

MENTAL TOUGHNESS IN TABLE TENNIS



By Tara Fusco



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An Introduction to Sports Psychology

Sports psychology is the study of how psychological factors influence sports, athletic performance, exercise and physical activity. Sports psychologists investigate how participating in sports can improve health and well being. They also help athletes utilize psychology to improve their sports performance and mental well-being.

Broadly speaking the main topics in Sports Psychology are:

1. **Motivation:** Includes both extrinsic and intrinsic motivators. Extrinsic motivators include such things as medals, rewards and recognition and intrinsic motivators come from within, such as a personal desire to win or sense of pride that comes from performing well.
2. **Goal setting:** The ability to create precise and challenging short and long term goals which act as motivational factors for an athlete
3. **Positive self-talk:** The ability to turn negative thoughts into positive ones
4. **Visualisation & Imagery:** Involves visualising performing a task or successfully performing a particular skill. It involves creating an image of what you intend to happen and athletes often use this tool to visualise themselves winning an event.
5. **Anxiety & Stress:** Athletes often need assistance in dealing with the intense pressure that comes from competition. They need to learn how to channel their nerves in a positive way rather than letting them affect their performance negatively.
6. **Emotional control:** The ability to control ones emotions in a way that will positively impact on performance
7. **Attentional Focus:** Involves the ability to tune out distractions such as loud spectators and focus attention on the task at hand

The healthy mind in a healthy body philosophy dates back as far as the ancient Chinese and Greek civilisations. However it is only in recent years that the discipline known as Sports Psychology has become recognised as a major component in the science of sports performance.

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In 1925 Coleman Griffith established the first sport psychology lab in the University of Illinois. Soon after, similar labs were set up in Berlin and Leningrad.

Today there are hundreds of sports psychologists working throughout the world. Many are working in the field of research in a constant effort to improve our understanding of the psychological processes which influence behaviour and performance in sport.



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The Psychology of Table Tennis

Table tennis is not just a physical sport but demands a lot of the mind also. As one of the fastest sports in the world, it requires not only quick reflexes but also quick thinking, with decisions on which shot to play having to be made in a split second. It makes sense therefore that we train our minds to play table tennis as well as training our bodies. However, mental training remains largely neglected in our clubs and coaching sessions as coaches and players focus on fine-tuning technique and movement and give little or no time to the mental aspect of the game. Mental toughness is however what separates players of a similar ability in tight situations, it therefore makes sense to include some aspects of mental training into your practice routine.

It was only in the last few years that I started reading up on Sports Psychology and how it can be applied to table tennis and I took a Diploma Course in Sports Psychology to broaden my knowledge further. Before this I too remained rather ignorant on its key role in performance enhancement. Now when I look back to my own playing career I wish I had known more about Sports Psychology then and how it could have helped me control my anxiety and emotions before, during and after competition.

As a coach I am therefore very keen to pass on this recently acquired knowledge to my players. I have delivered several presentations and webinars on the subject. The “Nine Mental Skills of Successful Athletes” model as devised by Jack Lesyk at the Ohio Center for Sports Psychology in 1998 is the model that I like to use in training my players on how to develop their mental toughness.

The nine mental skills of successful athletes according to Lesyk are:

1. A positive attitude
2. A high level of self-motivation
3. High, realistic goals
4. Good people skills
5. Positive self-talk
6. Positive mental imagery
7. Control over anxiety
8. Control over emotions
9. Maintaining concentration

In this e-book I will examine these skills in detail and offer some suggestions on techniques that can be used to improve your mental toughness.

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About the Author



Tara Fusco was born and lived all her young life in Dun Laoghaire Co. Dublin. She is now married with two children and lives with her family in Bray, Co. Wicklow. Tara is an ex Irish International table tennis player, who represented Ireland at 5 World Championships and 7 European Championships during her 13 year International career. She played in Germany on a semi-professional basis between 2006 and 2009. She has won every domestic tournament in Ireland and was National singles champion on two occasions.

Tara has been a Level 2 Table Tennis Coach for over 25 years and has many years of experience coaching in clubs, schools and at International level. Tara continues to play to a high level representing Dun Laoire Table Tennis Club in the Women's British League.

In recent times she has started focusing on the importance of fitness in table tennis and has also undertaken Business Diplomas in Sports Nutrition and Sports Psychology. She recently set up a website www.ttfans.ie, an online resource offering table tennis players of all standards expert advice on all aspects of table tennis from technique, fitness, tactical awareness, psychology and nutrition.

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Her latest project is the creation of a Master Class series of E-Books, of which this one “Mental Toughness in Table Tennis” is the fourth. If you have missed any of the previous ebooks in the series "A Step by Step Guide to Improving Your Technique", “Table Tennis – A Tactical Masterclass” or “Sports Nutrition for Table Tennis” they can be downloaded below.

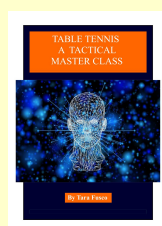
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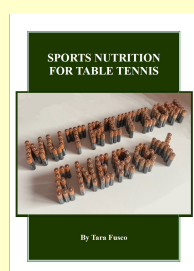
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