

Empirical Study of the Psychology of the Winner (On the Example of the Republic of Mordovia Athletes)

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Abstract

The paper describes the results of empirical studies on the psychological traits of the winning athletes of international and European tournaments, with the title of "Honoured Master of Sports" and "International Master of Sports" in sports such as athletics and combat sports. The study used the following psychological and acmeological diagnostic methods: author's questionnaire named "Psychology of the winner", which includes questions relating to the biographical information of athletes, intellectual and personal traits, motivation and value constructs, emotional and volitional components of personality, etc.; the "Mini-Mult" questionnaire (a shortened version of the Minnesota multidimensional personality test, MMPI), which assesses personal traits (tendency to asthenoneurotic, sociopathic, anxiety and mistrust, hypertemic options of personal development, touchiness, susceptibility to affective reactions doubt, emotional detachment degree, complexity of social interaction, activity, and excitability); the Cattell test 16 PF (Form A), which measures the traits and properties of the human person as character, temperament, intelligence, emotional, volitional, moral, communication, and other features. In addition, there were interviews conducted in a free form, as well as handwriting analysis was applied to signatures of the winning athletes. The authors justified the position that outstanding winning athletes are the acmeological objects. The authors develop a systematic description of the psychological traits of the winning athletes.

The paper demonstrates the psychological traits of the winning athletes specialising in athletics and combat sports. The paper formulates conclusions and the urgency of further study of the psychology of the winner.

Keywords: psychological training in sports, psychology of the winner, sport psychology, psychology of professional, winning athletes, acmeology, acmeological object

1. Introduction

Priority in the state policy of the Russian Federation is paid to the development of professional sports. Across the country, including in the Republic of Mordovia, there are conditions for the effective training of professional athletes in the chosen sport. In particular, the Government of the Republic of Mordovia signed an agreement on cooperation with the Ministry of Sport of the Russian Federation, which pursued clarification the powers and responsibilities in the implementation of the Federal Target Program "Development of physical culture and sports in Russia for 2006-2015" and had a positive impact on efficient implementation of state policy in physical culture and sports (The Federal Target Program, 2006).

According to statistics, as of January 01, 2014, the Republic of Mordovia has 42 sports schools, including 36 youth sports schools and 6 specialized youth sports school of Olympic reserve included in the list of the Ministry of Sports of the Russian Federation, as well as the Olympic Training Centre Republic of Mordovia for Race Walking named after V. M. Chegin, the School of highest sports art, the Republican Centre for Sports Training for Teams of the Republic of Mordovia, which involved a total of more than 29,300 people. These figures indicate the coordinated work of the regional authorities to implement the Strategy for the Development of Physical Culture and Sports in the Russian Federation for the period up to 2020 approved by the Federal Government as of August 07 2009 (Regulation of the Government of the Russian Federation, 2009).

The Republic of Mordovia has all the required conditions for psycho-acmeological, medical and methodological support for training highly skilled athletes able to achieve high sports results. Over the last 12 years, the Republic of Mordovia was represented in the national team of the Russian Federation by athletes involved in athletics and combat sports. Among all, during the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, Mordvinian athletes won 1 gold and 1 silver medal, during the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, athletes were awarded by 2 gold and 1 bronze medals, during the 2012 competitions in London, the treasury of the Russian Federation got 2 gold, 1 silver, and 1 bronze medals from the Mordvinian athletes. In addition, the athletes of Olympic Training Centre in race walking named after V. M. Chegin and Specialized youth sports school of Olympic reserve named after A. V. Mishin gained high achievements at the World Championships and European tournaments.

Victories of Mordovia athletes at the Olympics 2004-2012 demonstrated the dynamics of sports achievements serving as the basis for a study aimed at investigating the psychology of winning athletes.

2. Literature Review

Approach to the problem of the winner's psychology is impossible without the analysis of the theoretical and methodological foundations of the problems on establishing a professional, which is reflected in the works of local teachers and psychologists, such as E. F. Zeer, E. A. Klimov, L. M. Mitin, N. S. Pryazhnikov, S. A. Chistyakov et al. The most complete reflection of the essential individual traits of a professional, the regularities of formation and development of such a structural component of the personality as career orientation, can be found in the psychological and acmeological scientific theories and concepts, such as: psychological theory of personality (Antsyferova, L. I., Myasishev, V. N., Platonov et al.); psychological theories of abilities (Druzhinin, V. N., Il'in, E. P., Teplov et al.); general psychological concepts of the developing individual's potential (Altschuller, G. S., Guilford, G., Jackson, F., Markov, V. N., Petlenko et al.), the concept of researching careers (I. P. Lotova, A. K. Markov, et al.); theory of career progression (Egorshin, A. P., Mall, E. G., Pryazhnikov, N. S., Mogilevkin et al.), and career strategy (Romanov, V. L.); theory of professional orientation of a person (Gonobolin, F. N., Dodonov, V. I., Zabrodin, Yu. M., Sosnowsky, B. A., Klimov, E. A., Kuzmina, N. V., Krutetsky, V. A., Lomov, B. F., Markova, A. K.); theory, revealing the features of career orientation of a person (Zhdanovich, A. A., Kiselyova, E. V., Ovseychik, N. V., Shane, E.); theory of career orientation (Kanamatova, A. K., Mokritskaya, A. O., Shchelokova, E. G.) (Mokritskaya, A. O., 2011).

