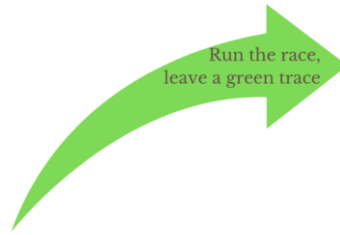


Project number: 101133603, Project acronym: SPEED



D2.2 Methodology for the athletes for effective self-preparation programmes for mental training as part of the sports program



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Disclaimer: Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

¹ *The final version of the Methodology will be finalized following the feedback received from the Second Training Event planned in the Project*



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1. Introduction

The SPEED project is a collaborative initiative between the Sport Club for Athletics “Athletic” and the Rijeka Sports Association, aimed at advancing the field of sports training and psychology.

The SPEED Project addresses four specific objectives:

SO1: To enhance the skills of Sport Clubs Team to apply an effective physical and mental training programs;

SO2: To enhance the skills of the athletes to apply an effective self-preparation programme for mental training;

SO3: To attract new participants with fewer possibilities to practice sport;

SO4: To establish international networking cooperation with institutions in the field of sport.

Through comprehensive approach the project involves diverse target groups, including 30 sports clubs, managerial and coaching staff, 160 amateur athletes aged 7 to 29, 30 disadvantaged participants, their parents, and 30 sports organizations, along with four training and research institutions.

The expected outcomes of the SPEED project include enhanced expertise and knowledge within sports clubs, improved training program implementation, increased athlete proficiency in mental training, greater participation among disadvantaged groups, promotion of healthy lifestyles, and the establishment of robust international sports networks. Through these efforts, the SPEED project aims to foster a more inclusive and effective sports environment, benefiting a wide range of participants and stakeholders.

The concept of SPEED involves two core activities to be organised and held: 1. Trainings to exchange knowledge and practices in the field of sports training programmes and sport psychology and 2. Establishing international networking cooperation with institutions in the field of sport. In contemporary sports coaching, acknowledging the significance of sports psychology is important for optimizing athlete performance and achieving sustained success.

This methodology provides an insightful overview of the pivotal role that sports psychology plays in athlete preparation and performance enhancement and can support the coaches in their everyday work with athletes alongside the sport-specific training.

Sports psychology constitutes a fundamental aspect of modern coaching methodologies, recognizing the intricate relationship between an athlete's mental state and their on-field performance. Beyond physical prowess, an athlete's mental preparedness is often the differentiating factor in achieving peak performance levels and maintaining consistency in competitive environments.

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2. Introduction to psychological preparation

Psychological preparation is crucial for athletes to optimize performance by managing emotions, thoughts, and behaviours. This methodology aims to equip athletes with practical tools to handle pre-competition anxiety, boost confidence, and maintain focus. The program integrates reflective exercises, emotional awareness, and cognitive restructuring techniques to enhance mental resilience. This methodology for effective self-preparation programs in mental training incorporates reflection on past experiences, emotional and physiological awareness, and cognitive restructuring techniques. By engaging in these activities, athletes can develop skills to manage their emotions, thoughts, and behaviours, leading to improved performance and resilience in competitions.

3. Self-preparation programmes for mental training

3.1. Managing Emotions, Thoughts, and Behaviour

Situation Analysis

A. Low Confidence and Anxiety Before Competition

Reflection Exercise:

- **Recall a Competition:** Think about a competition where your confidence was low and anxiety was high, leading to poor performance.
- **Detail Documentation:** Write down all the details of this situation in your workbook. (*See Annex 1*)
- **Card Selection:** Choose a card, for example using card from DIXIT game, that represents your state during that competition. Write in your workbook why you chose this card and what it symbolizes for you.



- **Thought Analysis:** Document the thoughts that were running through your mind at that time.
- **Behaviour Assessment:** Reflect on and write about your behaviour and performance during that competition.

B. High Confidence and Positive Experience Before Competition

Reflection Exercise:

- **Recall a Successful Competition:** Think about a competition where your confidence was high and you performed exceptionally well.
- **Detail Documentation:** Write down all the details of this situation in your workbook.

- **Card Selection:** Choose a card that represents your state during that competition. Write in your workbook why you chose this card and what it symbolizes for you.
- **Thought Analysis:** Document the thoughts that were running through your mind at that time.
- **Behaviour Assessment:** Reflect on and write about your behaviour and performance during that competition.

Emotional Awareness and Physiological Responses

- **Identify Emotional Locations:** Draw where in your body you feel different emotions such as anger, happiness, pride, tiredness, fear, excitement, anxiety, and sadness. Remember where you have localized each of those emotions. This will help you to work for overcoming the negative emotions when they next show up.



- **Behavioural Exercises:**
 - **Winning Posture:** Stand as if you won a championship.
 - **Losing Posture:** Stand as if you lost and came in last.
 - **Reflection:** Notice the difference between the two postures and draw how you want to stand before a competition in your workbook.

