

## A Description of Self-talk\_ Narrative Self-talk to Examine the Value of Self-talk In Soccer Player

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### Abstract

Background: Self-talk can be described as what people say to themselves either obviously or non-obviously. Self-talk has been known as someone talks inside or quietly. As a matter of fact, self-talk is self-communication which can occur in several situations. Objective: Together the athlete's perceptions of the Self-Talk intervention and its relationship to their performance to obtain information about self-talks as clear as possible. Method: One veteran Iranian national soccer player candidate voluntary (age= 26) attended in three session's open-ended interviews. He also has had 10 years of playing experience. The content of interview transcripts was then hierarchically analyzed to identify the themes. Result: The finding revealed that self-talk in positive patterns was mostly motivational and in negative patterns was motivational and cognitive as well. Conclusion: Interviews and narrow observations of outstanding athletes showed precious knowledge about psychological factors specifically in self- talk since it is considered as sort of leader for

unpredictable event in and off the sport field.

**Keywords:** Psychological mental skills, self-talk, and soccer players

### Introduction

Over the past decade, applied sport psychology literature has focused on athletes' use of self talk (ST). Cognitive strategies, such as ST, involve activating mental processes to change or influence existing thought patterns (Theodorakis, Weinberg, Natsis, Douma, and Kazakas,2000). The idea is that focusing on the desired thought will lead to the desired action or behavior. Self-talk can be described as what people say to themselves either obviously or non obviously. It has often been categorized into two types; positive or negative and can occur out loud or in head. It also becomes an asset when it enhances self-worth and athletic performance (LeUnes, 2008). However, ST may also consist of neutrally toned, task-specific instructions (Gammage, Hardy, and Hall, 2002). Much of the ST literature has focused on the assessment of positive and negative ST. (Cousinsand Gillis, 2005., Hardy, 2006., LeUnes, 2008) Generally, positive ST is believed to be an asset that enhances self-

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esteem, motivation, concentration, and performance. In contrast, negative ST is believed to be critical, self-demeaning, and to have a negative effect on performance as it grows self-doubt and anxiety (Weinberg and Gould, 1999). Self-talk has been known as someone talks inside or quietly. As a matter of fact, self-talk is self-communication which can occur in several situations. Self-talk is a stream of thoughts or internal conversation in our minds either negative or positive which can sometimes be changed to belief (Burton and Raedeke, 2008). It has been seen during competition player talks to him/herself to motivate or scold. In this modern and competitive athletic world, every single athlete attempts to train harder and thinks smarter (Vealey, 2007). In fact, they try to catch higher level but sometimes because of hard moment of competition, continuous stream of thoughts either negative or positive fill player's mind. These kinds of thoughts cause players to start talking to themselves to control their emotions, moods and at last their performances. But in fact, it is observed that self-talk is a kind of habit among players. In psychological aspect in sport performance, many items such as goal setting, imagery, relaxation and self-talk play important roles in all kinds of situations like rest, training and competition (Burton and Raedeke, 2008., Sadeghi, Omar-Fauzee, Jamalis, Latif and Cherek, 2010., Vealey, 2007). According to Gaudreau and Blondin (2002), all up-written items have influenced on skill behavior and performance. One of the mental skills for which few researches have been conducted in the exercise area is that of self-talk. Typically, self-talk is defined as occurring which may happen at any time while a person speculates about something (Cousins and Gillis, 2005). However, there are limitations to this definition. First of all, self-talk focuses on thought content, and not statements made to oneself (Hardy and Hall, and Alexander, 2001). As a result, this definition is to some

