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**Motivations of
New Zealand Triathletes**

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ABSTRACT

The studying of motivation in the sporting environment has been seen by researchers as important for reasons such as development of theories and models of motivation in sport as well as improving coaching and training techniques through better understanding of athletes' motivations. The present study aimed to examine the motivations of triathletes selected for the New Zealand team for their age group. Other objectives of the study were to compare motivations of males and females, to examine the reliability of the Sport Orientation Questionnaire (Gill & Deeter, 1988), and to examine the effects of training related variables on SOQ scores in order to expand on the nature of sport orientations. Thirty-five male and female triathletes, aged from 18 to 66 years, who had been selected as part of the national Triathlon team in their age group section, participated in the study. Participants completed self-administered questionnaires developed by the researcher as well as the Sport Orientation Questionnaire (Gill & Deeter, 1988). Four of the participants were also interviewed. Results showed that the triathletes in the sample were highly motivated and had high levels of enjoyment. They reported a number of different factors which motivated them to participate and compete in Triathlon. Although no significant gender differences were found on the three subscales of the SOQ, qualitative data were contradictory. Statistical analysis provided further support for the continued use of the SOQ as a multi-dimensional measure of sport orientations. However, it was suggested that factors which lead to a feeling of success should be examined separately from other motivating factors.

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INTRODUCTION

Triathlon

"I doubt the highest paid athlete will ever be a triathlete, appear on the front of a Wheaties box, or ever become a household word"
(Town, 1985. p.33).

In New Zealand, the name of Erin Baker did become a household word, and although her picture may not have appeared on a Weet-bix packet, Sanitarium has sponsored a number of "Tryathlons" for children.

Today, throughout New Zealand, individuals compete in Triathlon at all levels, from recreational to elite. The reason for such enthusiasm could be that New Zealanders see Triathlon as a lifestyle choice (Klap & Paterson, 1985). Emphasis is placed not only on training but also on nutrition, stress control, determination and self motivation. The sport provides for total body fitness and less threat from overuse injuries due to the fact that as "your general level of cardiovascular fitness...[is]...improved and then maintained by all three activities, less time/mileage work will be required in each sport, so the threat of overuse injuries will be greatly reduced" (Plant, 1987. p.27). Apart from providing for total body fitness, "the three events - swim, bike, run - are within the capabilities of us all. Efficiency in each sport is associated with consistent training and with only a moderate reliance on technique" (Town, 1985. p.34). These features mean that Triathlon is a sport readily accessible to a majority of people.

Generally, Triathlons consist of the three disciplines of swimming, cycling and running, although other multisport events can include kayaking, skiing, mountain biking and cross country running. There are several lengths of races, ranging from the sprint or short distance events, to the Ironman length. Common distances are short (1000m swim, 25km bike, 5km run), Olympic (1500m swim, 40km bike, 10km run), and Ironman (3800m swim, 180km bike, 42km run), although there are other events of varied distances. Because there are events of different lengths, individuals of all ages and levels of ability can participate.

The first swim/bike/run Triathlon took place in May 1975 at Fiesta Island in

Mission Bay, near San Diego, while the first Ironman event was held in Hawaii three years later (Vaz, 1984). However, it has been suggested that Julie Moss' finish in the 1982 Hawaii Ironman, where she struggled, exhausted, to crawl across the finish line, is what really brought the sport of Triathlon to the attention of the world (Klap & Paterson, 1985). New Zealand's first Triathlon was the Les Mills Triathlon in Auckland in 1979 (Klap & Paterson, 1985). Since then, Triathlon in New Zealand has become increasingly popular, as a recreational sport. At an elite level, New Zealand has hosted the World Championships, as well as produced triathletes such as Erin Baker, Jenny Rose, Rick Wells and Hamish Carter, who have been internationally successful .

