

A competitive mindset

Competitive mindset largely consists of:

1. Attention
2. Intensity
3. Intent

Individual and team mental slip-ups reside in the complex mix of attention, intensity, intent...and the coach as deep-dive detective has to untangle any weeds in this mental mix...this mental mash-up...

Attention – what are they focusing on? Where specifically is their attention? What are they seeing and what decisions are they making based on what they see? Are they focusing on their tasks associated with our game model? If not, how can we help them to better do this?

Intensity are they executing actions and tasks at the right intensity...no lethargic Llama's...no headless chickens...just players executing actions at an optimal mental speed and an optimal physiological pace.

Intent – are they executing actions and tasks positively and proactively? Approach behaviour – front-foot perhaps. Fearless maybe. See and doing...quick decisions, slower decisions – but all decisions carried out with clarity, no hesitation.

To go again and again and again...

The challenge facing elite sports competitors and elite sports teams...is to go again and again and again...to be brutal, relentless competitors week after week, month after month, season after season.

This is why I'm so insistent on a common language for competitive play...a shared framework for optimal mindsets...

1. High Performance Mindset (HPM)
Low Performance Mindset (LPM)...

“Our job on the pitch is to start and stay in HPM no matter what. We start and stay in HPM as individuals and as teammates. We are brutal, relentless competitors”

A linguistic lean towards HPM excellence is, ideally, an all-in thing. Not a one player objective but a whole team goal. In that way players can hold each other accountable. In that way players help each other rise from LPM when they sense a team mate dropping into a sub-optimal mental state

ALSO

Competitiveness – the ability to high perform consistently under pressure – may require the subtle hand of language rather than the over-zealous all-or-nothing approach...

“I must play perfectly this weekend...we must win and I must perform at my best to make it happen. It’s such a big game and it will be a disaster if we’re not successful...”

Or...

“I’d like to play well this weekend...it’s an important game for us and an opportunity to test ourselves and put into practice what we’ve been working on in training. We’ll strive to perform well as individuals and as teammates, and it will be great if we win, but it won’t be the end of the world if we don’t win...”

The first statement feels so right for elite sport doesn’t it. That passion! That desire! That urge to put it all on the line. It feels like competitiveness should live at the end traits...at the extremities of language...within a bubble of physiological intensity that can only be accessed with an all-or-nothing gung ho attitude.

And for some perhaps it does. Perhaps, for a few, this type of extreme language works to heighten performance arousal and to deliver a sense of performance readiness.

But for some, occupying this extreme position can de-serve their capacity to high perform consistently under pressure. It can de-serve their capacity to go and execute what they've been working so hard on in their training and practice.

BUT

...is it the safest? Is it the healthiest? And does everyone HAVE to put themselves into some warrior-like trance to compete...to high perform under pressure?

Perhaps...some of the time...for some?

Perhaps instead second statement at the top of the page may hold the power. It may hold the kind of language that entices the type of mental flexibility required for the demands of competitive sport.

Maybe!

It's not a soft statement...it's not a soft approach...it's an intelligent, sophisticated approach that helps players meet the challenges awaiting them on the pitch, the field, the court or the course.

1. it can help tone down the volume of anxiety going into a game of significance
2. it can evoke a challenge state rather than threat state (an opportunity, not a threat!)
3. it can encourage approach behaviour rather than avoidant behaviour as a consequence of a less fearful narrative
4. it lays down a narrative that can help a player play with greater mental flexibility during the game itself – rather than being embroiled in 'must-win', a 'strive-to-win' philosophy can promote maintenance of high

performance behaviour “even if we’re losing and look like we will lose!”

5. it can offer an emotional insurance policy post game. An extreme ‘win-at-all-cost’ approach can invoke strong negative emotions experienced after the game that are hard to shift. A less extreme, flexible narrative can dampen negative emotion and may even serve to heighten positive emotion (maybe!)

It’s scary though, it goes against, perhaps, what feels like over a century of ‘how we do sports performance...!’ how we do competitiveness’.

Be curious around extreme language. It may help but it also may hinder.