extent unclear, and not suitable to operationalize as it can enjoy any type of thought, for instance, mental imagery. Hardy et al. (2001) have subsequently suggested that a more exact definition by Hatzigeorgiadis, Zourbanos, Mpoumpaki, and Theodorakis (2009) is desirable. Hoigaard and Johansen (2004) defined self-talk as "an inner conversation, [in which] the individual explains emotions, approaches and feelings, estimates, regulates and changes judgment and assessment, and gives him/ herself guidelines and instructions". This definition is more functional and emphasizes the importance of language, which is influential in the development of thinking, and therefore action (Hardy et al. 2001). Researches have been conducted in various designs (experimental, intervention and single-subject designs) in several sports and tasks have supported the effectiveness of the self talk strategy in facilitating learning and enhancing task performance (De Moor, Beem, Stubbe, Boomsma, and De Geus, 2006). Research has one after another moved towards the recognition of self-talk effectiveness as a basic function or the mechanism through which self-talk affects on performance task (Hardy, 2006). Hoigaard and Johansen (2004) suggested that the heart of self-talk indicates that focusing on the desired thought leads to the perfect behavior. In other words, self-talk is a direction to create or perform an action or a sequence of actions. Several explanations have been provided regarding the facilitating effects of self-talk on performance. Johnson, Hrycaiko, Johnson, and Halas (2004) supported an intentional explanation of the self-talk effects. Hardy (2006) recommended that self-talk can be employed to promote concentration, while Johansen showed that self-talk can be a helpful method to direct or redirect focus to relevant task. Weinberg and Gould (1999) indicated that self-talk can serve to control attempt and causes increasing self-confidence, while Hardy et al (2001)

believed that self-talk can also affect on controlling anxiety and stimulate proper action. Primer evidence regarding the hypothesized effects of self-talk has been provided through investigations examining the effectiveness of self-talk in several of tasks and settings, and from athletes' post-experimental reports. Gaudreau and Blondin (2002) asked young tennis players after the conclusion of competitive matches to report their self-talk and how they thought their self-talk affected their performance. Participants reported that positive self-talk helped them to concentrate and enhanced their motivation. De Moor et al. (2006) carried out a self-talk strategy aiming at increasing volleying skills in collegiate tennis players. Players reported that self-talk method helped them to feel more confident and direct their concentration more efficiently. Weinberg and Gould (1999) conducted a 12-week self-talk training program in junior basketball players and identified the use of self-talk improved players' dribbling and passing performance tasks. On the post experimental short questionnaire, participants showed that the use of self-talk enhanced their concentration and self-confidence. Guillot, Nadrowska, and Collet, (2009) carried out psychological skills training methods on four recreational athletes competing at a laboratory based triathlon task. The results proved that participants' performance at the task promoted during trials. Participants felt that self-talk increased their motivation and self-esteem and enhanced their concentration of attention. Finally, Johnson et al. (2004) used a single-subject multiple baseline design to investigate the effectiveness of a self-talk interference program among female football players, measuring performance tasks in the low drive shot over a three months. Their results indicated that shooting performance improved for two of the three players, whereas all three participants reported enhanced self-confidence compared to baseline. From an applied perspective, the

mental skill of self-talk is frequently included as an integral component of psychological interventions (Cousins and Gillis 2005). The common use of self-talk in combination with other mental skills does not permit an understanding of how each of the respective aspects function in a stand-alone fashion. This lack of understanding is compounded by the, until recently, relative lack of systematic research conducted on self-talk. This is unfortunate that individual's thoughts and self-talk are critical to both cognitive processes (Hardy, et al, 2001) and emotions (Gaudreau and Blondin 2002). In this regards, inevitably problems exist within the literature. For example, researchers have employed definitions of self-talk that do not describe the full extent of the construct. The clarity of how concepts are defined has important for research and theory building. Although the focus was placed on the importance of theory within the behavioral sciences by Gucciardi, Gordon, and Dimmock (2009) and development of the theories with relevance to the study of self-talk was mentioned by Gammage, et al. (2001), the lack of theory-based research increases worry among the experts of the field (Hardy, Gammage, and Hall 2001). The overall aim of the literature review was to stimulate further interest and ultimately research on Self-talk in both the sport and exercise domains. Given the limited development of the field, it was deemed wise to offer an explicit comprehensive definition of self-talk as well as suitable future directions for researchers to pursue. To this end, three fundamental aspects relevant to self-talk are covered: (a) definitions of self-talk; (b) the nature of self-talk; and (c) applicable theories to self-talk, with an emphasis on theories that have thus far not been offered as important to the field.

