Patterns of Body Language

PERFORMANCE PSYCHOLOGY
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Introduction to Patterns of Body Language

In a sporting context, an athlete's physical movement – speed, reaction, power, fluidity - tells us a lot about their physical state at any given point in a contest. Crucially also, visible actions and behaviors in response to key moments of potential consequence are an important tell-tale about an athlete's mental control and in they are in or out of their "zone". Athletes who are either untrained or have slipped outside of their zone can give away clear signs of how they are feeling by the repeated behaviors, or, patterns of body language. In this way -

Body language HAPPENS, with OR without your manipulation and control

Harnessing body language and training it to be used as a positive force during predictable or recurring in-game scenarios is a critical tool in demonstrating a strong will and virtual "unbreakability" to yourself and your opponent.

"You can't control the outcome of the match BUT you can control your preparation & commitments to how you will carry yourself with demonstrated behavior during competition"

Athletes' visibly negative body language patterns are often harmful to actual feelings of confidence, ability to stay within your ideal zone or flow, and performance. These behaviors are akin to handicapping yourself against your opponent. It is something that requires constant attention and awareness so it can be manipulated into being a positive and helpful tool to optimal performance.

Definition of Patterns of Body Language

Patterns of body language refer to visible physical actions that are a recurring response to either physical states like fatigue and injury or emotional states like anger, disappointment, and anxiety. In order to become a useful tool to maintaining optimal performance, patterns of body language are predetermined and rehearsed through methods such as visualization until they become more dependable if not automatic – no matter the scoreboard or physical and emotional state

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How do I Successfully Develop Patterns of Body Language?

You may be able to develop these yourself but, should you prefer, there are tools such as the Athlete Performance & Mental Skills Profile to help tease out your patterns, routines and triggers. You can also try and work with a coach, or with Dr. Petersen as a specialized Performance Psychologist and teaching pro, to support the process.

1. Harnessing body language and training it to be used as a positive force, during predictable in-game scenarios, is a critical tool in demonstrating strong will and virtual “unbreakability” to yourself and your opponent

2. It is something that requires constant attention and awareness so it can be monitored under stress and fatigue

3. With appropriate training and technique, athletic body language patterns can be manipulated into becoming a positive and helpful tool to optimize performance

4. Given the number of different in-game scenarios that test an athlete’s body language, it is useful in this and many other instances to keep a journal. Create a section called “Patterns of Body Language”. List out the important scenarios that benefit from routines showing positive physical action, and then write out in the journal “I commit to the following body language in the following scenarios” – and then list them out. These might include –

- Racquet sports: Warm-ups, break point down, big game lost, opponent hits a big winner (and also opposites of these when positive things are done), concern regarding fatigue, or possible minor injury
- Field sports: Warm-ups, when your opponent runs past you or gets the ball off you, bad call by a ref, a poor pass by you or a team-mate and also opposites of these when positive things are done), concern regarding fatigue, or possible minor injury

5. Here are some examples of positive body language specific to racquet sports but adaptable to other sports:

- *Body animation (head and shoulders up, visibly encouraging yourself with words, even smiling)*
- *Bouncing on your feet*
- *Twiddling racquet in upright position (rather than racquet hanging down),*
- *4-10 skip-steps before return of serve (need to understand what your similarly positive routine is for serve), and*
- *Audible explosive footwork (shoes squeaking on court surface) during the point. Remember, opponent can hear it too …*

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6. Visualize using your patterns – do this any time! This is just like a mental rehearsal – you'd be amazed how good you can get at using it to make serious improvements! In the days leading up to competition – when there is a bit more nerves or tension or excitement:

- Take "walking rehearsals" to relax, picture confidence and ease, & reinforce
- Use focused breathing as a form of meditation to quiet your mind and stay present. So, before you start rehearsing, close your eyes and take 5 slow long breaths, listening to your inhales and exhales, and emptying your mind of any thoughts. Repeat this if need be until you empty your mind
- Now, your mental rehearsal should be about seeing yourself positively, calm, in control, even joyful
- Run through your routines, your patterns, and your reactions, as needed

7. TRIGGERS – when you're practicing in drills, practice your body language patterns so that, when you catch yourself using something different, TRIGGER the desired behavior and implement it. Smile and forgive the mistake. Remember, you can't control the outcome / score in a drill BUT you can control your preparation and your commitments to how you will act and think in competition

- Triggers require you to first become aware of the various thoughts and actions that you use in sports that are NOT constructive or positive
- You probably already know some of your negative habits, BUT you should also keep a journal nearby during practice and after games to write down specific scenarios where your routines of body action or self-talk are negative
- You can then work to create a profile of different situations where you're aware that you can be negative sometimes and, with some thoughtful effort, work to create a profile of TRIGGERS – responses you can rehearse that you will use with your actions or self-talk to create a beneficial moment to support your performance
- Then, in the period before game-time, when pressure is somewhat reduced, you can read and rehearse these scenarios and triggers by reviewing your journal and by visualizing moments in the upcoming match.

8. Journal the progress and your feelings about it – right there after practice.

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How do I Measure my Progress with Using Patterns of Body Language ?

It is critical that you allow a period of time to first learn, then put into use, these new tools like Patterns of Body Language. Here is an overview of planning for success:

1. It can take several weeks to figure out your scenarios or moments where patterns of body language will be tested, using journaling and memory to develop

2. It then takes some time to actively rehearse these patterns using visualization

3. Practicing patterns of body language in low-pressure situations means you can focus more on the scenarios and process of implementation, without worrying about failing or losing

4. Then, finally, you can test your Patterns of Body Language in a game situation, with pressure, to learn how they stand up under pressure
- a. Use your journal to document the combinations and how well they worked in specific situations

5. Build your profile of patterns that are suited to a variety of pressure situations

GOOD LUCK ! if you need assistance, please email me at info@petersenfuturesolutions.com

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