletes
- PST is only for elite athletes
- PST provides “quick fix” solutions
- PST is not useful

# The basic psychological skills

imagery

relaxation

goal-setting

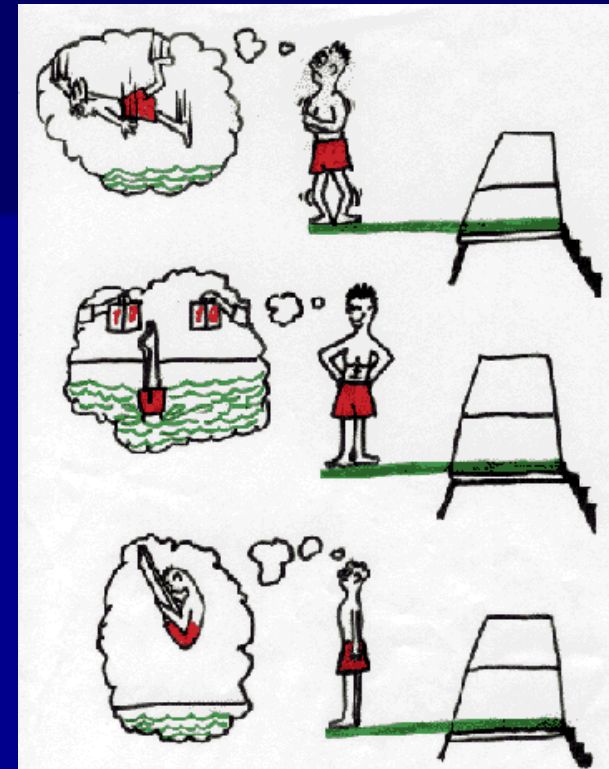
self-talk

lead to improvements in psychological aspects, such as...

concentration, confidence, motivation,  
anxiety control

# Imagery

- Also known as visualisation, mental rehearsal and/or mental practice.
- Creating or recreating experiences in the mind.
- Multi-sensory process: can involve seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and feeling different things and sensations.



# Who uses imagery?

- Jack Nicklaus, 18-time major winner in golf.
- Greg Louganis, gold medalist in diving in the 1984 and 1988 Olympics.
- Sally Gunnell, gold medalist in 400m hurdles in the 1992 Olympics:
  - "I was a real 'visualisation' person. I used to visualise crossing that line over and over again."



<http://www.runnersworld.co.uk/forum/forummessages.asp?UTN=4928>

- "I always used to struggle with the motivational elements of running until I discovered visualisation. Now, I make a conscious effort to think of good things all day about my run. I picture myself running effortlessly with long strides along the actual route... of approaching the last 1/2 mile and of finishing, but more importantly, of actually doing and enjoying the run."
- "I re-read the mental preparation section of Amby Burfoot's Complete Runner : (a Runner's World publication). I worked on strong mental images again... I took another 46 seconds off my 10k pb to finish in 48.47."

# An exercise

- Get into pairs and we will try some imagery!

# Imagery guidelines

- Relax
- Include all senses
- Internal or external perspective
- At first, keep imagery practice simple
- Focus on creating images that are vivid and controllable
- Combine with movement and/or physical training
- Practice, practice, practice!

# DIFFERENT USES OF IMAGERY IN SPORT

## IMAGERY USE

## EXAMPLES

Mental practice of specific techniques

Imaging a new running style

Improving confidence

Imaging successful performances

Tactical rehearsal and problem solving

Imaging potential scenarios

Controlling arousal and anxiety

Imaging relaxing images

Performance review and analysis

Reviewing a race for strong and weak points

Preparation for performance

Imaging performing well in different conditions

Maintaining mental freshness during injury

Imaging your running when unable to physically train

# Basic exercise

- Imagine the following and rate your ability to do so based on:
  - 0 = No image, 1 = Some image, 2 = Clear image
- 1. This room
- 2. Tasting your favourite fruit
- 3. The feel at the end of a hard training session
- 4. The sound of your alarm clock
- 5. The smell of freshly cut grass
- 6. Running at 6:30am in the winter
- 7. The start of your last race

# Development exercises

1. Imagine an event you have recently competed in. Recreate the scenario (e.g., venue, crowd, athletes, weather etc) and experience the sensations you felt 10 mins prior to the start. Move to the final 100m. What do you see, how do you feel?
  - After, consider which of your senses (seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting, smelling) were the most important and were any difficult to recall?
2. Repeat the above, but instead of thinking of a previous event imagine your next event.



# An example script\_

- Find a quiet place where you feel comfortable. You can either sit or lie down. You may find that it helps to have your eyes closed. We'll start with some relaxation. Take a few moments to do this. Concentrate on your breathing and try to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. As you inhale through your nose count in, 2, 3, 4. As you exhale through mouth count out, 2, 3, 4... Try also to scan your body for signs of tension and relax those parts... Once you feel relaxed continue onto the next part.
- Picture your self entering the warm-up area before a big race. As you enter the warm-up area, you feel the warm sun on your face along with a refreshing gentle breeze. You scan the scene... taking in the overall layout of the warm-up area and it's inhabitants... You notice the coaches and athletes talking... The sound of athletes preparing themselves before the event.
- You imagine yourself getting ready for the race... putting on your trainers... spending some time stretching and warming up... you go over last minute details in your head... This is your best race... you're well prepared for this event and you are feeling mentally strong...
- The official calls your event... Imagine yourself at the start... the starter commands "take your marks" ... you take your starting position... the race starts... you feel powerful and energised as you take your first strides... there is a spring in your step as you cover the ground... you feel the sun on your skin... the sound of athletes running beside you as you move quickly across the ground.
- Each stride you begin to feel stronger and stronger... moving at a fast but comfortable pace... You notice another runner near you... but you put him out of your mind ... and strive to race your own race... Even more you concentrate on each stride.
- As you enter the final 200m, you are still feeling very strong... you've trained all year for this race and it feels great... stride and stride you propel yourself forward... faster... faster... As you near the finish... you feel your speed increasing... You are completely focused on your stride... with poise and purpose you push yourself forward to the finish...
- As you cross the line you immediately look up at the time... a personal best ... and a win ... You slowly begin to regain awareness, colours come into focus, you hear the sound of the crowd... you realise you've achieved your goal... you become aware of the feelings of excitement and accomplishment... pride builds inside you... you have succeeded... you are a great runner.

Thank you.

Any questions?