

## What is Sport Psychology?

Contributed by Beth Athanas, MS  
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Sport psychology is something that we often hear about, but may not know exactly what it is. It is the principles of psychology used in a sport setting. Sport psychology consultants look at how psychological aspects control an individual's physical performance, and how competition in sport affects their psychological development, health, and well-being (Weinberg & Gould, 2003). Unfortunately, it is often viewed as something necessary for the weak-minded competitor who has "issues." The reality is that the mental game of sports affects every athlete, no matter what their strengths or weaknesses may be. Sport psychology can help any fencer strive to meet their potential.

Fencing is both a physical and mental game. Fencers prepare for the physical game by developing muscle memory through repetitive bladework and footwork drills. The mental game is obvious to fencers; however, little is done to train this large portion of fencing. The majority of fencers who utilize sport psychology training are Division I fencers (Athanas, 2007). Consequently, many competitors are not fully prepared to meet all of the demands of their sport.

There are many benefits from working with a sport psychology consultant. Applied sport psychology professionals are interested in how participation in mental skills training can help an athlete's development throughout their competitive career. The athlete may have trouble reaching goals, have an injury, or confidence difficulties. Through sport psychology, an athlete can gain the "mental edge" to reach their goals, recover from injury, or gain confidence. Techniques that are commonly used in sport psychology include (but are not limited to) imagery and visualization, relaxation, goal setting, building confidence, learning to focus, and regulating energy levels.

Through learning and practicing these techniques, fencer has the ability to reach their potential.

You may be wondering how to get started. However, you don't want to fall prey to scams. There are many people who claim to be "experts" in sport psychology but lack the proper training and education.

It is recommended that you only work with legitimate professionals. Before investing any money, ask the consultant questions about what their client population is, what their educational background is, if they are specialized in working with athletes, and how long they have been involved in sport psychology. Only certified sport psychology consultants are recognized by the Association of the Applied Sport Psychology. If you are seeking a certified sport psychology consultant or you would like to know more about sport psychology, refer to [www.aaasponline.org](http://www.aaasponline.org) for more information.

It is important to point out that fencers of all divisions and experience levels can benefit from sport psychology. By working with a sport psychology consultant, you will be able to fortify your weaknesses and improve your strengths through mental skills training. Fencing has both physical and mental components. Many fencers already toughen their bodies through practice and physical fitness. Toughen your mental game through practicing applied sport psychology.

References: Athanas, E. H. (2007). Fear of failure, experience and division as predictors to state anxiety in USFA epee fencers. Georgia Southern University. Statesboro, Georgia. Unpublished Masters thesis.

Weinberg, R. S. & Goldberg, D. (2003). Foundations of sport and exercise

psychology. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Books.