



The Mental Toughness UNIFORM for High School Varsity Water Polo: The Curriculum

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Abstract:

Since 2004, the author has been involved in teaching sport psychology skills (i.e., life skills) to high school student-athletes using the Psychological UNIFORM curriculum. More specifically, UNIFORM (which is now referred to as the Mental Toughness UNIFORM) represents seven key psychological skills or concepts: U = use goal setting, N = no mistakes, only learning opportunities, I = imagery, F = fully focused, O = overtly positive, R = relaxation and stress control, and M = make routines. The program is taught via the Game Plan Format (GPF; Gilbert, 2011; 2017) and uses a multi-method approach emphasizing sport terms to connect the student-athletes with the sport psychology content. There are nine different activities for each skill. First, the student-athletes are introduced to the sport psychology skill/concept (i.e., Warm-up) and perform some in-class activities related to this topic (i.e., Conditioning). Then they are introduced to an elite athlete or coach who uses the specific skills through a testimonial called Proof it Works! Next, they are given guiding questions while watching a short film clip (e.g., 5-8 minutes) that shows the topic in an entertaining way. This is the Films component. The student-athletes are then given a homework assignment that reviews the material (i.e., Practice). When the Practice assignment is returned, the student-athletes have a brief review of the topic (i.e., Chalk Talk). The student-athletes then compete physically in the Drill where they further see the sport psychology skills/concepts in action. This is followed by a mental competition, the Game. The Game is a 10-point quiz comprising multiple choice, true-false and/or short-answer questions. Finally, the student-athletes complete a journal entry in their Playbooks. These nine activities (as well as the answer keys for Conditioning, Films, Practice, and Games) were created for each week of the Mental Toughness UNIFORM curriculum. The curriculum is designed as a 12-week program and includes a week for each UNIFORM skill along with two introductory weeks (i.e., What is Mental Toughness? and What is UNIFORM?), two review weeks (i.e., Review Week #1 and Review Week #2), and a week that emphasizes the use of the skills in everyday life (i.e., Mental Toughness Outside of Sport). Because of the need to be sport-specific and current, all activities were created for the research study. The Mental Toughness UNIFORM documents will be discussed during the presentation and specific activities shared with attendees.