Examining the Effectiveness of a Mental Training Program
Oriented Toward the Exploration of the Athlete’s Inner World

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Abstract

Standard mental training programs for athletes involves teaching certain psychological skills without dealing directly with the athlete’s personality development. The authors, however, believe that psychotherapeutic techniques can be effective for enhancing athletic performance. The present study examines the effectiveness of a novel mental training program which emphasizes psychotherapeutic techniques which are applied together with selected standard mental training exercises.

The 10 session program, which is called Inner World Exploration Type mental training, uses the following techniques in addition to some standard mental training techniques: group sand play (2 sessions), drawing method (The Landscape Montage Technique; 2 sessions), identification of social support (1 session), and group discussion on the mental training experience (in each session). The effectiveness of this new program is examined by comparing the effects of the explorative type of training with a standard program consisting of learning psychological skills. Both programs consist of 10 sessions of about 2 hours per week (study 1). In addition, the efficacy of Inner World Exploration on the enhancement of athletic performance is further explored with a presentation of a case study on two doubles tennis players who undergo sessions with the sand play technique (study 2).

The results of study 1 indicate that explorative type mental training brought about the same progress in psychological competitive ability as the standard mental training program as well as other specific effects. Study 2 shows that group sand play technique improved personal relations, psychological competitive ability, and brought on a change of attitude toward competition in the doubles tennis players. In conclusion, a mental training program oriented toward exploration of the athlete’s inner world is considered to be a useful method to improve athletic performance.

Key words: mental training, performance enhancement, psychotherapeutic technique, ‘inner world exploration type’, group sand play