



All in the mind

Building up Team Jersey for the Commonwealth Games is the job of sports psychologist Jeremy Cross, as Martyn White finds out

He clarifies the point: "Everyone going to the Games wants to do well, which is an obvious motivator, but there may well be things that get in the way that the athletes can't deal with, which will de-motivate them, and that's where I come in."

Sports psychologists can be used to teach sportspeople mental skills such as visualisation, concentration and positive thinking, but Jeremy, who has a PhD in Performance Psychology from Loughborough University, sees his role as more of a management consultant.

"During a game or event there are often non-performance related problems for athletes, but these problems could potentially be performance threatening. They're nothing to do with competing, but they could ultimately affect performance," continues Jeremy. "Having someone to talk through those little niggles, and to create plans for what they're going to do about those problems, will take the weight off the athlete's shoulders, allowing them to focus on meeting their objectives."

Jeremy has won numerous Island Games medals for Jersey and will be drawing on his own big event experiences when helping Team Jersey at the Commonwealths. But it's not just the athletes who he'll be mentally preparing. "Often the team officials can get more stressed than the athletes themselves, which can transfer to the athletes," he says. "So managing pressure and decision making issues together with understanding the difference between management and crisis management will be key."

But is he worried that some members of the team may see it as mere mumbo-jumbo? "Some sports are more open to it than others, as some see it as new-fangled stuff. They believe they've been coping well already, to which I say, 'That's great, carry on with what you're doing'. My role in Melbourne will generally be as a support to the athletes and management

Listening to negative emotion is not the job of a sports psychologist. Neither is hypnotising an athlete to believe they're the best in the world. For sports psychologist Jeremy Cross, who is helping Jersey's Commonwealth Games team to prepare for Melbourne 2006, it's not even about therapy.

Back in the island for an initial session with team officials and athletes, he's frequently faced with misconceptions about his role. "People often wonder what sports psychologists do and think 'oh they're going to read my mind'," he says, chuckling. "The role is often linked to being a shrink for sportspeople, but that's far from the case."

Clearly undaunted at being the first ever sports psychologist to be used by Jersey's Commonwealth Games team, he points out that sport has many different components, such as physical, technical and tactical aspects, but it has a psychological side that is often ignored. "In my view that's the most important area because if that isn't right the sportsperson won't be able to perform to the best of their ability in other areas," he says.

A Jersey born ex-professional tennis player, Jeremy now works for Lane4, a performance development company headed by ex-Olympic swimmer Adrian Moorhouse. He also finds that people expect a sports psychologist to be Mr Motivator. "You can't ever motivate someone though," he warns. "You can only create the conditions within which they are motivated. It's a subtle difference, but you can help to raise awareness of interferences and deal with them for the athlete. So I won't be coming up with amazing anecdotes so the athletes can go off and do amazing performances."

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staff who want it. I'll be a general hands-on-deck kind of person."

Involved throughout the build-up, during the event and for evaluation purposes after the Games, Jeremy sees the use of a sports psychologist as a positive step for sports in Jersey. He says: "It's another sign that the Commonwealth Games Association of Jersey are thinking ahead in terms of professionalism, especially as we have other support staff, such as doctors, that are of a great standard."

In the high-pressure environment of a Commonwealth Games, being mentally, as well as physically, prepared could well be the difference between realising an athlete's success or failure.

Team Jersey is sponsored by M&S Jersey.

24SE7EN facts about the Commonwealth Games

1. The Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games will be held from 15-26 March 2006, where 4,500 athletes will compete in 16 sports and 24 disciplines.

2. Eleven nations, including Australia, participated in the first British Empire Games in Hamilton, Canada, in 1930. There are 71 nations in the Commonwealth, representing over a third of the world's population and all are expected to compete in Melbourne in 2006, including Jersey and Guernsey.

3. Six sports featured in the first Empire Games in Hamilton, Canada in 1930 – Track & Field, Bowls, Boxing, Rowing, Swimming/Diving and Wrestling. Melbourne will present 12 individual and four team sports involving 24 disciplines.

4. Melbourne will introduce Basketball to the sports programme for the first time at the Commonwealth Games. After making their debut in Manchester, Table Tennis, Mountain Bike and Triathlon will return.

5. The Commonwealth Games Village in Parkville will become a home from home for 6,000 athletes and officials.

6. The Games Village is traditionally open for a total of 25 days, starting 10 days before the Opening Ceremony to allow athletes the necessary time to acclimatise and adjust to their surrounds before they compete. The Games Village closes three days after the Closing Ceremony to allow enough time for each team's departure.

7. Visitors to the Games are unlikely to go hungry – or thirsty. Victoria has around 3,500 restaurants with 2,500 of them in metropolitan Melbourne and 400 in the CBD. There are more than 320 wineries, 100 within one hour of the city. Visitors also have a place to stay; Melbourne has 25,000 hotel beds within 5km of the city.

Source: www.melbourne2006.com.au