After analysing all the available research in the field of psychology and acmeology, one can conclude that at the initial stage, psychological and acmeological support will be required in the form of the structure of sustained support for becoming a professional. A promising option of the psychological support may be the psycho-acmeological model of career orientation for the individual, developed by D. V. Zhuina, comprising of 5 sections (Zhuina, D. V., 2014): 1) theoretical and methodological; 2) target; 3) meaningful; 4) organizational and developmental; and 5) assessment and effective sections.

In order to confirm the scientific validity of the developed psycho-acmeological model of career orientation for the individual within the theoretical and methodological section, the main approaches, theories, concepts and methodological principles forming the basis of the model, are covered.

The target section of psycho-acmeological developed model has a set goal to optimize the process of formation and development of career orientation for the individual.

To achieve this goal, it was necessary to define the very essence of the concept of "career orientation of the individual". In order to do this in the meaningful section, we defined the main components of the career orientation of the individual with their definition. Thus, analysing the psychological and acmeological literature on the issue of the research, we identified a number of studies on the definition of value-semantic (Shchelokova, E. G.) and socio-psychological (Mokritskaya, A. O.) content of the career orientation concept (Mokritskaya, A. O., 2011), (Schelokova, E. G., 2011). Nevertheless, we believe that this phenomenon is poorly understood in terms of ontology, content, and structure of the concept. The general concept of career orientation for the individual is not developed. There is no theoretical model of psychological and acmeological career orientation;

the psycho-acmeological factors of managers' career are unexplored; methodological tools are not developed; the main components of the career orientation are not described.

We have developed a new definition of career orientation for the individual, by which we mean a complex structural component of the overall orientation of the person, representing a multidimensional process orientation and meaning to human activities in the professional field, integrative traits including stable career image, formed career orientation and career potential, stable career motivation, mediated by the professionalization process.

The developing organizational section represents peculiarities of psycho-acmeological support of the career orientation for the individual in terms of activity of the Acmeological centre, being the innovative structure, which is part of the Centre for collective use "Mordovia basic centre of teacher education" (the city of Saransk). The purpose of the Centre is to provide sociocultural and psychological-pedagogical support to professional and personal development of subjects in different fields, and promotion of human resources in the region. In accordance with the purpose, one of the main tasks of the Centre is to support complex formation and development of career orientation for subjects of educational space at pedagogical university, scientific and methodological support of career guidance and employment assistance, career planning and development (development, testing and introduction of modern professional orientation, socio-adaptation technologies and planning and career development technologies) (Zhuina, D. V., 2011).

3. Method

Currently, the psychological science pays sufficient attention to research on the study of the psychological training of athletes during the training sessions and competitive activities (Maydokina, L. G., Kudashkina, O. V., 2014, 2011).

Psychological factors in the training process and training the athlete for competition are great importance both in the papers by the experts in the field of sport theory (V. N. Platonov, N. G. Ozolin, Zh. K. Kholodov, L. P. Matveev, V. S. Kuznetsov et al.), and in the works of sports psychologists (A. V. Alekseev, G. D. Babushkin, G. D. Giessen, G. D. Gorbunov, V. N. Nepopalov, A. Ts. Puni, A. V. Rodionov, G. I. Savenkov, V. F. Sopov, O. A. Chernikova, et al.) (E. P. Il'in, 2011; V. A. Kurashvili, 2008; V. F. Sopov, 2010).

A. V. Rodionov believes that the psychological training of an athlete means an organized, controlled process of realization of athlete's potential mental capabilities in the objective results adequate to these capabilities (Psychology of Physical Culture and Sports, 2010).

G. D. Gorbunov defines the psychological training as the process of formation and improvement of significant sports personality traits and their underlying mental qualities. The task of psychological training in everyday activities becomes more narrow and specific - to create athlete's mental state favourable for the success of training and competition (G. D. Gorbunov, 2012).

