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## The Importance of Psychological Preparation in Football

Cătălin Octavian MĂNESCU<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

*The psychological preparation plays a particularly important role, being meant to group the player's resources and skills that allow him to process the information, select the answers and apply his tactic thinking, according to the game plan and game strategy formulated by the coach. The planning of the mental preparation is enforced by concretely establishing the objectives, actions, achievement means, responsible factors, related duties and by a current and periodical control of the results.*

*The aim of this paper is to reflect the importance of psychological preparation in football by presenting the objectives pursued the three main groups of psychological processes and the ways and means psychological preparation can be achieved.*

### **Keywords:**

*psychological preparation, football, training, objectives, mental;*

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### **Introduction**

Psychological preparation of the sportsmen is defined as the set of training and education strategies and techniques used in order to increase the mental capacity and to develop sportsmen's personality, according to the requirements of the sports events or of the specific sport, so as to obtain high effects and results in training and competition (Epuran, Holdevici, Tonita, 2001). The importance of psychological preparation in football is marked by the appearance of the idea and concept of "total training", which translates as complete development of the individual and the team, since the maximization of the sportsman's performance cannot be obtained without maximization of sportsman's personality (Rădulescu, Cojocaru, 2003) .

Football requires the psychological skills of mental toughness, motivation to compete, self confidence, imagery, energy management, performance routines, team cohesion and goal setting (Hacker, 2004).

Once players have mastered football's mental game, they can focus on the physical dimensions of the sport and thereby fulfill their potential.

### **Objectives of psychological preparation**

Psychological preparation in football targets the following objectives:

- development of the mental capacities as performance support;
- development of the speciality features;
- specific intellectual, affective and will preparation;
- development of self-control;
- approaching and acting upon specific issues related to psychological preparation in football;

Football is mainly characterized by intelligent-motor behaviour, the player being bound to solve actual situations during the game, either by using the schemes that he studied or learned, or by discovering other tricks, therefore by finding a creative solution ( Cernăianu, 2001 ).

Psychological preparation of the football player develops progressively, at increasingly higher levels; specific preparation for the game consists of an entire set of measures, actions and efforts made by the players and coaches in order to obtain a favourable result ( Niculescu, 1999 ).

The more experienced a football player becomes, the more rapidly he can select the information and offer an appropriate solution; this thing is possible as he has stored in his memory a large number of answers compared to a young and inexperienced player.

The psychological preparation plays a particularly important role, being meant to group the player's resources and skills that allow him to process the information, select the answers and apply his tactic thinking, according to the game plan and game strategy formulated by the coach. The planning of the mental preparation is enforced by concretely establishing the objectives, actions, achievement means, responsible factors, related duties and by a current and periodical control of the results (Caliguri, Herbst, 1997).

### **Processes of psychological preparation**

Psychological preparation in football game refers to three main groups of processes: knowledge, sensitiveness and will (Epuran, Egon, 1985).

1. Knowledge processes refer to the objective reality, usually met in the game, by means of perceptions:

- the pitch with its various lines, spaces, gates; various technical and tactical acts and actions are connected to it;
- players (partners-opponents), with their different positions, according to which the same technical-tactical procedures are performed;

2. Sensitiveness (emotions, feelings) represents the part on which the coach focuses most. A larger period when a player's efficiency decreases is caused by:

- excessive tension that appears before a game;
- a weaker mobilization for the games without an important stake;
- player's depressions caused by reasons other than the sport or by the evolution of the game;
- decrease of the competitive feeling or the victory feeling;
- mental and nerves fatigue, caused by various preoccupations, inner conflicts, etc.
- fatigue caused by effort, heat, cold, etc.

3. Will – it is a mental quality that consciously determines someone's actions in order to reach a certain goal. In football, a goal is

reached by getting over multiple difficulties that might appear either from outside (opponents, time, field, audience, referee, etc.), or from inside (fear, fatigue, nervousness, pain caused by injuries, etc.). In case of football players, the will must be developed and perfected, because the competition conditions, including weekly trips, various opponent teams, loud audience, are most of the time unfavourable.

### **Methods**

The most important ways and means to achieve psychological preparation in football are:

1. Training of players' motivation for practicing performance football, oriented towards 2 directions (Bompa, 2003):

- moral aspect related to the practice of the most popular sport, related to reaching a high level of professionalism, related to gaining recognition both at the national and international level, with a special, well-known and appreciated personality;
- material aspect, which finds solution in material co-interest in professional football, that our country also subscribed to;

2. Ethical conversations on different subjects, organized by the management members and coaches – open and sincere discussions about some problems closely connected to the life of the players;

3. As efficient means to develop the thinking in the game, the following are recommended:

- progressive presentation of the playing system, with active participation of the players;
- emphasizing on the explanations by using intuitive materials (board, videos, posters);
- introduction of precise themes when playing;
- observation of the game of other teams, followed by discussions and analyses;

4. Development of team spirit by:

- combining collective and personal interests;
- combining the players' prestige with coach's prestige;
- necessity to apply just measures and their persistent maintenance;
- permanent maintenance and development of team spirit;

5. Development of self-confidence, depending on own possibilities, by: persuasion, convincing, realistic critic, self-analysis related to results and work for good results;

6. Training of perseverance, resoluteness, and decision is achieved by guided preparation of the player under tough conditions (great effort, unfavourable time, exercises of great difficulty, playing with an inferior number of players);

7. Training of the will is achieved within an entire educational-social complex system, from a very early age, and the training process follows the following aspects:

- discipline;
- will to win, to be combative, to assert oneself;
- will to get over difficulties, tiredness or other circumstantial difficulties;
- self-control or will to prepare one's nerves.

### **Results and discussions**

The success of the athletes, from a psychological point of view, is given by the fact that they manifest physically, technically and tactically at least similar to and sometimes exceed their performance in practice. This also requires and demonstrates a total capitalization of their work in training, an adaptive potential (effort capacity and psychological capacity) acquired over the years of training.

In short terms, success in competition means the athlete to give his best at a certain time, the matchday.

In my opinion, according to Niculescu ( 1999 ) for the team to have value, each component of it must have :

- motivations ;
- real and exceptional physical, technical, tactical and psychological skills for football ;
- positive attitude towards hard work in training and a total dedication during official games.

If the athlete does not meet these conditions then the entire work of the coach will be harder and the results below expectations.

### **Conclusions**

Football is a fast-paced game based as much on strategies and split-second decisions as on quickness, strength, accuracy and endurance.

Often, deficits in the psychological game rather than the errors in physical performance keep players from performing their best in practice or competition.

Research evidence shows that more physically skilled athletes are not always more successful than less physically skilled athletes. Why? Because of the differences in their mental games. Sometimes, it is more important to be strong psychologically than to be strong physically. In fact, the mental game is often the primary explanation for sport outcomes and fluctuations in individual performance.

When more than 600 United States Olympic athletes were interviewed after the Olympic Games and asked to list the top 10 factors essential for success at the higher levels of competition, mental skills constituted the top 5 spots and, not surprising, the single most important quality cited was mental toughness ( NSCAA, 2004 ).

From here we can now understand the importance of developing the psychological dimension of the game; no matter what level of competition, recognizing and refining the mental game plan should be a top priority.

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