

SPORT PSYCHOLOGY CONSULTANT AND ATHLETES MAKE A WINNING COMBINATION

Preparing mentally and physically for Olympic speed skating competitions go hand-in-hand

MADISON, WI– February 2010 – For U.S. Olympic short track speed skaters Katherine Reutter and Travis Jayner, preparing for the most challenging event of their lives has required training their bodies and minds.

Reutter and Jayner began working with sport psychology consultant Nicole Detling Miller, Ph.D., two years ago to find ways to deal with problems that were hindering their abilities to reach their maximum potential. Dr. Miller, a professor in the Exercise and Sport Science Department at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, was hired by U.S. Speed skating to work with the entire team.

Reutter, 21, acknowledges she used to lack confidence when she stepped onto the ice. Her confidence issues escalated after she became the U.S. National Speed skating Champion in 2008 and wasn't sure how to stay at the top of her game. "I am the type of person who needs a plan," Reutter said. "I like to go into a race feeling like I am in control."

Dr. Miller, a member of the Association for Applied Sport Psychology, said Reutter's confidence issues were evident as soon as they started working together, so they began a series of trial and error strategies to determine the best solution. Tools used by sport psychology consultants include visualization, relaxation and concentration skills. "I've been really impressed with how far she's come in a couple of years," Dr. Miller said.

For Jayner, 27, some of the same problems with confidence existed. But he was determined to overcome the troubles plaguing his performance and wanted to utilize every tool available to give him that extra "edge."

"I wanted to become a mental monster- whether there was someone trying to psyche me out or not," Jayner explained. "I'm always trying to evolve as a person and I'm hoping I won't have to come back and go over these same issues again with Nicole."

He appears to have achieved his goal, as Dr. Miller said he is the most mentally improved speed skater on the U.S. team. With so many variables in speed skating – including an athlete potentially causing another skater to fall during competition – it is difficult to plan for every situation. Even so, it is advantageous to have to right tools available for what is controllable, Dr. Miller said.

And it isn't only the athletes who benefit from Dr. Miller's expertise. The speed skating coaches, too, utilize her sport psychology training to help them learn to managed the pressures that come with coaching..

"There are some weeks when I am talking to the coaches every day and I help them with their own challenges," explained Dr. Miller. "Coaches use me as much as the athletes."

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Reutter and Jayner have been physically preparing for the Olympic Games since they were youngsters learning to skate. Now they have the mental techniques necessary to become stronger competitors.

“Being physically ready is only part of the package,” Reutter explained. “By the time you get to the Olympic level, it comes down to who is focused and who doesn’t let their nerves get in the way. The better you get, everyone else is at that same level, too. And you need every advantage available to win.”

The Association for Applied Sport Psychology

The Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) promotes the ethical practice, science and advocacy of sport and exercise psychology. Founded in 1986, AASP is an international, multidisciplinary, professional organization that offers certification to qualified professionals who practice sport and exercise psychology. With more than 1,200 members in 28 countries, AASP is a worldwide leader, sharing research and resources with the public via its Web site, www.appliedsportpsych.org.

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