



Empire Runner Classics

Body Language - August 1990

Doc Isabeau: *Rest Your Legs! Train your Brain!*

Way back in the dark ages (sometime around 1984), as a fledgling intern in chiropractic school, I had the good fortune to meet a man named Jerry Lynch. Dr. Lynch was my psychology professor; on the side, he was a consultant in sports psychology to the Olympic Training Center and he was (maybe still is) a nationally ranked masters runner.

When the prescribed subject matter of our courses got too dull, Lynch would liven things up by talking about his experiences as a sports psychologist to elite Olympic athletes. One thing he mentioned really sticks in my mind. Lynch would ask these athletes, “what percentage of your athletic performance on any given day, is attributable to your current mental fitness, as opposed to your current physical fitness?” Almost across the board, the elite athletes would say, “80-90% mental, without a doubt.”

That’s a startling response, when you consider that most of us (myself included) never or rarely ever devote any focused attention to the mental side of training. We train our heart and muscles intensively day after day, only to leave our performance on race day hinging on 80-90%, upon our untrained brain. How much of our true potential is sabotaged by excessive anxiety, negative imagery and self-destructive, self-fulfilling prophecies? I, for one, have ruined many a good race even before the gun has gone off!

The realm of sports psychology is fascinating and offers a rich opportunity for athletes, recreational and elite, to enhance their performance and, most importantly, their enjoyment of the sport. For those of you interested in training your brain, get a hold of one or more of the following books. They are all very informative, enjoyable and insightful, and you may end up accomplishing more with your running than you ever thought possible. As Dr. Lynch says about running a great race, “Whether you think you can, or think you can’t, you’re right”.

1. ***The Competitive Edge***: Mental Preparation for Distance Running, by Richard Elliott
2. ***The Total Runner***, by Jerry Lynch Ph.D.
3. ***The Mental Athlete***, by Kay Porter, Ph.D. and Judy Foster

Editors Note: A quick check on-line revealed that all of these books are still available in 2010.