

Confidence Case Study: "It's About Attitude"

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Background/Introduction

Slump Busting - Conner is a talented high school baseball player who seems to be his own worst enemy. Conner is a perfectionist, and whenever he makes a mistake or performs poorly, he gets down on himself and begins to focus on all his faults and puts himself down for not being able to eliminate these silly mistakes. Unfortunately, when Conner gets down on himself, he can't let go and keeps running these negative thoughts and personal putdowns over and over in his head. This negative attitude affects his confidence and concentration, and his performance suffers. Conner has had several slumps during the season that seem to be brought on by his inability to deal constructively with his flaws and mistakes.

Tom Bradley, Conner's coach, wants to help Conner deal with his negative attitude because he is the team's most talented player and the key to their success this season. Coach Bradley thinks Conner needs to work on his self-talk, so he can maintain a more positive attitude and develop a better approach toward mistakes. Conner doesn't know much about self-talk other than those funny skits they did on Saturday Night Live. He's skeptical and thinks it sounds like a loser making excuses. The following Case Study will explain the rationale for the chosen Mental skills training tools that will support Connor's performance, including positive/effective self-talk.

Case Study

According to Dr. Rick McGuire, "Effective self-talk" in sport is positive self-talk, which means thinking "right." Thinking right means that we think in positive ways that support us. We cannot control everything that happens to us, but we can choose how we respond to it..." (McGuire). Self-talk are the thoughts that we associate with about different experiences, which

have the potential to support us or hinder us. As mentioned in McGuire, “When we encounter situations, we have thoughts. Our thoughts affect our emotions. Our emotions affect our physical being, our physical being affects our behavior. Bad thoughts mean bad performance. Our thoughts affect how we play” (McGuire). In order to have effective self-talk that support athletes in performance, we have to have positive self-talk to reference.

As mentioned in McGuire, “it’s hard to pick right thoughts if you do not have a lot of right thoughts to pick. Affirmations are strong positive statements about yourself...Affirmations are strong, positive, rational, strategic, motivational, and personal... We have to build positive thinking habits that will support us, and affirmations are an effective strategy” (McGuire). Athletes should develop affirmation statements to support them in developing effective self-talk in sport.

In addition, according to McGuire, “positive self-talk is a skill, positive self-talk is controllable, positive self-talk should be taught by the coach. The coach should “model” positive self-talk, positive self-talk is thinking right. Positive self-talk can only be achieved right here and right now; when we are focused in the here and now” (McGuire). Effective self-talk in sport is developed through practice, such as using affirmation statements. Effective self-talk is controllable only if we bring our attention to it and practice it, which can be developed and enhanced with modeling by the coach. Lastly, effective self-talk is achieved in the present moment with how we choose to respond to our experiences in a more positive way.

According to Burton & Raedeke (2008), “positive thought patterns help create a flow mindset by boosting confidence, maintaining an optimistic attitude, promoting concentration at crucial moments, enhancing motivation to push your limits, creating an optimal level of arousal,

and ensuring poise and mental toughness when confronting failure or adversity” (Burton & Raedeke, 2008, p. 104-105). To develop these positive thought patterns and develop more effective self-talk in sport, Burton & Raedeke (2008) highlight the following guidelines.

The following guidelines are referred to as, smart talk commandments that support athletes in developing positive thought patterns and effective self-talk that support them in sport:

“1) Be an optimist, not a pessimist: Focus on the positive in every situation; Concentrate on what athletes can do, rather than what they cannot; emphasize strengths, correct weaknesses. 2) Remain realistic and objective: translate self-talk into specific goals and action plans. 3) Focus on the present, not the past or future: the past cannot be changed, and we cannot predict the future, the present is the only time that we can act. 4) Appraise problems as challenges rather than threats: Athletes who view problems as challenges bring out the best in themselves; they remain motivated and perform up to their capabilities. 5) View success as replicable and failures as surmountable: When athletes believe that their success is due to ability and effort... they see the success as replicable. Help athletes to attribute failure to factors that they can control, such as effort level, and mental preparation. 6) Concentrate on process, not product: Focus self-talk on process goals-hard work, mental preparation, skill, and strategy development. 7) Concentrate on things that you can control: Most important aspect of self-talk. We can control our emotions and behavior, not other people and events that occur beyond us. 8) Separate your performance from your self-worth: Your worth as a human being has nothing to do with how you perform. Help athletes to recognize

that they are unique human beings with their own gifts to offer the world, regardless of their sport performance” (Burton & Raedeke, 2008, p. 104-105).

