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Sailing in Israel

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In

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Introduction

During the past 60 years, since the establishment of the state of Israel, sports have played an important role in the development of the country. Israeli sport has had significant achievements, winning medals at the European, World, and Olympic levels. Elite Israeli athletes, including Olympic level performers, receive professional support from the Elite Sports Department, which is sponsored by the Ministry of Education, Sport, and Culture, and the National Olympic Committee. The Elite Sports Department and the Ribstein Center for Sport Medicine Sciences at the Wingate Institute provide professional services, including medical, scientific, and psychological support to elite athletes and their coaching staff. These sports science support services are regarded as an important factor in the success and development of Israeli sport.

view video: Wingate: Israel's Premier Sports Facility

Basketball and soccer are the most popular sports in Israel with the largest number of participants at all levels. However, in Olympic sports, the most successful achievements have been in sailing and windsurfing. Among the total of seven Olympic medals that Israeli athletes have won during the period 1992-2012, three medals have come from windsurfing, including Israel's first ever Olympic gold medal in 2004.

With access to four major bodies of water in Israel – the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea, the Dead Sea, and Lake Kinneret – sailing and windsurfing are very popular in the country. Israel has a large number of young and elite sailors and windsurfers, several role models who have succeeded at the highest level, modern training centers in Tel-Aviv, Eilat, Sedot-Yam, Haifa, and Lake Kinneret, numerous experienced coaches, and good management provided by the Elite Sports Department and the National Sailing Federation. These factors are considered to be the foundation for recent and future success.

In this chapter we present and discuss the psychological preparation provided for sailors and windsurfers in Israel. Based on personal experience from four Olympic Games, we briefly describe the history of sailing and windsurfing in Israel, present psychological skills training (PST) programs specific to these sports, and provide examples from our practical work.

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Israel's Achievements in Sailing and Windsurfing

view video: Gal Fridman talks about his Olympic journey

The first noteworthy achievement in Israeli sailing came in 1988 during the Olympic Games in Seoul, South Korea where Yoel Sela and Eldad Amir finished fourth in the men's 470 sailing class. Subsequently, Amit Inbar, won gold in the 1993, 1997, and 1998 European Windsurfing Championships, and gold in 1994 and silver in the 1992, 1997, and 1998 World Windsurfing Championships. Inbar's teammate and rival, Gal Fridman, continued to maintain the high level of Israeli windsurfers and achieved second place in the World Championships in 1996, a bronze medal in the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games, a gold medal in the World Championships in 2002, and an elusive Olympic gold medal in the 2004 Games in Athens to become Israeli's first Olympic champion.

Gal Fridman

view video: Israel's Olympic hope – Windsurfing Shahar Tzuberi

Shahar Tzuberi

Continuing this successful trend, Shahar Tzuberi, achieved a bronze medal in the European Championships in 2008, an Olympic bronze medal in 2008 in Beijing, and gold medals in the 2009 and 2010 European championships. His fellow national team member, Nimrod Mashiah, achieved third place in the 2010 World Championships, which prolonged their competition for a ticket to compete in the 2012 London Olympic Games. Shahar Tzuberi eventually won selection to compete in London, but disappointingly finished in 19th place.

view video: Lee Korzits picks up gold medal in Australia

The dominant figure in women's windsurfing in Israel, and indeed globally, is Lee Korzits, who has been the world champion four times. She won her first world title as a 19 year old in 2003, sustained a devastating back injury in 2005 that kept her out of the sport for five years, before reclaiming the world crown in 2011 and 2012. Korzits represented Israel's best hope for a medal in the 2012 Olympic Games, and although she finished a disappointing 6th in London, she went on to win gold at the 2013 World Championships in Brazil.

Credit: הכירע ירצום הרטקלא/Wikimedia Commons/CC-BY-SA

Lee Korzits

view video: Israel's Olympic hope – Sailing Vered Buskila

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Vered Buskila

In the 470 sailing class, Israeli athletes have also achieved significant success. Nir and Ran Shental won the first major international medal for Israel in sailing; a bronze at the 1995 World Championships. In 2000, Anat Fabrikant and Shani Kedmi, were fourth in the women's 470 event at the Sydney Olympic Games. Vered Buskila and Nike Kornecki achieved European bronze medals in 2001 and 2004 and a European silver medal in 2005. In 2008, they were fourth in the Beijing Olympic Games. Men's 470 sailors, Gidi Kliger and Udi Gal, achieved World Championship bronze medals in 2007 and 2008, and Gidi Kliger and Eran Sela won European silver medals in 2010.

