

SEABURY & PERFORMANCE

SP MONTHLY

2023 1

SPORTING REVIEW

SCIENTIFIC INSIGHT

CONTENT HIGHLIGHTS

# November

Performance Psychology and Mental  
Performance







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## MESSAGE FROM TOM

This is the first edition of the new Seabury Performance monthly magazine. The goal and focus of this publication is to summarise monthly insights, discuss real-world events of human performance and highlight areas of interest for those invested or interested in the world of elite sport.

October saw some key moments in the world of sport. From South Africa's historic fourth Rugby World Cup win to Kelvin Kiptum smashing the Marathon world record in Chicago, spectators of sport have continued to be spoiled for options to watch and support.

While sport can be inspirational and fascinating, it is built on a complex interweb of components. From physical prowess to mental fortitude, to push the boundaries of sporting performance, athletes can leave no stone unturned.

This publication looks to highlight all things mental performance. Cognition, mental health and mental fitness all have many layers to be discussed, and each month, we look to highlight areas that may interest athletes, coaches, and spectators of all sports.



*Tom Seabury*

DR TOM SEABURY





# ANGER: THE CONCENTRATION WAVERER

Anger and frustration are natural emotions that we all feel. However, it can be detrimental to our focus and overall performance.

When we allow these negative emotions to take control, our concentration wavers, disrupting our ability to make split-second decisions and execute skills effectively.

Instead of focusing on the game plan, our minds become clouded by anger, leading to lapses in judgment and, ultimately, poor performance.

These emotions also can create a vicious cycle.

Those who are frustrated or angry are more likely to dwell on their mistakes or perceived injustices, hindering their ability to move forward.

This fixation on the negative aspects of our performance not only impacts our focus during the current game but can also carry over to future competitions.

The mental burden of unresolved frustration can erode our self-confidence, leading to a lack of belief in our abilities, which is crucial for peak performance.

Moreover, anger and frustration can strain team dynamics.

Outbursts or expressions of frustration can create tension among teammates, disrupting the team's synergy and cooperation.

Effective communication and collaboration (essential for any sports team) become challenging when negative emotions are left unchecked.

Therefore, managing anger and frustration is not only essential for an athlete's focus but also for maintaining a positive team environment, where support and encouragement are the keys to success.

Those who learn to channel their emotions effectively can use them as fuel for motivation rather than allowing them to sabotage their focus.

This can cultivate a mindset that leads to improved performance and a healthier team dynamic.



