EBOOK

SPORT PSYCHOLOGY FOR FOOTBALL

InnerDrive

Many of the best footballers use a sport psychologist to improve their performance. This helps them improve their mindset, confidence, concentration and leadership skills. A sport psychologist can help to ensure that a player is competing and training with intensity, is motivated to improve and plays to their full potential. All footballers, from senior internationals to youth players can benefit from working with a football sport psychologist.

This guide has been created to help you understand how a football sport psychologist can help you be the best you can be.

Book a sport psychology coaching session

© InnerDrive Ltd.

WHAT IS SPORT PSYCHOLOGY?

Sport psychology helps footballers train with more focus, play with more confidence, and reflect more effectively after a match. This helps them maintain their motivation, resilience, emotional control and overall well-being. Sport psychologists can also help footballers cope with the stress and frustration of injury and transition back into playing after an injury has occurred.

Match day performance is a combination of technical, tactical, physical and mental performance. Here's an experiment: think of your best and your worst game. Now, assign percentages to each of the four areas to explain the difference in performance between the two games. You will probably have allocated a significant proportion of the difference to your mental game, but how much work and training do you put into it compared to the other three areas?

Footballers at the top of their game recognise that a football sport psychologist can help them improve on their weaknesses and further develops their strengths. The very best footballers leave no stone unturned in their quest for success and a sport psychologist can help them do this. With an ever-increasing pressure to perform, working with someone to maximise the mental side of the game is quickly becoming essential for the best footballers.

Recommended reading:

- What is sport psychology? – Sport Psychology today
- Our Sport Psychology videos
- The secret to success

© InnerDrive Ltd.

WHAT DOES A FOOTBALL SPORT PSYCHOLOGIST DO?

A football sport psychologist can help footballers of all levels become the best player they can be. A football sport psychologist works in two main ways:

- The first is when a player asks for help with something they are struggling with. For example, some footballers may be struggling with a lack of confidence or poor self-discipline on the pitch.
- Other players work with a football psychologist to improve their overall performance. Whilst they may not have a specific problem, they recognise that their mindset is such an important part of being a great footballer that it needs to be worked on and coached just as much as the other aspects of their game.

The job of a sport psychologist in football is to help you become a more complete player on and off the pitch. Not only can a football sport psychologist help you with the strategies and mental skills to perform to your very best while playing, but they can also help you prepare better off the pitch by helping you become a student of the game.

***Recommended reading*:**

- Sport psychology and the pressure of knockout football
- Sport Psychologist football
- Why football is a pressure cooker for mental health issues – The Telegraph

© InnerDrive Ltd.

HOW DOES SPORT PSYCHOLOGY APPLY TO FOOTBALL?

Having the right mindset in football and the ability to perform under pressure is vitally important. As Andrea Pirlo once said: "*Football is played with your head. Your feet are just tools.*" It therefore makes sense to train your way of thinking so you can really maximise your performances.

The best footballers play at their best consistently by keeping their emotions in check, thinking clearly and making the right decisions. Above all, they are motivated to improve and thrive in pressure situations. Big players put in big performances in big matches. It is interesting to consider that, despite being so important, not many players invest that much time in training this area of their game. That's where a football psychologist can help.

Recommended reading:

- The pressure on youth footballers
- Playing brilliant football: a sport psychologist's guide
- How footballers use sport psychology – The Telegraph

© InnerDrive Ltd.

HOW CAN A SPORT PSYCHOLOGIST HELP ME PLAY BETTER FOOTBALL?

Performing under pressure

A football sport psychologist can help you perform better during matches by improving your:

- ***Confidence*** – Knowing what to think about before and during a match;
- ***Concentration*** – Blocking out distractions and focusing on what's important;
- ***Intensity*** – Playing at your best for the duration of a match;
- ***Decision making*** – Being able to make the correct decisions quickly and clearly;
- ***Consistency*** – Playing to your best in training and matches.