Overall, during the period from 1992 to 2012, Israel won 6 European, 11 World, and 3 Olympic medals in windsurfing and 3 European, 4 World and 1 Olympic medal in 470 class sailing. For a small country of fewer than 8 million people, with a relatively recent tradition in sailing events, these achievements can be seen as a significant record of success.

Eran Sela


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Psychological Support Program

The first author provided psychological services for Israeli windsurfers and sailors from 1992 until 2008, and most of the sailors and windsurfers named in this chapter were involved in the psychological support program. A specific program for windsurfers and sailors was developed based on two existing Israeli psychological programs: The Wingate Five-Step approach (W5SA; Blumenstein, Bar-Eli, & Tenenbaum, 1997) and the Learning-Modification-Application approach (LMA; Blumenstein & Orbach, 2012a).

The Wingate Five-Step Approach

The W5SA is a self-regulation technique incorporating biofeedback (BFB) training. This technique teaches athletes to transfer the psycho-regulative skills learned in sterile laboratory settings to real practice and competition settings, utilizing regular testing and various simulation activities (Blumenstein & Bar-Eli, 2005; Blumenstein, Bar-Eli, & Tenenbaum, 1997). The W5SA has five stages:

(1) Introduction

The first step takes place in a laboratory setting, where the athlete is introduced to the various pieces of psychophysiological equipment. This includes 5-8 group meetings (i.e., coaches and athletes) and 5-8 individual meetings, 2-3 times a week, with each session lasting about 25-30 minutes. Athletes are taught to regulate their mental state by observing their own psychophysiological responses on the screen. The main goal of the introductory step is to achieve a stable process in which athletes relax for 2-3 minutes, maintain deep relaxation for 5-10 minutes, and then rehearse excitation for 2-3 minutes. In addition, psychological techniques, including self-talk and autogenic training (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autogenic_training), are introduced and practiced.


Credit: Courtesy of Boris Blumenstein

(2) Identification

In the second step, the goal is to identify and strengthen the athlete's most efficient response modality in terms of BFB, based on the athletes' psychophysiological characteristics and the sport discipline. Galvanic skin response (GSR), electromyography (EMG), and heart rate (HR) measurements have been found to be useful for sailing, which requires both cardiopulmonary and cardiomuscular endurance (Blumenstein, Bar-Eli, & Tenenbaum, 2002). In this step, athletes must be able to perform, in the laboratory setting, the required relaxation-excitation cycle quickly, accurately, and reliably. This step includes 10-15 individual or group meetings, lasting 30 minutes each.

(3) Simulation

In the third step the athlete performs the learned skills within different simulated training situations. This step includes 10-15 individual or group sessions that include BFB training with imagery on the beach and in the boat (e.g., planning competition situations, such as pre-start and start). In individual meetings, the emphasis is on concentration training on the beach and in the boat (e.g., self-talk, imagery, breathing, and BFB training with a portable device).

