



PÉCSI TUDOMÁNYEGYETEM
UNIVERSITY OF PÉCS

Sports psychology I.

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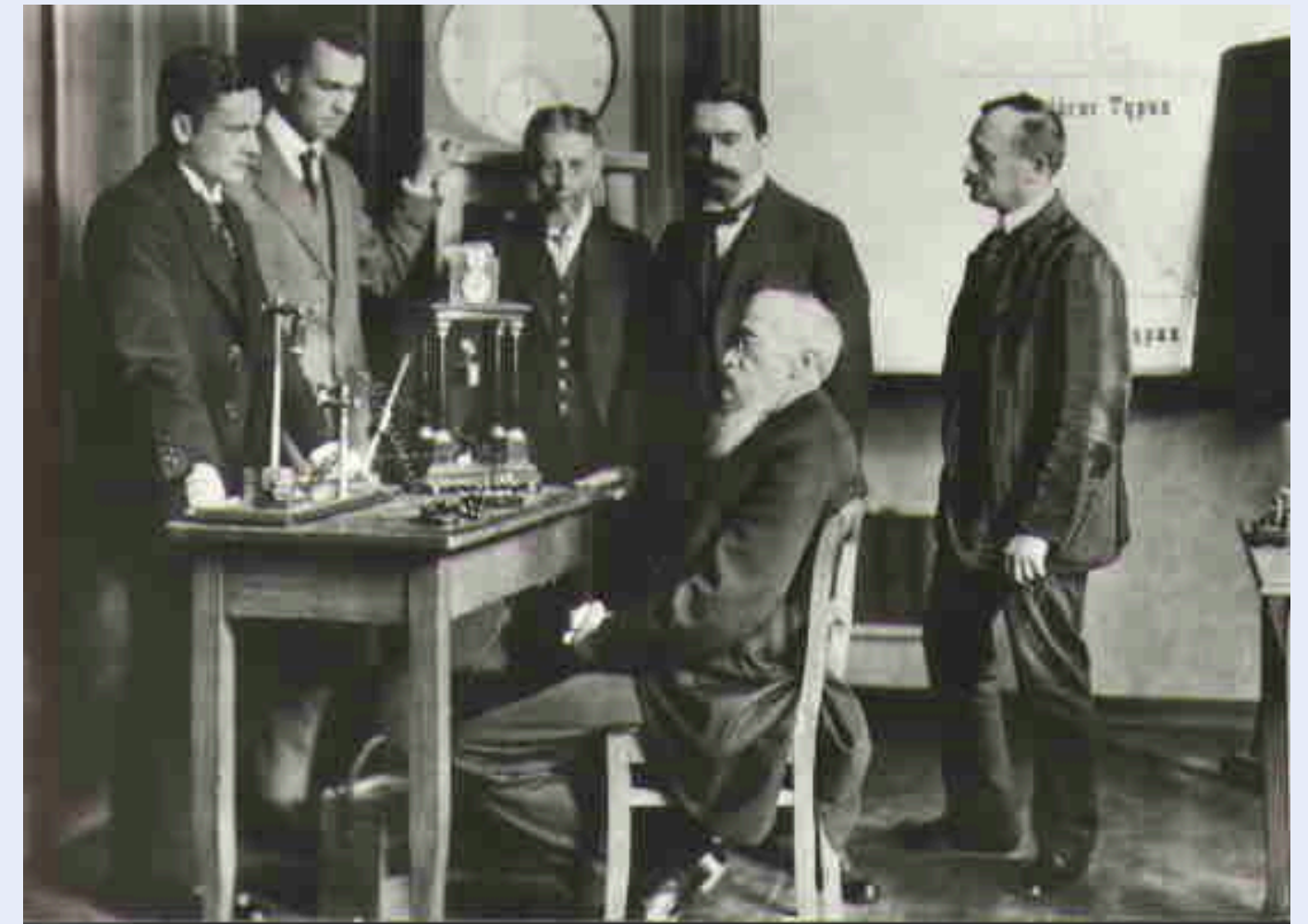
Pécs, 2026 March



International and Hungarian Background of Sport Psychology

International history I.