### **Research problems**

A possible reason for the current state of affairs in the self-talk literature may be due

to a lack of descriptive data upon which to further examine self-talk's relationships as Hardy and Gammage (2004) stated. Such as self-talk's relationships with several exist items around official match. Based on the principle that what people say to themselves influence the way they make action (Hatzigeorgiadis et al, 2009). So why we do not use it in advanced. Before we prepare our players for sport competition, prepare them for real human being. The relevance between training behavior and mental health has been examined by many researchers (Hatzigeorgiadis et al, 2009). This lack of understanding is combined by the relative lack of systematic research conducted on self-talk by now. As long as coaches know what is going on player's mind consequently they can guide, teach and control them well. This is unfortunate given that individual's thoughts and self-talk are critical to both cognitive processes, and emotions which is controversial. Certainly problems do exist within the literature. For example, researchers have operated definitions of self-talk but they do not clarified the fundamental toughest. The vivid way of how concepts of self-talk are defined has emphasized for research and theory building. However, the minority groups given the importance of theory within the behavioral sciences (Hoigaard and Johansen, 2004). And the fact that theories with relationship to the survey of self-talk have been advanced. Then we can state that the momentum of self-talk has not been found. The fact that the significant desiring of documentary research for self-talk is undeniable. So far, investigations have been mostly quantitative around training session, athletes have been told to use specific phrases or words in order to focus, direct, predict or etc. But generally, positive ST is believed to be an asset that increases self-confidence, motivation, concentration, and performance. In contrast, negative ST is supposed to be critical, distracting, self-demeaning, and to

have a negative influence on performance and movement as it increases self-doubt and anxiety, cited by Hoigaard and Johansen (2004).

If we look at the competition, it is seen among elite youth and adult football players there is lack of understanding in definition of self-talk, and they do not know how, to take advantage from it and as a matter of fact they do not have appropriate model of self-talk to follow. The problems which show up at the final minutes of competition, specifically for those highly motivated moments while unpredictable events are being occurred, the fruitfulness of self-talk can influence upon on player's performance. For instance beating stress and self-motivating. Another problem is while player is in rehabilitation period. Stages of the return to sport model was defined (Hardy, 2006). Returning to competition may undoubtedly be a source of excitement but it may also evoke feelings of trepidation and anxiety regarding the uncertainties of the "success" of the rehabilitation efforts and the ability to perform at pre injury levels. Athletes may also have fears about putting themselves in the same situation in which the initial injury occurred. A discussion with athletes at this time may be beneficial in allowing them to express any concerns or fears and to redirect their focus onto the positive aspects of the competition. It will also give athletes' a greater sense of predictability and control over their training and competition. Just few researches have been investigated on self-talk around official competition. In terms of the nature of football which is mixed by emotion and logic (Sir Alex Fergousen, world football, 2008), players enjoying sensational stream of thoughts. On the other hand, football has become very tight competitive athletic game where players must be strong in both side physically and mentally, also keep moving like a non-stop train in terms of fully programmed competitions. Although many researches support the use of self-talk as a

performance enhancing tactic, some investigations have examined the theoretical mechanisms for how and why self-talk may enhance performance. One reason for this lack of understanding is that possible mechanisms that might explain performance increases have not been investigated. As a result, there is lack of qualitative description about players self-talk around official matches when whole the advanced materials required.

It is seen among elite youth players there is lack of understanding in definition of self-talk, and they do not know how, when, why and where they should use self-talk. As a matter of fact, they do not have appropriate model of self-talk and self-awareness to follow. This lack of understanding is compounded by the, until recently, relative lack of systematic research conducted on self-talk. This is unfortunate given that individual's thoughts and self-talk are critical to both cognitive processes (Guillot et al, 2009) and emotions (Hatzigeorgiadis et al, 2009). Inevitably problems exist within the literature. For example, researchers have employed definitions of self-talk that do not caption the full extent of the construct. On the other hand we can look at the interesting dimension of psychology which Burton and Raedeke, (2008) mentioned. Psychological momentum within competitive soccer was considered to examine perception of psychological momentum from the perspective of competing players in a team sport to provide applied implications for athletes and coaches. Therefore, to overcome of that problem the intent of this study was the investigation is to report how, when, where and why players should use self-talk during and after training, competition and rest.

