

# THE PSYCHOLOGY OF HUMAN EFFORT

By Dr. PAUL MARTIN

Under the influence of materialistic doctrines, the theory of effort has often been defined in various educational systems, even in physical training as being purely mechanical, thus entailing solely an expense of physical energy, the main idea being to obtain a conclusive result of the physical or psychological order.

However, human effort does not depend on strength alone, it is the outcome of a vital state based on spontaneity and immanency. In physical education the psychological importance of human effort should not be overlooked on the plea that the aim to be reached is to realize performances. These performances are not merely the direct outcome of certain types of muscular superiority and physical and physiological fitness obtained by muscular training. Will power is essential and of prime importance in the training of the athlete.

It is therefore necessary to specify the conditions under which will power should be exercised seeing that it is the main spring of all effort.

By analysis, the main reasons which are the causes of failure and of breaking the spirit of young sportsmen seemingly earmarked to achieve brilliant performances, are enlightening us as to the principles which are the fundamental bases of this training.

The principle is this : « It is impossible to want what one does not know ».

An incomplete knowledge of the purpose to be realized is the chief cause of failure. It is not so much the display of strength which renders effort successful but, the exact knowledge of the aim to be achieved.

Each different form of sports training is characterized by definite, distinct stages. To each stage corresponds the amount of knowledge to be assimilated. The teacher who studies the question of effort or sport entirely from a speculative standpoint in order to grasp the full meaning of the question should primarily concern himself with the building up of all the separate elements into a connected whole but this concerns the teacher alone. The man who practises any type of sports has always to submit himself to this gradation which could be called pragmatic, we must lay stress on the importance of acquiring the degree of knowledge corresponding to each stage. This knowledge always runs parallel to effort and knowing the superior stages does not offer any practical value to the sportsman whose effort develops according to his experience. This, it appears to us is the secret of the steadfastness and endurance which places the true sportsman beyond the reach of depression during the initial stages of his training.

In skiing, there are spectacular performances which a skiing amateur is bound to admire from the onset. For the prospective skier, this admiration must not become the informative element of his training. It would be futile to presume that a complete beginner could, without discrimination, launch in the field of spectacular display. Whether he wishes it or not, in order to attain efficiency, the tyro must first of all master the rudiments of the skiing technique. However, commonplace and trivial the rules may seem to him, the beginner must realize that the skiing technique consists of balancing on one foot then, in order to be able to go forward or to turn, he must learn the importance of transferring his weight from one foot to the other.

For certain people, exceptionnally gifted with an inborn intuition, we cannot deny

that there is the suggestive power of imitative example. Even these exceptions must conform to the rules we have explained above, for intuition is an inborn knowledge which allows one to perceive more rapidly the various elements than the usual knowledge acquired through the complete discursive process of reasoning. Thus, in sportive education nothing can take the place of these factors :

1. The full consciousness of the immediate object to aim at.

2. The need to reduce the difficulties to the primary stage of knowledge.

Already at this stage, will power comes into play since it is the only means to check the physical effort till one can concentrate on the primary particular point reached at the beginning of the training.

For example, only the sportsman who fully understands the truth of these principles can submit himself to the tedium of learning breathing exercises, these are necessary while in training for running or swimming. In order to obtain a satisfactory result from the very first exercise, one must be convinced of the importance of this simple rule and one must concentrate one's full attention on this matter. The same principle is to be applied in relation to the second rule concerning relaxing or floating while in training for running or swimming.

Considerable will-power is needed as well as patience, in order to devote the necessary amount of time to face and overcome these elemental stages until one has mastered them. This display of will power is a direct proof of the truth of these principles as well as the enlightened knowledge concerning human effort.

One is often struck by the impression of ease, a kind of tirelessness given by Nordic people, especially the Swedes, Norwegians or Finns when participating in various international and Olympic competitions where their champions have achieved brilliant performances. A fact, generally unknown, is that their performances are a practical illustration of the principles mentioned above. In these countries, these maxims are applied with all the strictness of logic which regards physical training and education as a rite. The champions of these countries have the perseverance to carry out training exercises for days, weeks, or even months before-

hand, the tedium of which would discourage the sportsmen of Southern regions. An example of this is the daily walk of five or ten kilometres at a moderate pace, while concentrating only on the two main points : the lengthening of the stride and breathing correctly through the nose, that is, deeply and slowly ; all this carried out while relaxing produces efficiency and ease of style.

The champions who understand the importance of these elementary principles apply such simple practice even on the day of the competition. We cannot stress too much the importance of this point since the tendency is so common amongst sportsmen to complicate from the onset the diversity of the functions of human nature.

During training it is most important not to face all the difficulties at once, but on the contrary, to sort them out in logical analysis. Psychology and experience of life teach us that we must treat all difficulties and obstacles that we may encounter in the same manner. We must learn to endure suffering, for, sooner or later, one must undergo this experience. Suffering becomes bearable as long as we accept it gradually. Why then, take on today the burden of to-morrow's sufferings which may never materialize or may be completely different from what we actually imagined.

Most of the people who lose courage long before they achieve the results they are capable of are victims of a delusion which makes them persist in facing all their difficulties at once until they persuade themselves of the sheer impossibility of attaining the desired performance.

We are readily influenced by the process of our mind working in space-time as says Bergson ; we develop the bad habit of viewing our difficulties in their ensemble instead of analysing and judging them quantitatively instead of analysing and judging them qualitatively. A true sportsman must not become slave of these concepts of space and time though all his performances take place in space. He must, by using his reason and will-power submit himself to the notion of time and though, this may seem paradoxal, one can safely affirm that the best method to beat a record is to practise the art of taking « one's time ».

In order to climb a mountain, it is useless to race or display a great outburst of energy

at the start. The outcome of effort does not depend on hurry or acceleration of movement but on the display of sustained and progressive effort executed through the course of time.

The psychology of effort, as we see it, is based on this sense of gradation throughout the sportive education.

The philosophers of the middle ages had already proved that there exist a cumulative and progressive continuity in all things implicated in natural evolution. They used to say : « *Natura non facit saltus* » (nature does not proceed forward in leaps and bounds but moves slowly). This principle can be applied to training in all forms of sports since we can affirm, that it has never yet happened that an athlete was able to reach fame after his initial performance without passing through this intermediary stages. If, ever an athlete should reach an attainment infinitely superior to his actual stage of development, this phenomenon would be looked upon as a fluke purely accidental, and not considered as a genuine attainment since he could not repeat this achievement successfully twice running.

From this statement, one sees, that previous to the actual physical training, the practice of the sustained effort becomes a training of the mind. If the physiological side is comparatively simple on account of

it being based on hygiene and regular practice, one must not forget that the psychological element of sportive education is infinitely more complex, placed on a higher level, since it calls for the double action of the intelligence and willpower : the intelligence is the faculty of assimilating a knowledge acquired from the outside while willpower is a faculty of strictly carrying out an assimilated knowledge.

One cannot desire what one does not know. The experience in sports allows us to confirm that, the man who has striven to direct his effort towards a clearer understanding of the obstacle, while leading it back to its initial stages, must reach a high level of performance, provided he is in normal physiological conditions.

What makes the value and superiority of training in American colleges, is undoubtedly, the strictness with which the physical training instructors maintain the enthusiasm of their pupils in the understanding of the various stages of sport effort. The man who, in the presence of the pupils belonging to primary schools, could sneer at the importance given to a primary school certificate, by speaking to them of the difficulties in obtaining degrees in either medicine or mathematics, such a man would be entirely lacking in psychological insight. A school certificate has the same value in a child's mind as an University degree to an adult.

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