



ASPECTS OF PERSONALITY ASSESSMENT IN THE ACTIVITY OF PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES

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Abstract

Aim. In the complex activity of professional athletes, the sports psychologist and the coach can have the following roles: consultant and implementor of psychological training programs, and scientific researcher, investigating the factors that influence the behavior and performance in sport, by implementing and practicing the tasks that are specific to each sport. In performing these roles, the sports psychologist and the coach use various methods to investigate the variables of interest, among which the methods and techniques to diagnose individual characteristics among professional athletes.

Conclusions. A complete assistance endeavor for professional athletes must arrive at a very precise knowledge of the core psychological level (personality style) of an athlete, but also of the specific elements that differentiate that athlete from others. This way, one can unlock the full potential in the athletes' mind in the line of motivation-action-top performing behavior.

Keywords: professional sports, personality psychodiagnosis, athlete

Introduction

Psychodiagnosis - a side of assessment in professional sports

In the complex activity of professional athletes, the psychologist and the coach can have the following roles: consultant and implementor of psychological training programs, and scientific researcher, by investigating the factors that influence the behavior and performance in sports (Bull, 2011; Weinberg & Gould, 2007). In performing these roles, the sports psychologist and the coach use various methods to investigate the variables of interest, among which the methods and techniques to diagnose individual characteristics among professional athletes. Thus, before starting a psychological training, the psychologist can take into account certain cognitive and behavioral variables whose distribution among the subjects is observed, in order to control the possible effects that these variables can have on the training. The individual characteristics of the athletes in the target groups can be capitalized on during the psychological training (as resources or strong points), which is why their diagnosis is indispensable. Also, as researchers, the sports psychologists conduct various experiments in laboratories or in the gymnasiums, or even during competitions. With this in mind, they can use various methods, devices, and observation techniques to monitor the behavior among the athletes, or techniques to assess their dispositional characteristics. Given the importance of the diagnosis in the sports psychologist's activity, this paper will focus on psychodiagnosis, psychological assessment,

and the relationship between the two, with direct applications for professional sports.

A. Psychodiagnosis and psychological assessment

Etymologically, the term *psychodiagnosis* comes from the Greek words *psychē*, meaning soul, and *diagnosis*, meaning knowledge. Certain conceptual delimitations must be made between terms such as psychodiagnosis, psychological assessment, psychological measurement or psychological testing. Also, psychodiagnosis as a process involving a succession of actions logically chained must be differentiated from *psychodiagnostic*, a term designating the result of psychodiagnosis. Generally, *psychodiagnosis* designates the process of systematic gathering of information about a person or a group of persons, a process materialized in a sketch of the psychological profile of that person (group), aiming to make a prediction regarding the subjects' behavior (prognosis) (Șchiopu, 2002). Psychodiagnosis is a specific activity based on various types of instruments for collecting the data, in order to get valid information about the structure and organization of one's personality and the dynamics of one's psychological functioning (Minulescu, 2006). Because it aims to trace the psychological profile (as a descriptive portrait of a person), psychodiagnosis resists the various psychopathological or nosological labels that are usually encountered in clinical or psychiatric diagnosis. The result of psychodiagnosis is the diagnostic, designating a "... *logical conclusion to a series of investigations aimed to understand the*

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behavior of a person, the functioning of a group or the situation of an enterprise" (Sillamy, 1996, p.100), this definition being extended to comprise not just an individual, but also groups or organized collectives. The synthesis product of psychodiagnosis (the psychodiagnostic) contains relevant information about certain traits composing the psychological profile of a person, as well as about the relationships existing between these traits (interdependencies, hierarchies, compensations, etc.). The information included in the psychological profile are significant for the specialist only in relation to other personal, environmental, and social factors that compete in determining the conduct of the individual. At the same time, a rational and impactful psychodiagnosis process must be organized around three main principles (Sillamy, 1996): a) the information about a person must be varied and substantial enough to capture that person's specificity; b) the information must be related to the person being analyzed, meaning it must be relevant for that person; c) the information must be analyzed through its relation to the history of that person and in relation to the environment of that person.

