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Perceptions of the Contribution of Psychology to Success in Elite Kickboxing

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ABSTRACT

The study used semi-structured interviews to explore the views of three high performance kickboxers regarding the contribution of psychology to the development and maintenance of expert performance within kickboxing. The results provide a useful insight into the experiences of high performance kickboxers, identifying those mental skills and psychological attributes that are perceived to contribute to success. Participants identified seven mental skills that they believed to be linked to success in kickboxing; 1) effective use of self-talk, 2) relaxation, 3) heightened concentration, 4) self-regulation of arousal, 5) goal setting, 6) coping with being hit, and 7) imagery. Three psychological characteristics were identified by all participants as contributing to success, 1) high self-efficacy, 2) highly motivated and 3) mental toughness. Although not specifically identified by participants, it is suggested that a fourth psychological characteristic was also apparent. Participants demonstrated varying degrees of emotional intelligence through their ability to monitor and manipulate their emotional states prior to and during competition. Martial artists used a number of long and short-term psychological strategies in preparing for competition. Furthermore, whilst mental skills were not systematically practiced, all participants endeavored to integrate some form of mental training within physical training. It is recommended that sport psychologists help martial artists develop and refine individualized mental training routines, assisting with the formal integration of psychological training into physical training. Martial artists spend the majority of their time practicing as opposed to competing. As such, the integration of mental skills training within physical training may help ensure quality practice, and facilitate the effective transfer of mental skills into competition.

Key words: Kickboxing, mental skills, psychological attributes, expert performance

Key Points

- Perceptions of the contribution of psychology to success in high performance kickboxing

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