### **Objective of the study**

The main objective of this investigation is to report how, when, where and why players should use self-talk during and after training, competition, injury and rest.

Another significant goal of this investigation is to go through the depth of player's mind.

### **Methodology**

#### **Participant**

One veteran Iranian national soccer player candidate voluntary (age= 26) attended in three session's open-ended interviews. He also has had ten years of football playing experience. Four friendly matches as national player and ten national experiences via 10 years club experiences. Consequently he is considered as professional player. Since this is a qualitative method to study, only those who are willing to participate and have signed an inform consent letter will be examined.

#### **Procedure**

Multiple and in-depth interviews were selected as the most appropriate techniques (Martin I. Jones & Chris Harwood. 2008). The repeated interviewing idea made emerging of interpretation easier and helped minimize perceived distance between researcher and participant.

Data collection was separated into three phases. All phases were characterized by the identification of categories. Second phase and last phase was also used to seek elaboration on interpretations and to ensure participant had nothing more to say before data collection ended. These three phases of interview and simultaneous analysis helped fill in gaps, prevented data analysis becoming an overwhelming during stages (Lincon & Guba, 1994). Furthermore, the strength of quality was gained by cycling back of existing data and generating new interview strategies.

#### **Interviews**

Initial interviews ranged from 40 ( $\pm$  5) minutes in length and second interview lasting in thirty minutes. The final phase ended in twenty-five minutes. Three type of questions were used, 1) main questions, is normally initial conversation such as

why do you use self-talk, and 2) probe questions is looking for details, helped better understanding and enhance the quality of interview. 3) follow up questions which was to pursue problems like why did you use negative self-talk or why did you blame yourself (reflecting to the events)

### Data analysis

All written responses were transcribed, and the responses were divided into text units, which were then grouped to create four hierarchical trees. The qualitative data gained from the instruments were first subjected to inductive content analysis, which was followed in previous studies (Hardy, 2006). The analysis was conducted independently by investigator according to Hardy et al (2001) guidelines for carrying out qualitative research. Data analysis was completed when all text units, that is, a single word, phrase, or sentence relating to a single idea or meaning was organized into groups with similar ideas or meanings and application of both inductive and deductive methods (De Moor et al, 2006). Analysis could be adequately classified into the existing tree (Hardy, 2006). Frequency analysis was utilized for analyzing all participants' reflections' towards the implementations in order to realize about emphasize. Exactly frequency shows what a player says to him/her self related to situation.

