Mental Discipline


Reviewed by Debbie Crews, Department of Exercise and Sport Science, University of North Carolina at Greensboro

The author of this book combines a scientific approach from Western philosophy with Eastern philosophy to define mental discipline and its role in the pursuit of peak performance. His mastery of a wide range of topics is evident in his detailed descriptions of the physiology, psychophysiology, and physics related to sport. The book is a good reference for these three topical areas in both sport and training for optimal sport performance, but it is not an applied text explaining how to develop mental discipline for peak performance.

The first two chapters introduce the theory of right practice and its importance to sport training. In essence, the theory of right practice suggests that one's state of mind influences the state of the body through the agency of willpower. The theory emphasizes two important concepts: the importance of awareness during sport training and competition, and the importance of training to the point of failure rather than success. This forces the athlete to reach a period requiring the use of willpower, for it is only through willpower that the athlete reaches optimal awareness.

Chapters 3 through 7 review physiology, psychophysiology, and physics from the Western approach to sport and training. They illustrate why Western philosophy alone is not capable of explaining peak performance. Chapters 8 and 9 explain meditative procedures from Eastern philosophy that may be combined with Western philosophy to enhance sport training. The middle chapters provide an overview of complicated information that would be easier to understand if additional models were included. Chapter 10 returns to mental discipline and how it may facilitate the pursuit of peak performance.

Most readers could probably benefit from reading only chapters 1, 2, 10, and 11 and use the middle chapters as a reference guide. This is not an applied sport psychology book, in spite of the title. Readers seeking an explanation of the physiological, psychophysiological, and meditative properties of sport would benefit from chapters 3 through 9. Others would understand the concepts presented in the book by reading the first two and the last two chapters.
Golf: The Mind Game
By Marlin M. Mackenzie with Ken Denlinger. Published 1990 by Dell Publishing, 666 5th Avenue, New York, NY 10103. (224 pp., U.S. $8.95)

Reviewed by Gary Howard, Women's Golf Coach, Brigham Young University

After the many things written about the mental aspects of golf, it is refreshing to read a book that provides easy-to-understand techniques for training the mind and body to work together. Mackenzie has drawn from his experience as a coach, a neurolinguistic practitioner, and a consultant to elite athletes to help them develop useful techniques. The book teaches golfers how to draw upon their successful experiences and other mental resources to regulate their golf performance.

In the first of two sections, Mackenzie explains how to use the book and presents a technique to help the reader rediscover how the mind is capable of recalling and regulating golf shots. Then the reader is shown how to anchor the visual, audio, and kinesthetic sensations associated with a successful shot. The second section introduces techniques designed to help the golfer regulate specific situations on the golf course. Mackenzie is especially effective in identifying what elite golfers think about around the greens, compared to what they say they think about. Also helpful are three appendices that serve as guides to cue selection, enhancing sensory awareness, and selecting techniques to apply to specific problems. Each technique has more than one application, and each problem has several techniques from which to choose.

The book is easy to read as well as being direct in its approach to every subject. Although it is not designed to be a workbook, it has a workbook feel. Anyone with a specific problem who is willing to spend a few weeks to find and practice the right technique should be pleased with the outcome. In summary, Mackenzie has written a book that should guide the reader in developing the mental skills necessary to play good golf. Golf professionals, coaches, and sport psychologists will also find the book useful in working with golfers who want to enhance their performance through better mental control.
Guide du Training Mental

By Guy Missoum. Published 1991 by RETZ, 1 rue du Départ, 75014 Paris. (221 pp.)

Reviewed by Jean Côté, School of Human Kinetics, University of Ottawa

Guide du Training Mental is a resource book of mental techniques for self-improvement written in the French language. It is targeted not only at athletes but also at business executives, actors, musicians, students, or others interested in optimizing their potential. The book is divided into eight chapters. In chapters 1, 2, and 3, Missoum gives the steps to assess one’s personal psychological profile; he also presents the different techniques and objectives of mental training. In chapters 4 through 8, Missoum discusses mental training techniques, from simple to more complex approaches.

Throughout the book, the classification of techniques is systematic and clear, with examples of applications and exercises. However, Missoum’s attempt to cover a wide range of techniques results in a lack of depth in several areas, such as lucid dreaming, systematic desensitization, hypnosis, and sensory isolation. Although these techniques are not often mentioned in the sport psychology literature, they have been the focus of many papers and books in the field of clinical psychology. One major weakness of the book is that Missoum discusses various concepts that are regularly used in psychology and applied sport psychology without providing references to any supporting literature. One is left with the impression that he was the originator of several well-established psychological techniques in mental training.

In the first section of the book, Missoum offers methods for evaluating one’s psychological profile and proposes some objectives, such as body awareness and self-control, that can be enhanced with mental training. This section is straightforward and provides sufficient basic knowledge for an individual who knows little about mental training to begin a program. However, the performer who is more knowledgeable about mental training may find that some important aspects of self-assessment and mental training evaluation are missing. For example, little emphasis has been placed on using mental practice to reach performance goals and on recording those goals in specific behavioral terms. Furthermore, methods of assessing psychological variables during the program and references for evaluation methods currently used in sport psychology are not provided.

The last five chapters of the book focus on mental training methods and exercises. Each chapter displays specific techniques, which are presented in a similar way. In chapter 4, Missoum proposes four different techniques to refine somatic awareness: sensory and body awareness exercises, breathing exercises, sauna, and massage. In chapter 5, relaxation techniques, such as those elaborated on by Jacobson and Schultz, are presented. Chapter 6 is devoted to behavioral approaches and is divided into two main sections: The first section deals with biofeedback techniques using EMG, ECG, and EDG; the second section presents cognitive approaches, such as goal setting and simulation techniques. The focus
of chapter 7 is on mental imagery, systematic desensitization, sophrology, sensory isolation, hypnosis, and lucid dreaming. Finally, chapter 8 is entirely devoted to neuro-linguistic programming.

The order in which the training methods are presented is appropriate because it follows a progression based on the level of difficulty for learning each technique. The level of expertise achieved for the first methods has a positive impact on the learning of subsequent techniques. Despite this seemingly logical presentation, there is often a lack of pertinent information as Missoum attempts to cover a large number of techniques. For example, an overview of systematic desensitization is given, but the information provided is not sufficient for an individual who lacks adequate background knowledge to apply the technique; the absence of references further compounds this problem. In another instance, the concept of mental imagery is described, yet specific exercises for sport situations are absent in spite of the abundance of literature and applied materials existing in this area.

In summary, Guide du Training Mental is a book that lacks depth in many areas and therefore is not useful as a self-training guide for individuals with some expertise in mental training. However, Missoum does provide an extensive, though often superficial, survey of the techniques that are currently used in applied sport psychology, thus opening this field to French readers with limited knowledge in mental training techniques.