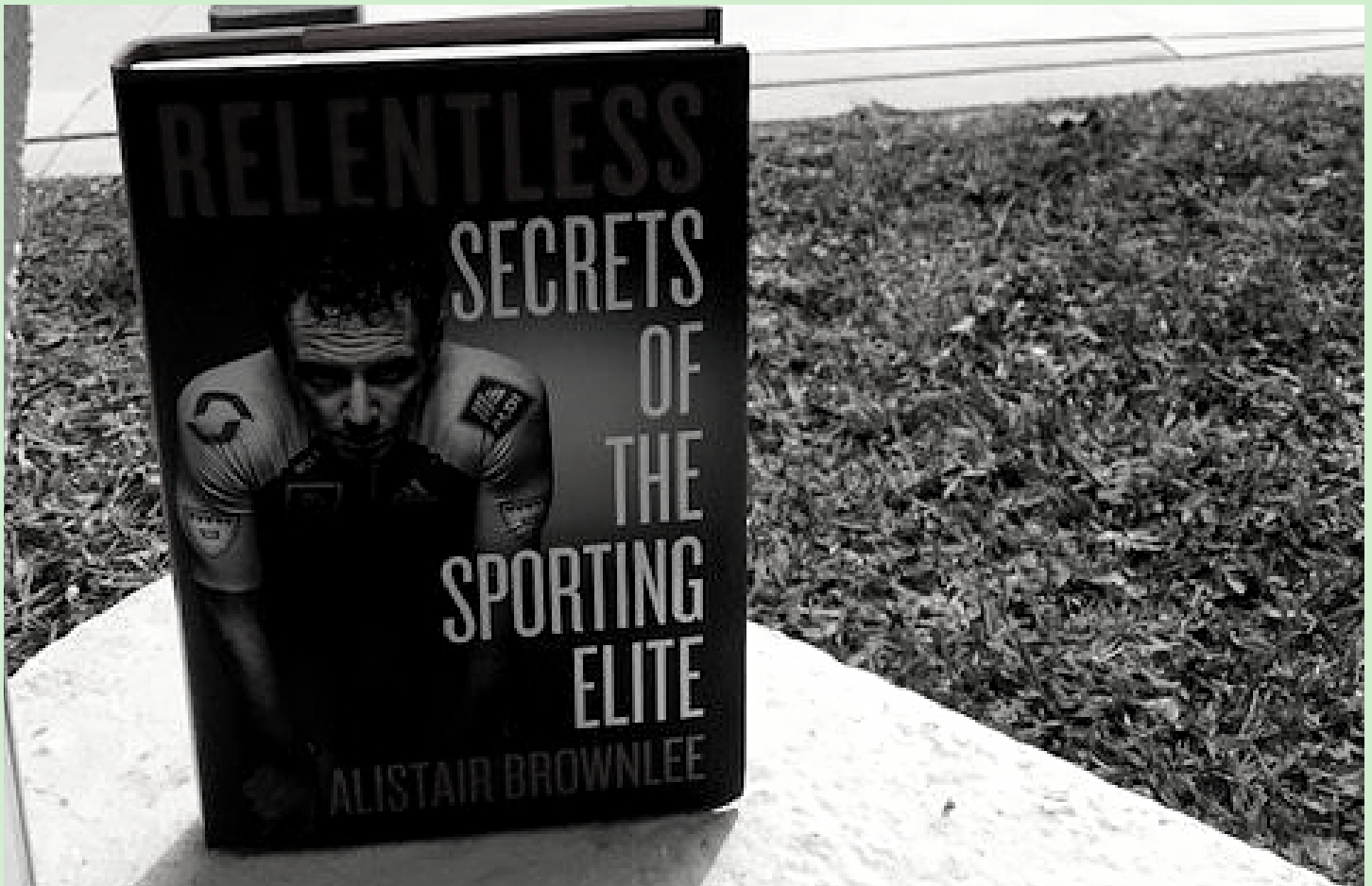


## BOOK OF THE MONTH - RELENTLESS

Over a span of four years, Olympic champion Alistair Brownlee engaged in conversations with elite high-performance individuals across various sports and consulted leading scientists and experts. His objective was to comprehend the factors that propelled these performers to the pinnacle of their fields and enabled them to stretch the boundaries of human capability in their unwavering pursuit of perfection.

Alistair distils intriguing insights from these interviews, complemented by extensive research spanning diverse sports such as athletics, cycling, football, rugby, horseracing, hockey, cricket, golf, motor racing, snooker, swimming, and ultra-running.

This comprehensive exploration paints a vivid picture: talent alone is insufficient. Instead, it is the amalgamation of hard work, enduring pain, coping with pressure, managing stress, taking risks, maintaining focus, making sacrifices, fostering innovation, embracing reinvention, nurturing passion, displaying ruthlessness, seizing luck, and learning from failure that collectively moulds a winning mentality and leads to sustained success.



BOOK BY ALISTAIR BROWNLEE



# VICTORY: THE BINARY LENS

In the world of sport, we often view success through a binary lens - a win or a loss.

This simplistic perspective (while rooted in the competitive nature of sport) overlooks the nuanced journey of athletes and the valuable lessons learned in both victory and defeat.

The emphasis on winning can create an environment where the final score overshadows the efforts and progress made.

Athletes, particularly those in high-stakes competitions, are frequently judged solely by outcomes.

This binary mindset can affect an athlete's perspective.

It can lead to ignoring the hours of dedication, sacrifice, and hard work they have invested in their training, their personal growth, and the resilience they display in the face of challenges.

Furthermore, athletes may feel a constant need to prove themselves, fearing the repercussions of failure.

This pressure can hinder their performance and detract from the enjoyment of the sport.

It can also obscure the significance of the journey itself, where athletes learn crucial life skills such as teamwork, discipline, and perseverance.

Sport is not just about the outcome of a single game; it is about the continuous process of improvement, the development of character, and the camaraderie built within teams.

Understanding and appreciating these aspects is essential for a more holistic and empathetic view of sporting success, acknowledging the complexities and growth inherent in every athlete's journey, regardless of the final score.





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SPECIALTY SECTION

# Sharpening the tip of the spear: Tailoring performance psychology for Special Operation Forces

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## TAILORING PERFORMANCE PSYCHOLOGY FOR SPECIAL OPERATION FORCES

When discussing elite human performance, we may look no further than the special forces. While athletes are constantly in the public spotlight, they offer great examples for ideologies and concepts, the special forces, by default, have minimal margin for error.

While a mistake from an athlete may cost themselves a match or their team a title, special forces actions define life or death.

This paper highlights the unique challenges encountered when researching and consulting with Special Operation Forces (SOF) within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) alliance.

This article discusses the potentially sub-optimal approach often employed in research due to a lack of specific knowledge of military culture and context.

While fascinating in its own right, this focus on tailoring performance psychology is an interesting discussion for any elite performer.

Whether providing mental health support, consulting with teams to optimise performance or conducting research to understand the requirements of such elite performers better, it is a complicated and often contested area to manoeuvre.