Abdominal Breathing Exercise

- **Heart Rate Monitoring:**
 1. Measure and record your heart rate for one minute.
 2. Perform an abdominal breathing exercise. Place one hand on your stomach and the other hand on your chest. Breathe in slowly through your nose so that your stomach moves out against your hand. The hand on your chest should remain as

still as possible. Tighten your stomach muscles, so that your stomach moves back in, as you exhale through pursed lips. The hand on your upper chest must remain as still as possible.

3. Measure and record your heart rate again.

Cognitive Restructuring

- **Identifying Negative Thoughts:**
 - Make a list of negative thoughts in your workbook.
 - Change these thoughts to more useful ones by focusing on the present moment and what you can control.
- **Negative to Positive Thought Transformation:**
 - Write down negative and dysfunctional thoughts.
 - Transform them into positive and functional thoughts using specific examples provided.

Examples:

NEGATIVE AND DYSFUNCTIONAL THOUGHTS	POSITIVE AND FUNCTIONAL THOUGHTS
I can't do this because I have never done that before.	Ok, this is the chance to learn something new.
I can't make a mistake.	I will give my best to do this right but mistakes are integral part of sport. Even the best athletes make mistakes.
We were late so I couldn't so all the exercises in my warm-up routine. This competition will be a disaster.	I will warm up best as I can now. Even on training we do not do all the exercises everytime and my performance is still just fine.
This will never work.	I will try and make it work.
I will never be good at this.	I will try again.

Behavioural Activation and Positive Thinking

- **Negative Thought Interruption:**
 - Notice when you are having a negative thought.
 - Imagine or say the word "STOP".
 - Take a deep, abdominal breath.
 - Change the thought into a more adaptive/positive one.
 - Focus on the task at hand.

Self-Awareness and Mental Training Routine

This part introduces a series of exercises and techniques designed to develop self-awareness, emotional regulation, concentration, and effective coping strategies, ensuring athletes are mentally prepared for competitions.

Refocus: Bring your focus to the present moment and adhere to the plan (adapt if necessary).

Ready: Take a deep breath and focus on the plan.

Respond: Trust your body and proceed.

Value Exercise:

Reflect on what is most important to you in your sport. Write it down and recall frequently what you value most.

Concentration techniques

- Distraction identification and management

External distractions: Identify distractions like spectators, weather, and media.

Internal distractions: Identify distractions like fatigue, pain, negative thoughts, and anxiety.

Focus areas: Concentrate on tactics, technique, goals, the present moment, and controllable elements.

Balloons concentration exercise:

Write down distractors and label/assign them on different coloured balloons. Choose three important focus areas and label/assign them on balloons with the same colour.

In a group with teammates practice the focus only on the balloons with the same colour representing your three main focus areas. The team throws all the colored balloons but you should try bouncing back only the main focus area balloons.

Practice keeping focus area balloons in the air while letting distractor balloons fall.



Other exercise for concentration

Scan the QR code with your mobile phone and follow the instructions of the game:

LET'S TRAIN YOUR CONCENTRATION!



Circles of control

Circle of Control: Focus on your reactions and behaviours.

Circle of Influence: Recognize but don't prioritize things you can somewhat influence.

Circle of Worry: Identify and ignore things you can't control.

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Arousal regulation

High Arousal: Recognize signs like tense muscles, rapid heart rate, and narrow focus. Use techniques like deep breathing and positive self-talk to calm down.

Low Arousal: Recognize signs like low energy and slow movements. Use physical and mental techniques to elevate arousal, like power poses and motivational speech.

Optimal Arousal: Aim for balanced energy, clear focus, and confident behaviour.

3.2. Mental preparation before competition

Self-Check: Assess your surroundings, feelings, goals, and plan.

Anxiety Management: Normalize symptoms, use deep breathing, focus on the task, and use encouraging self-talk.

3.3. During competition

Apply the COPE Model (Anshel, 1991):

Emotion Control: Maintain an upright/winner posture, use slow breathing, and encouraging self-talk.

Input Organization: Separate useful from useless information.

Planning: Quickly decide how to proceed with clear goals.

Execution: Trust your body and training.

3.4. Post-competition analysis

Reflect on what went well, what could be improved, and create a plan for future improvement.

If the result was bad or an injury occurred, analyse the situation objectively, recognize changes in thoughts and behaviour, and determine learnings and future actions.

Annex 1 Detail Documentation Workbook

BEFORE THE COMPETITION

Mental warm-up routine before the training/ competition

1. Where I am? What is around me? (time and space)
2. How do I feel? (be honest, everything is ok, think about what can be done in order to reach the optimal emotional level)
3. What do I want to achieve? (roughly)
4. How will I achieve that? (very specific – what will be done in terms of behaviour)

Drop in confidence before the competition?

1. Power pose
2. Remember the goals – focus on the process and task at hand
3. Encourage self-talk

Annex 2

Demo of the Training on effective mental training program with athletes



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