



news

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Improve Your Strength and Skills

I like weights. Lifting weights keeps me strong and flexible, maybe even protects me from injuries. But in sports training weights can't be the only means of resistance training because many sport-specific skills cannot be safely or conveniently practiced with them.

To duplicate the form of your movement with weights in, for example, grappling, swimming, or track and field, you would have to build expensive, heavy contraptions.

There is a safe and inexpensive alternative means of resistance training—elastic bungee cords. They can complement weight training by providing a different type of resistance and allowing you to do sport-specific exercises.

Sometimes, when you travel, you may have to use them for all your resistance exercises because lugging a few hundred pounds of iron would be impossible.

Bungee cord does not weigh much, but a couple of pounds of it can give you lots of resistance, and it is cheap.

Swimmers use bungee cords for swimming in a harness, to develop specific strength for swimming. Runners use them both for resistance and, in an opposite way,

for assisting them in running. Running while being pulled by a bungee is a way to break your speed barrier (see *Science of Sports Training* for an explanation).

Judoka use bungees for fit-ins (uchi-komi) because the elastic bungees duplicate well the forces encountered while throwing someone. Waldemar Legien, two-time Olympic gold medal winner, shows how he practices his favorite throw with bungee cords on the video *Judo Self-Defense*. Kickers attach bungees to their feet and kick to develop balance, proper body alignment, and strength. You can see these exercises on the video *Power High Kicks with No Warm-Up!*

Bungees are much safer than weights because they can't squash you when you let go, and the resistance they provide can't hyperextend your joints, which can happen with wrist and ankle weights.

I use 36 feet of bungee cord. I fold it in four, tie to a post, and practice my fit-ins and punches with two, three, and four 9-foot lengths of the cord. When I kick I fold it in two and practice with this 18-foot length.

You can order your bungee at 1-802-723-6175. It costs \$0.50 per foot.

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Stretching seminars on video

If you could not attend Thomas Kurz's seminars in Minnesota or in Vermont, you can still learn from them. These stretching seminars were videotaped and the best instructional footage from all of them is being put on one videocassette. You can learn different exercises than those shown in Kurz's book and video on stretching, as well as his techniques and drills for high kicks with no warm-up. If you want to obtain this seminar video, call Stadion Publishing Co., Inc. at 1-802-723-6175.



Thomas Kurz, age 40, kicks cold during his seminar in Minneapolis.

"I already had good flexibility ... but I was very far from obtaining a full split in suspension. After I started working with your techniques, it took me 2 months tops to accomplish what you see in my picture."—Hiram Carriles, instructor at Centro Universitario de TaeKwonDo, in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico.



Your Self-Confidence and Your Performance

by Artur Poczwadowski

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

—D. L. Feltz, *Understanding Motivation*

This is Part I 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 it, and in the case of an athlete who lost self-confidence, how to restore it to an optimal level.

The author, Artur Poczwadowski, 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. Currently he is working on his Ph.D. thesis in sports psychology at the University of Utah.

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

The level of athletic performance depends heavily on the level of the athlete's self-confidence. Self-confidence may be understood as the athletes' belief in their strengths, their ability to succeed, and their good physical preparation. In so many instances, presuming an athlete has achieved a high skill level in her sport, the actual level of performance is determined by one factor—the level of self-confidence. In sports psychology literature, self-confidence is often discussed under the term of self-efficacy.

Since you are most interested in the practical aspects of self-confidence in sport, this article aims at providing applied knowledge and recommendations for developing, maintaining, and restoring self-confidence in sport. To understand and then effectively use these strategies and exercises, however, you must first learn some theoretical assumptions regarding self-confidence in sports.

Would you have any difficulty standing on the chair you're sitting on now and keeping your balance for 30 seconds? Of course not! Now, what about your psychological reactions if the same chair were placed on the edge of the roof of a twenty-story building? Isn't it something like, "What's gonna happen if I fall off?" and "I mustn't lose my

balance because..." with butterflies in your stomach, perspiration, and shaking? The bottom line for the brain is a simple thought: "Can I do it?"

One of the many psychophysiological processes that were activated by this "insignificant" change in the location of the chair is the dynamics in the experience of your belief that you can successfully complete the task.

Let's look at two more examples. You probably know the famous outcome of Sir Roger Bannister's four-minute mile record. By breaking this magic record, he extended the boundaries that were thought to be physiological limits of human capacities. The belief that one can do it spread out among other runners. In the first year after the record was broken, this four-minute mile barrier was beaten by 12 other runners! The placebo effect provides more evidence of the power of a strong belief in something, or being certain about something. In an experiment investigating the placebo effect, it was not a pill that soothed patients' pain, but the patients' belief that this was going to happen after taking the "medicine." The pill contained neither pain reliever nor any other pharmacological substance, but the pain stopped!

