
Chapter 1

Problem Statement, Objectives and Hypotheses



PROBLEM STATEMENT, OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

1.1 Problem statement

1.2 Objectives

1.3 Hypotheses

1.4 Structure of the Dissertation

1.5 References

1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Field hockey is a high intensity, non-continuous game played by men and woman (Elferink-Gemser *et al.*, 2006:340) and is classified as an Olympic discipline (Demuth *et al.*, 2007:27). According to Elferink-Gemser *et al.* (2004:1053), success in this sport depends on well-developed physiological, tactical and technical abilities. Another component that plays an important role with regard to the performance of hockey players is their psychological skills. Cox and Yoo (1995:184) previously noted that psychological skills play an important role in any sport as it prepares the body and mind for optimal performance. This was further highlighted by Fallby *et al.* (2006:112) who stated that a combination of mental skills training (MST) and regular physical training enables the athlete to cope effectively with the performance demands and ultimately leads to performance enhancement.

The important role of sport psychological factors in achieving optimal performance and the development of MST programmes has become of great interest to players and coaches (Hacker, 2000:363). Weinberg and Gould (2007:250) define MST as the “systematic and consistent practice of mental or psychological skills for the purpose of enhancing performance, increasing enjoyment or achieving greater sport and physical activity self-satisfaction”. These skills include

goal setting, relaxation, mental imagery and self-talk (Thelwell & Greenless, 2001:128; Blakeslee & Goff, 2007:290), whilst the programme of Gordon (2007:392) consisted of self-regulation, concentration, arousal control, visualization, confidence, consistency as well as pre-, during and post-game activities.

Taylor (1995:339) noted that the individual needs and particular demands of the sport should influence the development of an effective MST programme. Rogerson and Hrycaiko (2002:14) further stated that such programmes should be position and situation specific. MST programmes have also been shown to be more effective than the single mental skill intervention approach often used (Thelwell & Greenless, 2003:335). Furthermore, it has been demonstrated by Hardy *et al.* (2004:251) that by combining psychological skills into a MST package may have a constructive impact on performance that in turn should contribute to positive self-esteem and enhanced self-confidence. Thus, it is important that when a MST programme is designed, it should be done according to the demands of the specific sporting code (Blakeslee & Goff, 2007:290).

Grove and Hanrahan (1988:226) observed relatively poor mental-imagery and self-confidence levels among field hockey players. More specifically, their ability to visualize their opponents and future performances, as well as forgetting about past mistakes and continuing play after making mistakes were assessed to be poor. Subsequently, these researchers concluded that mental imagery and self-confidence should be included MST programme for field hockey players. More recently, Elferink-Gemser *et al.* (2007:484) found elite hockey players to be significantly more motivated than their sub-elite counterparts, highlighting the importance of optimal motivational levels in this sport.

Due to limited information regarding MST in field hockey, research findings on this topic from other sporting codes will be brought to light. A survey on netball players by Van den Heever *et al.* (2007:263), showed that provincial players in South Africa have had limited previous exposure to MST. These players also indicated the need for the development and implementation of a MST programme. This was further emphasized by Andrew *et al.* (2007:6) who demonstrated that elite rugby players of South African tertiary institutions also expressed a

need for MST programmes as some of these players perceived their psychological preparation as average.

It is in light of the above-mentioned research findings that the following research questions are posed: (1) What are the hockey players opinions regarding MST and their need for such programmes for each gender? (2) What is the perceptions of these players regarding their ability to psychologically prepare for matches for each gender? (3) What are the current mental skill levels of these players for each gender? (4) Does the mental skill levels of hockey players in different playing positions differ from one another?

Answers to these research questions would provide valuable information for the development and implementation of a players MST program by taking into account the specific demands facing field hockey players.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

The purposes of this study is to determine:

1. The players' opinions regarding the importance of and need for MST.
2. The players' perceptions of their ability to prepare psychologically for matches.
3. The players' actual mental skill levels.
4. Whether the mental skill levels of players in different playing positions differ from one another.

1.3 HYPOTHESES

The hypotheses of this study are that South African field hockey players at tertiary institutions:

1. Perceive MST to be important and will express a need for MST.
2. Perceive their ability to prepare psychologically for competitions as good.
3. Have average and poor mental skill levels.
4. There will be significant differences between the mental skill levels of players in different playing positions.

1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation is submitted in article format as approved by the Senate of the North-West University and is structured as follows:

- Chapter 1 consists of the problem statement, objectives and the hypotheses of the study. A reference list is provided at the end of the chapter according to the prescriptions of the North-West University.
- Chapter 2 is a literature study entitled “A literature study on the effects of mental skills training in sport”. A reference list is provided at the end of the chapter according to the prescriptions of the North-West University.
- Chapter 3 is a research article entitled “A survey of mental skills training among South African field hockey players at tertiary institutions”. This article was accepted for publication in the *African Journal for Physical, Health Education, Recreation and Dance (AJPHERD)*. This article is hereby included according to the specific prescriptions of the journal. The instructions for authors are included as Appendix A (Guidelines for authors).
- Chapter 4 is a research article entitled “Mental skill levels of South African tertiary institution field hockey players in different playing positions”. This article will be submitted for publication in the *African Journal for Physical, Health Education, Recreation and Dance (AJPHERD)*. This article is hereby included according to the specific prescriptions of the journal. The instructions for authors are included as Appendix A (Guidelines for authors).
- Chapter 5 consists of a short summary, conclusion, shortcomings and recommendations of the study.

1.6 REFERENCES

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