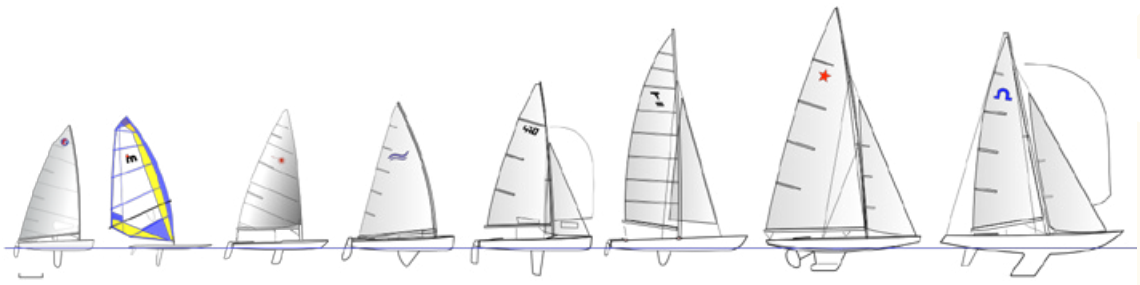
(4) Transformation

In the fourth step athletes mentally prepare for a specific upcoming competition. The material learned and rehearsed by the athletes in Steps 1-3 is transferred to actual training settings, using portable BFB devices, in contrast to the laboratory setting in which the previous steps were conducted. This phase of the mental training is conducted in the boat during training and between races for approximately 10 sessions. It includes relaxation, imagery, and recovery with a portable GSR/BSB device. The main purpose of this step is to enable the athlete to simulate real future competitions, as described in Example 1.

Portable GSR/BSB device

(5) Realization

In the fifth step, athletes apply the mental techniques during competitions. The main focus is on pre-start support, planning competition scenarios (on shore), and recovery between races. Athletes begin by applying the procedure in 3-5 relatively less important competitions (e.g., national regattas) until they are ready to employ the technique for more important competitions (e.g., international regattas). This ensures that athletes gradually learn to cope with increasingly difficult situations and to become less crisis-vulnerable. The examples overpage show applied work with sailors, indicating the last three steps of the W5SA, which demonstrate the transformation from laboratory setting to training and competition.



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Wingate 5-Step Training

Example 1: The Simulation Step

Event: 470 Class

Place: Sport Psychology Laboratory, Wingate Institute

Date and Time: Friday, 13:00-13:50

Introductory Part

Developing sport motivation and positive thinking

Main Part

- **MUSCLE RELAXATION** *with portable EMG/GSR: 3 times x 1-2 minutes each.*
- **CONCENTRATION** *with portable GSR/BFB: 5 times x 30 seconds each.*
- **IMAGERY** *with verbal comments:*
  - **SITUATION 1**
    1 minute before water start, actual water start, and best performance 1 minute after start: 2 times
  - **SITUATION 2**
    30 seconds before water start, actual water start with portable GSR/BFB: 3 times.
  - **SITUATION 3**
    1 minute before water start, actual water starts with GSR/BFB: 3 times.

Final Part

Relaxation with music for 10 minutes.

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Example 2: General Pre-competition Weekly Mental Training Program

The General Pre-competition Weekly Mental Training Program is based on the Transformation and the Realization steps described earlier.

Sunday and Monday: Concentration exercise on beach (5 minutes); Muscle relaxation in boat (4-6 times x 1 minute); Brief relaxation after training with portable GSR/BFB (5 minutes).

Tuesday: Homework with portable GSR/BFB, brief relaxation-excitation cycles (2-3 times x 1-3 minutes).

Wednesday: Imagery on shore (technical elements); Information exchange and communication in boat before and during start (2-3 minutes); Mental recovery after training with portable GSR/BFB (15-20 minutes).

Thursday and Friday (competition day): Concentration exercise in boat (20-25 minutes before start, 2-3 minutes); Imagery before start (2-3 times x 1-3 minutes); Relaxation after race with portable GSR/BFB (1-5 minutes).

Credit: Imran Ahmad/flickr/CC-BY-NC 2.0

The Learning-Modification-Application Approach

In recent years, we have worked intensively with a newly-developed program, known as the Learning-Modification-Application (LMA; Blumenstein & Orbach, 2012a) approach. This approach is based on biofeedback training and the periodization principle of sport training (Bompa & Haff, 2009). The LMA approach includes three steps that accompany seven different stress distractions to prepare athletes to cope with a variety of stress situations.

In the first step, *Learning*, the sailors acquire fundamental psychological techniques in a controlled, sterile, laboratory setting, to achieve the goal of teaching them the basic foundations of each psychological strategy, using biofeedback support. Part of the training during the Learning stage is provided under light stress distractions, including positive and negative verbal instructions, such as “good work”, or “another mistake?”

Credit: David Poultney/flickr/CC-BY-NC-SA-2.0

In the second step, *Modification*, the objective is to perform relatively short psychological strategies quickly and precisely, in laboratory and training settings. This practice is provided with more challenging stress distractions, such as performance of relaxation and concentration in progressively shorter time limits, from 5 minutes to 1 minute.

