



O'Neills® + ULSTER GAA

COACHING AND GAMES DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE

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Mental Preparation in the training environment

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Aims of this workshop

1. To raise awareness about the role of Mental Preparation in the training environment
2. To share some key findings from Applied Sport Psychology of possible relevance to Gaelic Games
3. To offer some suggestions for coaches on forms of Mental Practice (esp. self-talk & cue words)



Warm-up

- How important do you think Mental Preparation is within your team / your club ?
- During last season, how much Mental Preparation did your team undertake ?
- Can you think of an example where something you said or did influenced a player ?



A manager's view

“If you can play well for five minutes, then, with practice, you can play well for eight minutes, and gradually progress. It is a question of getting the body physically ready and then developing the mentality to be able to concentrate for a particular length of time”

Séan Boylan, Meath football manager 1983-2006



Another manager's view :

“Getting in their heads. That’s what the game is about. It’s an extremely important part to be sure. Get them on the right wavelength. What we went through together was deeper than football. We’d be concerned about each other – concerned about anything which would perturb a player.”

Kevin Heffernan, Dublin footballer 1948-1962,
Dublin football manager 1973-76 & 1979-83



A player's perspective :

“Attitude is tremendously important in chasing success. That’s why I believe that talent alone will get you very little in this world.”

- Jim Stynes, former Dublin GAA footballer, Australian footballer and recently AFL Hall of Fame





Have you any idea what
sport psychology is ?

Do you know any
sport psychologists ?





Mental preparation & sport psychology

“For most sportspeople, sport psychology is any mental activity that relates to performance and performance enhancement.”

(Kremer & Moran, 2012)





..... So what does a **sport psychologist** do ?

Help players, coaches, teams to adapt the way they feel and think to improve performance – and also to maintain their mental fitness & health.

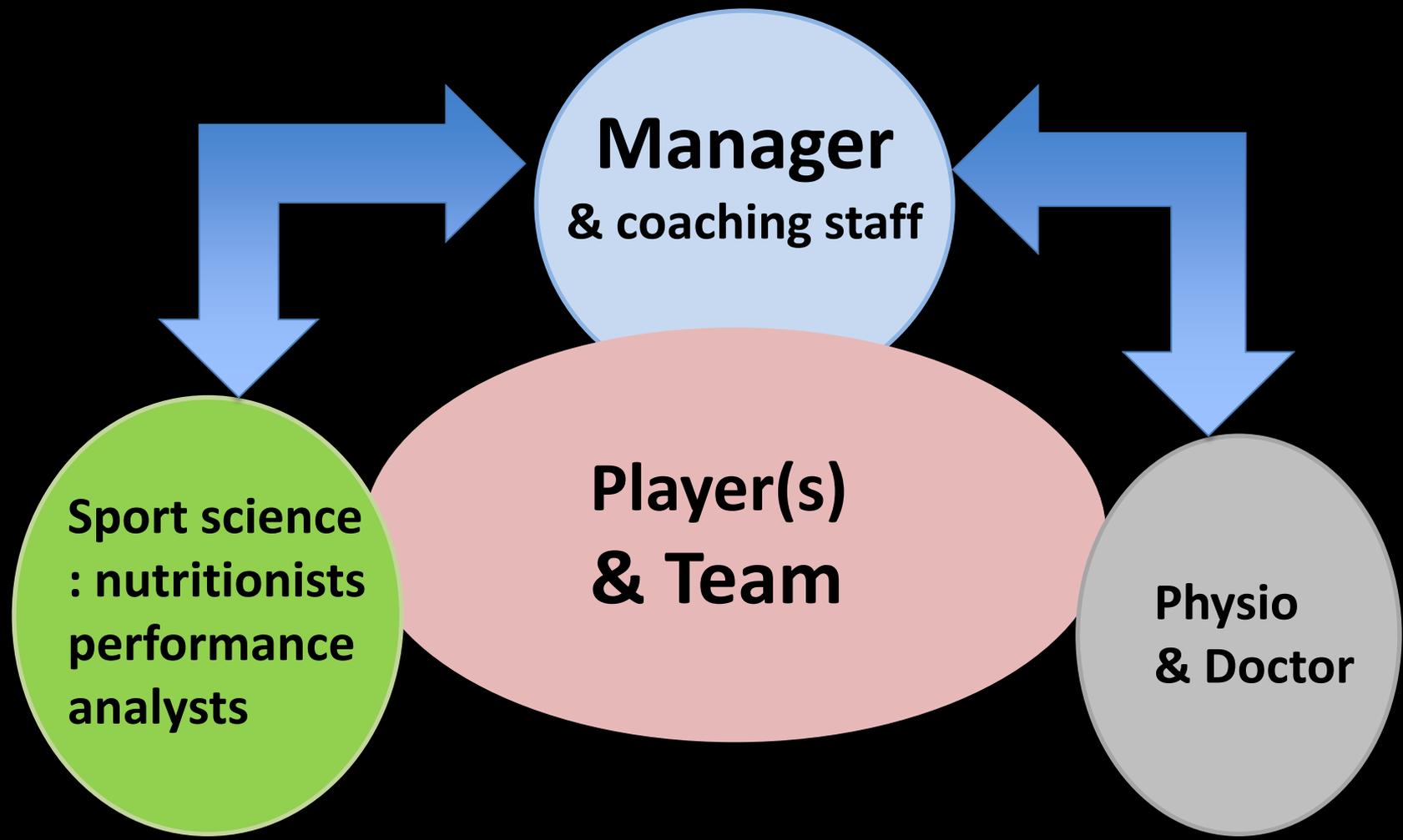
- It's not counselling - it entails counselling skills.
- It's not motivational speaking - includes exploring, explaining & enhancing individual & team motivation.
- It's not apart from Coaching – it's A Part of it.



