



Psychological Profile of Elite Athletes – How Do You Compare?

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If you are an athlete who wants to become one of the best, then you need to begin finding out how the “best” perform. Most athletes compare, mimic and set goals based on the actual athletic skills. For example, young athletes will spend many hours on the ice shooting at the net trying to emulate Gretzky’s skills, making amazing shots like Kobe Bryant, or holing putts like Tiger Woods. This is definitely a necessary component to greatness, but it is not the only thing. If you want to be the best, you also have to study and learn the mental skills and attitudes of the best athletes. This is just as important as the execution of skills.

Recent research (Williams, 2006) demonstrates that the following characteristics are the psychological attributes that differentiate elite athletes:

Highly self-confident	Total commitment
Strong performance focus	Cope well with stress
Cope well with distractions	Optimistic, positive attitude
High personal standards plans	Well developed competitive plans
Controlled emotions	View anxiety as beneficial
Set performance goals	

As an athlete at any level – Olympic, professional, college, high school, or youth - if you want to reach your potential and become *your* best or one of the best in the world, it is vital that you understand and evaluate yourself on the characteristics listed above. Athletic prowess and physical conditioning are a must, but psychological development is critical as well. Greatness takes tremendous hours of work, skill, luck, and attention to detail. Psychological skill is a vital detail, especially as an athlete’s skill and physical conditioning become more advanced. As we all know, it is one thing to be able to

perform in practice, but it is a completely different to be executed when all eyes are watching and when it is a must. This is the psychological piece.

If you want to be the best, the next step for you is to rate yourself on these qualities above. Be honest. If you deceive yourself, you will not develop to be your best. Ask then for two teammates and two coaches to evaluate you on these qualities so you will then have a more clear picture of what needs to be developed. The next steps are to make the commitment to work on them and figure out how to do so. This latter part may require the assistance of a sport psychologist.

Play Hard, Play Smart and Play Well!