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Flexibility and Strength



Michael Adrowski, Ph.D., taekwondo instructor from Davis, Illinois, shows that suspended front splits are just as possible as the suspended side splits.

Dr. Adrowski sent us his first photo, of a suspended side split, a few months after he ordered *Stretching Scientifically* in 1992.

In June of 1997 he sent us another photo, of a suspended front split. I asked why it took him so long to accomplish this split, which is easier for most people? Here is his answer:

“Why did it take a few years for me to be able to do the suspended front splits, when I could already do the suspended side splits?”

“Well, it boils down to the fact that I really did not have strong hamstring mus-

cles Where I had a specific problem was in my upper hamstrings’ region, right below the gluteus maximus muscles. It was in this region where I felt and knew muscles were weak, especially the further I went down into the splits. As you say in your book and video, ‘If you experience pain in any way, stop what you’re doing and rest. Start back with exercise slowly and begin again.’ What did help strengthen my hamstrings was my doing squats. I am not a ‘legs’ workout person, so it took me a few months of doing squats in order to build up my leg strength. Holding a deep front stance for 30 seconds and longer also helped build up my hamstrings.”



Dr. Adrowski, in a photo he sent to us in 1992, shows a suspended side split, the result of a few months of following the methods of [Stretching Scientifically](#).

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Athlete’s Bookshelf

The Athlete’s Bookshelf lists books from other publishers on injuries, nutrition, physical training, and mental training that are recommended by our authors. Here is a partial list of these books:

Mastering The Zone: The Next Step in Achieving SuperHealth and Permanent Fat Loss by Barry Sears, Ph.D., gives compelling medical facts and detailed information on designing your diet for peak performance.

Periodization of Strength by Tudor O.

Bompa, Ph.D., tells you how to design your strength training so you have top strength, or power, or muscular endurance when you need it. His other book, *Power Training for Sport: Plyometrics for Maximum Power Development*, shows you how to dramatically and safely improve your jumping ability and power.

Science and Practice of Strength Training by Vladimir M. Zatsiorski, Ph.D., world renowned sport biomechanist and former conditioning consultant to the

Soviet Olympic Teams.

Super Squats: How to Gain 30 Pounds of Muscle in 6 Weeks by Randall J. Strossen, Ph.D.

Training for Endurance by Philip Maffetone, D.C., presents a training program for endurance athletes—marathoners, triathletes, and cyclists. Testimonials from Mark Allen (six-time Ironman Champion), Mike Pigg (two-time Triathlete of the year, World Cup Champion), and Stu Mitelman (World Ultramarathon Champion).

Your Self-Confidence and Your Performance

by Artur Poczwadowski, Ph.D.

You can do it if you just have a little confidence.

—D. L. Feltz, *Understanding Motivation*

This is Part IV of a four-part article that explains what self-confidence is, what can happen if you are over-confident or not confident enough, and how to develop, maintain, and restore it to an optimal level, in the case of an athlete who has lost self-confidence.

The author, Artur Poczwadowski, Ph.D., is a sports psychology consultant. He graduated from Gdansk University (M.Sc. in psychology) and from AWF—University School of Physical Education (M.Sc. in coaching). He competed on a national level (in Poland) in judo. He is a visiting assistant professor at the University of Utah, Department of Exercise and Sport Science.

You can reach Artur Poczwadowski by e-mail at apoczwar@hsc.utah.edu to arrange consultations on preparing mental training programs, implementing these programs, monitoring, and adjusting them.

Creating positive experiences

Creating positive experiences is a strategy for coaches. Their teaching and leadership style, communication skills, coaching philosophy, knowledge, and experience will ultimately affect (positively or negatively) their athletes' self-confidence level. Within this strategy they can do the following:

1. Plan a competition calendar and select competitions while taking into account the importance, level of difficulty, and optimal number of performances in one season. If, for example, a tournament is to be filled out with many strong rivals and the preparation plans show that a given athlete or team will not peak during this contest, there is a high probability of failure. In this situation, when the coach does not give enough informational and emotional support, an accumulation of such failure experiences may fatally affect the athletes' self-confidence. Alternatively, taking part in lower class competitions and succeeding there (again, with relevant explanation from the coach) may be of a high usefulness during the initial stages of building an athlete's self-confidence.