Lastly, in the third step, *Application*, some of the psychological techniques continue to be practiced in the laboratory, but most of the techniques are transferred to daily practice. The stress distractions used in the laboratory focus on creating conditions similar to the real world, such as competitive noises and pictures.

The LMA approach is based on the periodization principle and adds a planning timeline tool to athletes’ overall preparations. Therefore, the LMA approach is linked to, and incorporated within, athletes’ training periodization phases throughout the season. For example, the Learning stage of the LMA is linked with athletes’ general preparation, the Modification stage of the LMA is linked with athletes’ specific preparation, and the Application stage of the LMA is linked with athletes’ behaviour during the competitive phase (Blumenstein & Orbach, 2012a, 2012b).

Long-term Psychological Skills Training (PST)

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Long-term PST was provided to the sailors throughout the training season and was provided in laboratory, training, and competition settings. Usually, the first contact between the sport psychologist and the sailor was arranged through the elite sport department. The first few meetings were conducted in the laboratory with the goal of establishing a good relationship with the sailors and the coach. To understand the environment in which the sailors trained, the first author attended practice sessions at sea for over a month. During this period he spent time with the coach on the boat and learned various aspects of sailing training and competition. This knowledge gave him the competence to identify the most appropriate times during training that allowed for psychological interventions. More specifically, he focused on teaching psychological interventions, such as relaxation and recovery to be used after training (and later, between races and between competitions), optimization of pre-start emotional state, concentration during the 5-10 minutes before the water start, and self-confidence during competition. Moreover, in this period, several lectures were provided for coaching staff and athletes, on topics such as sport motivation and sailing training, psychological interventions in sport, psychological skills and competitions, and mental preparation for practice and competition. It is important to note that the first author had the full cooperation and support of the coaching staff, who believed that the mental training program had a positive effect on the sailors and was a valuable additional tool to improve performance. Parallel to our visits during practice training, sailors began to learn basic psychological techniques in the laboratory setting.

relaxation and recovery

Laboratory setting. In the initial 6-week period we focused on teaching self-regulation techniques, such as relaxation, imagery, self-talk, focusing attention, and biofeedback training using the W5SA approach. Later, we modified basic techniques according to the demands of the specific sport and event. For example, imagery sessions were relatively short and were combined with training for concentration during the water start (1minute each exercise); short relaxation of 3-5 minutes with imagery, in which athletes imaged for 10-30 seconds the prerace phase, actual water starts, and their best performance during the 1-2 minutes after the start of the race. During this period, we met with the sailors twice per week in the laboratory setting and twice per week in training.

For the team events, we asked the two athletes who partnered in a boat to independently give us a roadmap of a competition race. The roadmaps included the competition plan from start to finish, identifying potential problematic points. For example, during the starting point sailors had to work on the decision-making process, regarding which strategy they should choose, along with


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their corresponding behaviours. We developed a prestart routine that included necessary verbal information to be communicated when the boat was in the prestart position, applied exercises for optimization of concentration and arousal levels, and mutual aid and cooperation strategies before and during all races (i.e., avoiding mutual accusation). Moreover, in this period, some questions linked with training motivation, teamwork issues, and decision-making during races were discussed.

Training setting. During this 2-month period, we met with the sailors 3-4 times per week and provided them with mental training sessions both on the beach and on the coach boat. On the beach, we gave special attention to athletes' relaxation after long and hard sea training. The main goal of this intervention was recovery. All interventions were accompanied by portable BFB equipment, using EMG/GSR channels. Usually, during weekend meetings, we worked on relaxation sessions lasting 20-25 minutes and we sometimes accompanied the relaxation with music. Athletes also practiced short relaxation using portable GSR devices for 3-5 minutes at home.

On the coach boat we concentrated on short relaxation sessions of 1-3 minutes with imagery, in which the sailors imaged themselves 20-30 seconds before the beginning of the race, during the start, and their best performance 1 minute after the race had started. This extended period of training had a positive effect on coach-athlete relationships and improved the training and competition atmosphere. In addition, the coaches noted that they significantly improved their psychological knowledge and self-confidence.