B. Role and function of psychodiagnosis.

Through its operational significations, the term psychodiagnosis can be close to the term psychological testing, although it is not just that. In fact, if one enlarges the concept meaning and regards the psychologist's intervention as a multiple step approach, integrative and unitary, the psychological testing, measurement, and assessment are processes that are continuously mingling. On the other hand, the purposes of various methods of psychodiagnosis and the ways in which they can be used emphasize the importance of aspects in the functioning and conduct of a person that are observable in the present and, based on these, of the progress aspects that appear according to the way in which, under certain conditions, the current situation evolves in the future. Psychodiagnosis is focused more on the current state of a person (without neglecting that person's past), but the end goal is the *prediction* regarding the person's future functioning and conduct (Minulescu, 2006).

C. Psychodiagnosis methods. There are various strategies, methods, and techniques for measuring and assessing the different sides of an individual's personality and behavior. Over time, they have evolved to be increasingly complex, stimulated by the progress of the information and quantitative processing of data technologies, and by the diversification of the demand for services of psychological testing and assessment, for various purposes. Generally, the psychodiagnosis methods are classified as follows: a) psychometric methods (psychological tests and behavioral scales); b) clinical methods (projective techniques, observation in natural situations, clinical interview, anamnesis and

techniques related to the biographical method, study of the products of personal activity).

Being one of the main methods of the practitioner psychologist, psychological testing aims mainly to determine as precisely as possible the development degree of a characteristic or a set of characteristics of a person. In a more general view, the psychological *test* signifies a systematized procedure for measuring a person's behavior and describing it using metric scales or a category system. For P. Pichot (1997), the psychological test represents a standardized situation that serves as a stimulus for a behavior, which is assessed by comparing it with other individuals' in the same situation, allowing the classification of a subject, typologically or quantitatively. The usefulness of this definition consists in the fact that it allows the differentiation of the test from the clinical examination, in the sense that the test allows the quantification of the characteristics or behaviors that it studies.

The clinical interview aims to gather information about a person and understand the way that person functions psychologically, by focusing on the emotions expressed by the person and on the relation that is established during the interview situation (Dafinoiu, 2002). Although some authors use the terms *anamnesis* and *biographical method* as interchangeable, certain distinctions must be made between these two psychodiagnosis methods. It is true that both involve the collection and analysis of data regarding a person's past, as well as the person's current life, however while the anamnesis involves only gathering information about the history of a person, the biographical methods involve also the attribution of significations for the known facts and events, establishing relationships between them, creating meaning for the person investigated, etc.

The analysis of the products of personal activity is not considered by some authors a psychodiagnosis method per se, but more of a variant of the biographical method (Cosmovici, 1996). However, it must be said that the human beings' psychological potential is externalized not just through motor, verbal or expressive-emotional conducts, but also through the way the humans formulate and solve various problems, through technical constructions or literary creations or scientific productions. Although it is very difficult to do and it involves much subjectivity, the analysis of these products of the activity of a person can offer some information about the development level of that person's psychological abilities and their dynamics.

Aspects observed in the psychodiagnosis of professional athletes

A. *The athletic behavior* represents the result of a cumulation of needs manifesting in the human personality to reach-satisfy certain individual parameters. As the researchers in the field (Sleak,

1998) show, the professional athletes practice sports also from a need to confirm, strengthen, improve their self-image. In other words, the one practicing sports has a much better self-image than the one who does not practice sports. On the other hand, practicing sports means getting cultivated, being educated in regards to one's entire personality. Professional sports represent a pedagogical process by methodology, an educational act through the principles that structure it and through the effects captured in the behavior, in the attitude of the athlete. Researches in the field of sports psychology studied the factors that facilitate, support and determine the behavioral consistencies in the practiced professional sport. "... top performance depends on the athletes' total ability - ability to perform, their bio-psychosocial system, a result of perfecting the performing-regulating functions of the morphological, functional, physiological, informational, decisional, psycho-regulatory, etc. sub-systems. Thus, top performance is the optimal aspect of the human beings, regarded in their totality" (Epuran, Holdevici & Tonița, 2008). Synthetic points of view regarding the significant factors determining top athletic performance can be found in G. Thomas (1975): a) social-political-cultural factors; b) personality: affectivity, conation, intelligence; c) motivation and attitudes; d) level of aspiration and activation; e) heredity; f) physiological aspects; h) psychomotor skills.

