

Study shows why sporting heroes should thank their friends

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Encouraging words from friends and family can pave the way to sporting victory, according to research by the University of Exeter, released today. Dame Kelly Holmes and Sir Chris Hoy have both cited the ongoing support of their families and friends as a major factor in their Olympic success. Now, for the first time, this study quantifies the benefit of this kind of support on sports performance.

Published in the *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, the study shows the benefit of this 'social support' is most significant when a player is under stress. In this study, only those with the highest levels of social support were able to maintain good performance during a high-pressure game, or when experiencing personal problems.

The researchers focused on 197 British male amateur golfers, who all played at a high level (handicaps ranging from +2 to 4). The golfers completed a series of questionnaires to measure the level of support they receive from their peers. They were also questioned about their confidence before a game and about a number of factors that could cause stress or anxiety. The quality of their performance was measured, taking into account their final score, handicap and the conditions on the day. Statistical analysis then revealed the relationship between these sets of results.

The results showed that, when playing under stress, social support could improve performance by nearly one shot per round of golf. The researchers believe that this significant difference is the result of the

increased confidence brought about by social support. For players with the lowest levels of support, increases in stress caused a performance deterioration of up to three shots per round.

Dr Tim Rees of the University of Exeter's School of Sport and Health Sciences, said: "Our study reveals the ongoing support of friends and family to be one of the most important factors influencing sports performance. While training, tactics and luck all play a part, the encouraging words or kind gestures of a partner or friend can make the difference between a footballer scoring that winning goal, or a sprinter achieving a record time. The encouragement and support of friends and family clearly plays a massive part in building confidence, which is so important when the pressure is on."

Although they focused on golf, the researchers believe their results would be relevant for any sport and probably for other areas of performance, including work.

More information: [www.atypon-link.com/GPI/doi/ab...
1/jscp.2009.28.2.244](http://www.atypon-link.com/GPI/doi/ab.../jscp.2009.28.2.244)

Source: University of Exeter

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