

Brief Book Review

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A Review of Mind Gym: Revisiting a Sports Management Classic

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Every sports fan remembers watching a game where one team that clearly dominated another in skill and power and then, magically, quickly, unexpectedly the other team won. Expert commentators and fans alike are left scratching their heads, “what happened?” Sports psychologists have the answer. Sports psychologists emphasize that being successful in sports is not only about the physical game on the field but also the inner game of psychology. In sports management classic, *Mind Gym*, Gary Mack¹ discusses mastering the inner game. Mack¹ uses his experience with top athletes and research on the psychological factors of success to teach the reader what it takes for athletes to master themselves and make the most of their physical skills so that they can achieve their potential on the field of their choice.

SUMMARY

Mack¹ begins his book in part by defining the inner game of sports so that the reader is well familiar with the importance of the mental game and how it affects success in sports. Mack¹ outlines an approach where he trains athletes mentally and checks their state of arousal so that they are equipped for the game but not over-aroused where their excitement converts to counterproductive nervousness. He talks about critical factors in the mental game such as emotional regulation and resilience, psychological concept of coping with stress and adversity.² In part two, Mack¹ moves from describing the key components of the mental game and why they are important to discussing the necessity of accepting and enjoying success. This is an inspiring section wherein Mack¹ concentrates his energy on helping athletes realize that they are worthy of success and that their dreams are worth dreaming. In part three, Mack¹ builds on this point by continuing to emphasize the positive mindset that athletes need to embrace success. Finally in part four, Mack¹ addresses the idea of the “zone” (p. 161). The zone is a complicated concept because when athletes get into the zone they lose the sense of conscious thought that drives most of people’s performances in life. Mack¹ states that the zone is “no mind” (p. 170). Yet Mack¹ notes that it takes a great deal of ‘mind’ and focus on the mental game in order to get into the zone at critical times in the game. Mack¹ emphasizes that athletes practice the components of their mental game prior to the actual game so that when they get onto the field they are ready and can enter the zone of ‘no mind’ without compromising their mental acumen.

CRITICAL EVALUATION

Mack¹ begins the book with an enigmatic quote from Yogi Berra, “Ninety percent of the game is half mental” (p. 3). On one hand, this quote alludes to the importance of the inner game while the numbers appear to be incongruent. However, upon closer inspection Berra is actually saying that 10 percent of the game is luck (coincidence), whereas 90 percent is player controlled. Of the 90 percent, half of what the player invests in the game is physical but the

other half is mental. Berra's quote captures the essence of Mack's¹ message emphasizing the inner game without creating a formulaic approach and stating that athletes can learn to control the outcome of their games.

Mack's¹ emphasis on dreams and goals is another important component of this book. Having goals enables the athlete to struggle through adversity because he/she can concentrate on the goal and confront problems with a determined, persistent, tenacious attitude. These goals enable athletes to remain focused on change and to recognize when change has been achieved. Indeed, it is valuable to reflect on accomplishments. However, this requires the athlete to know where the journey begins and ends. Without this understanding, there can be no sense of achievement. As Mack¹ builds on this point in part three, he asserts that "fear lives in the future" (p. 125). Athletes *psych* themselves out of a game, because they fear what *may* happen, not what is happening. For instance, when the opposing team scores at a critical time, athletes may fear that they will lose the game. This fear fuels an imagined loss instead of focusing on their confidence in their own abilities to win. This purports a powerful technique for change, growth, performance and the relationship between mental wellness (toughness) and optimum functioning.

CONCLUSION

Mack's¹ style of prose is to inform and inspire, but he works hard to avoid creating a rigid system of rules for athletes. The book's thematic mental game is one that athletes should cultivate. It makes sense that if the controllable part of the game is half mental then athletes should spend time developing this part of their game. If practicing the physical game only accounts for half of athletes' performance, ignoring the mental game may undermine their chances of success. Mack's insight into managing adversity suggests that fear focuses on potential future problems and that doubt lives in a person's lack of self-worth. Therefore, this book is highly recommended to anyone interested in sports psychology, athletes actively playing their favorite games, and anyone else interested in how the mental game affects their performance in their chosen careers. The practical nature of this book lends its utility to coaches and players, and may aid in designing interventions aimed at reducing inadequate thoughts, and feelings often experienced by athletes. This book would be applicable to any athlete struggling with performance, and goal-achievement.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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