**Memory bytes – Personal computer ?
US House of Congress library? Human brain ?**

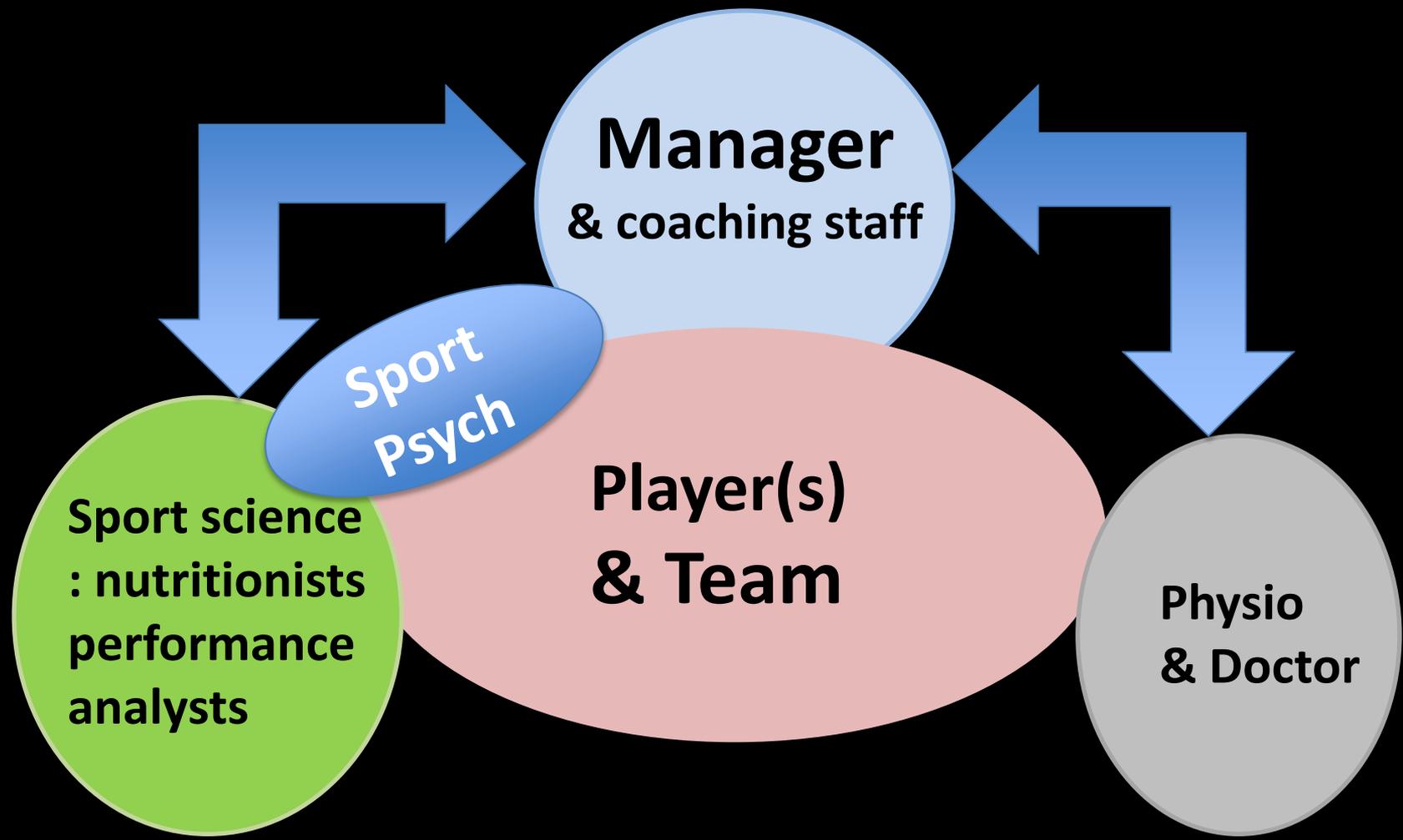


Component parts of a gaelic team





Where does sport psychology fit in?





What can **psychology** give **sport**?

Social learning theory ; schema theory; self determination theory; attribution theory; social identity theory; self-efficacy theory; social categorisation; self-esteem; theory of planned behaviour; social cognitive theory; social exchange theory; self-regulation; self-awareness
..... *and much, much more besides*



Let's look at that again... :

Social learning theory ; schema theory; **self** determination theory; attribution theory; **social** identity theory; **self**-efficacy theory; **social** categorisation; **self**-esteem; theory of planned behaviour; **social** cognitive theory; **self**-regulation; **social** exchange theory; **self**-awareness.

Can you **notice** any **patterns** ?



Where is the 'I' in Team ?

Whiteboard exercise





Finding the 'I' in Team: Performance profiling

Coaches say advantages of profiling are:

- goal setting
- structured training
- monitoring performance
- developing confidence
 - motivation
 - communication



Case study – All Blacks rugby team

Strengths-based approach to coaching :

“We worked on their strengths, rather than just their weaknesses. We wanted them to understand that they were there because of what they were already good at.” – Wayne Smith, All Blacks

From Hodge, Henry & Smith (2014) - referenced under 'further reading'.



Let's try an experiment





Improving performance – Self-Talk

- **Weigh what You say** : Words matter
- **Self-Talk** helps cue performance; enhance concentration; increase motivation & confidence
- **Example**: Dublin senior gaelic football team now call their own kick-outs : **'Possession retention'**



Instructional self-talk in practice

“With my long shots I just wanted to stick to my ‘process’, making good decisions, making good swings. And then ‘spot’ was for my putting. I was just picking a spot on the green and trying to roll it over the spot every time. I wasn’t thinking about holing it.”

