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Emotion or Passion?

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In a previous article I wrote that “emotional responses to external situations are often difficult to understand and produce very strong physical reactions in the human body. These responses result in physiological changes which can greatly influence performance levels of athletes in all stages of development.” What should be mentioned here is that while emotions can be, and are a very strong motivating force, playing on emotion is exhausting and short lived.

Emotions like anger, frustration, fear, joy, sadness, and many others are not lasting features of our humanness. These emotions are often activated by circumstances which are out of our control. The joy of seeing a good friend or child, the joy and celebrating a big win or an unbelievable play in sport, the frustration and feelings associated with a big loss. Regardless of the emotions we feel, most occur because of some outside influence resulting in physiological change within the body.

I’ve heard it said many times that the athlete who is able to control their emotions often is crowned the winner. It doesn’t matter what the sport is, the fact that there will be a winner and a loser at the end fuels our emotional response which in turn controls our physical response. Once our emotional response mechanism is activated our bodies are given the task of responding. Too much emotion and we can literally shut down due to chemical

imbalances making it impossible to continue in the moment.

The emotional/physical response is so powerful in fact, that the body often does not know how to deal with the emotion. Tears of joy in victory or tears of loss in defeat both have a similar physiological response. In either case the pent up emotion which was building throughout the competition is released, temporarily overwhelming the body of its ability to function appropriately. These emotional releases, if they occur during competition also have a detrimental effect on performance by distracting the athlete, causing them to focus on items and events outside of their control. When our emotional responses of fear, or joy occur we are no longer functioning “in the moment, on the next play, one shot at a time”, and we are in danger of losing control of our fine motor skills which influence our game skills.

The question then remains; do we, as athletes want to rely on our emotions to lift us up to victory? My answer to this would be no, emotions do not last, and are not sustainable in the heat of competition. Our emotional responses to events which occur before, during, or after competition are quick to rise, but are also quick to fall leaving us feeling sluggish and exhausted, empty inside.

Controlling our emotions then requires the athlete to prepare in advance for them. Building a strong foundation of mental and physical support is the key and this begins with a “passion” for your sport, not your emotions. Passion is lasting; passion is a deep desire to continue on even in the midst of emotional breakdowns; passion is sustainable where emotions are fleeting. Developing a passion for success drives us to continue on because we

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believe that what we are doing is who we really are. Passion then helps us focus on those parts which we can control and lifts us past the emotional responses which occur as a result of outside influences. Having a passion for what we do is the driving influence behind success. The problem is, emotional responses are so strong both physiologically, and mentally that they can sidetrack our path to success and cause us to question why we are sacrificing so much to try and accomplish success.

When this occurs we create thoughts of doubt, and a why me thought pattern instead of thoughts of why not me? It is here that an athlete has to rely on a strong foundation of both physical and mental attributes in order to proceed towards their goals and ambitions. This foundation is something that each athlete must develop if they hope to overcome the many setbacks which will occur on the road in front of them. Their level of passion is their strength and does not occur by accident. While it may seem that some athletes are simply blessed to succeed, success does not continue if their foundational beliefs are not sufficient to sustain them when challenges occur. Your beliefs, your goals, your plan, are your foundation.

Passion is sustainable, passion is powerful, passion says no, I will not quit when your emotions say quit, it's not worth it. Having passion is at the core of creating a set of foundational beliefs which can withstand the frustration of defeat, or overconfidence as a result of success. Passion drives us to excel.

Having a passion for what you are doing right now, today, tomorrow, next week, and next year draws your proverbial "line in the sand" where regardless of success or failure you will

not succumb to the rollercoaster of emotions which every athlete must navigate in order to feel successful.