

Are we looking for a long lasting positive impact on Sri Lankan Cricket.? Psychological Point of view by Prasanna Panditharatne Sports Psychologist

The current turmoil, instability and divisions in the national cricket management are disruptive not only for players of the national team but for all Sri Lankan cricket players and fans. Due to not receiving the necessary guidance and support from the administration and other support bodies the players are suffering from a profound lack of security about their future which directly results in poor performance on the field. It has been shown that a lack of security and the constant negative regard of the management towards players lead to stress, anxiety, confusion and a lack of motivation.

Writer's stand

Therefore it is this writer's intention to explain from the psychological point of view (as well as international Sports Psychology point of view) the way the current turmoil in Sri Lankan national cricket administrative is negatively affecting the players.

The Lost child: The Plight of the Sri Lankan Cricketer

Consider a child without parents, or several parents claiming the parenthood of a single child. Consider the confusion of this child. Similar to this the national players face the same confusion and lack of guidance and support due to the turmoil in the team's administration.

Are we there yet? Sri Lankan Cricket and Psychological support

In conjunction with science and technology, sports have progressed dramatically in the last decade. Like any other sport, cricket now uses advanced science and technology both on ground and off, not only to enhance player performance but also to present the game to its audience. Like any other activity, which needs

maximum mental consistency and self-integrity, competitive sport like cricket requires higher self-discipline. Furthermore players require absolute mental peace and concentration to achieve optimum performance on the field.

Recent trends in developed countries have seen the attempt to turn cricket into a mind game rather than a purely physical game. This is possibly due to the large financial interests the game now attracts and the fact that winning provides the ultimate satisfaction for supporters. Countries like Australia, the UK, New Zealand, South Africa, Pakistan and now even India provide psychological guidance, counselling and psychotherapy to players throughout their career. Administrators and sports educators enthusiastically encourage psychological guidance knowing the positive effects. This trend is supported by scientific findings that show that proper psychological guidance will both enhance individual performance on field and build a healthy personality in general. This practice will help to create healthy, respectable and psychologically '**well balance cricketers**' who will be ambassadors for the nation. In addition such people would serve as positive role models and help to rebuild harmony in a fractured society.

The following factors may directly effect a player and his/her performance on the field.

- High expectations of the player from parents and peers, clubs, selectors and the media causes enormous pressure, frustration and stress.
- Assimilation Problems. Players come from a diverse range of socio-economic backgrounds. This leads to anxiety and confusion about correct behaviour and standards.
- Communication Barriers. The inability to communicate due to language differences may cause players to miss vital information and lead to confusion, frustration and embarrassment.

- Extreme competition. Research suggests that 'competition' may not be the best factor for motivating players to perform at their peak. Consequently it may not be the best method to select players especially for national teams.
- Lack of experience at the national and international level can be harmful. Players from rural areas may require a strategy of systematic exposure to their new environment in order to avoid unnecessary disruption and distraction.
- Unhealthy habits such as drugs, smoking, binge alcohol consumption and unprotected sex can have a great negative impact on individual performance, undermine team discipline and team morale. Such behaviour is also harmful to the cricket industry at large.
- Irresponsible health management. For example ignoring minor injuries, lack of awareness of injury or fear of disclosing injury due to fear of not being selected.
- Personal Problems have a negative impact on player's performance particularly on young players. Research shows that reduced confusion of identity and positive relationships are vital to enhance performance. It has been apparent that a number of star players recently experienced devastating effects on their performance due to relationship problems. Further to that a significant number of incidents have come to light wherein personal/family conflicts directly effect individual performance on the field. This further supports the necessity of appropriate psychological support for each and every player of the team.
- Financial related difficulties effect a player's interest, motivation, concentration and even jeopardize their whole career. Most upcoming young players from rural areas constantly battle financial barriers due to lack of support.

- Political and economical instability also negatively effects performance in various ways. It hinders school and club level cricket practice and matches, blocking new players from performing well and progressing to the national level. Furthermore, teams from other cricketing nations rarely tour Sri Lanka which also negatively effects local player's performance and confidence.
- It has been suggested that nepotism and favouritism are prevalent in Sri Lankan school teams, clubs and even at the national level. These malpractices are discouraging for talented, ambitious players and ultimately effects performance, team morale and harmony.
- In addition, the recent Tsunami disaster generated a range of significant negative impacts on player's psychological well being. Some of the player's families were directly affected and their traumatic experiences have direct impact on individual player's performance.