Rory McIlroy , World no1. speaking after winning British Open Golf tournament 2014





Words can help cue performance

Sigerson Cup round one: NUI Galway 1-7 St Mary's University College, Belfast 1-10

Late goal Fitz the bill in St Mary's comeback

From Declan Rooney in Dangan

ST Mary's manager Paddy Tally glowed with pride after his side staged a memorable second half comeback to set up a Sigerson Cup quarter-final with DCU next week.

Substitute Matthew Fitzpatrick rounded off the move of the game with a sweet flicked goal eight minutes from time as the St Mary's bench made a massive impact.

Tyrone senior Conor Clarke also returned for his first game since his cruciate ligament injury last summer, while three second half points from Aidan Forker proved crucial for the Belfast troops.

"It was an amazing second half," said Tally (right).

"The boys showed fantastic football, not only good spirit and heart, but they played a lot of good football there to bring themselves

back. They were controlled and tagged it back point by point. They were full value for their victory."

NUI Galway were full value for their 1-6 to 0-5 interval lead after a blistering finish to the first half saw them kick an unanswered 1-3 from the 28th minute.

Robbie Kiely linked up well with Cristoir Davey to find the net, while three points from Cian Connolly before half-time also gave NUI Galway a nice cushion.

Crucially though, Westmeath's Ray Connelan missed two very easy frees in the 31st and 34th minutes which would have put two goals between the sides. Tally said they were crucial.

"I think we were five behind at one stage and Galway kicked two free kicks wide to put us out of the game, and that just kept us in the match to be honest with you," he said.

"We'll take DCU next week. But

we'll have to improve an awful lot.

"But first round games are like that. Coming away down here, it is always hard to win away from home in the Sigerson. We lost a game here three years ago, a very, very tight game as well.

"We knew Galway would make it extremely difficult for us today. Hopefully we'll learn and take the lessons from today's game and take it into the next day."

