



NLP teaches coaches how to maintain consistent behaviour, be a strong leader and stay calm under pressure

TEACHING POOL PSYCHOLOGY IN COACHING

A coach can enhance an athlete's perception of their ability, **Ian Coleman** tells **Helen Gorman**

It's pretty much the norm these days that most sporting superstars have a psychologist as part of their entourage. The British swim team has used the services of psychologists, particularly under Bill Sweetenham, and now the ASA is looking at the role of psychology in coach education.

Sports psychology will certainly be part of the wider ASA coach education programme and be part of the UK Coaching Framework, which sets out the attributes required by a good coach. While traditional sport psychology works primarily with our conscious understanding, neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) represents a valuable model of human behaviour, communication and performance that also works at the unconscious level. NLP is currently being considered for inclusion in the levels 3 and 4 coaching certificates.

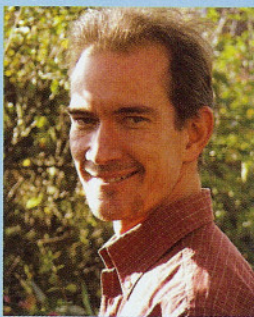
NLP has been called the new science of human behaviour and provides important information about how we learn

everything from excellent performance to bad habits. It was developed through the modelling of excellence in a variety of areas and can give coaches the skills to build rapport and communicate more powerfully. It encourages coaches to use positive language that can be understood both consciously and unconsciously and provides powerful tools and strategies that help solve the problems of teaching and motivating swimmers.

Ian Coleman, a sport psychologist and master practitioner of NLP, who runs a private practice and sport psychology clinics with SwimSkills, said: 'NLP gives people the resources to deal with challenging situations and it helps build confidence. Parents have told me that their sons and daughters have not only become better swimmers after consultations but have also started to do better at school and become nicer people to be with – even teenagers!

'I worked with one young swimmer who had a problem concentrating and

would often get out of the pool in the middle of main sets. The problem was that he had set his target times too high and as soon as he stopped achieving them he would get out because he thought he had failed. The target times were too hard and he had set himself up to fail. A simple adjustment to his targets had an immediately positive impact.



Psychologist **Ian Coleman**

'People each have an internal map that forms their interpretation of the world around them. The interpretation is never pure reality so it can be changed by adding more options and possibilities. In sport, people have a belief in their own ability, and this can be changed to be more

positive with reinforcement from a coach.

'A coach's behaviour affects everyone around them and NLP teaches how to maintain consistent behaviour, be a strong leader and stay calm under pressure. Swimmers pick up on positive as well as negative behaviour.'

Several of the coaches on the UK Sport Elite Coaches programme have done an NLP course, and generic psychological tools for coaching will be introduced into the new ASA coaching awards. Level 4 is still to be rewritten but the new level 3 will certainly cover a few basics.

NLP is one strand of the wider sports psychology that is on offer and is already proving to have positive benefits for swimmers of all ages. For teachers and coaches alike, a basic understanding of the psychology of human performance will be a valuable tool that can be applied to bring about positive outcomes in both skill learning and higher level competitive performance.

• See advertisement p53