

Self talk

I'd like to propose that developing-elite competitors in talent pathways be taught to cultivate a narrative that asserts their version of events that unfold in front of them. Developing-elite players need to learn to create their own story.

Let me explain why I believe this to be important...

Developing-elite and elite sport tends to be entrenched in failure. Such failure, presented daily, can be as small as a single mistake that leads to an important goal-against in training, or it can be as large as the same eventuality, only in a match full of incredible meaning, like a cup final or a play-off game. And failure experienced tends to be anywhere in between these bookends of bungle and bust. Failure is constant!

Uncomfortable technical changes that don't stick, lost games, poor swings, dire physical displays, missed shots labelled as golden opportunities, being dropped from the team, long term injuries, unjust decisions... ..and the thousands of mini experiences of failure tend to leave a negative mark on the mind and a feeling of emptiness that can be hard to shift.

In the face of such challenge, developing-elite competitors may be well-served to assert their own reality on these stories of deficiency and loss. They may do well to become an architect of an alternative reality – one that perhaps is as unbending and as productive as possible.

“Bad things will happen to me – today, tomorrow, next week, next month. That's ok. That's part of why I play. That's what makes it so interesting and challenging and fun”

This is tough to do. Failure hits somatically more so than

cognitively. It punches you in the stomach, winds you, and at worst can paralyse you for quite the stretch.

This is where an athlete's self-talk may come in. Self-talk can influence reality through the telling of a different narrative or story.

To me, self-talk is different to thinking. I tend to put to my clients that thoughts 'happen' to you, whereas you 'do' your self-talk.

Perhaps unscientific, I've found this to be a neat way to help clients differentiate between internal processes that unconsciously emerge as a result of environmental happenings, and top-down controlled processes that can be used to take charge of oneself. Thoughts 'happen' to you...you 'do' your self-talk! Thoughts emerge...self-talk helps you to take charge!

To be elite you have to learn to persuade yourself of your own credibility daily. To even think about climbing into the arena you have to sell yourself to yourself. You have to talk to yourself rather than listen to yourself:

"Stuff happens, that's ok, keep going, keep working, keep moving forward. Head up, chin up. Keep going, keep working, keep moving forward..."

I think someone once said that talking to yourself is the first sign of madness. Well, striving for elite may indeed be madness, so perhaps they're right. Either way, engage in self-talk. Strive to make it positive, helpful, energised.

Some questions you can use to prompt self thought:

1. **memory:** tell me about you at your best
2. **imagination:** tell me about your dream game
3. **perception:** who do you want to be when you compete?

Take charge of yourself to seize the moment.