In case you still have some doubt as to whether the issue of self-confidence has any place in your sport education, here are some quotes to muse over:

"Stop looking for proof that you aren't that good, and start looking for proof that you are."¹

"What we think about ourselves is very much related to how well we might expect to do, and in fact will do in a situation."²

"Accept the fact that faith is a growing process, not an absolute."³

"Self-confidence is one of the most frequently cited psychological factors thought to affect sport performance and is a primary focus of research by sport psychologists."⁴

Your self-confidence and you

Self-confidence is a part of one's self-concept. Additionally, self-confidence is based on self-image, self-esteem, and self-

efficacy. Without getting into the theoretical details of the meanings of these terms, you can adopt G.W. Russel's understanding of believing in oneself as "one's personal assessment of whether one possesses the wherewithal to achieve a designated level of performance."⁵ This belief has its emotional component (i.e., stable and positive emotions, strong motivation to complete the task), as well as behavioral consequences (i.e., selecting the relevant sport technical element or tactics, and their application to performance). These behaviors have been either previously learned in the training process and competitions or situationally created to solve the problem at hand.

Both research findings and the author's personal sport experience indicate that self-efficacy develops from:

- a) your performance accomplishments;
- b) vicarious experiences (you put yourself in somebody else's shoes—comparing yourself to that person while he or she is performing and succeeding);
- c) persuasion that comes from others (mainly from your coaches); and
- d) the conclusions that you come to about yourself as a performer.

This information is valuable in planning the intervention that can be implemented by a coach. You will also learn some techniques that may be used by a sports psychology consultant.

1. Orlick, T. *Psyching for Sport: Mental Training for Athletes* (Champaign, IL: Leisure Press, 1986) p. 88.
2. Singer, R. N. *Peak Performance... and More*. (Ithaca NY: Movement Publications, 1986) p. 67.
3. Nideffer, R. M. *Psyched to Win*. (Champaign IL: Leisure Press, 1992) p. 55.
4. Feltz, D. L. "Understanding motivation in sport: a self-efficacy perspective." In *Motivation in Sport and Exercise*, G. C. Roberts (ed), (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1992) p. 93.
5. Russel, G. W. *The Social Psychology of Sport*. (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1993) p. 67.

To be continued in the next issue

Sharpen Your Mental Edge with *Gold Medal Mental Workout for Combat Sports*

You can reach your full potential only if your mind will let you. The best conditioning can be wasted by an instant of doubt or hesitation during a contest. When two athletes of equal physical skill and ability compete with each other, the one who is better mentally prepared is the winner. It even happens that an athlete perfectly prepared physically loses against a physically weaker but mentally stronger opponent.

Athletes who do not control their minds will never fully control their bodies.

You can use now the same mental training program some of the best athletes in the world use—*Gold Medal Mental Workout for Combat Sports* (GMMW). It has been developed by Dariusz Nowicki, the leading East European sports psychologist, who prepared several world and Olympic champions for their peak performances.



Pawel Nastula, World and Olympic Judo Champion, performs Gold Medal Mental Workout Exercise 12: Recovery during a break in fighting.

Pawel Nastula, judo 1996 Olympic Champion and 1995 World Champion, says: “Nowicki’s mental workouts helped me to overcome fear and anxiety and gave me self-confidence. **GMMW** breathing exercises allowed me to regenerate my whole body and to keep full mental concentration in the difficult precontest conditions as well as during the contest itself.”

Marek Rzepkiewicz, Olympic judo coach, says: “I have never seen Pawel so well concentrated on the fight, carrying out

our tactical plan and using his coach’s advice so well. Mental preparation helped him to overcome weakness in difficult moments during his semifinal and final fights at the Olympics.”

Marek Garmulewicz, freestyle wrestler, two-time European Champion, says: “Thanks to Dariusz Nowicki’s mental training I do very well during the most important contests. Nowicki’s *Gold Medal Mental Workout* gives me energy, self-confidence, and the belief that I will win.”



Waldemar Legien celebrates winning his first Olympic Gold Medal in the 1988 Seoul Olympics.

Waldemar Legien, judoka with gold medals in the 1988 and 1992 Olympics, says: “You already have what it takes to be a winner. Now all you need to do is to unlock your potential! Your key is *Gold Medal Mental Workout*. It is easier than any other mental training and it helped me win two Olympic gold medals.”

“Suggestions in **GMMW** gave me an excellent mind-set for the Olympics. The spectators did not bother me. In the contest area I felt as if I already had been there and fought before. The hall seemed pleasant, cozy. In spite of the great number of spectators, I was not nervous or affected in any way. The will to win a gold medal gave me so much strength and faith in myself that I did not have any crisis, or even a shadow

of doubt in my victory.”

Janusz Pawlowski, judoka, with a silver medal in the 1988 Olympics, says: “During the few weeks preceding my start in the Olympic Games in Seoul, I participated in mental training conducted by Dariusz Nowicki. This mental training had a significant influence on my success in Seoul.”

