

Sports Psychologist

Spotlight

Athletes face challenges that are not only physically taxing but mentally too. Sports psychologists understand this and can help athletes reach their peak by looking into how the brain's functions influence an athlete's performance. To do this, they need to know about not only psychology but physiology and the technology that aids their practice as well.

Personal Connection

Psychologists need people skills above all else. Sometimes they have to help people in a fragile state, and it takes finesse to guide someone through a tough time. Athletes especially can be prone to mental difficulties that stem from the pressure they're under. It's also important to have a desire to dig into the psychology behind even seemingly small actions or decisions.

- Do you want a career that will allow you to work with people to help them become the best versions of themselves—as athletes?
- Do you want to work in sports but not as a professional athlete?
- Are you curious to learn more about not just psychology, but physiology?
- Do people come to you when they need advice or help getting through hard times?

Other Connections

Even if you don't end up becoming a sports psychologist, there are many different career paths that are involved in and are a part of helping care for people, including:

- Working in rehabilitation and helping athletes who have been injured or have illnesses in order to regain range of movement and control their pain as a physical therapist
- Helping families deal with relationship and behavioral issues by finding long-term solutions to mental and emotional disorders and a wide variety of relationship issues as a family / marital therapist
- Studying athletes' bodily responses to training and exercise to assist them in enhancing and refining their athletic performance and overall fitness as a sports physiologist
- Working with individuals, groups and communities to improve mental health as a therapist
- Taping or bracing athletes to prevent injuries before a game, evaluating injuries, giving emergency care, creating rehabilitation plans and going through them with injured athletes, and recording injuries, healing and recovery processes as an athletic trainer

Fun Facts

Some fun facts about psychology:

The scientific study of the human mind is over one hundred years old: One of the first studies in sports psychology was conducted way back in 1898, when a psychologist discovered that cyclists perform better in a competition than when cycling alone.

[Read more here.](#)

Some games are more mentally challenging than others: Every sport has a challenging aspect, but did you know that some of the most mentally taxing are baseball and tennis? [Read more here.](#)

There are some great mental tricks for improving athletic performance: Did you know that research has shown that having a pre-performance routine helps athletes in certain sports perform better?

[Read more here.](#)



Sports Psychologist



STEM Connection

Here are just a few ways that new and emerging technologies are transforming the work of sports psychologists:

- Virtual reality simulators allow psychologists to create environments that can challenge athletes and help them train their minds: Virtual reality is an excellent way to train because it provides a way to tailor the experience to the type of sport and treatment an athlete needs. [Read more.](#)
- Eye tracking gives psychologists a unique window into the minds of athletes: Our eyes reveal a lot about us, and by using eye tracking technology, psychologists can break down an athlete's thought process and how it may affect their performance. [Read more.](#)
- Brain computer interfaces can help athletes improve performance: A relative newcomer to the world of sports psychology, BCI aims to reveal what goes on in the brain while an athlete is competing or performing. [Read more.](#)
- Neurophenomenology looks at the connection between neuron activity and physical experience: A slightly more complex area of study is neurophenomenology, which could potentially provide insight into how an athlete's brain organizes activities during a sporting event. [Read more.](#)

Articles, Videos, and Podcasts of Interest

The day to day work as a sports psychologist is fascinating! Sports psychologists weigh in about the specifics of their job and what it entails. [Learn more.](#)

Are you wondering if sports psychology is really a field that's in demand? [This article](#) thinks so.

The official APA website offers guidance on how to become a sports psychologist. [Learn more.](#)

Sports Psychologist



Journeys to Becoming a Sports Psychologist

Sports psychologists are becoming more essential parts of sport teams, which used to simply consist of just doctors and coaches. The path to working in sports psychology may seem like a faraway dream, but did you know that you can get started on that path even in high school?

Read about one student's journey into her future in sports psychology:

Ashley Eckermann is a sports psychologist with a bachelor's degree in psychology and a masters in sports psychology. Her journey to becoming a sports psychologist started when she was just a child and watched her dad struggle with the difficulties of being an athlete. He was a golfer, and when he was on tour he would have trouble with self-doubt, emotional regulation, and staying focused. Ashley was too young to know how to help him at the time, but she learned then that what she wanted to do was help people like her dad believe in themselves.

Ashley also played several sports growing up, which helps her relate to the athletes she works with and gives her a perspective that those who haven't competed might not be familiar with.

Learn more about Ashley [here](#).

Read about another student's path into a career in sports psychology:

Matthew Cunliffe is also a sports psychologist, and he uses cognitive behavioral therapy to help athletes overcome obstacles that affect performance. "Athletes, coaches, and team directors are starting to realize that the top six inches of the body matter just as much the rest," says Matthew. He recognizes that while it's important to understand those top six inches (the brain) as well as the rest (the body), it's also vital to be able to relate to athletes on a personal level. "For any psychologist, it's about building a relationship with the athlete." Once that relationship is built, they can start training.

To help top athletes get in the zone and learn to work through anxiety, Matthew simulates the pressures that they would face and works with them to develop responses and strategies for dealing with those pressures. He also helps them develop pre-performance routines.

Learn more about Matthew's work [here](#).

