Thoughts of Korean Women Badminton Singles Players in Various Situations during Games

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The purposes of this study were: 1) to investigate the thoughts of Korean women badminton singles players before and during their games, 2) to extract rational thoughts in order to make them optimally perform by specifically identifying intentional thoughts which appeared in various situations, and 3) to help those who lack specific thoughts and/or have improper thoughts to have rational and appropriate thoughts for the competitions by providing appropriate programs that fit various competition situations. Twelve players were the subjects of this study (two top-elite level, five national level, and five company/university level players). A half-structured interview representing specific game situations was administered individually in order to identify their thoughts during competitions in general and during strokes. The personal interview questionnaire were made from my experiences as a badminton coach for 20 years and with the help of sport psychology consultants. The interview questionnaire included potential occasions that could happen in singles matches. It was divided into three situations, before and during competitions, and during strokes. After the interview, a qualitative research method was utilized to analyze the content of the interview. Results revealed that the thoughts during the competition were various. That is, there were mixed positive and negative thoughts, and there were specific and non-specific thoughts as well. Differences were found between top-elite and elite players and according to game situations. Especially, top-elite players didn’t yield their will regardless of any situation during the game, rather they even enjoyed those situations or had fun in the situations. In addition, they simply focused on each moment of the game and did their best. They hardly show their emotional swings, nor did they reveal their emotions during the game. Also, top-elite players recognized exactly the situation of each stroke when they or the opponent hit the shuttlecock. They said that they sent the shuttlecock in the direction intended and focused on the place where the opponent could send it back. In addition, they showed relatively low mental changes influenced by external moods or game situations.

Key words: badminton players, women’s singles matches, thoughts before and during the game, half-structured interview

Introduction

Purpose of the study

Athletic performance in the field is presented as the results of complex interactions among physical, social, technical and psychological variables. Especally, the psychological variable is one of the most important elements for the athletes to manage their game (Han, 1996; Han & Kim, 1995). Badminton was first introduced to Korea in the 1960s. At first the level of Korea was not

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good enough to be one of the best countries in terms of badminton performance. However, it is not
too much to say that the current level of the Korea badminton players has been recognized as some
of the top players in the world through continuous development. Koreans have proved the truth of
their reputation by winning two gold medals in male and female doubles in the 1992 Barcelona
Olympics and two gold medals in female singles and mixed doubles in the 1996 Atlanta Olympics.
Koreans are known to be strong in badminton doubles and nobody can deny that. However, it is
also true that they are weak in singles matches where the player face 1 to 1 situations and have
to cope with them. Many variables such as excellent skills and strong physical and psychological
components are involved in badminton. Since the rally proceeds very rapidly in a narrow space,
excellent results are expected only when those variables mentioned above are appropriately
interacted.

Previous studies in badminton mostly have analyzed the skills used in the game (e.g., Kim,
D.M., 1999; Kim, J.H., 1999; Kwon, 2001; Ra, 2002). Other studies have examined physiological
variables (Park & Park, 1991; Kim et al., 2002) and psychological variables (Park, 2001; Shin,
2000) and fitness/skill measurements (Ahn, 1998; Lee, 2001). Although a few studies (Park & Kim,
2000; Seong & Gu, 1992; Seong & Kim, 2001) have focused on the field research for the
performance enhancement of elite players, much more information is still required.

It is presumed that top-elite athletes who show superb performance in badminton matches also
have peculiar thoughts and behavior. Particularly, the ability of the player to stay calm, to solve and
cope with the difficulties/adversities is more important than any other element when she is
confronted with an urgent, dangerous, and uncontrollable situations in the singles match. In addition,
the top-elite players should respond appropriately to the opponent’s strokes during continuous and
repeated rally situations without physical exhaustion. They should also be able to manage fast
movements instantaneously. It is well believed that these factors are well developed through
training. However, when well-trained movements are not followed by appropriate thoughts, then
inappropriate movements or behaviors result. In order to perform efficiently in competitions,
appropriate judgment, expectations based upon game situations, and the ability to understand the
mind of the opponent play decisive and important roles.

Especially it is necessary for players to analyze opponents’ stroke courses and states
continuously and to prepare appropriate strategies based upon the analysis. The reason for this is
that single players may demonstrate habitually particular movements in similar situations such as
stroke habits in the game. Focusing on this necessity, previous studies (Park & Kim, 2000; Seong
& Kim, 2001) examined the stroke courses of elite players. The authors reported that there were
preferable courses that the players like to do in single matches, which resulted from habitual
movements. This indicates that players replicate the same movements as they hit the strokes during
a rally or that the same situations for the stroke during a rally are continuously repeated. In other
words, the stroke courses of the player can be anticipated by the opponent. Thus, what are the
thoughts of the players during games and what sort of thoughts they have during strokes are
highlighted as important matters associated with the game results.

In general, psychological skills related to performance results are variously presented. They
include anxiety, self-efficacy, psychological preparation, concentration, motivation, and imagery