A few of the *psychological dimensions* that are important in regards to top athletic performance, approached in an interdisciplinary and interactionist manner, are:

- *aptitudes are psycho-physical systems organized in an original way in order to allow a performance with high results.* Within the structure of the personality, they constitute its effective side. For sports, the identified, activated and cultivated *motor skills* are important. Motor functionality, based on *innate motor skills*, "is consciously led by superior mental abilities and in all sports the intelligence, the motivation, the emotional balance, the control, and the voluntary control are absolutely indispensable" (Epuran, Holdevici & Tonița, 2008). Adrian Gagea (1999) thinks motor intelligence is the *corespondent and the motor component of mental intelligence*. In Gagea's opinion, motor intelligence manifests through several characteristics: *motor memory, motor creativity, time-space sense*. The author emphasizes the fact that top athletic performance is determined by a series of factors, each with its different importance in achieving top performances. They are grouped into three large groups, specific to the biological typology: genotype, phenotype, paratype. However, motor intelligence remains indispensable for top performances. There are no *top performers* without motor intelligence. M. Epuran defines motor intelligence as being "*the subject's mental ability to solve problems, theoretically and practically, in a*

manner that is perfectly adequate for the motor actions in new or different situations. Motor intelligence represents a motor-cognitive synthesis with an intuitive or operative character that uses knowledge, representations, habits, reorganized according to the necessities of the situation."

- *creativity* - an important aspect of motor intelligence. Creativity is a process developing over time, characterized by originality, ability to adapt, and care for a concrete realization (Kimon, 1970). Gordon Allport (1991) considers it "the integrative part of human personality that expresses the ensemble of qualities leading to the creation of new, to originality." Creativity is defined as being the ability and disposition to produce something new. This ability uses previously acquired experience and knowledge, offering new solutions in solving problems. For Piaget, creativity is gradually *integrated* in intelligence, and as the child gets older, it increases together with the cognitive development. Thus, the two dimensions of the personality stimulate each other. In 1956, Guilford created the *structure of the creativity factors and the theoretical three-dimensional ensemble of intelligence*. The author believed that there are two groups of intellectual factors for creativity: thinking and memory. In 1959 presents the "theoretical model of the complete intellectual structure" at the same time saying that *intelligence is hard to define, it is something multidimensional, with multiple components*. Following his research, Guilford concluded that one cannot measure creativity based on intelligence tests, thus he created batteries of tests with which one can measure *factors and aptitudes* that are characteristic to the creative behavior. The author constructed a *three-dimensional model of the intellect structure*, structured on the following criteria: *operational factors of the intellect* (knowing or recognizing, memory, divergent thinking, convergent thinking, evaluative thinking), *contents* (figural, semantic, symbolic and behavioral), *products*. To this initial model the author adds a fourth dimension, *sensory modalities* (visual, acoustic, kinesthetic). According to the professional literature, the creative potential must be within certain parameters: *fluidity* (as many solutions as possible), *flexibility* (as many categories of solutions as possible, presupposes *jumps* from one category to the next), *originality* (an answer given with creative power, modifying the regular vision), *elaboration* (an idea is developed in multiple directions). According to Torrance (as cited in Mecu, 2000), originality and elaboration are the main parameters of creativity. The same author makes a distinction between *critical thinking* and *creative thinking*. The first one is about analysis, assessment, selection, argumentation. This type of thinking is vertical, rational. Creative thinking is about exploration, experimentation, reflection, intuition, invention. It is a type of lateral thinking (it

uses analogy), over-rational, experimental, and subjected to risks.

Motor intelligence is combined "creatively" with the other resources in the bio-psycho-socio-cultural system that is the human being.

B. Motivation - an essential determinant for the top performing behavior

Motivation, as a dimension of one's development and functioning, was defined in various ways. "... motivation is determined by the relationships between the independent/dependent variables that explain the direction, range and persistence of an individual behavior, maintaining constant effects on the skill, guidance, and understanding of the tasks and constraints that operate in the environment (Campbell & Pritchard, 1976)". As A. Prodan (1999) also states, these definitions have in common three elements that can be taken into consideration when defining motivation: a) *energizing*; b) *directing*; c)

maintaining and sustaining the behavior of an individual.

