



## Psychological skills of athletes with disabilities: The importance of systematic training

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### Abstract

Research has shown that athletes with disabilities can benefit from psychological training to improve their psychological preparation and are able to rely on psychological skills and strategies in a useful way. However, athletes and coaches often seem to neglect the importance of a systematic psychological training, specifically in practice settings.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the frequency of use of psychological skills and strategies according to the sport context (i.e., practice and competition setting) and to the number of hours of practice per week (i.e.,  $\leq 3$  hrs.; 4-5 hrs.;  $\geq 6$  hrs.) by Portuguese athletes with disabilities. Two hundred and thirty-nine athletes with different disabilities and playing different sports completed the Portuguese version of the Test of Performance Strategies (TOPSp). This instrument, originally created by Thomas et al. (1999), is a self-report questionnaire that assesses a set of psychological skills and strategies (i.e., goal-setting, emotional control, automaticity, relaxation, self-talk, imagery, activation, attentional control, and negative thinking) of athletes in both competition and practice settings.

The results showed a higher use of psychological skills and strategies in competition setting when compared with practice setting. Moreover, athletes who practiced more hours per week ( $\geq 6$  hrs) showed higher scores in most of the practice and competition subscales.

Therefore, these findings seem to emphasize the importance in to raise athletes and coaches' awareness about the importance of a systematic application of psychological skills during training sessions for its successful application in competition, as well to consider the influence of the volume of training in the psychological preparation of the athletes. Consequently, it seems that reduced opportunities for practice can limit an effective and systematic implementation of psychological skills training programs and originate an inconsistent use of psychological skills by the athletes.

**Keywords:** *Psychological Skills, Psychological Strategies, Sport Context*

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