

Effects of mental imagery use on anxiety, confidence, mental well-being, and performance in track and field athletes

Background: Student athletes can experience a number of stressors above and beyond those of their classmates, one being competition anxiety in their specific sport, which is common among varsity athletes (Storch, Storch, Killiany, & Roberti, 2005). Unfortunately, the tools to help with the demands of their sport mentally are often overlooked by not only the athletes, but their coaches, teammates, and supporters. The purpose of the present study was to introduce imagery as a tool to help deal with competition anxiety (i.e., fear of failure), and to improve confidence, mental well-being, and performance.

Methods: Two female varsity level throwers ($M_{age} = 20$) met individually with the researcher twice a week during the competitive season. Athletes were first introduced to breathing and relaxation techniques, followed by basic imagery scripts. For each session, the imagery scripts were changed and adjusted based on the needs and feedback from the athletes to focus on different elements (e.g., anxiety, technique, recovering from a bad throw).

Results: Both athletes decreased their anxiety levels, while increasing their self-confidence, mental well-being, and performance.

Discussion & Conclusion: The results highlight the positive effect of employing imagery in sport life.

Interdisciplinary Reflection: Imagery use can be also applied in other aspects of athletes' lives.