Each of these three elements represent an important factor in understanding the human behavior in general, including the one related to top athletic performance. The first element refers to the energizing forces that lead the individuals toward certain behaviors and to the environmental forces that influence the people's conduct. The second element expresses the direction of individual behavior toward certain clear objectives that the individuals seek to achieve. The third element refers to the forces of the individual and environment that offer the necessary *feedback* to rebuild the intensity and direction of the action. These components can be found also in most theories and studies related to motivation and behavior. Starting from the individualization of these elements, the author cited above presents a general model of the motivational process that she later develops, linking it to the dynamics of human resources and work behaviors:

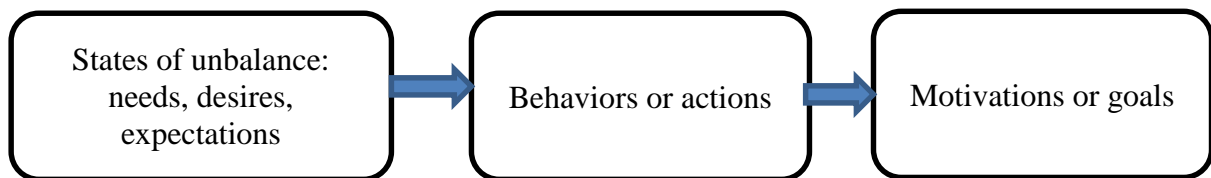


Figure 1. A possible general model of motivation (in Prodan, 1999, p.14)

In a larger sense, the concept of motivation expresses the fact that human conduct is based always on an ensemble of reasons - needs, attractions, emotions, interests, intentions, ideals - that support the performance of certain actions, facts or the expression of certain attitudes and opinions (Golu, 1973). These reasons constitute internal conditions, interposed between the external stimulus and the body reactions, mediating one behavior or another. For Sillamy (1996), motivation is an ensemble of dynamic factors that determine the conduct of an individual. This manifests as an energy support, sustaining the activity of every being. Motivation encompasses all the fundamental ways of mobilizing, activating or self-determining a person's conduct.

Biologically, motivation is based on the body's fundamental needs in which what comes first are the functional modifications generated by the permanent exchange of substances between the body and the environment, by the intake and consumption of biochemical energy stored in cells (Malim, Birch & Hayward, 2000). The complexity of motivation comes from its mix nature; motivation results from the combination of internal body demands and external environmental demands. It is previous to behavior and prepares it, becoming an affective-conative psychological factor.

In the field of professional sports, attitudes were systematized by Batterill (1980, in Epuran, Holdevici & Tonița, 2008) as shown in figure 2:

General and common:

- basic and derived positions;
- perceptive, interpretive, decisional preparatory states;
- motor pre-operational states (motor montages);
- convictions, ideals, motivation, aspirations.

<p>During training:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - willingness for effort; - desire to progress; - looking for new things; - cooperation for progress; - task-orientation; - performance-orientation; - helping other people; - objective self-assessment; - assertiveness; - discipline. 	<p>During competition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - desire for victory; - performance-orientation; - self confidence; - fighting - aggressiveness; - fear of success/failure; - anticipation of situation; - mobilization for effort; - cooperation with partners; - task-orientation; - mobility when evaluating the situations; - critical thinking; - desire for self-assertion; - accepting failure; - willingness to take chances; - respecting the audience; - fair-play.
<p>Toward the coach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - trust; - cooperation; - communication. 	<p>Toward the referees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - acceptance; - trust.
<p>Rejection attitudes: toward smoking, sexual and eating excesses, not respecting the work and rest regime, uncivilized, immoral and unfair conduct, instrumental aggressiveness.</p>	

Figure 2. Systematization of attitudes in the field of professional sports
(C. Batterill 1980, in Epuran, Holdevici & Tonița, 2008)