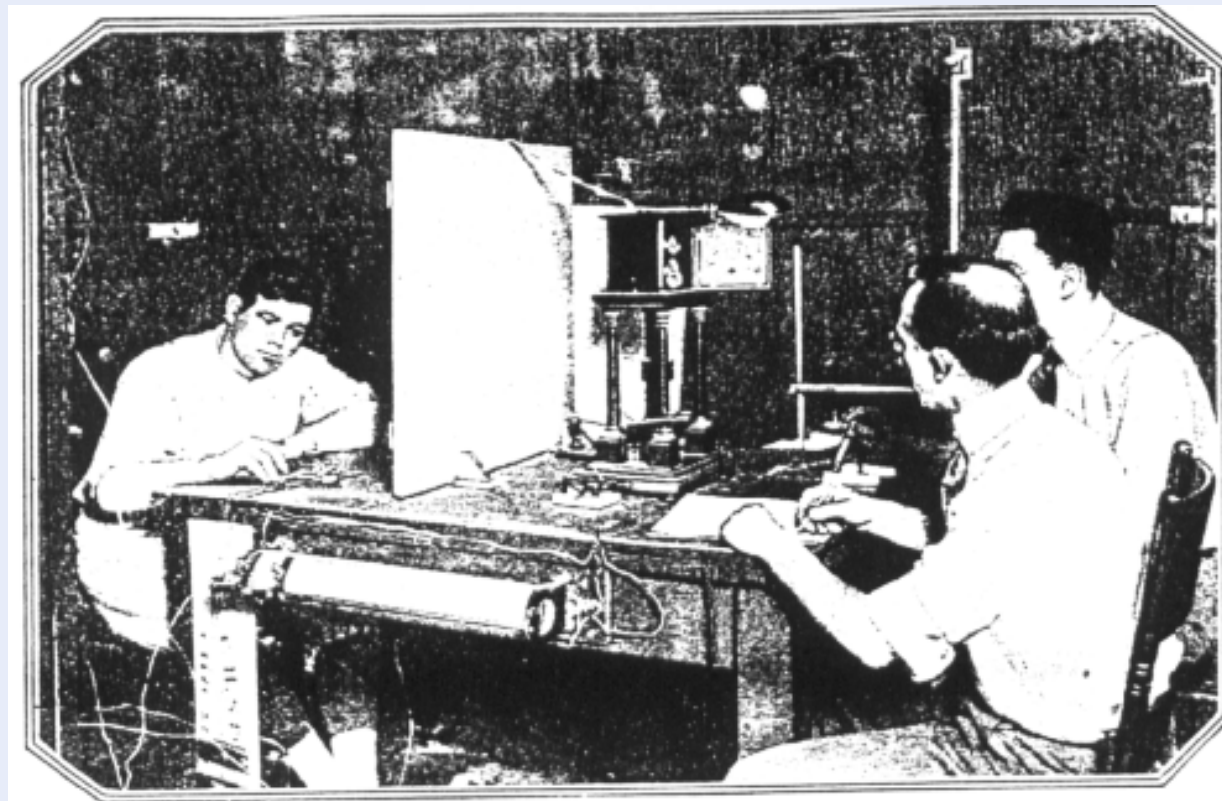
- young scientific field
- first psychological lab: **William James, 1875** (Harvard University, USA)- mainly theoretical teaching
- first experimental psychological lab: **Wilhelm Wundt, 1879** (University of Leipzig, Germany)
- -> psychology as an **independent scientific discipline**
- first (social) sport psychology-related experiment: **Triplett, 1898- social facilitation** (cyclists)
- first sport psychology laboratory: **Robert Werner Schulte, 1920** (Charlottenburg, Germany)- measuring athletes' physical abilities
- **Pierre de Coubertin, 1900**: La Psychologie du Sport (The psychology of Sport)- using "sport" and "psychology" in one term



Wilhelm Wundt with students; source: Psychology Pictures/Archives of Dutch Psychology

International history II.