According to N. N. Setyaeva, the psychological training helps to maximize the use of the athlete's potential to improve the efficiency and reliability of their competitive activities. The effectiveness and reliability of competitive activity of an athlete is determined by their not only diverse preparedness, but also readiness to a specific competition (N. N. Setyaeva, A. V. Fursov, 2010).

G. D. Gorbunov indicates that the psychological training is primarily an educational process aimed at personal development by establishing an appropriate system of relationships. This allows transferring fragile mental state into a stable one, i. e. into an individual trait. In this case, the psychological training of the athlete to a long training process is carried out, firstly, due to the continuous development and improvement of the grounds for sports training and, secondly, by creating favourable attitudes towards various aspects of the training process (G. D. Gorbunov, 2012).

According to V. R. Malkin, the psychological work with athletes at the initial stage of sports training involves the formation of a stable motivation in sports, building self-esteem, forming an optimal aspiration level, goals for manifesting volitional effort during physical stress, forming the ability to concentrate and develop operative memory (V. R. Malkin, 2008).

We shall agree with V. N. Nepopalov and A. A. Magomedov that psychological training is an important component for athlete winning the competition. The work of coaches shall study and take into account the individual psychological traits of athletes and environment. In addition, coaches shall maintain contact with the environment in their work. The ability of an athlete to overcome timely the aroused difficulties is largely due to the high development of the athlete in all aspects of their psyche, especially thinking, memory, will, attention, and imagination. Therefore, the continuous improvement of these traits shall be the goal of psychological support (V. N. Nepopalov, A. Magomedov, 2009).

G. I. Savenkov includes the following elements into the structure of psychological training of an athlete:

1. Psychological passport of the chosen sport, the system requirements for the psyche and personality of an athlete engaged in the sport determining the achievement of high sports results. This structure element is characterized by the traits of personality and psyche, to which one shall strive in the process of sports perfection.
2. Psychological traits of an athlete as a factor in assessing mental qualities and personality traits exhibited by the athlete. According to the author, it is not possible to carry out psychological training without the knowledge of the athlete's individuality, without regard certain psychological qualities (congenital or acquired during life) possessed by the athlete.
3. The general psychological training of an athlete as a basis of formation of personality in the process of sports training. The structure of this type of training is based on moral, volitional, emotional, intra-group (communicative) and intellectual types of training. Each of these types solves specific problems.
4. Psychological training for specific training as a system of psychological and methodological activities related to the following:
 - a) the formation of the target goal for the given training;
 - b) the organization of the athlete's attention, which is aimed on physical actions performed by the athlete with the program of consciousness orientation;
 - c) the psychological analysis of the performed training.
5. Precompetitive psychological training of the athlete as a system of measures for the mobilization of the athlete's readiness to a specific competition.
6. Pre-start psychological training is aimed at organizing the life and activity of the athlete, their attention to the pre-start period for competitive activity, the formation of a competitive spirit, and setting to achieve high results.
7. Directly competitive psychological training associated with the development of the athlete's ability to think tactically and operationally in the highly competitive struggle, the ability to regulate arbitrarily their emotional states, reactions, and relationships.
8. Post-competition psychological training aimed at the analysis of successful and unsuccessful competitive activity by individual parties for controlling mental and motor actions, for solving challenges and super tasks assigned to the athlete (G. I. Savenkov, 2006).

The analysis of the problem of psychological training in sports demonstrated that science developed theoretical and methodological basis for the psychological support of an athlete. However, the problems of the winner's psychology are understudied.

In order to answer the question on what is characteristic of the winner's psychology, one shall conduct a psycho-acmeological study of the winner's psychology. These studies were initiated based scientific and practical innovation "Acmeological centre" at Mordovia State Pedagogical Institute. The prerequisite of this study is the following: the traits of psychology of the winner can be determined by studying the psychological traits of those who are eligible called the winners (A. A. Derkach, V. G. Zazykin, 2003). These are primarily the Heroes of Russia, heroes awarded by the Order of "Courage", and athletes-champions. An empirical study was carried out for this purpose in the form of psycho-acmeological survey of 15 winners of major international tournaments in athletics and martial arts with sports titles "Honoured Master of Sports", "International Master of Sports", and having solid sports experience from 14 to 25 years, indicating that their sports victories are not a matter of chance. Athletes-winners are acmeological subjects since they achieved outstanding results by achieving peaks in their personal and professional development. This results in the fact that such a sample is quite representative from acmeological point of view, as outstanding athletes in any sport comprise about five per cent of all those who practice it.