All-round development

As well as playing your best when the pressure is on, a football sport psychologist can help you develop all round by improving your:

- ***Motivation*** – Having the drive to train at your best;
- ***Coping skills*** – The ability to bounce back from setbacks and poor performance;
- ***Learning*** – Learning from your performances to improve for next time;
- ***Attention*** – Having a clear focus on what is important to improve and play better football;
- ***Leadership and playing with others*** – Effective communication with other teammates.

© InnerDrive Ltd.

***Recommended reading*:**

- How to perform under pressure
- 6 ways to reduce stress
- 9 ways Olympians develop resilience

© InnerDrive Ltd.

HOW CAN A SPORT PSYCHOLOGIST HELP MY FOOTBALL TEAM?

The most successful football teams are those that have a well-functioning squad. Traditionally, sport psychologists work with football teams in three main areas:

- They work with individual players in the team to raise their personal performance;
- They work with groups of players in the team to make sure that they are working effectively as a unit;
- They work with management and coaching staff to help create a great environment and ensure that their feedback and leadership are as effective as possible.

There are a variety of ways that football psychologists help within the team environment. We draw on our experience and knowledge of psychology to help teams that we work with. Here are some of the areas that our football psychologists cover:

- ***Motivation*** – The drive to work hard for others, on and off the pitch;
- ***Togetherness*** – Making sure that the group are united and working together towards a common goal;
- ***Goals*** – Helping teams to identify team goals to work towards;
- ***Leadership*** – Exploring leadership styles for players and coaching staff;
- ***Feedback*** – How to give feedback and receive feedback in more constructive ways;
- ***Communication*** – Effectively communicating on and off the pitch.

© InnerDrive Ltd.

***Recommended reading*:**

- How the psychology of the England football team could change your life – The Guardian
- 6 ways to develop a winning team culture
- 7 reasons to build a good team around you

© InnerDrive Ltd.

FOOTBALL SPORT PSYCHOLOGISTS IMPROVE YOUR EMOTIONAL CONTROL

Managing your thoughts and emotions whilst you play is often the difference between good and great footballers. Sometimes, emotions are complicated because they can be both a good and a bad thing when you are playing. For example, some footballers play better when their emotions are running high; however, another footballer might lose focus if they are not calm enough. Knowing how your emotions affect you is key.

A football sport psychologist will recognise that players experience a range of emotions whilst playing, which is why they work hard to help footballers learn how to control and use their emotions so that they can play at their best.

***Recommended reading*:**

- 10 top tips to help control your emotions in sport
- Football sport psychology – Fear of failure
- Emotional control and composure in sports – Sport Psychology Today

© InnerDrive Ltd.

FOOTBALL SPORT PSYCHOLOGISTS IMPROVE YOUR SELF-TALK

The way you talk to yourself is vitally important. How a footballer talks to themselves can affect their concentration, persistence, stress levels and their emotions, which in turn affects their motivation, confidence and overall performance. The way they talk to themselves can also affect their belief that they can always improve and their ability to deal with distractions.

Self-talk is an important tool that everyone can benefit from. The key to overcoming negative self-talk is to recognise that you are doing it, call a stop to it, then say something both helpful and positive. The best footballers do this. This is a skill that can be learnt, just as any football skill is. With the help of a football sport psychologist, this process can be accelerated.

Recommended reading **:**

- The three worst words to say to yourself
- 6 ways to improve how you talk to yourself
- Challenging unhelpful beliefs

© InnerDrive Ltd.

FOOTBALL SPORT PSYCHOLOGISTS HELP WITH INJURY

There are two types of players: those that are injured and those that aren't injured yet. When a major injury occurs in a footballer's career, it can be a stressful and lonely time. Athletes with poor coping skills can find being injured a very challenging time, which can have a major impact on how they feel, think and behave.

Injuries can often be a bad time in a footballer's career, no matter what level they play at. By helping athletes use this time effectively, a football psychologist can help footballers recover from injury quicker and more effectively. It can also make it less stressful and more productive.

***Recommended reading*:**

- How to help injured athletes
- 7 ways of developing resilience
- The emotional stress of a sports injury – Verywell Fit

© InnerDrive Ltd.

