

The Semi-Professional Footballer

THE BACKGROUND

As part of Masters Degree research at Roehampton University looking at the use of NLP in enhancing Emotional Intelligence and performance of an athlete, Inside Performance worked with Joe Smith* - a semi-professional footballer in the Blue Square South League.

Joe had been playing as a defender for his club for two seasons and like many elite players was playing at his physical peak, yet was being limited by his mental skills on the pitch. He was also experiencing a lack of motivation in his game and overall career.

Some of the issues that Joe felt were holding him back were...

- His negativity on the pitch – most often after making mistakes
- His frustration and temper creating poor performance and aggressive behaviour towards himself
- A tendency to 'accept' he was having a bad game rather than take action and change his performance

THE SOLUTION

After assessing Joe's Emotional Intelligence, two areas in need of improvement for Joe's performance were his **Stress Management** abilities and his **Adaptability** to take charge and find solutions to challenges he faces on the pitch. These areas of Joe's Emotional Intelligence were very reflective of the issues Joe said he was facing in his mental performance.

A variety of NLP techniques were used when working with Joe. As with all clients, it was fundamental to give him the basic principles and understanding of NLP in order for him to take what he learned and apply it to both his sport performance and his personal life. Some examples of some of the NLP methods involved in Joe's support...

- Specific NLP communication techniques enabled us to get a deep understanding of the issues and negative behaviours Joe faced in his performance, including, **how** these issues were being represented internally and **how** Joe was processing these behaviours on the pitch.
- We explored what Joe really wanted to achieve in his football career and what is really important to him about the game. Using NLP language and visualization techniques we created a very detailed and specific goal-setting process that was right for Joe to follow to achieve his ultimate career goal. An NLP technique known as 'Submodalities' was used to give Joe the power to adapt the unwanted behaviours he was performing on the pitch and leave him with desired behaviours that produced positive performance during play.
- Finally, Joe was taught the technique of 'Anchoring'. A powerful state management technique that draws upon both body language and imagery to access any positive, energising and performance enhancing states (feelings) that Joe would find extremely useful on the pitch.

THE RESULTS

After re-assessing Joe's Emotional Intelligence, there were noticeable improvements in not only the areas of focus but in **all** areas of his Emotional Intelligence. More importantly for Joe, he noticed a remarkable difference in his own self-awareness of how he thinks, behaves and performs both on and off the pitch. He felt empowered to conduct many of the changes in himself he felt were necessary to improve his attitude and performance.

Specifically, Joe found the major principles of NLP gave him the most positive change in his beliefs about his abilities to change his own performance for the better, particularly when replacing the negative thoughts he originally held about his football ability. This new confidence, along with the goal-setting process has enabled him to re-engage in his ultimate goal to play pro again which his manager found has resulted in a marked difference in his motivation to succeed.

The mental skills and techniques learnt through the use of Submodalities and Anchoring he found were extremely effective in directing his focus to new positive behaviours during play instead of fixating his attention and frustration on a mistake. He felt no need to feel frustrated anymore as it wasted time that could be spent in more resourceful states such as confidence and power, the sort of energising states that he learnt to access and utilise whenever and wherever he needs them.

THE FUTURE

Since working with Inside Performance Joe's team found a successful consistency in their game with a 9 match winning streak and promotion to the Blue Square Premier League. That's not to say that Joe's improvement in performance was the only contributing factor to their success but it certainly helped with many of their clean sheets!

Joe continues to play in the first team squad and the club manager is keen to introduce NLP into his own repertoire of coaching skills in order to pass on the evident benefits to all his players.

*The name provided is an alias to honour client confidentiality.

Useful links...

EQ-i - <http://www.mhs.com/mhs/product.aspx?gr=IO&prod=eqi&id=Description>