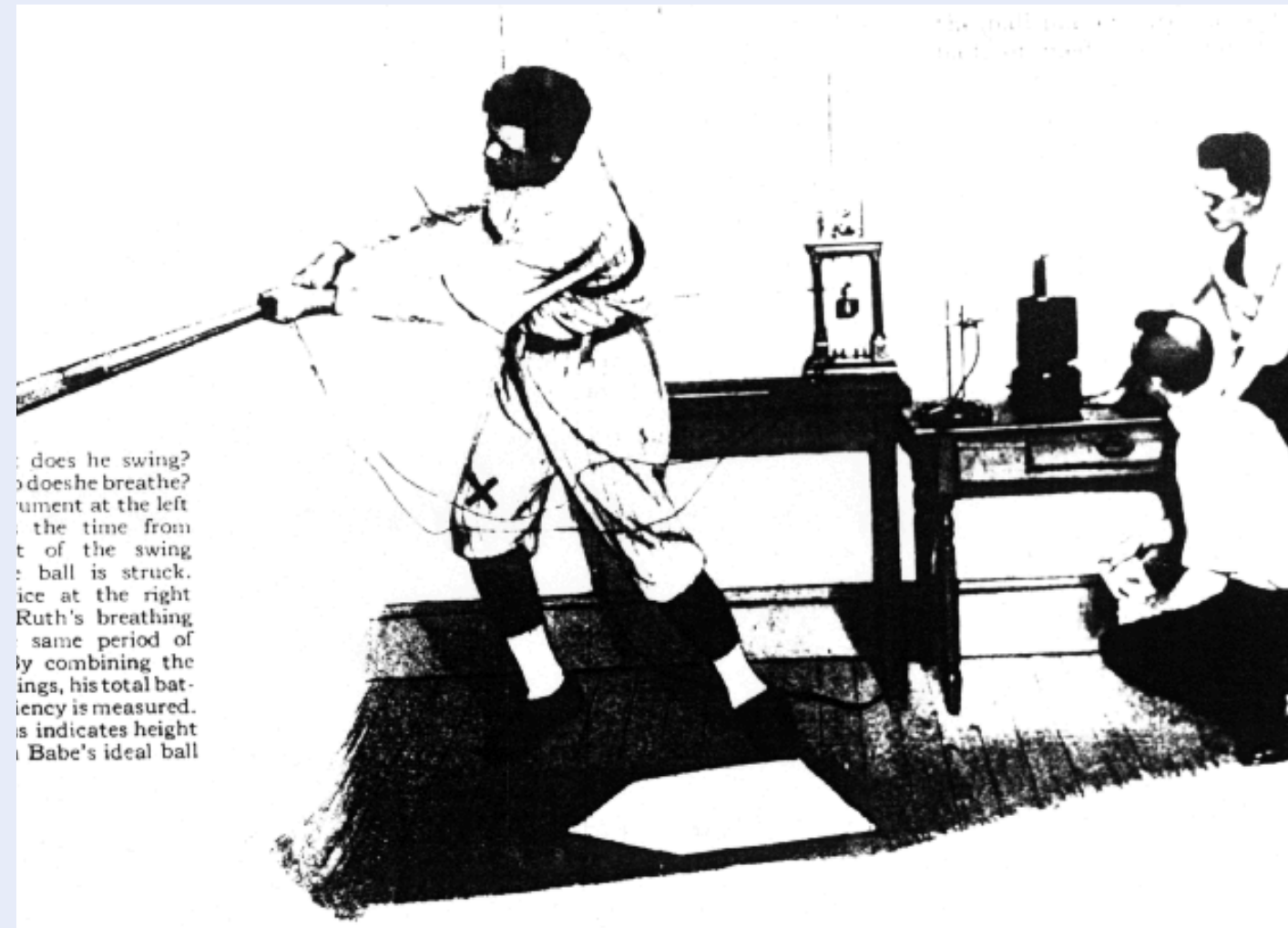
- 1921: sport psychology testing: examination of "**Babe**" Ruth baseball player
- What explains his talent and performance? What are the components of sport performance? (<https://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Fullerton/>)



Testing Babe Ruth for Quickness of Eye, Brain and Muscle

Ruth was told to press the telegraph-key when a light flashed on the board before him. Results showed that his muscles responded to the eye-and-brain impulse more than one tenth quicker than do

those of the average person. Scientists say this is one reason why he can follow a sharp breaking curve with his bat and hit the ball fair enough to drive it far over the fence