2. Another method used by many coaches is simulation practice. This is a

competition-like workout with officiating, invited spectators, videotaping, and all the trappings of real contests. It is a working implementation of mental plans (precompetition, competition, and postcompetition plans and routines) and their correction.

3. Praise (positive reinforcement) and constructive criticism. Praise should be given by a coach immediately after a well-performed task or behavior. On initial stages of learning this reinforcement should be frequent, and from time to time once the skill is mastered. The frequency of the praise will depend on the style of the coach, the characteristics of a given athlete, and the context. While praising an athlete (in a short positive comment) it is usually advisable to point out specific elements of a technique, tactic, or behavior. Even a very short and global: "Good job!" or "That's it" may turn out to be very beneficial in enhancing an athlete's or a team's self-confidence.

Use constructive criticism to refer only to a specific performance mistake or behavior. When it does not have any implications for the athlete as a person, he or she will treat it as a piece of information of technical content and self-esteem and self-confidence will not suffer from such a comment.

4. Within a workout, the coach needs to manipulate the difficulty and complexity of an exercise or drill based on sound teaching and coaching principles—among them the principle of beginning with simple tasks and then moving to more complex ones; and the principle of considering the preparation phase and psychophysiological functioning of an athlete during a given workout session.

5. Setting goals in a way that an athlete or a team can accomplish them fairly quickly helps in developing and maintaining an athlete's self-confidence. It is wiser to set performance goals than outcome goals because the result in the competition depends on more factors than just the performance itself (e.g., officiating, or the strength of the rivals).

As a final comment to the import of the coach's influence, hear what Rainer Martens has to say: "Some athletes believe self-confidence gives them an immunity

against making errors. It does not, but a healthy self-confidence gives an athlete a powerful weapon in dealing with errors. When athletes' self-worth is not in doubt, they feel free to pursue the correction of these errors. They are not afraid to try. Coaches who chastise athletes for making errors are likely to deny athletes the use of this powerful weapon" (Martens, 1987, p. 152).

Planning for competition

Orlick (1986) believes that there is a direct relationship between self-confidence and consistency in high-level performance (note carefully, this is performance level, not the competition outcome). Consistency in performance positively affects self-confidence, which in turn facilitates an optimal mind set: emotions, thoughts, and concentration. Further, an optimal mind state facilitates good performance, which enhances self-confidence, and so the cycle continues. According to Orlick (1986), an optimal mind set ("the ideal mental state for competition," p. 16) and self-confidence both may be reached through mental plans used: a) one to two days before the competition, b) during the competition day, c) in the last minutes prior to the event, d) during the performance, and e) after the competition is over.

Based on special strategies (e.g., relaxation and recalling the athlete's best states, and filling out competition reflection questionnaires), an athlete selects specific behaviors, thoughts, and actions that work best during competition. These may be, for example, his or her best warm-up routine, breakfast menu, or self-talk just prior to the start in the event. In other words, while building mental plans, the athlete asks him- or herself the following questions: "What is it that is within my own control and that helped me perform consistently at my highest individual level? Which of these tools do I include in my competition plans?"

Later on—prior to and during competitions—the athletes who implement such plans will find it a lot easier to accomplish the ideal mental state that has helped them so many times in their past performance.

(continued on page three)

Your Self-Confidence and Your Performance (continued from page 2)

In addition, implementing step-by-step these previously used plans gives an athlete a sense of control and belief that this time the good performance is going to happen again, which is important in any discussion on self-confidence.

