

**COPING AND MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES OF NON-ELITE  
ENDURANCE ATHLETES UNDER EXTREME  
ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS – A SALUTOGENIC  
PERSPECTIVE**

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**MAY 2006**

## DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my own original work and have not been previously used in full or partially at any other University for degree purposes.

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J.W. O' Neil

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Date

***“And let us run with perseverance  
the race marked out for us”.***

**Hebrews 12: 1**

***“And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so,  
but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that  
sufferings produces perseverance; perseverance character;  
and character hope”.***

**Romans 5: 2 – 4**

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## SUMMARY

The number of South African endurance athletes is increasing yearly. However, very little research has been done on non-elite South African endurance athletes. Due to the length and nature of endurance sport and especially extreme endurance sport, athletes have to employ more self-motivating strategies for longer periods to perform well. One factor that increases athletes' stress levels is the environment within which they are participating. These environments can and usually are very harsh, such as extreme heat or cold. However, the motivational- and coping strategies used by athletes specifically in extreme endurance events have not been studied to a great extent (Weinberg & Gould, 2003).

The aim of this study is to determine the coping- and motivational strategies that non-elite athletes use to overcome environmental factors during endurance events. A qualitative approach was used where 53 non-elite endurance athletes completed a questionnaire and interviews. Through analysis of the data it emerged that environmental factors are perceived to have a physical and mental impact on performance. The perception of this impact differs and can be positive, negative or neutral depending on situational factors. Motivational strategies that are employed during endurance events are the result of two factors: focus of motivation and source of motivation. By combining these two factors, four motivational strategies were identified: positive-internal, positive-external, negative-internal and negative-external of which positive-internal was most frequently used, followed by negative-internal, positive-external and negative-external. Endurance athletes used all three coping strategies that were identified in the literature. The most frequently used strategy was to remove the source of the stress, followed by strategies that changes the athlete's perception of the stressor, and lastly strategies that focuses on the symptoms of the stress.

Endurance athletes perceive themselves able to overcome the challenges of endurance events. However, this ability must constantly be tested by participation in endurance sport or other stressful situations. Previous successful participation in endurance events or other stressful situations leads to an increase in positive self-perception of own abilities, as well as an increase in performance in endurance events.

## OPSOMMING

Die getal deelnemers aan uithousport vermeerder jaarliks in Suid-Afrika. Daar is egter betreklik min navorsing gedoen oor Suid-Afrikaanse amateur uithou atlete. Uit die aard van uithousport en spesifiek ekstreme uithousport is dit vir deelnemende atlete noodsaaklik om meer gebruik te maak van selfmotiverende strategieë oor langer tydperke as nie-uithou atlete. Een faktor wat kan lei tot 'n toename in stresvlakke by uithou atlete is omgewingsfaktore soos hitte of koue. Betreklik min navorsing is egter gedoen oor die motivering- en aanpasingsstrategieë wat deur uithou atlete gebruik word spesifiek in ekstreme uithoukompetisies (Weinberg & Gould, 2003).

Die doel van hierdie studie is om te bepaal watter motivering- en aanpasingsstrategieë deur uithou atlete gebruik word in ekstreme uithoukompetisies. 'n Kwalitatiewe benadering is gebruik waar 53 amateur uithou atlete 'n vraelys en onderhoud voltooi het. 'n Analise van die data het getoon dat die persepsie bestaan dat omgewingsfaktore 'n fisiese en psigiese invloed het op atlete tydens uithoukompetisies. Die invloed van elke faktor verskil van situasie tot situasie en kan positief, negatief of neutraal wees. Motiveringstrategieë wat gebruik word is die resultaat van twee faktore, naamlik fokus van motivering en bron van motivering. 'n Kombinasie van die twee faktore lei tot die identifisering van vier motiveringstrategieë naamlik positief-intern, positief-ekstern, negatief-intern en negatief-ekstern. Positief-intern word die meeste gebruik gevolg deur negatief-intern, positief-ekstern en negatief-ekstern. Al drie aanpasingsstrategieë wat in die literatuur geïdentifiseer is, word gebruik deur atlete gedurende uithoukompetisies. Die mees algemene strategie is waar die oorsaak van stres verwyder word, gevolg deur strategieë wat die persepsie van die stres verander en laastens strategieë wat fokus op die simptome van stres.

Voorts beskou uithou atlete hul eie vermoëns voldoende om die uitdagings van uithoukompetisies te oorkom. Hierdie beskouing moet egter voortdurend getoets word deur deel te neem aan uithoukompetisies of soortgelyke stresvolle situasies. Vorige suksesvolle deelname aan uithoukompetisies of soortgelyke stresvolle situasies versterk hul positiewe selfkonsep en lei tot verhoogde prestasies in toekomstige uithoukompetisies.