

Sport Psychological Fitness (SPF)

Text: Maurice Aronstam, Monja Human, Dr Melissa Jacobs and Dr Ina Rothmann

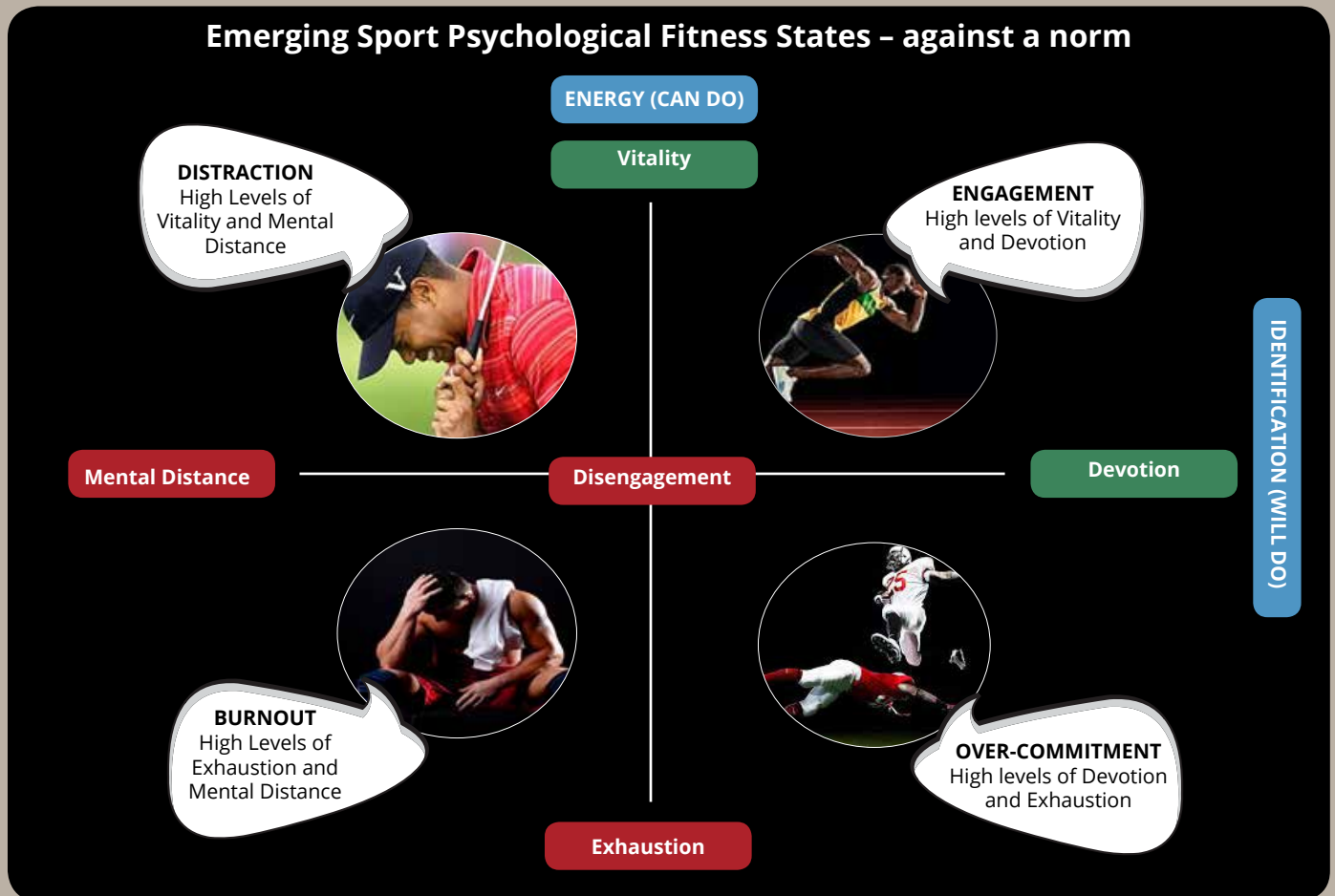
It is commonly accepted that the psychological aspects associated with sport strongly impacts on sport performance. Opportunities are constantly sought to gain the competitive edge over opponents. One of the tools available to athletes, coaches and consultants is to get a measurement of some of these psychological aspects. That is where psychological and psychometric assessments can play a role.

Athletes train to be the best they can be, but this does not happen within a vacuum. An important factor determining the success of an athlete(s) is the sport climate or environment in which they function daily. This sport climate comes with its unique set of physical, mental and emotional demands. How effectively we cope with the sport demands and utilise our sport resources determines if there is a balance between the energy we invest and energy we get back.

A recently developed tool measuring **Sport Psychological Fitness (SPF)**, gives you a measure of the athlete's perceived psychological fitness; a state characterised by high levels of psychological energy (emotional and mental) and psychological motivation (desire).

When there is a balance between the energy invested to cope with the high physical, emotional and mental demands of sport, the result in return is a high level of psychological energy (in the form of vitality for the sport) and high psychological motivation (in the form of desire/devotion for the sport). This results in high engagement with all aspects of the sport. When the sport climate requires more psychological energy than the athlete is gaining back, the result is the risk of over-commitment (low energy with high desire/devotion), distraction (high energy but low desire/devotion) or burnout (low energy and low desire/devotion).

The following four states make up the SPF profile; engagement, over-commitment, distraction, and burnout.



The sport engagement state leads to positive energy, enthusiasm and a positive identification with the sports' activities. The three negative states, namely over-commitment, distraction and burnout, has characteristic behaviours associated with each and can lead to sub-optimal sport performance. The SPF gives a measure of all four states, and offers an opportunity to proactively take steps to improve current states of an athlete. This will result in a more positive balance between the psychological energy invested by the athlete versus the energy gained through the athletes' sporting experience.

The proactive intervention is typically facilitated in conjunction with the athlete/teams' management staff (coach, psychologist, team doctor, trainer or manager). The areas addressed typically include strengthening the use of the resources available to the athlete in his/her sports climate. Some of these resources include:

- coach relationship/support
- teammate relationships
- communication
- coaching style
- role clarity
- performance management
- availability and quality of physical resources

So if you are looking for a sport-related wellness tool that aims for improved sport performance, look no further than the SPF.

Who should use the SPF?

1. Organisations, teams and coaches looking for:
 - a. Improved sport performance
 - b. Assertive psychological and behavioural responses
 - c. Reduced risk behaviour
 - d. Prevention of injuries
 - e. Reduced turnover of personnel
2. Athletes looking to:
 - a. Manage stress and stress-related ill health symptoms
 - b. Increase sport engagement levels
 - c. Reduce risk of over-commitment, distraction and burnout
 - d. Improve sport commitment behaviour levels