

Relaxing the mind a key component in competitive athletes off season

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For many World Cup winter athletes there is a pending guilt during their season ending time spent resting and relaxing the mind and body. It is a guiltiness that becomes greater the closer they get to the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver, B.C.

As much as they understand the importance of taking a break from their sport physically and mentally, there is still an urge to continue pushing themselves to gain strength, endurance and knowledge of the technical aspects of their particular sport.

"It's a universal love for the sport. Athletes tend to perform as well as they feel they deserve. That is why there is a fire burning inside to improve physically and gain power in the gym," said Richard Monette, a sports psychology advisor. "My goal is to help them manage the physical and mental components and make them feel like they deserve more."

According to Monette, in his experiences athletes that have suffered injuries that were considered to be career ending have a better understanding of the refreshing, recuperating and rebuilding process.

"It's almost as if they reap the rewards of being injured because they understand the value of using their time wisely to get better," Monette added.

One of Monette's most notable clients is 2006 Olympic silver medallist, and two-time World Champion in the skeleton event, Jeff Pain.

"Becoming world champion was the most complicated simple thing I have ever done....my sport was simply an arena in which Richard helped me learn about myself. An arena in which I became me and achieved my potential," Pain said.

Monette and Pain have been working together for the better part of seven seasons and because of that they can very quickly get to the challenge at hand because they know each other's style and approach.

Monette's role is one where he helps Pain and other athletes manage their surroundings and the components of their performance. His only reward is that of a sense of accomplishment in a background role.

"To achieve your full potential is an act of courage. Shedding layers of self-limitations also requires courage. Reflecting on a defeat and identifying what you learned from it is courageous," Monette said. "Early on in athletics the physical side is important but once you reach the World Cup level it is mostly mental. At that point all the tools are there it just becomes a mental game."

The majority of Monette's clients are those that compete in an individual sport with a team surrounding and from that aspect he helps athletes manage the pressure that comes from working within a team.

"One thing I try to emphasize is how much energy can be spent dealing with the political aspects of sport," Monette said. "I help clients achieve piece of mind and conserve energy."

One particular exercise Monette

uses helps show athletes what drains their energy and outlines and identifies how much a negative environment and their reaction to it can affect them.

"We work together to make a wiser athlete," said Monette.

A Banff resident since 1993, Monette doesn't work strictly with Olympic athletes as he also plays a role with the Banff Hockey Academy.

"I teach them the ability to think like a World Cup athlete although their repercussions are not as intense. I tell them to live each shift as a universe of its own," he said.

Monette believes that to enhance performance and the level of fulfillment, one must recapture the focus, drive, creativity and open-mindedness of play.

In his work as a business strategist, corporate performance coach, sports psychology consultant to professional athletes and Olympians, author and public speaker Monette helps his clients apply these elements of playing into the arenas of business and personal life.

Monette is currently working on his second novel entitled *Success=Results Delivered x Fulfillment Lived*. The Banff resident is also working on a novel about the idea of slowing, which to Monette means, taking the time to enjoy all aspects of an event or activity.

"I am constantly trying to rejuvenate myself by getting deeper in my thinking," he admitted. "Many sports psychologists have one approach. To be effective you need to have a million so that you can apply to the specific needs of the person."