C. Psychological variables of top performing personality

- *Self-efficacy.* In the social-cognitive theory of personality, perceived self-efficacy represents a central variable in the self-regulating mechanisms of the body to the demands of the environment. The concept of self-efficacy (SE), proposed by Bandura (1982) represents a construct that is relevant for understanding the stress and disease protective factors. According to Bandura, self-efficacy refers to "one's trust in one's own ability to mobilize one's cognitive and motivational resources that are necessary to accomplish successfully the given tasks" (1988, p. 1). *b) Self-esteem* (Se) is a component of the cognitive scheme of the self and is defined in multiple ways. Some authors see Se as a global assessment of one's own person (Rosenberg, 1965); others think that Se is determined by the combination between the assessment of one's own value and one's ability to reach the desired goals with the feelings resulted from the assessment processes. In the opinion of the authors of this present study, self-esteem incorporates both aspects; being an attitude that describes how much a person has the tendency to self-assess herself in a positive manner, self-esteem contains both cognitive and affective elements (as all attitudes do). Self-esteem does not come from "cold" self-assessments. The human beings cannot think about themselves in a detached, emotionally uninvolved manner. They feel good or bad according to the favorable or negative terms used to judge themselves.

- *Locus of control.* The concept of locus of control (LOC) was introduced by Rotter (1966). He argues that the attitudes and beliefs regarding the causal relationship between behavior and effect represent a characteristic of a global and relatively stable personality. The concept originates in the theory of social learning and defines the way in which a person explains success or failure through internal or external causes, controllable or uncontrollable. Internal locus of control involves the belief that personal power and control can influence the events, that one's own success is due to one's own skills and work. External locus of control refers to the belief that personal power has a minimal effect on the events, which are caused by destiny, chance, or other people's power. Rotter links LOC with other variables in psychology of personality, such as: alienation, competence, autonomy, need for success, attribution.

- *Robustness.* The concept of robustness was introduced by Kobasa (1979) as an individual variable with significance in stress endurance. Robustness was defined as a personality disposition, manifest at a cognitive, emotional and behavioral level. This trait results from the perception of personal control, the value and significance of involvement and from the perception of live events and changes as being stimulating. According to the aforementioned author, robustness involves the following characteristics: *control / engagement / challenge.*

- *Control* expresses the belief that events can be controlled and influenced; this belief does not

involve naive expectations regarding a total control of the events, but more a perception of one's own ability to actively relate to the environment, to take responsibility for one's own fate. *Engagement* expresses the tendency to get involved and persist to reach an end goal, the belief that events make sense and have meaning. In other words, engagement is the ability to believe in the importance of one's own actions, to have a real interest for the various fields of life: profession, family, interpersonal relationships, social institutions. *Challenge* is a characteristic of robustness deriving from the perception of changes as a normal aspect of life that can offer chances of personal development; due to cognitive flexibility and tolerance for ambiguity, new experiences are sought and interpreted as being stimulating and beneficial. The challenge is expressed also in the tendency to direct toward the future.

- *f) Sense of coherence.* Concrete and dramatic life experiences of some of his colleagues have influenced considerably Antonovski's activity as a sociologist and researcher. Following several interviews he conducted with concentration camps survivors, he was impressed by the positive attitude and emotional balance some of them had. What determines some of the Holocaust survivors to situate themselves toward the pole of good mental and physical health of the health-disease continuum? What is the secret not just for the mental and physical endurance following a traumatic event, but also for the recovery from experiences that have annihilated mentally and physically some many thousands of people? After three decades of study in medical sociology, Antonovski, who had become one of the greatest researchers of the field, thought that he can approximate the answer. The mystery of maintaining one's health despite some extreme adversities, carries the name, according to him, of sense of coherence.

The sense of coherence (SC) is defined by the author as a global cognitive orientation that expresses the degree in which one believes that: a) external and/or internal stimuli encountered throughout one's life are explicable and predictable; b) one has resources to face the stimuli; c) the demands have a meaning, thus one's involvement and effort investment are justified. The SC is not conceptualized by the author as a personality trait in the classic sense. Despite its name, the sense of coherence does not refer to an emotional aspect of the personality. SC is "essentially a cognitive characteristic that expresses one's way of perceiving, judging and interpreting the world and oneself". No matter if it is called a sense, a belief or a coherent image of the world and self, the coherence derives from the synthesis of the three characteristics described in the definition: *comprehension/control/purpose*. *Comprehension* refers to the degree in which one can understand the situation that one goes through, attributing it a meaning. The