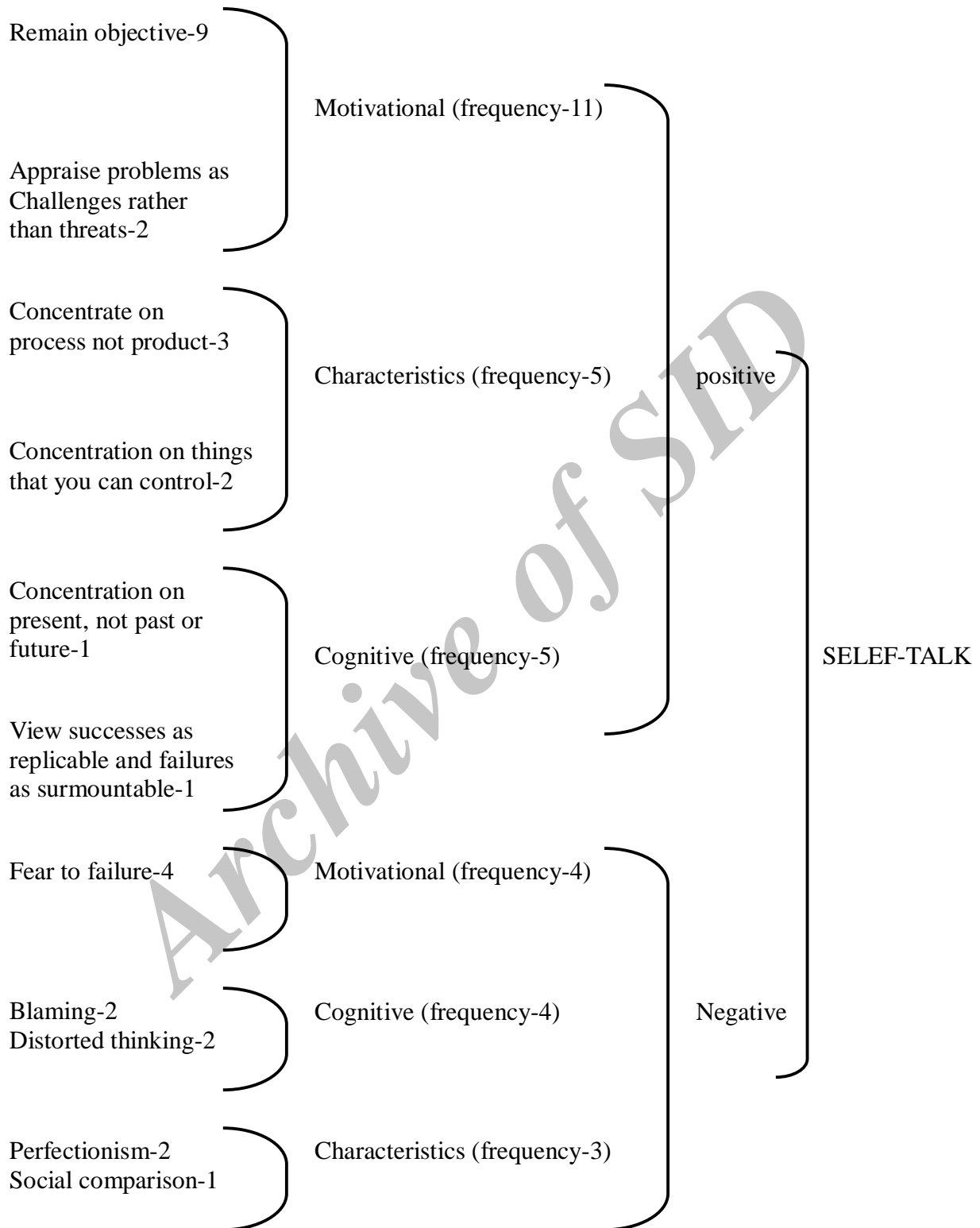
### Result

A veteran soccer player has been interviewed by investigator through following open-ended questionnaire.

1) Do you know about self-talk? 2) When do you use self-talk? Explain it. 3) What do you say to yourself before, during, after competition? Explain it. 4) If you have done bad or destructive movement, what do you say to yourself? Explain it. 5) Do you judge people and your friends? Explain it. 6) If you ever have been injured, do you say to yourself normally?

Explain it. 7) Do you analyze your performance after competition? Explain it. And exactly primer to the whistle, I am telling to myself with exaggerating like you are the best defender in this match. You can play like Nesta (Italian player). You are the best header. You have to do your utmost. You need it champ. You have to make it and you should not let anyone to head or hit the ball before you. Then I slap on my face saying wake up, wake up. It is your time; it is what you are looking for. When I have done something significant for my team, I say to myself: continue. I found out there is no end of mistake, bad luck, disaster or catastrophe. So I have to cope with them and I started saying to myself that by gone be by gone, start it again. I am finding my own pathway, I will find my way. No matter what the end is, I have to stay in river. I look at them deeply to identify distinct between what is good for me and what is bad. Forinstance, I say see it is bad for you. Professional players are smarter, that is, they before receiving the ball have had a plan for it like I always tell to myself; see before you get it. I can start it again now. But when I have done something bad, like a mistake, I was telling to myself that: coach is going to make substitution. I do not deserve this. I am not good enough. I should have been trained more. I started blaming myself till the end of match time and I could not focus on rest of my goals like why I did that, what is wrong with me. But I was surrounded by whole of negative and depressing thought like chain and I told to myself why Time is ticking much slower. I often judge what I have done and what my friends have done to clarify the situation and relationship. I was inculcated that I am the best. I often analysis the events which have been taken place. After the final whistle, I start analyzing about my accomplishments on my mind to mark, to rank my motion as positive or negative. I am 7 out of 10. Comparing with the others, I am bad.