The study of winning athletes' psychology used the following methods: author's questionnaire named "Psychology of the winner"; the questionnaire "Mini-Mult" (a shortened version of the Minnesota multidimensional personality test, MMPI); the Cattell test 16 PF (Form A). In addition, there were interviews conducted in a free form, as well as handwriting analysis was applied to signatures of the winning athletes (V. G. Zazykin, 2010).

Particularly informative is the author's questionnaire named "Psychology of the winner", which includes the following questions:

- 1) Full name, age.
- 2) Sporting achievements, awards.

- 3) Experience in sports activities.
- 4) What was the first step of your sports career?
- 5) Who influenced on, helped the development of your sports career?
- 6) Do you know what does the psychological training of the athlete imply?
- 7) What role does the psychological training of the athlete play in the sports training system?
- 8) Rate from 1 to 10 the value of psychological training of a highly skilled athlete.
- 9) What is the content of psychological training of the athlete in the sports training system?
- 10) Is there anybody to carry targeted psychological training for you in the sports training system?
- 11) Name the content of psychological training of the athlete in the sports training system.
- 12) List the qualities of personality, character traits that, in your opinion, are in demand in your sport.
- 13) List the qualities that, in your opinion, contribute to achieving high results in your sport.
- 14) List the ways of development the psychological qualities required for your sport.
- 15) Suggest psychological description of the winner (3-5 sentences)
- 16) Are you satisfied with the terms of training sessions?
- 17) Rate the satisfaction degree with the school classes from 1 to 5.
- 18) List the professionally important qualities of a coach, contributing to achievement of high sports results.
- 19) List the qualities of a coach, preventing achievement of high sports results.
- 20) Name the conditions, which, in your opinion, contribute to the achievement of certain results in sports activities

4. Results

The scientific and practical centre "Acmeological centre", being the innovative structure of Mordovia basic teacher training centre at Mordovia State Pedagogical Institute named after M. E. Evseviev, conducted an empirical study of the psychology of the winner. The study involved 30 athletes of different age - winners of international and European tournaments in athletics and martial art, having sports titles of "Honoured Master of Sports" and "International Master of Sports».

The results of the diagnostic based on the "Mini-Mult" questionnaire (a shortened version of the Minnesota multidimensional personality test, MMPI) are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Properties of the individual winning athlete by the Mini-Mult questionnaire

Basic scales	Track and field athletes, %	Combat athletes, %
Hypochondriasis (Hs)	0	0
Depression (D)	2 (20%)	1 (20%)
Hysteria (Hy)	0	0
Psychopathy (Pd)	0	0
Paranoia (Pa)	0	0
Psychasthenia (Pt)	0	0
Schizoidness (Se)	0	0
Hypotension (Ma)	8 (80%)	4 (80%)

According to Table 1, such individual feature as hypotension dominates among track and field athletes (8 people - 80%), manifesting in high spirits regardless of the circumstances, characterized by energy, activity, vigour, and vitality. Such personalities like to work with often changes, and readily contact with people.

The individual traits found in track and field athletes extremely rarely include depression (2 people - 20%) inherent in diligent, conscientious, moral and dutiful people, not able to decide on their own, having no self-confidence, and who fall into despair at the slightest failure.

Similar results were obtained on the sample of combat athletes. They are also characterized by hypotension (4 people – 80%). Rarely individual traits include depression (1 person – 20%).

Perhaps these results are explained by great physical and emotional stress experienced by the athletes during training. These conditions tend to lead to lower mood, loss of the ability to experience pleasure, loss of interest in usual activities, and as a consequence - to depression.

In order to study personality traits and features, reflecting the relatively stable ways of human interaction with the world and oneself, the method of "The 16-factor Cattell test" (Form A) was applied. According to the data obtained in the analysis of test results, the following results were received (see Table 2).

Table 2. Individual traits of the winning athlete winning by the 16-factor Cattell test

Factor	Combat athletes, %		Track and field athletes, %	
	"+" pole	"-" pole	"+" pole	"-" pole
A	0	2 (40%)	0	1 (10%)
B	0	0	5 (50%)	0
C	0	0	0	0
E	2 (40%)	0	0	0
F	0	0	0	0
G	3 (60%)	0	3 (30%)	0
H	0	0	2 (20%)	0
I	0	3 (60%)	0	1 (10%)
L	0	0	0	0
M	0	0	0	8 (80%)
N	0	0	0	0
O	0	0	0	0
Q1	0	0	0	0
Q2	0	0	0	0
Q3	0	0	0	0
Q4	0	0	0	0

Table 2 based on the personality profile (positive profile meaning), demonstrates the predominance of the G factor (high super-ego) among combat athletes - 60% of the subjects. These people have strong character, honesty, perseverance, poise, responsibility, insistence, persistence, determination, composure, sense of duty, perseverance in achieving the goal, accuracy, and are business oriented. 40% of the athletes (2 people) demonstrate prevalence of the E factor (dominance). They are characterized by domination, authoritativeness, obstinacy, self-confidence, assertiveness, aggressiveness, stubbornness, conflict, wilful, instability, independence, and inflexibility.