Creating neuropsychological experiences

What follows are some of the methods and techniques that can be used by a sports psychology consultant. The majority of these techniques refer to restoration and use of self-confidence during a competition. It is assumed that self-confidence was previously developed by the coach or a sports psychology consultant.

The purpose of these paragraphs is to show that applied sports psychology possesses a wide repertoire of interventions and programs that can and should be used by coaches and athletes for their own advantage.

1. Relaxation training and using of a deep relaxation state (which is an altered state of consciousness). This is a method of coping with stress and facilitating positive personality changes (e.g., lowering the anxiety). Many sports psychology consultants indicate that managing competition stress directly enhances self-confidence (e.g., Singer, 1986). In addition, relaxation skills form a basis for better use of visualization (imagining oneself to be very competent in a competition situation), ideomotor training (imagery-based technical and tactical training), autosuggestion (e.g., "I am very well prepared and I will do my best"), and conditioning of certain

cognitive-emotional responses to given triggers (gestures, symbols, words). Conditioning and triggers are widely used (e.g., Nowicki, 1997) and basically support the effects of mental plans. In this situation, a given word or gesture serves the function of a trigger that initiates a desired psychophysiological state of, for example, self-confidence, relaxation, and activation.

2. Self-confidence related self-awareness training (Weinberg, 1988). This technique requires an athlete to analyze the self-confidence dynamics that occur in some critical moments of his or her sport performance (e.g., penalty shot or losing a score). They ask themselves a question: "When thus-and-so happens, do I feel optimally self-confident?" As Taylor's (1993) research findings indicate, different sports challenge athletes in a different way with respect to optimal levels of self-confidence. This is why it is so vital that a sports psychology consultant work very closely with both the athletes and their coach, so that the consultant comes to understand better the specificity of their sport. The better this understanding on the part of the consultant, the more effective will be the psychological skills plans and their implementation.

3. Self-talk training. Based on the self-awareness training, an athlete will know exactly when he or she experiences lower levels of self-confidence. This is also a moment when a negative self-talk usually occurs and takes over the athlete's mind. Thoughts such as "I will not do it" or "I can't" are common. Consequently an athlete needs the skill of recognizing and stopping negative thoughts,

and replacing them with positive ones (Nowicki, 1997).

4. Dissociation. The effects of self-talk training can be magnified by the skill of dissociation, which means removing from the mind or choosing not to attend to certain perceptions (e.g., fatigue or pain). One way of combining these two skills is as follows: first, dissociation (stopping perception of fatigue) and then positive self-talk (e.g., "Just a few reps more," or "One at a time," and "Now, now, now...").

All the four discussed strategies need to be included in the training process according to the phases and goals of planned preparation. In addition every athlete is different, which is why the psychological preparation programs need to consider not only the specific sport context, but the athlete's individuality as well. Both the coach and sports psychology consultant have to keep that in mind.

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Self-Defense Tip

This tip will deal with low fighting stances—often a neglected and poorly practiced element of fighting and self-defense. Low stances, most often seen in traditional karate and in northern styles of Chinese boxing, are very helpful in self-defense but only if understood and practiced well.

Many top full-contact karate and judo fighters use very low stances. The rule is: The closer the distance the more beneficial is a low stance. Look at the contest performances of technical fighters in those sports and you will notice this.

Low stances are functional but they are not for standing. They are for moving and protecting from attack and counterattack as you move.

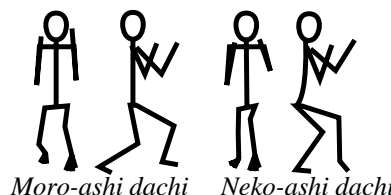
In this issue you will learn the simplest low stance—*moro-ashi dachi* (parallel foot stance).

Keep your trunk upright and straight, hips low, supported by flexed legs. Most of your weight is on the front of your feet, both feet pointing in the same direction, one foot advanced about one foot-length ahead of the other.