The above mentioned negative factors effect individual players physiologically and psychologically in numerous ways. **Research into the experience of professional cricket players shows that the following psychological disadvantages are prevalent:**

- Depression, low self esteem, lack of concentration, complaints of physiological discomfort without physiological illness, sleep disturbances, Anorexia Nervosa (Quite common among players; characterized by intense fear of becoming obese can lead to dramatic weight loss).
- Anxiety related conditions such as Agoraphobia: research shows that a certain amount of anxiety is common and some cases can be healthy for cricket players. However if a player is anxious about being in certain places or situations from which escape might be difficult their performance is negatively effected.
- Phobias – Specific situational type (Air travel, elevators, enclosed places), Social phobic situation (Quite common among Cricket players; A

marked and persistent fear of one or more social or performance situations in which the person is exposed to unfamiliar people or to scrutiny by others. The individual fears that he or she will act in a way that will be humiliating or embarrassing. This fear may hinder their communication with cricket authorities, social functions, and building rapport with international players).

- Obsessive - compulsive tendencies; with two essential characteristics:
 1. Recurrent and persistent thoughts, ideas and feeling
 2. Repetitive, ritualised behaviour. Quite common when a player is under tremendous pressure. Players tend to show agitated, erratic behaviour followed by ritualised behaviour such as compulsive hand washing, ordering, checking cricket equipment, shoe laces etc, repetitive praying, counting, repeating words silently, and repetitive knocking the cricket bat to the pitch.

In response to such problems and discomfort, teams from most of the other cricketing nations are implementing programs of effective psychological techniques to minimize the negative effects and facilitate and rebuild a positive psychological environment for players.

Have we learned our lesson yet?

It has become apparent that '**Psychological Counselling by foreign Counsellors**' is largely ineffective in the face of a team crisis, such as periods of poor performances by talented senior players, player's public outbursts, rivalry, rumours and so on such as we have witnessed over the last decade. It is my belief that the ineffectiveness of the overseas psychology professionals is primarily due to the language barrier between the psychologist and the players. In addition the psychotherapist's may lack understanding of the local cricket culture and how

cultural issues effect players. It has been shown repeatedly that without considering cultural aspects of an individual, effectiveness of psychotherapies is minimal or nil. It is also likely that a player may be unwilling to disclose actual personal difficulties due to lack of trust in the psychotherapist particularly if they are from a rival cricket playing nation. Ironically, Sri Lanka is the only national cricket team that employs foreign psychological counsellors?

This writer has discussed the above issues with Sri Lankan cricketers in Australia, some of which have played at the national level and they agree that there is an urgent need of the assistance of a Sri Lankan trained in psychology.

In conclusion it is important to draw the reader's attention to the current status of Sri Lankan Cricket. The remedy for the present situation is not cheering when the Sri Lankan team is winning and blaming them when they are losing! Being negative about the current situation is also not helpful, rather it is important to draw public attention to the present situation at this critical moment and take action that is both lasting and transparent. There is much that can be done to improve the future of Sri Lankan Cricket.

About the writer

The writer is a qualified Practicing Psychologist (Registered both locally and internationally) and has substantial experience in the field both nationally and internationally. He has a broad understanding of Sri Lanka and its '**cricket culture**'. Also has years of experience in guiding both local and international cricketers, bringing their ability to the optimum level. He strongly believes that

advanced and up to date Psychological Counselling techniques can and will bring about a positive and long lasting impact on Sri Lankan cricket.

As a cricket loving Sri Lankan patriot he strongly believes that it is imperative for the better future of Sri Lankan Cricket that the National team employs the services of a well-trained Sri Lankan Psychologist.

(Please Note: This article been prepared prior to the World Cup Tournament 2007.
Writer wishing very best of luck to Sri Lankan Cricket Team)

For all your comments please forward to

Prasanna Panditharatne

Consulting Psychologist

Prabu1@pbpconsultancy.com

www.pbpconsultancy.com

T: 2 707 601

M: 0779472336

All rights reserved*