



Overtraining and perfectionism. This summary describes the findings of a study that examined the relationship between overtraining and perfectionism in junior athletes.

Introduction

To succeed in sport athletes are required to participate in intensive training regimes. However, excessive training accompanied by inadequate recovery can result in overtraining. Overtraining is characterised by a decrease in performance that can persist for weeks and sometimes months at a time. Therefore, getting the balance right between training and recovery is essential for coaches.

How does psychology fit in?

An athlete's risk of overtraining may be affected by their personality. Identifying psychological factors that predispose athletes to a greater risk of overtraining would therefore be very useful for coaches as they manage training and recovery for their athletes. One psychological factor that may be important in terms of overtraining is perfectionism. This is because perfectionistic athletes may train harder and for longer than non-perfectionistic athletes.

What is perfectionism exactly?

Perfectionism is a personality characteristic that is thought to be learned from parents and other important people in their lives during adolescence. It includes a range of features. These features include setting high standards, a need to be organised, concerns about mistakes, and doubts about one's own actions. It can also include beliefs about what other people expect (e.g., "my coach expects me to be perfect") or the tendency to have high expectations of others (e.g., "I expect my teammates to be perfect"). The more positive features of perfectionism are collectively called "perfectionistic strivings" and the more negative features are collectively called "perfectionistic concerns."

The study

The purpose of the study was to examine if perfectionism predicted increases in overtraining over a period of three months. To address this purpose, 141 male and female junior athletes from sports academies (age ranged from 16 to 19) completed questionnaires to measure perfectionism and overtraining.

The results

The study revealed that:

Perfectionism predicted increases in the risk of overtraining over the three month period.

However, only perfectionistic concerns predicted this change, whereas perfectionistic strivings did not.

Practical implications

Coaches need to be aware of the risk of overtraining. To help reduce this risk of overtraining, coaches should consider the following:

- Encourage athletes to be conscientious and flexible (not perfectionistic) regarding training loads so to change their "more is better" attitude.
- Regularly seek feedback and input from athletes regarding training loads.
- Monitor training loads and recovery among athletes. One simple way to do this is to use a short questionnaire (available online from <http://bit.ly/2f4fLm8>).

This summary is based on the article below:

Madigan, D. J., Stoeber, J., & Passfield, L. (in press). Perfectionism and training distress in junior athletes: a longitudinal investigation. *Journal of Sports Sciences*.

Other useful readings on the topics discussed are:

Jowett, G. E., Mallinson, S. H., & Hill, A. P. (2016). An Independent Effects Approach to Perfectionism in Sport, Dance, and Exercise. In A. P. Hill (Ed.), *The Psychology of Perfectionism in Sport, Dance, and Exercise* (pp. 85-149). London: Routledge.

Meeusen, R., Duclos, M., Foster, C., Fry, A., Gleeson, M., Nieman, D., & Urhausen, A. (2013). Prevention, diagnosis and treatment of the overtraining syndrome: Joint consensus statement of the European College of Sport Science (ECSS) and the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM). *European Journal of Sport Science*, 13, 1-24.

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