Is there really something called the “Athletic Personality”? 

For decades, psychologists attempted to identify personality traits that distinguished athletes in one sport from those in another (and from nonathletes). Using American psychologist Raymond Cattell’s Personality Factor Questionnaire and a battery of other paper-and-pencil inventories, researchers came to contradictory results. Beyond the fact that athletes are more physically active than nonathletes and the equally obvious fact that athletes drawn to individual sports score higher on “autonomy” and “independence” than athletes devoted to team sports, there was little consensus on “the athletic personality.” If one controls for social class, athletes tend to be like nonathletes and all athletes, regardless of sport, tend to be very much like one another.

Studies of the “athletic personality” have become rare, but studies of motivation and aggression have increased in number and have become increasingly multifactored and sophisticated. Early studies of motivation, often inspired by the work of American psychologists David McClelland and John Atkinson, examined the relationship between the need for achievement and the fear of failure. Female athletes proved to be a special problem. For a number of years, their lower levels of motivation were explained as a fear that athletic success came at the cost of diminished femininity. This fear was, in turn, explained as the result of role conflict. A woman’s fervent interest in sports might be perceived as an expression of a masculine nature or lesbianism; psychological tests such as American psychologist Sandra Bem’s Sex Role Inventory routinely classified female athletes as “masculine” because they scored high on scales for competition and aggressiveness.

By the end of the century, however, in Europe and North America greater social acceptance of intensely competitive female athletes (and of lesbianism) more or less eliminated role conflict and the “fear of success.” At the recreational level as well as the elite level, recent studies have shown conclusively that sports participation generally leads to increased, rather than diminished, self-esteem for girls and women as well as for boys and men.

In Problem Athletes and How to Handle Them (1966), Americans Bruce Ogilvie and Thomas Tutko attempted to apply motivational principles to improve sports performance. Their widely used Athletic Motivation Inventory was designed to measure personality...
traits, such as leadership and mental toughness, conducive to athletic achievement. Other psychologists have explored a variety of techniques, including meditation, mental imaging, and even hypnosis, to lessen anxiety or control arousal or improve concentration. Still other psychologists have sought to enhance performance by studying the dynamics of small-group interaction and the relative efficacy of different coaching and leadership styles.

Gender accounts for some of the observed differences. Although female athletes are increasingly similar psychologically to male athletes, they continue to respond more readily than men do to encouragement and to react more negatively than men do to admonition. Cultural differences, which sports psychologists sometimes neglect, are also important. Japanese athletes respond better than their North American counterparts to harsh criticism and punitive discipline. Cultural differences also play an important role when the stage is set for pharmacological intervention. The more authoritarian the culture is, the more likely it has been that coaches will demand that elite athletes use performance-enhancing drugs, such as anabolic steroids, and abjure recreational drugs, such as cocaine. The motivation for recreational sports is unquestionably different from the motivation at the elite level. Recreational and elite athletes share a common desire to improve their skills and to win, rather than lose, a contest. Both are likely to value the social pleasures of team membership and to experience the moments of ecstatic fulfillment that some psychologists refer to as “flow.”

There are, however, important differences in the kind and intensity of their motivation. Material rewards figure, of course, among the motives of openly professional athletes, but, even when economic motives are not in play, elite athletes are a breed apart. They are likely to feel themselves to be representatives of their nation (or of some other collectivity). Standing on the victor’s podium and watching one’s national flag rise to the strains of one’s national anthem can motivate as strongly as the prospect of signing a million-dollar contract (and the first frequently leads to the second). When inspired by a combination of economic and representational motives, elite athletes can reach almost unimaginable levels of athletic performance, but they are also liable to develop a win-at-all-costs attitude that motivates them to use performance-enhancing drugs, to commit intentional fouls, and to risk lifelong physical disability by “playing hurt” (continuing to compete despite a serious injury).

This disregard for one’s health is perhaps the most important motivational difference between the elite and the recreational athlete. For the latter, a principal motive for sports participation (and for visits to an aerobics class or a fitness centre) is a desire to improve one’s health and to shape one’s body into closer conformity to contemporary ideals of physical attractiveness. For the former, the physical self is frequently jeopardized and sometimes sacrificed on the altar of sports success.

From: http://www.britannica.com/blogs/2006/12/the-%E2%80%9Cathletic-personality%E2%80%9D%E2%80%94mere-myth/
How You Can Improve Your Performance Through Sports Psychology

by Cristina Bortoni Versari, Ph.D.

Is there a relationship between personality type and sport preference? How do those know what their sports personality might be? What do those who participate in the same sports have in common? In order to answer questions related to sports psychology, over five hundred athletes were tested and evaluated. To examine the relationship between personality types, sport preferences and performance, team and individual athletes' personality profiles were designed.

Results indicated that teams exhibit a predictable personality profile and that by understanding the psyche of the athlete, performance and team productivity can be enhanced. Optimal communication and performance can be achieved by identifying the athletes’ preferred learning and personality styles. The more athletes and coaches understand about their personalities and the team profile, the more productive they can be.

Benefits of Understanding Sports Psychology

1. Helps assess the fit between persons and sports and even positions on a team
2. Helps athletes and coaches value their strengths and become more aware of those areas in which development may be warranted
3. Helps coaches and athletes in a strained relationship analyze the source of the conflict and build a strategy to reduce it
4. Can lead to motivated and committed behavior
5. Useful for the athlete and sports professional in career and life planning, self-management (such as stress/time management) and interpersonal skills areas
6. Many applications in team building and management training

Background

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is organized by using eight different personality preferences. The preferences are arranged by four functions and four attitudes. The four functions are composed of two kinds of perception, sensing (S) and intuition (N), and two kinds of judgment, thinking (T) and feeling (F). The four attitudes are composed of extraversion (E), introversion (I), judgment (J), and perception (P).

The roles of the functions are as follows:
- Sensing (S) seeks the fullest possible experience of what is immediate and real.
- Intuition (I) seeks the furthest reaches of the possible and imaginative.
- Thinking (T) seeks rational order and plan according to impersonal logic.
- Feeling (F) seeks rational order according to harmony among subjective values (Myers, McCaulley, 1985).

The roles of the attitudes are as follows:
- Extroversion (E) draws energy from objects and people in society and the environment.
- Introversion (I) draws energy from an inner world of concepts and ideas.
Judgment (J) seeks to make decisions, closure, plan operations, or organize activities.
Perception (P) outer behavior is spontaneous, curious, and adaptive, open to new events and changes (Myers, McCaulley, 1985).

The MBTI can be applied to many different settings, such as, education, counseling, career guidance, athletics and teamwork, and communications.

- In education settings, the MBTI can help to analyze curricula, methods, media, and materials in light of the needs of different types.
- In counseling, it can help couples and families learn the value of both their differences and similarities.
- Using the MBTI in career guidance can help guide individuals in their choice of school majors, professions, occupations, and work settings.
- For athletics and teamwork, it can help select teams, and help team members grow in their own development as each learns from the skills of the other.
- In a communications setting, the MBTI can help to increase understanding by "talking the language" of different types in the group.

The investigation of athletes personality type and its relationship with individual and team performance is innovative; results of the work conducted with NBA players, Olympic athletes and high school athletes have been very positive. Coaches and parents can now better understand the behavior of athletes and teams. Athletes can better understand their preferences and utilize that information to maximize their performance in sport and in their second careers.

From: [http://www.selfhelpmagazine.com/article/sports-psychology](http://www.selfhelpmagazine.com/article/sports-psychology)