information generated by the situation is decoded cognitively as being clear, structured, consistent and not chaotic, redundant, accidental or inexplicable. A person with SC can anticipate future events due to their predictable nature. Even when the events happen unexpectedly, they can be explained and classified. Comprehension has nothing to do with the situation's desirability. Death, war, failure can take place, but the person can find explanations for them. *Control* is defined as one's ability to perceive the existence of resources that are available for the confrontation with stressful events. "Available resources" does not refer only to one's ability to face a situation; this category includes all the resources that the person can use in need: spouse, friends, colleagues, divinity, physician, organization, etc. Depending how much one perceives one's own personal and social resources, one will not feel the victim of destiny, even if the lived events have negative personal significance. *Purpose* refers to the perception of a necessary or wanted finality. Purpose emphasizes the importance of the individual's involvement in the process of making decisions and modeling the daily situations or the ones determining the personal destiny.

- *Optimism.* Scheier and Carver (1992) define optimism as a general, relatively stable tendency to have a positive conception on the future and life experiences. The concept is derived from the theory of behavior self-regulation, according to the anticipation of the effects. In this sense, optimism is also defined as a cognitive-motivational structure characterized by positive mental representations and expectations in regards to reaching the desired goals. The people who regard life with optimism evaluate in a positive manner their social and physical environment, they invest more effort to prevent their problems or to transform them, they savor life more, they adjust more effectively to stress and disease. The pessimistic style is described in contrast with optimism - being characterized by negative expectations regarding the outcome of one's actions. Pessimists react to problematic situations and disappointments by giving up, avoidance and denial. The repercussions of the pessimistic style are exacerbated by the association with an internal, stable and global attributional style. Pessimism during youth was proven to be correlated with a deterioration in health during middle-age adulthood, being worsened by immunological mechanisms.

The athletes' top performance can be conditioned by multiple individual cognitive and non-cognitive characteristics (that are related to their nature and their reaction and behavioral style). To make a complete inventory of these characteristics is impossible, because of: a) the complexity of the demands that top performances involve in sports; b) the inter-individual differences regarding the combination of characteristics that ensure the success



of an athlete in his or her field. I. Holdevici (2011) offers quite a comprehensive list, including *11 personality and behavior characteristics* that, in her opinion, represent the basis for the success of a champion: extroversion/introversion, stress tolerance, emotional reactivity and stability, intellectual level, strength of character, dominance, self-confidence, preoccupation for their exterior aspect and health, anxiety, neurosis, and aggressiveness. The following paragraphs present a short description of each of these characteristics in relation to the activity of a successful athlete.

Extroversion involves an easiness in making social contacts, a relaxed and confident behavior in new situations, orientation in relation to reality and a need for interpersonal contact, while *introversion* involves certain difficulties in relating and self-presenting, a tendency for isolation, subjectivity in perceiving everyday life, avoiding activities performed under new circumstances. Nevertheless, introverts have a higher level of self-control and self-regulation of their conduct.

The stress tolerance represents a body's ability to resist the action of stressful agents, and generally, the functioning of an individual, his/her ability to manage demanding situations in a way that is beneficial for his or her mental balance. For example, researchers studied stress tolerance in boxers, finding that an increase in the demands during training, and the boxers' effort to adapt to them do not reduce stress, but intensifies it, however, at the same time, it increases their stress tolerance, especially in experienced boxers. Stress tolerance in athletes can depend on certain situational, functional factors and on certain characteristics of theirs. Three forms of tolerance have been described: accidental (appearing mainly in critical situations), probable (conditioned by the presence of situational factors), and determining (when tolerance is a relatively stable characteristic of one's personality). Stress tolerance depends largely on some particularities of the central nervous system, and on certain temperamental particularities, to which certain perceptive and cognitive sets are added, differentiating the athletes.

Emotional reactivity and stability are two characteristics that are tightly connected to the ability to adapt to constant changing situations, which the athletes should possess. These two characteristics involve the ability to self-regulate one's own emotional states. How much this characteristic is present differs from one sport to another: for example, swimmers tend to be more emotionally unstable than the athletes playing sports that involve a direct body contact with the opponent.