Learn to move in this position and eventually to strike and kick from it or grapple. In grappling this position makes it difficult for your opponent to "shoot" or do a leg takedown on you. For your attacker's leg grab to work, you see, he needs you to lean forward (or lose balance in any direction). *Moro-ashi dachi* keeps your trunk straight while keeping hips low on flexed legs, and this lets you intercept your attacker's dive for your legs.

In karate-type sparring this position lets you absorb shin kicks to the outside of your legs. Bringing the lead knee to the center, shifting your weight to the back foot, and moving your hips to the back naturally flows you into a cat stance (*neko-ashi dachi*) which protects you from strikes to the groin and inner thighs.

To learn more techniques, order *Basic Instincts of Self-Defense* (see the order form on page four).



Q&A on STRETCHING (continued from previous issue)

This is a continuation of my answer on the order of workouts and exercises in a workout from the previous issue.

■ **I have listed the exercises in the order I do them. What do you think?**

Days 1 & 6: TECHNICAL/SPEED

*Techniques & kicking drills

*Sparring

Days 2 & 5: STRENGTH

*Bench press/dynamic leg stretches

*Chest flies/hamstring curls

*Military press/leg extensions

*Biceps curls/squats

*Dips/deadlifts

*Chin ups/adductor flies

*Crunches

*Back extensions (machine)

*Isometric stretches

*Relaxed stretches

Day 3: AEROBICS

*Jump rope

*Running/sprints

*Bike

*Relaxed stretching

Day 4: OFF

Answer: From my answer in the previous issue of Stadion News, you know that the order of your workouts in the week may keep you from reaching your potential or even lead to overtraining. Doing strength exercises (Day 5) before your speed or technical workout (Day 6) worsens the quality of your work on speed or technique because you are still fatigued after strength work.

You also now know that doing deadlifts before adductor flies makes it harder to stabilize your body when doing the flies and can cause an injury. Similarly, abdomen crunches, which fatigue the abdomen muscles that stabilize your trunk during back exercises, should not precede back extensions.

Your choice of exercises is strange for a martial artist. Instead of using functional strength exercises that improve both your strength and performance you use isolated body-building exercises (curls, leg extensions, dips, chest flies).

Use natural movements for your strength exercises—do not isolate muscle groups with artificial, bodybuilding-like exercises. There is no isolation in any natural movement, be it lifting, jumping, pushing, or

pulling and there is no isolation in any of your martial arts techniques. Isolation is a concept suited to bodybuilding (which is looks-oriented) and has no application in strength training for action-oriented sports.

There are three types of strength exercises: general, directed, and sport-specific.

General strength exercises strengthen all major groups of muscles around each joint in a balanced way so no muscle group is more developed than others, which would pull your joint out of its normal alignment. These exercises prepare your muscles, ligaments, and bones to withstand the more intensive directed and specialized strength exercises. Usually, doing general strength exercises, you move slower than when doing your sports or martial arts technique, and with a resistance that develops a different type of strength than that most often used in the actual techniques.

Some of the typical general strength exercises with weights: squats and lunges, deadlifts and other forms of back extensions, forms of pull-and-jerk and snatch, bench press, abdomen exercises.

Directed strength exercises involve all or some of the muscle groups that are the main participants in the actual sports technique. Their speed and rhythm are similar to the actual sports technique, so they use the same energy source as the technique. They differ from the technique in their range of movement and trajectory. Various throws with medicine balls are the directed exercises for boxers, for example.

Sport-specific strength exercises are those that have very similar spatial form (trajectory, angle, and range of motion) to the actual competitive technique or its part; they have similar speed and rhythm as the actual technique; and the maximal force in those exercises is developed in the same spot and instance as in the actual technique.

How to select exercises and plan training is explained in books by Zatsiorski and Bompa on the [Athlete's Bookshelf](#).

Regarding your Day 3: Why bike when you can jump rope and run? Biking does not allow a full range of extension in the hip and knee joint and so, if you bike a lot, you may reduce the flexibility of your legs.

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