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Bridge and Confidence

The Physicality of Mindsports Through Elite Bridge Players' Sensorial Experiences: Presence, Confidence, and Bodies

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The Sociological Review

Summary

A mindsport such as bridge involves high levels of thought, stamina, emotional investment and practice, rather than physical effort.

This paper explores from an academic viewpoint how the mind and body are intertwined. It discusses the findings from a sociological point of view, and studies the implications of focusing on the body in bridge players' training, repercussions for mindsports practitioners, and the evolving understanding of how sports and physical activity are understood in society.

The paper then describes the factors that players consider when asked what helps them to play well. It uses data from in-depth interviews with 52 elite players from the USA and Europe. There are many supporting quotes from the players.

Findings

Although bridge is primarily a mental activity, there is a physical element as well. Players expend energy and experience fatigue during a long event. How they prepare for and deal with this is partly on a personal level, and partly as a partnership. The paper identifies several themes:

Physical Preparation

It is important to be physically prepared to compete in long events. Everyone has their own view of what

'preparing well' for a tournament involves, to improve sharpness while playing. Some players have to balance bridge with their working lives. The players often did not differentiate their 'physical' preparations from their 'mental' preparations, but instead discussed the two as being interconnected.

Sleep is often mentioned as being a vital component of preparation. Many players feel the importance of diet, exercise and sleeping aids as part of preparing well for competing, as well as maintaining their performance throughout long tournaments. Properly preparing for an event involves an interlacing of both physical and mental elements.

Concentration/Focus

Players use many different terms when describing what helps them to perform well at the table, many of which are related to preparing well. Concentration and focus are seen as vital components of high-level bridge performance. Being able to relax in between competition times is something that many players both recognise as being important and that they struggle to achieve. Players mention the need to be a bit nervous in advance, then once playing, for the nerves to disappear. Discipline, adrenaline and energy are also mentioned.

Confidence

In a similar way to other sports, bridge players can feel in or out of form. This affects confidence, and can result in players getting more close decisions wrong. Confidence can be affected by competition pressure or by physical environment (e.g. temperature or uncomfortable clothing). This leads to anxiety, nerves, and discomfort.

Players counter this by arriving early at an event to acclimatise and by attempting to relax when not playing.

Players' ability to master their bodily sensations within a competitive environment is a crucial factor. Diet, sleep, travel and atmosphere influence the level of physical dis/comfort or 'confidence through the body'.

Partnerships

Confidence is not restricted to a player's own actions, but also partnerships. How individuals interact as a partnership is an inescapable component of their own performance. Players frequently refer to the challenges and opportunities involved in playing competitively with another player. As well as technical discussions, players need to consider how to cater for partner's needs.

Body language is important, both in behaving appropriately to partner and reading their mood. This means that players need to control their emotions and also understand how best to deal with partner, e.g. when they have made a clear mistake. It might be necessary for one player to adjust their game according to how partner is feeling (and so how well they are likely to play). The need to be attuned to partner's physical state is often linked to being key to a successful partnership.

Some players feel more confident (and therefore tend to play better) when playing with a partner who is equal or weaker than their own standard.

Conclusions

In sport in general, and bridge in particular, it is not possible to separate 'mind' from 'body' when considering how to perform at optimum level. As well as physical sensations of travel, time and temperature affecting players' perceptions of their performances, confidence provides an additional component within and between partnerships. It is important to have an awareness of others such as partner and the opposition to perform optimally. This paper has the potential to contribute to bridge being recognised as a sport.

Access the Full Research

Read the complete paper from the BAMSA Project at University of Stirling

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