The guidelines support the development and application of effective self-talk by emphasizing the importance of being optimistic, realistic, focusing on the present moment, appraising situations as challenges as opposed to threats, viewing success as replicable and failures as surmountable, concentrating on the process and what you can control, and separating the performance from you as an individual. By following these guidelines, individuals can develop positive thought patterns that can support them in their sport.

What these guidelines say about Conner’s negative attitude and difficulty in dealing with mistakes is that he lacks the education and resources to change his thought patterns. Conner has not practiced the awareness to recognize the way his thought patterns negatively impact his performance. In addition, Conner has not developed the awareness or skillset to change his thought pattern to be more positive to support him in overcoming mistakes. Further, Conner has not developed affirmations statements that support him and help him to develop a more positive thinking pattern to overcome challenges and mistakes, therefore he recycles his old negative thinking patterns that continue to hinder his performance. Furthermore, although Conner’s coach would like him to develop positive self-talk, it appears that the coach has not recognized the value of modeling the positive self-talk that would support Conner in developing a more effective self-talk.

The preceding guidelines also reflect that Conner does not think optimistically and therefore is not naturally developing positive thought patterns. In addition, Conner is a perfectionist, therefore he is not being realistic with his expectations or his self-talk. Further,

Conner dwells on his mistakes and gets consumed by his failures therefore he is dwelling on the past and not focusing on the present, which is hindering him from recognizing his ability to develop more constructive thought patterns. Additionally, Conner is not effectively concentrating due to his negative thought patterns, so he is not recognizing his ability to take control of the situation by controlling his emotions and behaviors with more positive thought patterns. Lastly, from the understanding of the preceding guidelines it appears that Conner is unable to separate his worth from his performance therefore he mentally destroys himself whenever he makes a mistake. In other words, if Conner recognized his worth beyond his performance, he would not let his poor performances result in him destroying himself as a person; he would be able to recognize that his performance is a separate aspect of himself that he can change and improve and not a complete representation of all that he is as a person.

McGuire and Burton & Raedeke (2008) provide guidelines for effective self-talk and positive thinking patterns that support athletes in sport. These guidelines emphasize the value of optimism, being realistic, focusing on the present moment, appraising problems as challenges; not threats, viewing successes as replicable and failures as surmountable, concentrating on the process and things that you can control, and separating the performance from your self-worth. The guidelines reveal that Conner is lacking many of the important features to support him in having more positive thinking patterns and identified a number of areas that we can address to support him.

According to Burton & Raedeke (2008), “the critic is the inner voice that attacks and judges you...the critic blames you when things go wrong and negatively compares you to others; sets impossible standards of perfection, then blasts you for falling short; and maintains an album of

failures but ignores your successes“ (Burton & Raedeke, 2008, p. 105). The critic is the negative thought pattern that belittles us whenever possible. The critic is the inner dialogue that we have the power to silence when we empower individuals with positive self-talk and effectively, consistently develop and maintain positive thought patterns.

The impact that the critic has on Conner’s attitude is profound. The critic dominates Conner’s mind whenever he falls short of his perfectionistic expectations. The critic consumes Conner’s mind on a regular basis and fills him with doubts and failures that knock his confidence and concentration down to progressively lower levels. The critic controls his reactions to his mistakes, reinforcing his negative thought patterns about himself whenever he makes a mistake, therefore inhibiting him from having a constructive thought pattern that could support him in effectively learning from his mistakes and constructively moving past mistakes. Further, the critic continues to demoralize him, preventing him from seeing his agency that he can develop better thought patterns that would assist him in overcoming his adversity.