It is an interesting read for anyone involved in or intrigued by the world of elite performance.

Ytterbøl, C., Collins, D., & MacPherson, A. (2022). Sharpening the tip of the spear: Tailoring performance psychology for Special Operation Forces. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 1068896.

# TENNIS' PSYCHOLOGICAL PIT STOP

Tennis is an extremely mentally demanding sport.

Two players battling it out on the court with nowhere to hide.

Each set in tennis is a distinct battle, with its own ebbs and flows, triumphs and challenges.

Regardless of whether a player has won or lost the previous set, the key to winning the match lies in the art of mental resetting.

The transition period between the first and second set in tennis is a pivotal pit stop that can significantly impact a player's performance and the course of the match.

This brief intermission allows players to reassess their mental and tactical strategies.

Reflecting on the dynamics of the first set, players can analyse their opponent's strengths and weaknesses, identifying patterns and nuances that might not have been apparent during the heat of the game.

This reflection helps players refine their game plan, capitalising on their strengths and exploiting their opponent's vulnerabilities in the subsequent set.

Equally important is the chance to manage one's mental state during this break.

Tennis is as much a mental battle as it is a physical one.

Players often experience a whirlwind of emotions during a match – from frustration and anxiety to confidence and determination.

The time between sets provides a moment of reprieve where players can reset their mentality, shedding any negativity or self-doubt that might have crept in during the first set.

In essence, the time between the first and second set in tennis is not just a momentary pause but a strategic interval where players recalibrate their mental and physical resources, arming themselves with the tools necessary to face the challenges of the next set with vigour and determination.





# THE POWER OF VITAMIN D

Vitamin D is crucial in various cognitive functions within the human body. One of its primary effects is on our brain health. Vitamin D receptors are abundant throughout the brain, especially in areas related to mood and cognition.

Studies have suggested that adequate vitamin D levels are associated with improved cognitive function, including better memory, attention, and problem-solving skills. Inadequate vitamin D levels, on the other hand, have been linked to cognitive decline and an increased risk of neurodegenerative diseases, such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease.

Vitamin D is also known to have a significant impact on mood regulation. It influences the synthesis of neurotransmitters like serotonin, often called the "feel-good" neurotransmitter. Serotonin is vital in regulating mood, emotions, and sleep-wake cycles.

Insufficient levels of vitamin D have been associated with an increased risk of mood disorders, including depression and seasonal affective disorder (SAD). Adequate exposure to sunlight, which helps the body produce vitamin D naturally, has been shown to have a positive effect on mood, reducing the risk of these disorders.

Vitamin D plays a multifaceted role in cognitive function and emotional well-being. Maintaining optimal levels of this essential nutrient is not only crucial for physical health but also vital for supporting a healthy and sharp mind.

Starting study for extra reading:

Balion, C., Griffith, L. E., Strifler, L., Henderson, M., Patterson, C., Heckman, G., ... & Raina, P. (2012). Vitamin D, cognition, and dementia: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Neurology*, 79(13), 1397-1405.





## COACHING: THE SHAPING OF VIEWS

Coaches play a fundamental role in an athlete's life. They help shape their view of their sport and their experiences.

Through their mentorship, coaches not only enhance athletic performance but also contribute significantly to the overall mental well-being of their athletes.

For coaches, it is crucially not just about physical training; it's about nurturing minds and spirits.

**Empathy and Active Listening:** A great coach listens as much as they instruct. Athletes need to know their thoughts and concerns are heard and valued. It is essential to create an open-door policy where they can express themselves without fear of judgment.

**Positive Reinforcement:** Celebrate the small victories. Regardless of the outcome, acknowledging effort and progress boosts an athlete's confidence. It's not just about winning but about the journey, the growth, and the lessons learned.

**Constructive Feedback:** Feedback is a powerful tool but must be given constructively. Coaches should focus on specific behaviours, not personal attributes, highlighting areas of improvement while also recognising strengths.

**Encouraging Risk-Taking:** Athletes should feel safe to push their limits and take risks without worrying about failure. A supportive environment encourages them to try new techniques, fostering innovation and resilience.

**Team Bonding:** Creating a sense of belonging within the team is vital. Activities that promote trust and camaraderie build a strong, supportive community where athletes can be themselves without fear.

Coaching isn't just about shaping athletes' skills; it's about nurturing their self-belief, resilience, and mental well-being.

A culture where every athlete feels psychologically safe to thrive and achieve their fullest potential creates a huge possibility of success.



## QUOTE OF THE MONTH

**“Don't be scared to be ambitious. It is not humiliating to have a high target and fail. The real humiliation is to have a target and not give everything to reach it.”**

**Arsene Wenger**

There's a cultural tendency to value humility and modesty, where people often fear that expressing their ambition could be perceived as boastful or arrogant.