(They are all Omid' answer)  
Result Table



**Discussion**

The present study attempted to assess the use of self-talk by open-ended

questionnaire in and out of the competition and during injury. As such, this study examined the 4 Ws (where, when, what,

and why) of self-talk. It is evident that it can show the frequency of self-talk usage. The result in frequency of self-talk during competition is remaining objective, comparing with using self-talk during exercise (Gammage et al, 2001). The results from where and when indicated that exercisers used self-talk most frequently at their exercise location, and most frequently during exercise. These findings might be expected to cause motives for exercising, and they can be contrasted to competitive sport, especially with regard to the personal meanings and demands associated with each type of activity. As a matter of fact, second frequency beside the remaining objective is fear to failure which is negative dimension of self-talk.

One exception to this finding that self-talk was primarily used during exercise was the reported use of self-talk by some participants before exercise for one specific purpose: to encourage themselves to go to their workout. It appears that self-talk is one way individuals ensure them to continue to work out. Athletes, by contrast, do not report using self-talk for this reason (Hardy, Gammage, and Hall, in press). It may indicate the fact that while exerciser shave only themselves to motivate them and encourage exercise behavior, athletes have many significant others (such as coaches, teammates, family, and spectators) that serve a similar function. But what is elicited in this report is the fact that athlete used self-talk before competition to motivate himself. On the other hand, it is concluded that most dominant self-talk in this investigation was motivationally positive. And on the second line, positive characteristics can be placed. And if our result is deeply referred to, like, "Then I slap on my face saying wake up, wake up". It is your time; it is what you are looking for. When I have done something significant for my team I say to myself: keep on (Omid said). And Gaudreau and Blondin (2002) I tried to block out my doubts by thinking positively. I imagined that I was doing a

good performance I visualized my all-time best performance. Or here, see before you get it (Omid said). I visualized my all-time best performance I tried not to think about my mistakes (Gaudreau and Blondin 2002). Or in the social comparison case Omid said; I am 7 out of 10. comparing with the others I am bad. I analyzed the weaknesses of my opponents (Gaudreau and Blondin 2002) or I analyzed my past performances. In the other case like concentrating on things that you can control Omid said: see before you get it, keep focus. And in the other research it was like. I visualized my all-time best performance I tried not to think about my mistakes (Gaudreau and Blondin 2002). The lack of self-talk and attention oriented research may be partially accounted for by issues surrounding (Gaudreau and Blondin 2002) conceptual framework and the measurement of attentional style. It is recommended that self-talk researchers who are interested in examining this association should avoid exclusive reliance on surveys such as the Test of Attentional and Interpersonal Styles (Hardy et al, 2001). The employment of multiple strategies to the assessment of attention is preferred (Hardy, 2006). While self-talk might influence one's attentional focus in a performance enhancing manner, direct experience examination of this hypothesis and the measurement of attention have been extremely limited in the self-talk literature. Although attentional focus has not been treated as a dependent or outcome variable, in its own right, preliminary support reflecting the possibility of attentional focus as an underpinning mechanism for self-talk's effects has been generated (Guillot et al, 2009). An alternative explanation for the effect of self-talk orients around athletes' information processing (Guillot et al, 2009) and related use of rules to control behavior (Hardy, 2006). Weinberg and Gould (1999) proposed that verbal cues could influence all three functions of information processing to positively