FOOTBALL SPORT PSYCHOLOGISTS HELP TO CREATE WINNING MINDSETS

Footballers with Growth Mindsets believe that their abilities can be improved. By focusing on learning and improving, they ensure they stay hungry for success and are more likely to develop their abilities. In all walks of life, people with a Growth Mindset tend to learn faster and are more successful than their Fixed Mindset counterparts. A good sport psychologist will help footballers and teams develop a Growth Mindset, which can boost player development to new levels.

Examples of Fixed Mindsets (the belief that your abilities and skills can't be improved) can be seen on the training ground all the time. For example, some footballers will never practise what they're bad at because they think it will never improve. Others often blame their own or their team's setbacks on others around them instead of taking responsibility for their bad performance.

One way to help develop a Growth Mindset is to help others see failure as a necessary part of learning. In doing this, you can reduce pessimism, increase self-esteem, and stop players from avoiding challenges.

***Recommended reading*:**

- How do you actually develop a Growth Mindset?
- Football sport psychology for parenting youth footballers
- Developing excellence in young athletes

© InnerDrive Ltd.

WORKING WITH A FOOTBALL SPORT PSYCHOLOGIST

No matter your level, our football sport psychologists will help you reach your full potential by tailoring our work to your specific needs. We have worked with a variety of footballers in the form of one-to-one sessions, as well as in groups workshops. This includes Premiership footballers and England internationals.

Our one-to-one sessions often take place in a footballer's home, so that they feel comfortable. This also helps ensure that it is discreet and confidential. In these sessions, we explore a variety of strategies to develop a footballer's ability to perform when it matters most, as well as focusing on their all-round development.

In our group workshops, we work with footballers, parents and coaches in a practical and interactive way to aid understanding of psychological principles and develop strategies to put them into practice.

Recommended reading:

- Parenting young athletes
- How to help your child in sports
- One-to-one coaching with a football sport psychologist

© InnerDrive Ltd.

FAQ

As sport psychologists, which footballers have you helped?

We have had the pleasure and privilege of working with some of the best footballers in the world. These include senior internationals who have played for England, Scotland, Wales and Japan. We have worked with many players from a range of clubs that include Manchester United, Manchester City, Tottenham, West Ham, Crystal Palace, Watford, and Brighton and Hove Albion.

What does working with a football sport psychologist look like?

We work with individuals on a private confidential basis. Sessions take place wherever our clients prefer. This includes at the training ground or at their house.

How can I play better football?

Here's one quick tip. Focus on what is most important and what you can control. What three things do you need to do well in order to have a great game? Focusing on these and not on any distractions allows you to get into the zone faster.

How else can a football sport psychologist help?

You can break down mental toughness into three sections: before, during, and after a match. Before, it is all about good focus in the build-up. During, it is about performing well under pressure. After, it is about reflecting and learning as much as possible from the experience. Each of these areas can be improved.

© InnerDrive Ltd.

The last sport psychologist I saw didn't really understand football. Do you?

Yes. Some sport psychologists are great university lecturers and researchers. Unfortunately, this doesn't always translate into helping footballers play better. We are different.
We have worked with hundreds of footballers over many years, and have helped academy footballers earn pro contracts, first team players play better, and helped senior internationals represent their country. So, the answer is: yes, we do.

I think I want to work with a football sport psychologist. What are the next steps?

Get in touch with us here. We are happy to have a chat about what we do and how you could play better football by working with a sport psychologist.

© InnerDrive Ltd.

FURTHER READING

Here are some of the football psychology blogs we have written:

- What to think about before a match
- A sport psychologist's guide to player celebration
- A sport psychologist's guide to fan celebration
- Perfect penalties
- Penalties: myths vs facts
- 8 ways to maximise training

More resources that could be of interest:

- The Premier League pressure
- Mind Games: how footballers use sport psychology
- How football is slowly starting to make the most of sport psychology
- The importance of sport psychology

© InnerDrive Ltd.