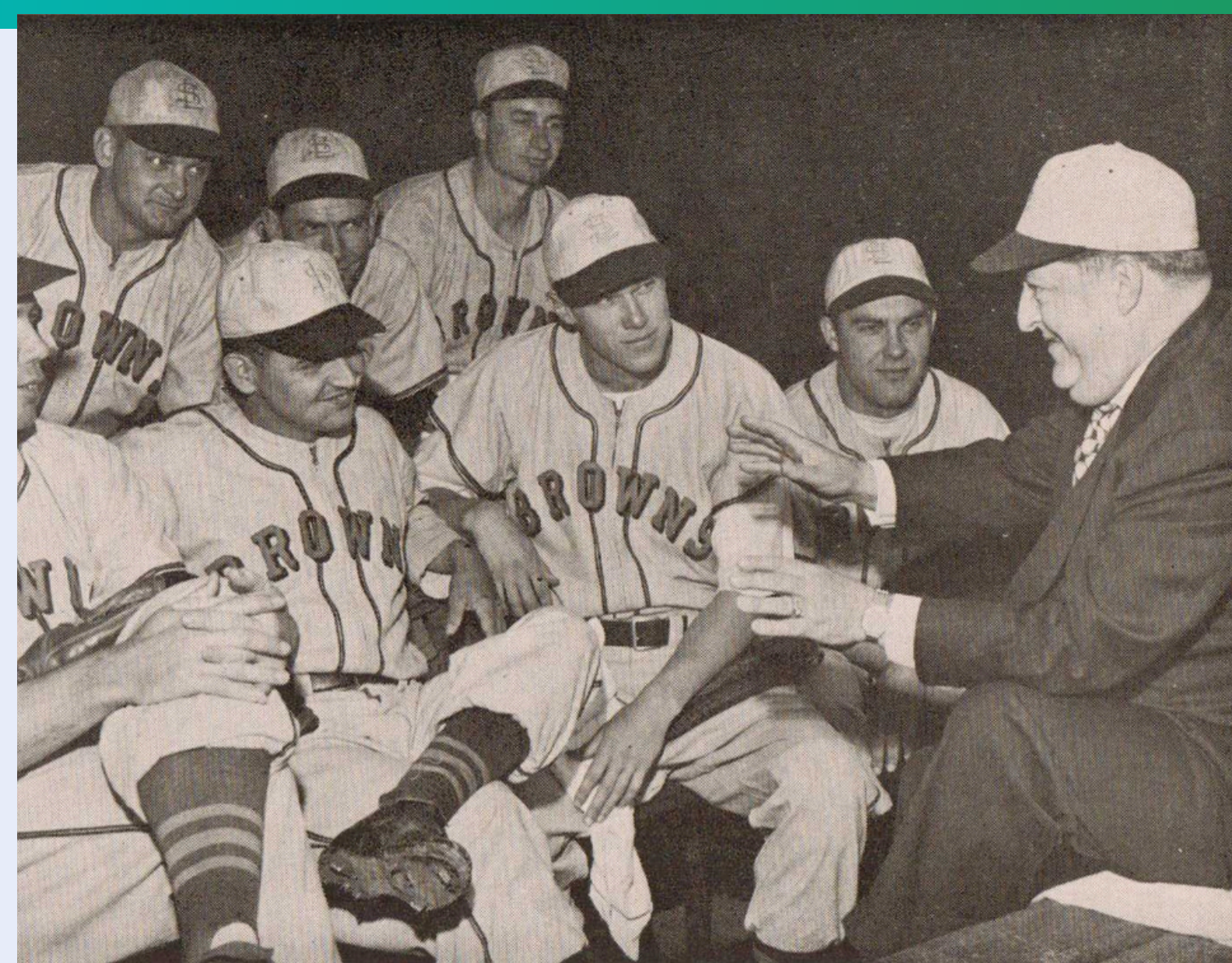
... does he swing?
... does he breathe?
... ment at the left
... the time from
... t of the swing
... ball is struck.
... ice at the right
Ruth's breathing
... same period of
... y combining the
... ings, his total bat-
... ency is measured.
... s indicates height
... Babe's ideal ball



Do you think you could place this stylus in the three holes on the triangular-shaped board in consecutive order 132 times a minute? Probably not, because the average is only 82; but the "home-run king" found no trouble in doing it, thus showing that his power of coordination is unusually great

International history III.