Tightly related to emotional reactivity and stability is *neurosis*, which involves emotional and behavioral instability, a state of anxious expectation, reactions of self-denial or not accepting observations and criticism. The athletes with this characteristic

have difficulties in dealing with frustration caused by failure or criticism regarding their own activity coming from colleagues or coaches. During competition, they have bursting moments, their results being less consistent over time. This kind of athletes are less capable of a plastic adaptation of their behavior (they have a hard time resisting behavioral and action stereotypes). Especially for athletes who are offered the role of team leaders, a combination of high neurosis and extroversion is not advisable.

Even though, in a strict sense, the *intellectual level*, as well as the various characteristics of the cognitive functions, are not personality traits, taking it into consideration can be relevant for the characterization of the determinants of top athletic performance, especially when referring to an inclination toward abstract thinking (which is important for sports involving strategy). A study has identified a high level of intelligence in valuable athletes. A good intellectual level can help the professional athletes indirectly, offering them a basis for their strategies and their decision that they make during competitions, as well as for an openness toward the identification of and capitalization on various professional development opportunities.

Strength of character is the most mentioned trait when one talks about top or exceptional athletes. Raimond B. Cattell thought that people with strength of character tend to be emotionally mature, independent in their thinking and actions, firm and critical in assessing their own person and other people's, etc. It is to be understood that these characteristics represent a protection against competition stress, to which the athletes are frequently subjected.

Even though *dominance*, the behavior style directed toward the subordination of other people, seems to be more frequent among coaches than athletes, this characteristic can be a resource in some sports (such as boxing or wrestling). Still, in the case of team sports, dominance might work against the athletes who possess it, because they can be persistent in their demands, boastful, aggressive, extrapunitive in case of failure, egotistical, etc.

Self-confidence represents the engine that sustains the long run effort of a professional athlete.

Preoccupation for one's exterior aspect and health represents a characteristic related to the motivational sphere of a professional athlete, who is expected to be permanently functional, in optimal physical shape, and to avoid all behaviors or actions that would increase the risk of incapacitation for training and competition. At the same time, especially in sports with direct physical contact, this characteristic suggests a dimension referring to physical pain. Clinical studies have emphasized the existence of a type of athlete with a propensity for injuries, who in fact has some unresolved conflicts.

Also there are athletes inclined toward hypochondria and exaggeration of their own health problems, as well as athletes with a tendency to simulate a disease or injury, in order to justify their lack of motivation or failures during a competition.

Anxiety represents one's tendency to experience fear even when the reality does not justify it. In female athletes, anxiety can manifest strongly before and during competitions. When its level goes beyond a certain point, the athletes' performances can decrease in quality significantly. Many times, experiencing anxiety is more about the anticipation of a probable failure, especially when the athlete is strongly motivated by top performance.

Finally, *aggressiveness* is considered to be a necessary characteristic in certain sports, especially in the ones requiring a direct physical contact with the opponent. However, a distinction must be made between aggressiveness and competitiveness. The former can have a destructive nature, it can involve uncontrolled reactions, anger and brutality, while competitiveness can be the socially acceptable side of the same fighting tendency, but with a more active-constructive nature. Despite this distinction, empirical evidence shows a more accentuated tendency among top professional athletes to be more aggressive and to manifest their aggressiveness openly. It was suggested that by practicing a sport, one's aggressive tendencies tend to decrease, however this conclusion must be nuanced according to the athlete's predispositions, the level of physical effort, and the effect of the aggressive actions.

Discussions

For Mitrofan (2009), the athletes' personality assessment involves the administration of tests with very precise goals and that have a high level of standardization. Other authors (Șchiopu, 2002, Minulescu, 1996, Sillamy, 1998) think that the assessment of personality, in general, and of the athletes' in particular must highlight that optimal potential that can become the central core during the tactical and psychological training in professional sports. Within the great variety of expressed opinions (Epuran, Holdevici, Tonița, 2008, Holdevici, 2011, Minulescu, 1996), the large majority of professional sports experts declare their adhesion for a holistic approach of professional athletes, starting, however, from a knowledge of basic, motor and psychological resources.

Conclusions

A complete assistance endeavor for professional athletes must arrive at a very precise knowledge of the core psychological level (personality style) of an athlete, but also of the specific elements that differentiate that athlete from others. This way, one can unlock the full potential in

the athletes' mind in the line of motivation-action-top performing behavior.

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