There are a few types of distorted thinking and irrational beliefs that may be responsible for Conner’s problems, which include overgeneralization, polarized thinking, and perfectionism. Overgeneralization may be one form of distorted thinking that is responsible for Conner’s problems due to the nature of overgeneralization and Connor’s tendency to let one mistake destroy his whole concept of who he is as an athlete and person. According to Burton & Raedeke (2008) “Overgeneralization is the process of erroneously forming conclusions based on one isolated incident while ignoring broader facts” (Burton & Raedeke, 2008, p. 106). For instance, Conner tends to overgeneralize his overall performance based on one mistake. Conner forms the conclusion that because he made one mistake that he is a mistake altogether; He focuses on all of

his faults and overgeneralizes the mistake as being all encompassing of who he is as a person and does not remain separate from the experience.

Polarized thinking may be another form of distorted thinking that may be responsible for Conner's challenges. According to Burton & Raedeke (2008), "polarized thinking frames things in all-or-nothing terms-black or white, good or bad. Polarized thinkers take extreme positions and give themselves little room to be human and make mistakes. They see themselves as either stars or flops, and this self-labeling in absolute terms can directly affect performance" (Burton & Raedeke, 2008, p. 106). For example, Conner appears to approach his mistakes and performances with polarized thinking, because as soon as he makes one mistake, he is automatically a failure and cannot perform. There is little room for him to acknowledge that he can be a successful athlete and still make mistakes. He believes that he is either a successful athlete that does not make mistakes or he makes mistakes and that means he is a loser, failure, and no longer a successful athlete. He goes from one extreme to the other.

Lastly, Perfectionism is one form of irrational beliefs that may be responsible for Conner's problems with reference to Burton & Raedeke's (2008) definition of perfectionism. According to Burton & Raedeke (2008), "perfectionism involves believing that one should be thoroughly competent in every aspect of their game at all times, never have ups and downs or make mistakes" (Burton & Raedeke, 2008, p. 106). For instance, Conner is identified as a perfectionist and whenever he makes a mistake his whole concept of himself crumbles and he dehumanizes himself. Perfectionists tend to believe that they should never make mistakes, they should always perform perfectly, and whenever they do make a mistake, they tend to dismantle their whole self-concept.

Conner is consumed by the critic that recycles negative thought patterns that control his performance outcomes and inhibits him from constructively learning from his mistakes and positively overcoming adversity. He appears to be challenged with overgeneralization, polarized thinking, and perfectionism that may be responsible for his problems. By acknowledging the critic, his distorted thinking, and irrational beliefs, we can develop more positive thought patterns that will allow him to overcome his challenges and effectively support him in his sport.

The following are positive self-talk statements that could help Conner to maintain a more positive and constructive attitude:

- 1) "I am in control of my performance and process, and I can make adjustments to my process as I go." This positive self-talk statement would help Conner to maintain a more positive and constructive attitude, because it would help remind him that regardless of what happens in his environment, he can control his process and how he responds to the moment. The reminder from his positive self-talk statement would prevent him from dwelling on his mistakes because he would be reminded of his agency in the process to change things as needed in the moment.
- 2) "Everyone encounters mistakes, failure, and adversity. I am not my mistakes." This positive self-talk statement would help Conner to maintain a more positive and constructive attitude because it would remind him that everyone makes mistakes, therefore he is not alone, and even the greatest athletes make mistakes. In addition, this positive self-talk statement would also remind him that he is not his mistakes, which would prevent him from becoming consumed by the critic that dismantles his self-esteem whenever he makes a mistake.