Competition setting. The first author accompanied the sailing team on numerous training camps and competitions, such as the European and World Championships, the Olympic Games, and various international regattas. No two competitions were the same, which provided added challenges in terms of psychological preparation. Often, based on the situation, we made decisions and accordingly gave recommendations to be applied specifically on that occasion. However, overall, the sailors became more focused, self-confident, stable, and medal-oriented. We consider that this was because the sailors progressively learned to apply the behavioral models and mental skills during stressful real-life competitions. The first author consulted the sailors on minor issues that were not part of their regular mental preparation, according to the specific demands and situation.

psychological interventions

Sometimes psychological interventions were applied to a specific issue based on a request from the coaches. The example in Figure 1 demonstrates such a case in which the dilemma revolved around the decision-making process on the start line. The psychological work was tailored specifically to the issue and the intervention took place mainly under training conditions.

Example of a Specific Short-term Intervention

Here we present a case in which the coach of a sailing 470 team requested urgent psychological support. After analyzing previous competitions, the coach highlighted the impact of incorrect decision-making and a problematic relationship between the two sailors, which negatively affected their performance. The first author visited the marina, met and talked with the sailors, and joined them for sea training on the coach boat and later on the sailors' boat. The experience of taking part in numerous sea training sessions helped to clarify the relationship between the sailors and the coach, and to collect information about their communication, leadership, decision-making, and stress management.

understand challenges the sailors faced

One key issue was to understand challenges the sailors faced during a race. Therefore, each athlete provided a road map of a competition race, including the optimal path from start to finish, identifying specific, potentially problematic points. For example, during the starting point the sailors had to work on their decision-making process, regarding which strategy they should choose, along with their corresponding behavior. Another example involved a curve in the path in which the sailors had to decide in which style they had to "attack" the mark (i.e., float) representing the starting line, while considering other boats, as illustrated in Figure 1.

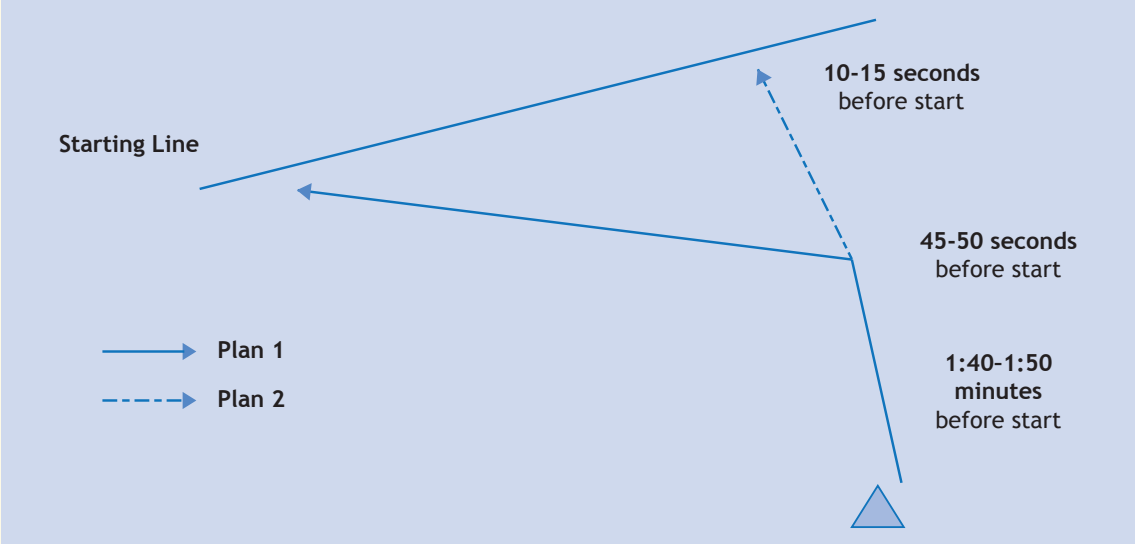

Figure 1. Decision making for the start of the race

The sailors and their coach identified the starting spot as an important and problematic point, given that a good start can determine the performance level of the whole race, and a bad start is an additional stress factor to deal with during the race. Therefore, we helped the team to develop an optimal prestart routine in order to establish a controlled and effective mental state. This assisted the sailors to focus on the important acts to be performed before and during a race. Together with the sailors, we developed a basic Plan 1 and a reserve Plan 2 (see Figure 1). The sailors practiced the plans through imagery. Initially, the practice took place on the beach and later in the boat. The sailors practiced the starting scene together, while we verbally marked three important time points: 1:40-1:50 minutes prestart, 45-50 seconds prestart, and 10-15 seconds prestart. During that time, the sailors verbally practiced the commands and actions they had to perform during a real race. They practiced this scene 4-5 times during each meeting, for one month. Then the team practiced this imagery exercise on the boat, and finally applied the plan during competitions.