Although Triathlon is only a relatively new sport, it has become apparent that there is something intrinsically different about athletes who choose to participate in the sport. The sport involves mastering three disciplines, and because of this, it is a great equaliser. Athletes cannot rely on expertise in only one or two disciplines, but must become proficient in all three. This requires training for long hours. Sleamaker (1989) proposes that elite triathletes need to spend an average of 800 to 1400 hours in training per year, whereas elite runners need only train for an average of 500 to 700 hours a year, and elite cyclists need only train for an average of 700 to 1200 hours a year. In order to be able to train for such long hours, triathletes must be highly motivated, and according to Dr John Hellemans, this is what makes triathletes different from other athletes. Hellemans proposes that "commitment, dedication, determination and motivation are crucial elements in properly executing the often complicated and extensive training programmes of triathletes. Continuous self-motivation is needed more than in any other sport" (Hellemans, 1993. p.15). Central, then, to the difference between triathletes and other athletes, is the factor of motivation.

The present study aimed to examine the motivations of triathletes selected for the New Zealand team for their age group. Other objectives of the study were to compare motivations of males and females, and to examine the effects of training related variables on SOQ scores in order to expand on the nature of sport orientations as measured by the Sport Orientation Questionnaire (Gill & Deeter, 1988). Therefore, the rest of the introduction looks at why it is important to study motivation in sport, reviews the concept of achievement motivation, and examines the goal approach, instruments

which measure motivation in the sporting context, and gender differences. Finally, a rationale for the present study is proposed, and the research objectives are presented.

Motivation

According to Duda (1989a), the sporting domain is a suitable environment in which to examine the psychological factors, particularly motivation, which relate to four behavioural patterns. These patterns are choice of activity, intensity of behaviour, persistence and performance. Duda suggests that the sporting environment is suitable because of the variability between different activities in terms of : “(1) the degree of competition and social evaluation involved, (2) the extrinsic reinforcements available, (3) the level and type of performance required, (4) the time commitment and energy expenditure entailed, (5) the possibility to participate as an individual or within a group, and (6) the degree of formal structure (e.g. rules and prescriptions) imposed” (Duda, 1989a. p. 83).

Apart from sport being suitable for the study of motivation, Weiss and Chaumeton (1992) have suggested that, studying motivation in sport is important “for reasons related to both theoretical development and effective and successful programming applications” (p.61). This means that examining the motivations of athletes can lead not only to the development of theories and models of motivation in sport, but also to the practical application of improving coaching and training techniques to produce ‘better’ athletes.

Hodge (1994) has also noted the importance of motivation in all aspects of sport. He has proposed that,

There are many different types of motivation. For example, long-term motivation such as commitment to training and practising for your sport; short-term motivation such as motivation for an upcoming race or game; extrinsic motivation such as rewards, trophies, recognition, and trips away with teams; intrinsic motivation, for example, playing for fun, enjoyment, and mastering the skills of your sport; participation motivation such as the reasons for playing a particular sport; and, finally, we can look at pre-game or pre-event motivation such as the ‘psych-up’ before your game or race (p. 34).

Of these different types of motivation, ‘pre-game or pre-event motivation’ is the most commonly associated with sport. Coaches can often be seen trying

to arouse or 'motivate' a team before a game. However, sustaining 'long term motivation' is essential but more difficult for most people. While it is relatively easy to be motivated to participate in a sport for a short time, it is more difficult to maintain motivation in the long term, when it means setting aside time for training at the expense of other things such as time with family, social life and perhaps study. It is thought that a need to achieve is what distinguishes those who are able to sustain long term motivation, and those who cannot.

Achievement Motivation

Achievement motivation has been studied since the 1950s. In that time a great number of theories have been presented to define achievement motives and to explain the differences found between individuals. For example, McClelland and colleagues (McClelland, 1985 cited in Maehr & Braskamp, 1986) proposed that an individual's motivational patterns are formed by past experiences, and that the need to achieve can be seen as a relatively stable personality trait. According to Maehr & Braskamp (1986), McClelland and his colleagues believed, like Freud, that motivation could be accessed through dreams and fantasies. Therefore, to assess an individual's motivation, they showed them a number of pictures which were open to a variety of interpretations. Achievement themes, amongst others, were then scored for each of the pictures. It was found that those subjects who fantasised about achievement situations

were likely to take moderate risks in competitive and gamelike situations, seemingly welcoming a challenge. They were also more likely to work on their own, with success at the task as the only reward. And, in general, they seemed willing and able to delay gratification and to work energetically and independently to live up to a standard of excellence...Above all, they could be characterised by an overall proclivity toward attaining success (Maehr & Braskamp, 1986. p.20).

