



Winning At Sport



Five Key Beliefs of Sporting Champions

**by
Jeremy Lazarus**



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Yours faithfully

Jeremy Lazarus

The Lazarus Consultancy Ltd

www.WinningAtSport.com

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Five Key Beliefs of Sporting Champions

This article covers one of the foundations for success in sport – a winning mindset. Valeriy Borzov, the 100 and 200 metre Gold medallist in the 1972 Olympic Games, and Sally Gunnell, the 400 metre hurdle Gold medallist in the 1992 Olympic Games, sum it up:

Gunnell: *“The mental side of it played the biggest part; that was the difference between silver and gold.”*

“...for any athlete who stands on the starting line, as much as 70% of the race outcome is shaped by the mental aspects.”

From Jeff Grout & Sarah Perrin, *Mind Games – Inspirational Lessons From The World’s Biggest Sports Stars*, Capstone Publishing Ltd, 2004, p. 51 and p. 64.

Borzov: *“For success, first performers must have talent, then they must work and third they must have control of their mind.”*

From David Hemery, *Sporting Excellence. What Makes a Champion?* CollinsWillow, 1991. p. 163

This article will cover some of the beliefs and attitudes that can be considered as forming ‘the winning mindset’. These beliefs are not ‘truths’, merely beliefs: if we act as if they are true, our results will improve. The following is written for both athletes/players and coaches; please apply them to your particular situation.

Belief 1 – There Is no failure, merely feedback

Billy Jean King and Roger Black are two champions who have publicly stated this to be a belief they hold. In essence, if we do not achieve what we want in a particular race or competition, we could either see that as ‘failure’, or that we simply have not succeeded YET. Either could be ‘right’, and I would suggest that the latter is more empowering for you. By treating ‘non-success’ as simply feedback, you will be more able to learn from these situations, however disappointing they might be, and hence you will be able to improve, grow and develop.

Belief 2 – Flexibility Rules, OK!

Generally, the more flexible we can be, either as an athlete/player or a coach, the more chance we have of getting the result we desire.

As a coach, the more flexible you can be the more likely it is that you will be able to find an approach that works for your athlete or player. Similarly, the more options you have as an athlete or a team, the more likely it is that you will get the result you want. The ability of players and teams to adapt to weather conditions, the oppositions' tactics, referees' decisions, the crowd atmosphere, the playing surface etc, is a crucial factor in success.

Belief 3 – The mind and body are linked

There is a huge amount of evidence that the mind can and does impact on the body. Many athletes train their body, without paying attention to their mind. Champions recognise the importance of training the mind - the quotes by Sally Gunnell and Valeriy Borzov above illustrate the point.

Belief 4 – I am in charge of my mind (and therefore my results)

Given that there is a mind-body link, if we can control our mind (which we can, with a little practice and guidance) then we can influence our results. (There are numerous techniques from the field of Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) which can assist us to do this.)

Much of the negative impact on athletes/players of so-called 'external' influences, such as pressure, and the crowd, can be minimised or managed by using one's mind effectively. Put another way, if you are not in charge of your mind, who is?

Belief 5 – Be ‘At Cause’

The above can be usefully summed up by the concept of ‘Cause and Effect’. In essence, we can either be ‘At Effect’ of some ‘Cause’ over which we have no control and which ‘makes’ us respond in some negative way, or we can be ‘At Cause’.

Being ‘At Effect’ generally leads to people making excuses, having lots of really good ‘reasons’ for not getting the results they want in sport or life generally and generally not getting enough of what they want. When we are ‘At Cause’, we take full responsibility for what happens on our life and the way we respond to it; we make no excuses, and tend to get better results than if we are ‘At Effect’.

Yes, maybe performances have been under our normal standards lately, maybe the other team has more money to spend, maybe it is really windy. And? Who is in charge of your mind and how you respond to situations? YOU ARE! Whether you are a coach or an athlete, are you ‘At Cause?’. Do you repeatedly make excuses?

Clearly even with an ‘At Cause’ attitude we may not always get the results we want in the short term. However, competitors who are ‘At Cause’ will usually get better results over the long term than those who are ‘At Effect’

Summary

The five beliefs outlined above form the cornerstone to having a winning mindset, the foundations of excellence in your sport. This is not to say that by having this mindset you will always win, but it will give you the best chance to do so; if you do not have this mindset, you are unlikely to win or perform at your best.