- 3) “I am here in the moment, right here and right now, and my performance is what I make it.” This positive self-talk statement would help Conner to maintain a more positive and constructive attitude because it would remind him of the importance of staying in the present moment, ultimately reminding him of the power and control that he has over his performance and process when he stays in the present moment. In addition, this positive self-talk statement would also minimize Conner from dwelling in the past on the mistakes that he makes, ultimately supporting Conner with maintaining a more positive and constructive attitude.
- 4) “I minimize my mistakes by learning from my mistakes.” This positive self-talk statement would help Conner to maintain a more positive and constructive attitude because it would remind Conner the value that he can take away from mistakes. As mentioned in Vernacchia (2003), “If mistakes are made, focus on error correction rather than dwelling on past failures. Learn from mistakes, make changes, adapt, and focus on present performance behaviors or strategies which will increase the probability of future success in sport.” (Vernaccia, 2003, p. 11). This positive self-talk statement would help Conner to recognize that he can minimize his mistakes by just recognizing and learning from them, instead of dwelling on them, so he can move on and continue to perform at his best.
- 5) “I like who I am as a person, I value the relationships that I have, and I am more than just an athlete.” This positive self-talk statement would help Conner to maintain a more positive and constructive attitude because it would remind him that he is more than just his performances and an athlete. Further, this positive self-talk statement would help Conner to keep perspective that whenever he makes mistakes that he has value and

abilities beyond his sports, so he can more easily move through them and does not let his mistakes define him.

These positive self-talk statements would support Conner because they would remind him: That he has control over his performance; that everyone makes mistakes; that his mistakes do not define him; that he can learn from mistakes; that he has power by staying in the moment, and that he is more than just an athlete. By staying in the moment, learning from his mistakes, and recognizing the value that he possesses beyond his performance, he would be able to maintain a more positive and constructive attitude to support him in performance.

Self-talk reprogramming is changing negative self-talk programs to more positive self-talk programs that create more positive thought patterns. As highlighted in Burton & Raedeke (2008), Self-talk programming helps enhance positive thinking patterns. Self-talk reprogramming can be used to help Conner to become a better baseball player by helping him to develop more positive and supportive thought patterns that allow him to increase his confidence and concentration.

Conner can re-frame his remaining negative thoughts by following the Three D's of reframing highlighted in Burton & Raedeke (2008). "The three D's of reframing: Detect negative, unproductive, or irrational thinking; disrupt negative thoughts by means of thought stopping or thought changing; and dispute negative thoughts by using effective counter-arguments" (Burton & Raedeke, 2008, p. 115). Conner would use the three D's by first detecting when he is experiencing a negative thought. As mentioned in Burton & Raedeke (2008), "negative thoughts might be hard to detect at first since they have become automatic, remind athletes to look for thoughts that precede feelings of stress" (Burton & Raedeke, 2008, p. 115).

Once Conner becomes aware of his negative thoughts, he has the opportunity to disrupt these negative thoughts with the use of thought stopping.

According to Burton & Raedeke (2008), “Thought stopping is a self-talk technique that forcefully disrupts the stream of negative thinking before replacing it with more constructive thoughts. Stopping negative thoughts requires a sudden, intense stimulus that grabs your attention, such as saying “stop!” to yourself...or snapping your fingers” (Burton & Raedeke, 2008, p. 115). Conner would complete the reframing process by disputing his negative thinking with counterarguments, as highlighted in Burton & Raedeke (2008). As mentioned in Burton & Raedeke (2008), “In this step, athletes use logic to establish that a negative thought is irrational and counterproductive, then develop a better way of looking at things...Counterarguments are solutions, not cover ups” (Burton & Raedeke, 2008, p. 115). The three D’s process will support Conner in developing more constructive thinking patterns by acknowledging his negative thinking patterns and reframing them to being more positive and supportive.

Self-talk reprogramming is changing negative self-talk programs to more positive self-talk programs that create more positive thought patterns. Conner can use self-talk reprogramming to help him to be a better baseball player by creating more positive self-talk that supports him in his performance. Conner can reframe any remaining negative thoughts by using the three D’s of reframing highlighted in Burton & Raedeke (2008), to develop more positive thought patterns that will support him in becoming a more successful baseball player.

References

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