However, embracing high ambition is crucial for progress. Embracing ambition means setting audacious goals, challenging the status quo, and persistently working towards one's dreams. It fosters a mindset of continuous improvement, resilience, and determination, all of which are vital qualities for achieving success.



# THE STRUGGLES OF SUCCESS

The psychological challenges often intensify as we climb the ladder of success.

Our expectations skyrocket when we become proficient and gain recognition for our skills.

The pressure to maintain our performance levels can be overwhelming.

The fear of failure becomes more potent because not only our pride is at stake but also the expectations of parents, fans, teammates, and sponsors.

As a result, we may grapple with self-doubt, questioning our abilities and fearing we may not live up to the standards we have set for ourselves and others have set for us.

Additionally, the fear of losing our ranking and achievements can create immense stress, leading to anxiety and impacting our focus and confidence on the court/track/field.

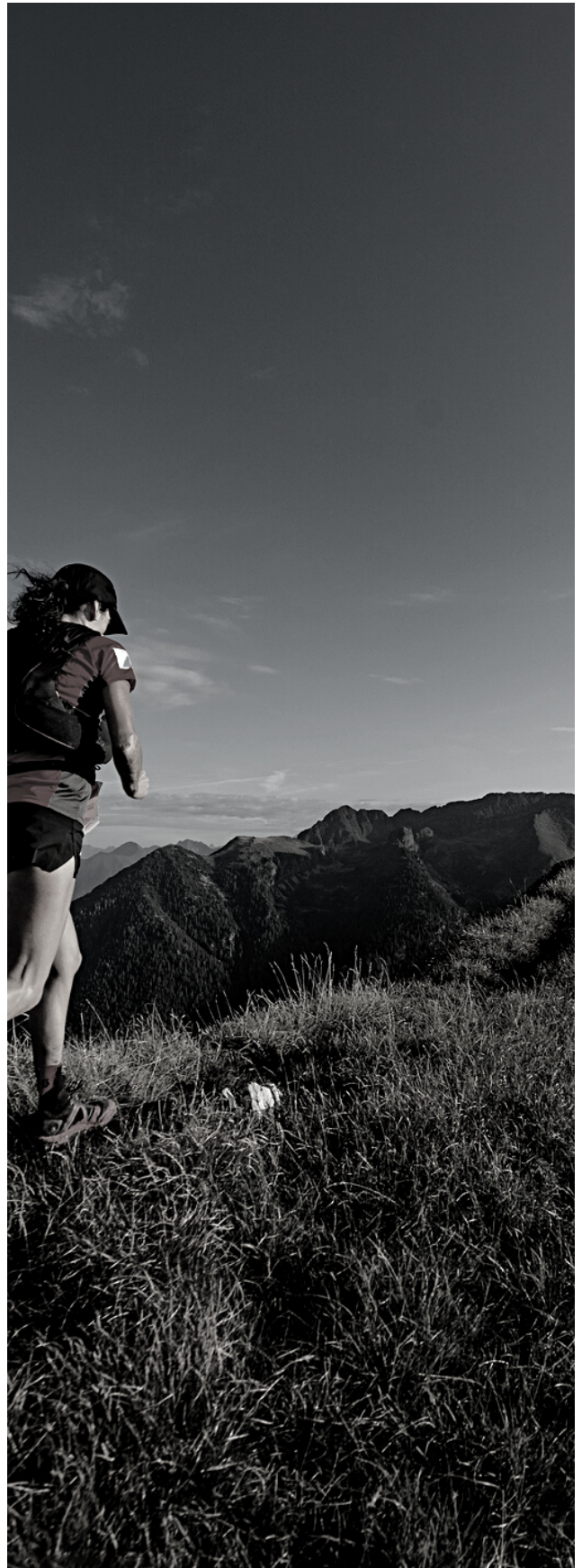
Success can also breed complacency.

Those who have achieved a certain level of success may find it difficult to maintain the same level of motivation and hunger that propelled them to the top in the first place.

This lack of motivation can lead to a decline in performance, which, in turn, can cause frustration and self-criticism.

Overcoming these psychological hurdles requires resilience and a strong support system, including coaches, sports psychologists, and teammates, who can provide guidance, encouragement, and a reality check when needed.

Learning to navigate the challenges of success is crucial for sustaining excellence and finding fulfillment.







## FINAL THOUGHTS

This publication aims to offer snippets and topic overviews each month. The goal is to provide free information for athletes and coaches, as well as sports enthusiasts, to understand better the complicated interweb of mental performance.

This month, we have included one-page articles, book and item recommendations, academic study highlights and an introduction to the focus of this publication moving forward.

This publication is in its infancy, and it is always looking to grow, expand and improve.

If you have topics you would like included in future issues or sections that would improve the reading experience, please let us know by visiting:

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