Maslow (1962, 1970 cited in Geen, Beatty & Arkin, 1984), however, postulated that the need to achieve was just one of many needs which mediate action. To Maslow, the order of needs was vitally important, and therefore he developed a hierarchy of needs, which progressed from basic physiological needs such as hunger and safety, through to the psychological needs such as needs for affiliation, achievement and self-actualisation. Although Maslow's hierarchy of needs is intuitively appealing, research examining the order of these needs has produced mixed results, with many studies indicating that the order in which the needs are met, is not fixed (see Geen, Beatty & Arkin, 1984 for a review). However, Maslow (1943) counters this, suggesting that a particular behaviour does not occur due to only one level of need being active, but "any behaviour tends to be determined by several or all of the basic needs simultaneously" (Maslow, 1943. p.375).

Other researchers studying achievement motivation have examined the motive to achieve in terms of the conflict between approach and avoidance tendencies. Atkinson (1974 cited in Weiner, 1985) is one of the theorists who posited that achievement motivation is derived from a hope of success and a fear of failure. According to Weiner (1985), Atkinson's theory posits that "Achievement-related activities elicit *positive affective anticipations* because of past successful accomplishments and experienced pride, as well as *negative affective anticipations* learned from prior failures and experienced shame" (Weiner, 1985 p.193). Atkinson's model of achievement motivation uses an expectancy-value framework and he therefore has proposed that the tendency to approach or avoid an achievement situation is a function of the strength of the tendency to approach the task minus the strength of the tendency to avoid the task. In order to assess the strength of the tendencies to avoid or approach a task, Atkinson has used the Mandler-Sarason Test Anxiety Questionnaire (TAQ) to assess anxiety, and the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) to assess motives to succeed (see Weiner, 1985 for a review).

As well as examining individual differences in achievement motivation, many researchers (e.g. Biddle & Brooke, 1992; Harter, 1981; Plant & Ryan, 1985) have assessed the effect of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. One of the most contemporary and well known theories, which has been developed by researchers such as Elliott and Dweck (1988), Nicholls (1984) and Roberts (1984), and which takes account of factors which affect achievement motivation, is known as the goal approach.

The Goal Approach

A recent theory of motivation, is that the need to achieve is mediated by a number of different goals which individuals pursue (Duda, 1989a; Elliott and Dweck, 1988; Nicholls, 1984; Roberts, 1984). These goals can be mastery oriented, with the individual striving for personal achievement through learning new skills or improving on a past performance, or they can be outcome oriented, with the individual aiming to complete a task to a specific standard. Within this approach, Nicholls (1984) has defined achievement motivation as "that behaviour in which the goal is to develop or demonstrate - to self or to others - high ability, or to avoid demonstrating low ability" (Nicholls, 1984. p.328).

In the literature there are several different terms used in place of mastery and outcome goals. Goals which emphasise mastery have also been called learning goals (e.g. Elliott & Dweck, 1988), task goals (e.g. Nicholls, 1984) and goal orientation (e.g. Gill & Deeter, 1988), while goals which emphasise outcomes and social comparison have been called ego goals (e.g. Nicholls, 1984), performance goals (e.g. Elliott & Dweck, 1988) and win orientation (e.g. Gill & Deeter, 1988). Although there are subtle differences in meaning between the various terms, in order to be able to make general comparisons across research, it should be recognised that these terms focus on similar concepts.

The goal approach to studying achievement motivation, developed by Nicholls and Dweck over the 1980s, is based on a number of premises. These include :

- i) the importance of perceptions of competence in achievement motivation,
- ii) predictions of the relationship between effort and ability,
- iii) the link between achievement goals and cognitive development, and
- iv) the effect of situational factors on achievement goals.

On the whole, research in the area supports these premises, within both the educational and sporting achievement domains (e.g. Duda, 1987b, 1988;