Hiram Carriles (see his photo on page one) says: “I am currently using the **GMMW**, and even though I haven’t gone through [all of] it, I am very pleased with the results. In the last National Championship in Mexico I breezed through the elimination rounds and lost in the quarterfinals after making a Mexican bronze medalist (’91 World Champ) really sweat.”



Karolina Plecha, hapkido, European Champion

Karolina Plecha, European Champion (hapkido), five-time Champion of Poland (taekwondo), says: “**GMMW** helped me win the European Championship in hapkido, Belgium International Championship and Great Britain International Championship in taekwondo. It helps me relax and to concentrate during contests. Thanks to **GMMW** I learn faster and easier and do not have stage fright before contests.”

To order *Gold Medal Mental Workout for Combat Sports* call 800-873-7117 or use the order form on page four.

Self-Defense Tip

What should your first reaction be when someone grabs you by the throat?

First, protect your throat! Bring your chin to your chest to prevent attacker’s fingers or thumbs closing on your throat. If the attacker already has his or her fingers or thumbs on your throat, trapping them under your jaw will make it more difficult to squeeze your throat.

If you let the attacker squeeze your throat hard

enough to crush the cartilage in your windpipe, you will die of asphyxiation. It may take a minute or more for you to pass out but you will die in great pain, gasping for air, no matter what you do to your attacker.

Second, grab the attacker’s wrists (it may be done simultaneously with digging your chin into your chest), squeeze or push them toward each other, while jerking your upper body away from his or her hands. I say “upper body” because you should not move your head alone as this would open up your throat.

Now, when you see someone teaching “de-

fenses” against hand chokes, where the demonstrator allows the attacker’s hands on the front of the throat—you know they are phonies. It does not matter what defender does to the attacker, how he or she tears off the attacker’s ears, gouges eyes, locks arms, kicks shins or groins—if the fingers can squeeze the throat, and that takes only a split second—the defender is dead.

To learn more techniques, order *Basic Instincts of Self-Defense*. Call 800-873-7117 or send us your check or money order (see the order form on page four).

Q&A on STRETCHING (continued from previous issues)

Study these typical questions on stretching carefully. Among them may be just the one that you wanted to ask.

■ **Question:** *Although I come within one foot of a full side split, my range of motion in dynamic stretches (when I swing my leg out to the side) is much worse. Why is this?*

Answer: Make sure that you let your pelvis tilt forward (or move buttocks to the rear) when you raise your leg to the side. This action permits raising your leg higher—just as tilting your pelvis forward helps in the side split.

■ **Question:** *Why does the body have a natural tendency to prevent one from doing a split? I know that I have the ability to do a split because when I do side lunges (one leg extended and one leg pulled in, supporting my body) I can do a “half-split.” That is, I can fully extend one leg till my pelvis hits the floor—but with my other leg pulled in underneath me. I can do this with both legs but not at the same time. Why does the nervous system have to be trained to allow for fully extending both legs at the same time?*

Answer: To find out more about the nervous system, read about reflexes in neurology textbooks or see page 22 in *Stretching Scientifically*. Apart from reflex contraction the lack of sufficient strength in adductors makes them tense harder and thus get shorter when both legs, spread out, have to support your weight. The wider the angle between your legs the less efficient is the adductors’ leverage.

■ **Question:** *Why don’t you make a video for athletes who have a particular level of flexibility, for example, those who cannot reach their toes?*

Answer: This method works regardless of anybody’s level of flexibility. Exercises are demonstrated at a fairly high range of motion, but one can do them at any range, no matter how low, and increase it gradually.

■ **Question:** *Would doing all stretches for all the body parts be too much flexibility training for karate?*

Answer: I think it would be too much for

any sport and for anybody’s muscles.

■ **Question:** *Would doing weightlifting and all kinds of stretches in a workout be too much for one’s muscles?*

Answer: This depends on the person and exercises. If you do not feel sore after such workouts, then they are probably okay.

■ **Question:** *Could you suggest a program useful for karate?*

Answer: I would suggest leg raises in all directions and isometric exercises for side and for front split.

■ **Question:** *Would two months of not stretching reduce flexibility of someone who can do suspended splits?*

Answer: I think that flexibility would not be reduced much but the strength required for suspended splits could be too low to do them.

■ **Question:** *How long it takes to do full front and side splits using your method?*

Answer: It depends on your strength and initial flexibility. Some people reach splits within a month while others need several months.

■ **Question:** *I heard of a method of training called “dynamic tension.” It involves performing various movements while simultaneously tensing all muscles. It is supposed to be very effective for developing strength and flexibility. What do you think of it?*

Answer: It is difficult to gain as much strength with “dynamic tension” as with using external resistance—for example, weights. This is why it is not used by weightlifters and track and field throwers. It is impossible to duplicate the character of effort and thus develop the specific strength and coordination required for any dynamic movement against resistance (wrestling, boxing, track and field) using dynamic tension.

To evaluate dynamic tension, compare the amount of time needed to achieve the same final results as with other methods.

To get the most out of your training I do not recommend you use any one method exclusively. Use all rational methods for the best overall result.

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