

WHY SPORT PSYCHOLOGY FOR DRESSAGE??

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As the world of competitive dressage becomes more and more popular, each point that we earn or lose in competition becomes more critical. Sport Psychology helps ensure that the rider does not waste any of those precious points due to a lapse in their mental performance.

Sport Psychologists consider the equestrian sports to be one of the most psychologically demanding of all of the sports. This is because half of the competitive team is a very large animal that can be very unpredictable. We all admire the mental toughness of athletes such as golfer Tiger Woods. Yet how mentally tough would Tiger be if he was never sure, on any given day, whether his golf club might want to spook at the ball! Retaining strong mental and emotional resilience despite this unpredictability is a tremendous goal. Yet our mental performance is something we do have a great deal of control over in this unpredictable sport.

There are many ways in which Sport Psychology can help the rider's performance. In the following months we will examine ideas around each of these areas. Here are some of the common ways that Sport Psychology can contribute to your dressage performance:

1. **Performance Anxiety:**

Do you ever feel so nervous that it interferes with your ability to concentrate? This is called performance anxiety, and it is a very common occurrence in athletes of all sports. There are many Sport Psychology techniques that can help resolve this uncomfortable feeling.

2. **Concentration and Memorization:**

The slightest lapse in focus and concentration can easily lead to points lost in competition. When we forget to prepare our horse for each movement, the quality of each movement suffers. Even if there is no obvious mistake, this lack of preparation can cause the loss of single points throughout the test.

3. **Body Awareness and Relaxation:**

Do you leave your best performance at home? Does your body feel a stranger the moment you enter the competition arena? Sport Psychology can teach you to perform well whether you are calm or nervous.

4. **Imagery and Visualization:**

These powerful mental techniques can enhance any training program, and allow you to continue your practice off the horse.

5. **Self Talk and Affirmations:**

Our internal dialogue, the way we talk to ourselves, can have a big impact on our self confidence. Sport Psychology can teach you to become more aware of your inner voice, and how that inner voice can impact your dressage performance.

I will look forward to discussing these topics with you over the next several months. If you have specific concerns you would like me to address in this article you can email those concerns to me at seanaadams@aol.com.

SeanaAdamson Ph.D, is a psychologist specializing in Sport Psychology for equestrians. She is a United States Dressage Federation Gold Medalist, and the author of "Memorize That Dressage Test: A workbook of mental games to improve focus and flow" (seanaadamson.com).