Track and field athletes revealed the predominance of the B factor (high intelligence) by positive personality profile - 5 people (50%). This factor is characterized by such personality traits as self-discipline, intelligence, abstract thinking, vision, and short reaction time. 3 people (30%) have predominant G factor (high super-ego). 2 people (20%) have dominant H factor (Parmia), which is characterized by such traits as courage, enterprise, social boldness, risk tolerance, sociability, activity, and responsiveness.

Negative personality profile of combat athletes have dominant I factor (Harria) - 3 people (60%). These people have low sensitivity, severity, rationality, realism judgments, practicality, some brutality, courage, self-confidence, and responsibility. 2 people (40%) are characterized by the A factor (Schizothymia), distinct with invisibility, isolation, criticality, inflexibility, defending own ideas, and objectivity.

In terms of negative personality profile, track and field athletes demonstrate dominating M factor (Praxernia) - 8 people (80%). These people are characterized by practicality, strength, honesty, integrity, and management of the objective reality. 1 person in each group (10%) manifested the A factor (Schizothymia) and the I factor (Harria).

Thus, the personal traits of athletes definitely include strong character, integrity, perseverance, balance, responsibility, perseverance, persistence, determination, persistence in achieving goals, practicality, strength, and honesty. These qualities determine the winners in different sports.

5. Discussion

The results of the survey allowed formulation of the following conclusions. The majority of respondents began their career with training in the sports section (15 people – 100 %). A significant part of the participants (12

people - 80%) note the influence of the coach on the formation of their sports career. 3 people (20%) claim that career advancement was influenced by their loved ones (family, friends, etc.).

The question "Do you know what the psychological training of the athlete implies?" the majority of respondents answered positively (13 people – 86.6 %). All the participants noted the importance of psychological training in the training sessions. At the same time, a significant portion of respondents answered the question "Please rate the value of psychological training for a highly skilled athlete on a scale from 1 to 10" put the highest marks: 2 people (13.3%) - 8 points; 2 people - 9 (13.3%) points; 11 people (73.4%) - 10 points).

The questionnaire offered the participants to reveal the contents of psychological training of the athlete in the sports training, which caused some difficulties. According to them, the psychological training of the athlete comes to motivation to win, self-control, and willpower.

A series of questions was offered relating to the description of the personal traits of the winner. The most common responses are the following: "perseverance, persistence," "commitment," "hard work", "patience", "fortitude", "mental stability". In addition, the subjects offered psychological traits of the winner, among they often encountered: "hard work", "courage, the ability to go to the end, never give up", "win at all costs", "ability to sacrifice everything to achieve this goal", "thirst for victory", "patience", "self-confidence", "continuous self-work", and "belief in success".

Analysing the results of the "Signature" methodology the following data was obtained: the majority of athletes (11 people - 73.3%) demonstrated in their signature the initial letter of their name, which indicates an effort to emphasize the importance, and somewhat high self-esteem. The signature is sprawling, occupying a lot of space, which characterizes the desire to emphasize their status, their capabilities, and even expand them.

A significant proportion of athletes (13 people - 86.7%) are noted for the presence of emphasizing arcs and strokes at the end of their signatures, indicating a desire to stand out, to draw attention to them.

Some of the respondents (3 people - 20%) are distinguished with undecipherable, complex signature with lots of wavy and complicate lines, which is the evidence of variability, the desire to live for oneself, perhaps selfishness. Sometimes it is a manifestation of inflated self-esteem, emphasizing their status, "statehood".

The signature of 2 people (13.3%) is characterized by sharp, energetic vertical lines, which is a sign of dominance.

Thus, the results of the "Signature" revealed the winner, primarily, as having the desire to dominate, to emphasize own importance, the desire to stand out, to draw attention.

The empirical study will define the main personal qualities inherent in the winning athletes: activity, energy, communication, diligence, integrity, strong character, perseverance, responsibility, perseverance, persistence, determination, perseverance in achieving the goal, the desire to dominate, and the desire to stand out.

The prospects for further psychological and acmeological studies of winners determine the object and the methodical expansion of space, identification of the factor structure of the individual winner, and the definition of correlations.

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