

Sport psychology pros help athletes prepare mentally for Olympic Trials, Games and beyond

CHAGRIN FALLS, Ohio—June 2016—Athletes spend years preparing for a chance to make it to the Olympic Games but for many Olympic hopefuls, they are stopped at the Olympic Trials, falling short of making the team. “In many respects, the Olympic Trials are more difficult mentally for athletes when they are trying to make the team than when they are competing in the Olympics,” said Karen Cogan, Senior Sport Psychologist with the U.S. Olympic Committee (USOC) in Colorado Springs and Certified Consultant of the Association for Applied Sport Psychology.

“I often spend more time helping those with disappointing performances and who didn’t meet their expectations because there are many more of those individuals than athletes who are celebrating after making the team. Each country can only bring a limited number of competitors and although there is a higher intensity at the Olympic Games due to visibility and media broadcasts, there can be more competition at the Trials. For athletes who do not make the team, it can be devastating, said Cogan.

Cogan is one of six full-time sport psychology professionals on staff at the USOC Training Center which offers sport psychology resources to coaches and athletes on a team or individual basis. “Our services are very individualized depending on the needs of coaches and athletes,” said Cogan.

“Depending on the sport, individual athletes may not want to work with the same sport psychologist as their competitors, so I refer them to someone they can work with in their part of the country or with the expertise they need.” Cogan oversees the Sport Psychology Registry of 160 professionals who are referrals to outside sport psychology services. Among the required qualifications to be listed on the Registry is being a Certified Consultant of the Association for Applied Sport Psychology (CC-AASP).*

Sport psychology professionals are specifically trained to help enhance performance and commonly work with athletes on mental skills coaching in such areas as:

- Reducing performance anxiety
- Improving concentration
- Setting both short- and long-term goals
- Increasing and maintaining motivation
- Building self-confidence
- Recovering from injury

Preparing for the future

Part of the mental preparations leading up to the Olympic Trials is that the sport psychologist is often talking with athletes about what comes next. According to Cogan, “Some are planning on retirement, some are going to grad school, or there is a career path in place. If they have a plan it helps during the post-Olympic let-down phase. Some athletes choose to focus only on their preparation leading into the Trials or don't have a clear plan. They will begin to focus more on their future after the Olympics, and I have it on my radar to follow up with these athletes as well,” she added and that she was involved in career counseling in her previous job. The USOC has been working on programs to assist athletes with their transition out of sport and offers Athlete Career and Education (ACE) programming.

**The Association for Applied Sport Psychology is an international, multi-disciplinary, professional organization that offers certification to qualified professionals in the field of sport psychology.*

Certified Consultants of the Association for Applied Sport Psychology (CC-AASP) have met the highest standard in education, training and supervised practice. The AASP certification process encourages sport psychology professionals who complete it to maintain high standards of ethical conduct while giving service to others. To find a CC-AASP in your area, visit www.appliedsportpsych.org/certified-consultants/find-a-consultant/.