After those wiles it seemed just a matter of time before St Mary's pegged back that four-point lead.

Tommy Casavan's free got them up and running before Kiely was black carded for the home side.

Forker kicked two points from play in a five-minute spell to put the minimum between the sides, but when Neil McNicholl freed Paddy McBride down the right and Fitzpatrick flicked his pin-point pass to the net, there was no doubt about

the winners.

The return of Clarke is a major plus for both St Mary's Sigerson Cup campaign and Tyrone's National League ambitions.

He lined out at full-forward after replacing Jack Gragan with 11 minutes remaining.

"That's Conor's first game since he did his cruciate," said Tally.

"It's great for him, he had hard luck there but he has fought back well from injury and it's great to have him back."

MATCH STATS

NUI Galway: 0-0 Sullivan Limerick, J Kennedy, D Murray, J Cullen, R Kiely (1-1), J McManus, A Nolan, E O'Dochagha, D Conlane, R Feeney, A Varley, C Davey, R Connelan (0-2 frees), S Moran, C Connolly (0-4, 0-3 frees). **Subs:** C Brennan for Connelan (88 mins), C O'Shea for O'Dochagha (49 mins), E Lavin for Davey (56 mins).

Black cards: Kiely (44) replaced by F Kiely. **Yellow cards:** D Conlane (25 mins), C Connolly (41 mins).

St Mary's: R Burns, A Beattie, D McBride, D Morrow, P McBride, A Forker (0-4), K McGoony, B Og McGilgan, C McCann, J Johnston, C McGeary, R Johnston, T Casavan (0-4, 0-3 frees), J Gragan (0-1), K McKerran (0-1).

Subs: N McNicholl for McGilgan (8), N Loughran for Morrow (9), E Shady for McCann (35 mins), B O'Hagan for McGeary (39 mins), C Clarke for Gragan (49 mins). **Black cards:** J Johnston (10), replaced by M Fitzpatrick (10).

Yellow cards: C McGeary (8). **Referee:** D D Mahoney.





What about **negative** thinking?



Image from GPA 'We Wear More' campaign



Mental fitness & Mental health

- Is this picture this linked to performance?
- Player welfare is part of our duty of care, and.....a player who is in good Form

is better able to perForm



Can you think of examples?

Case study



As a coach, words matter :

“What you say or don't say to players is so important. You tell certain ones how brilliant and strong they are, when really you know they are mentally weak and might let you down. It is all about getting the best out of them.”

– Gordon Strachan (former manager of Glasgow Celtic FC) in Kremer & Moran, 2008, p.168.



Team Cues: 'We' not 'Me'



Championship 2014 – Donegal V Antrim



Team Cues: 'We' not 'Me'



Championship 2014 – All-Ireland Final





Concluding points

- ✓ **Weigh what you say** : Words matter.
- ✓ **Mental Practice** aids Development & Performance
 - ✓ Find the 'I' in Team. **Foster** the 'We'.
- ✓ **Sport Psych** is not Apart – It's a Part of coaching



Further reading

- Kremer, J. & Moran, A. (2008). *Pure sport. practical sport psychology*. Routledge.
- Hodge, K., Henry, G. & Smith, W. (2014) A case study of excellence in elite sport : motivational climate in a world champion team. *The Sport Psychologist*, 28, 60-74.
http://journals.humankinetics.com/AcuCustom/Sitename/Documents/DocumentItem/06%20Hodge%20TSP_2013_0037_ej.pdf
- Hyland, J. Shanahan, R. (2011). The use of mental imagery technique to improve free-kick accuracy in GAA footballers. <http://esource.dbs.ie/handle/10788/1692>
- Telegraph (2012) article on sport psychology in the English Premier League :
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/active/10568730/Mind-games-how-footballers-use-sports-psychology.html>
- Blog by Dr Martin Turner (2014) on how over- thinking inhibits performance :
<http://www.inc.com/martin-turner-jamie-barker/sports-psychology-stop-overthinking.html>
- RTE blog by David Gillick (2014) 'turning the mind into an ally'.
<http://www.rte.ie/sport/athletics/2014/1216/667215-dealing-with-nerves-and-becoming-a-mentally-strong/>
- The Independent (2015) article on Andy Murray's self-talk
<http://www.independent.co.uk/sport/tennis/andy-murrays-motivational-notes-revealed-try-your-best-and-be-good-to-yourself-10052880.html>