influence performance: (a) perceptual processing; (b) decision processing; and (c) effector processing. Another theory that seemingly has application to self-talk is Guillot (2009) verbal theory of self-regulation. This theory proposes that human's develop cognitively to use language as a tool for thought. Gammage distinguishes between at least two forms of language: social speech and private speech (overt self-talk). This distinction reflects two very different functions of language, communicative and regulatory. This was one of the first verbal self-regulation theories to distinguish between speech for others and speech for the self. O Connor (2004) supported the effectiveness of cognitive strategies in reducing anxiety in athletes. The design in this research required that baseline data to be collected with participant until the data were stable or in the opposite direction hypothesized as a result of the treatment. At that time, the intervention was provided from participant (Hatzigeorgiadis et al. 2009). A variety of methods were utilized to collect data from the participants in self-talk study, including surveys, interviews, and the quantitative assessment of participants. The effort to acquire qualitative as well as quantitative data responds to the request. Additional information is processed to enhance our understanding of how athletes view objective and subjective measures of self-talk (Johnsen et al, 2004). The combination of techniques enhances our confidence that ST is an effective strategy for improving performance (Johansen et al. 2004).

### **Conclusion**

Interviews and narrow observations of outstanding athletes showed precious knowledge about psychological factor specifically in self-talk which is sort of leader for unpredictable event in and off the sport field. The psychological factors have been interesting for many years for coaches, athletes and researchers. But yet, complete understanding and approach of

self-talk and the way how to employ it have not been advanced. Self-talk is defined as inner conversation which is spontaneous and exactly combined with goal setting, imagery, relaxation etc. As it was shown in this study, soccer player used more positive self-talk during competition and more negative during injury. Overall findings indicated that self-talk is being used during competition. But with an insight, these results of study showed the importance of self-talk for football players and addressed more at that kind of mental training in their athletic life. However, the results suggest that self-talk training will improve the motivation, energy management, attention, stress management, self-confidence and goal setting.

### **Suggestion**

Despite the above issues, the present study offers valuable evidence regarding the role of self-talk. The results provided further support regarding the effectiveness of self-talk but as a matter of fact, players are thinking in every single moment of their lives either in the pitch or off the pitch and both type of thinking might influence on each other and on performance. The best thing is to aware players of some clean symbols of self-talk to let them lead their behavior and performance. Another suggestion which should be insisted on for all coaches is to make interview with their players to know what is going on in players' mind, like knowing which way of thinking is constructive or disruptive. The next step which is most important is to correct style of thinking, for instance 1) becomes aware of self-talk, 2) stop negative, 3) replace with positive, 4) practice thought stopping. Another suggestion that could be made from the findings of this research is getting done more investigations about psychological momentum to develop clearer understanding of how psychological momentum is perceived. As a matter of fact, the major obligation for coaches is to

develop player as smart as possible for better performance. They say there's nothing wrong with talking to yourself, but when you start answering back, it's time to worry. They're wrong. Talking aloud to you in public isn't a sign of mental health, but holding an internal dialogue is quite normal and very useful.

In fact, inner conversations have a powerful impact on emotional well-being and motivation. Becoming aware of exactly what you are saying to yourself about yourself can help you understand why you react the way you do to events and people in your life. It can also give you a handle on controlling your moods, repeating your successes and short-circuiting your shortcomings. Negative self-talk can trip you up any time, but some common situations are particularly good times to monitor your inner voice for negative thoughts. What is happening to you doesn't jibe with what you expect or predict. Another easy way to teach players how to use self-talk is to grab your player's attention and get them to think about the meaning of the phrase "self-talk." Ask your players to define Self-Talk. Spend some time covering the common self-talk errors and give examples in each situation. Have your players consider their behaviors in each of these situations. Introduce the steps to change negative self-talk and spend some time on the exercises included at the end of the chapter. For a long term plan, have your players create a self-talk section in their competitive training logs, help them to monitor their own self-talk and assist them in changing their self-talk behaviors.

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