develop an optimal prestart routine

The goal of Plan 2 was to give the athletes an additional option in case problems arose during Plan 1. Plan 2 was shorter than Plan 1 and started from the 50 second prestart point. The difference in time gave the sailors the opportunity to identify a problem and to allow them enough time for change and modification. The skipper was the only one who could make the decision whether or not Plan 1 should be replaced with Plan 2.

We also provided the sailors with one-on-one consultation meetings, the goal of which was to improve the concentration and self-regulation skills of the individual sailors. The psychological techniques included concentration exercises with GSR/BFB, muscle relaxation, self-talk, BFB training, goal-setting and positive thinking.

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Summary

- *Sailors and their coaches benefit from psychological knowledge and apply it in practice especially when they trust the sport psychology consultant who is perceived to be part of the team.*

- *For trust to exist, the sport psychology consultant should understand the coaches' and athletes' personalities, and the demands of sailing training and competition, including wind direction and sea conditions. The sport psychology consultant should be patient, calm, and cooperative, with an excellent sense of humour.*

- *The sport psychology consultant should discuss the psychological plan and meet with the coaching staff on a regular, daily or weekly basis. The goal of this interaction is to exchange ideas, experiences and psychological knowledge to improve athletes' training programs and psychological readiness.*

- *Psychological consultations should be provided in three settings:*
  - Laboratory setting (i.e., sterile condition);
  - Training setting (i.e., during actual practice);
  - Competition setting (i.e., before and between races, after competitions).

- *The training setting is the main field for psychological support in sailing and windsurfing.*

- *Sport psychology consultants who work with sailors and windsurfers should always be available and time-flexible, prepared to attend for half days 3-4 times per week, on the coach boat or beach regardless of the weather conditions. In addition, the sport psychologist should attend international competitions 5-6 times a year or more.*

- *These secrets are, of course, relevant for other sports, although in sailing and windsurfing they are particularly significant.*

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Conclusion

In this chapter we have described how we, as sport psychology consultants, worked with sailors and coaches to help those dedicated to Israel's success at the elite level globally to have the best chance to achieve their goals. Through the commitment of substantial time and expertise, we are confident that we made a noteworthy contribution to the success of Israeli sailors at the highest level over a period of years. One key to the success of this work has been the expert application of biofeedback training that has marked the career of the first author. We hope that this chapter helps readers to recognize and develop their own psychological approach and style with sailors and windsurfers in their country.

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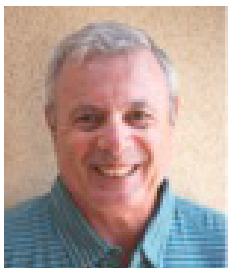
ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Boris Blumenstein PhD is the Director of the Department of Behavioral Sciences at the Ribstein Center for Sport Medicine Sciences and Research, Wingate Institute, Israel. His extensive experience in sport psychology spans some 30 years, culminating in applied work at the elite level. He was a sport psychology consultant for the Soviet national and Olympic teams and, from 1990-2008, for the Israeli national and Olympic teams. He is author and co-author of six books and over 90 refereed journal articles and book chapters. Dr. Blumenstein has given more than 80 scientific presentations at international and national conferences and workshops.

Iris Orbach PhD is a researcher and a sport psychology consultant in the Department of Behavioral Sciences at the Ribstein Center for Sport Medicine Sciences and Research, Wingate Institute, Israel. She received her PhD in Sport Psychology in 1999 from the University of Florida, Department of Sport and Exercise Sciences, in Gainesville, Florida, USA. Dr. Orbach has published two books, numerous articles and book chapters, and has given presentations at national and international conferences on topics related to sport psychology. Her current research interests include stress-performance relationships, children and motivation in sport, and the effectiveness of various mental training practices.