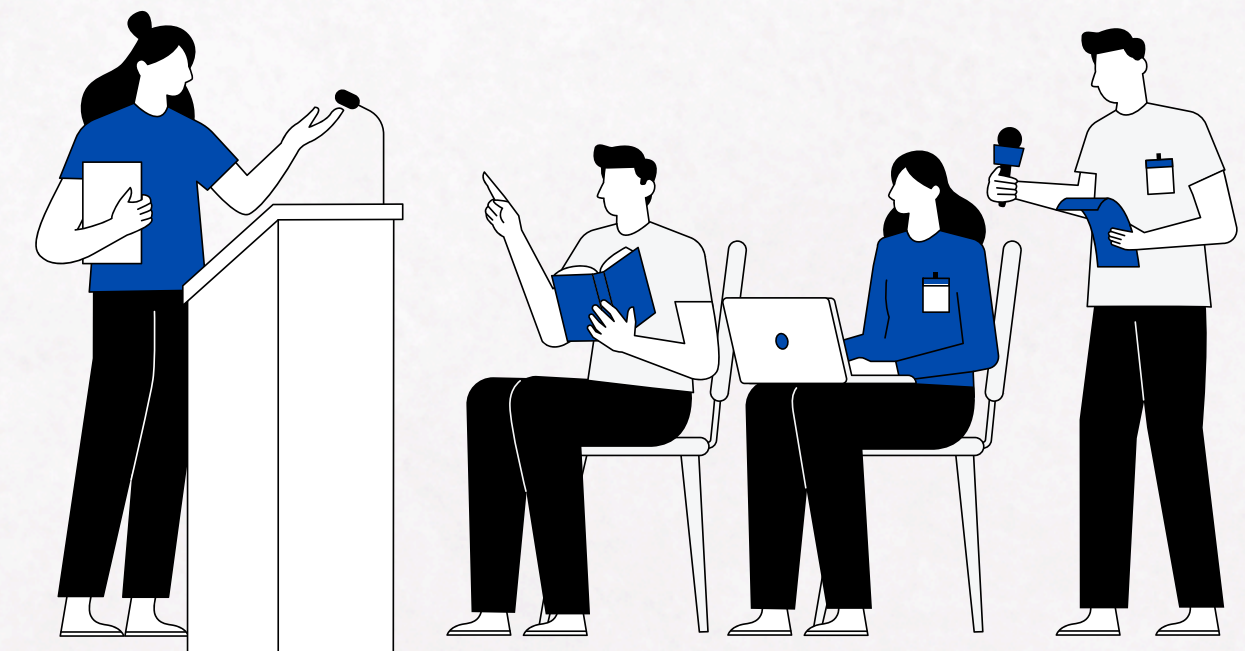
- first sport psychology laboratory in the United States:
Coleman Griffith, 1925 (University of Illinois)– first applied sport psychologist in America
- 1940–1960: growing number of sport-related studies in psychology; sport psychologists involved in Olympic preparation; introduction of psychology education for coaches
- **Dr. David Tracy:** performance optimization: relaxation, autosuggestion, hypnosis– St. Louis Browns
- first **World Congress of Sport Psychology: Rome, 1965**



Dr. David Tracy with baseball team, 1950

International history IV.

- **1965: International Society of Sport Psychology (ISSP)**
- first scientific journal in sport psychology: **International Journal of Sport Psychology** (1970)
- 1970–1990: The **United States Olympic Committee employs sport psychologists**
- Today: since 1965– **15 World Congresses of Sport Psychology**
- several countries offer sport psychology courses and specialisations
- an increasing number of elite and recreational athletes work with a sport psychologist
- **continuous research, development, and applied practice**



Hungarian Background

- first Hungarian publication in sport psychology: **György Doros, 1934** – The Practical Psychology of Sport (performance enhancement, talent selection)– importance of mind–body balance!
- first experimental sport psychology research publication: **Ferenc Hepp, 1942**: The Psychological Analysis of Aiming Throws (psychological components of throwing performance)
- **1978: establishment of the Sports Mental Health Department** of the National Institute of Sports Medicine (OSEI)
- **1980: Sport Psychology Section** of the Hungarian Psychological Association founded
- present: flourishing field; sport psychology training available at several Hungarian universities

**What does a sport
psychologist do?**



Sport psychology...

- **psychology and sport science**
- **applied field of psychology**
- approaches:

sport and personality – physical and mental well-being; health
performance optimisation – achieving the best possible,
outstanding performance

- specific features: positive approach, time-sensitive factor (e.g. competition vs preparation period), more flexible structure (session length, frequency, practitioner–client, relationship, location and circumstances)
- competencies:
- <https://www.ppk.elte.hu/content/sportpszichologiai-szakpszichologia.t.41807>



Sport psychology preparation

- mental preparation and state are as important as physical
- **competition preparation:** optimising performance, developing skills, supporting athletes and coaches, enhancing communication
- **direction of sport psychology work:**
e.g. self-regulation, improving concentration, reducing anxiety (beyond this: personal life crises) → clinical issues: eating disorders, anxiety and mood disorders, PTSD, trauma processing → referring to a clinical psychologist/psychiatrist
- psychological support and management of life events → timing and careful consideration
- **main areas:** attention/concentration, self-confidence, performance anxiety, stress management, motivation/goals, mental resilience, coping with injuries, communication with environment (club, coach, team)

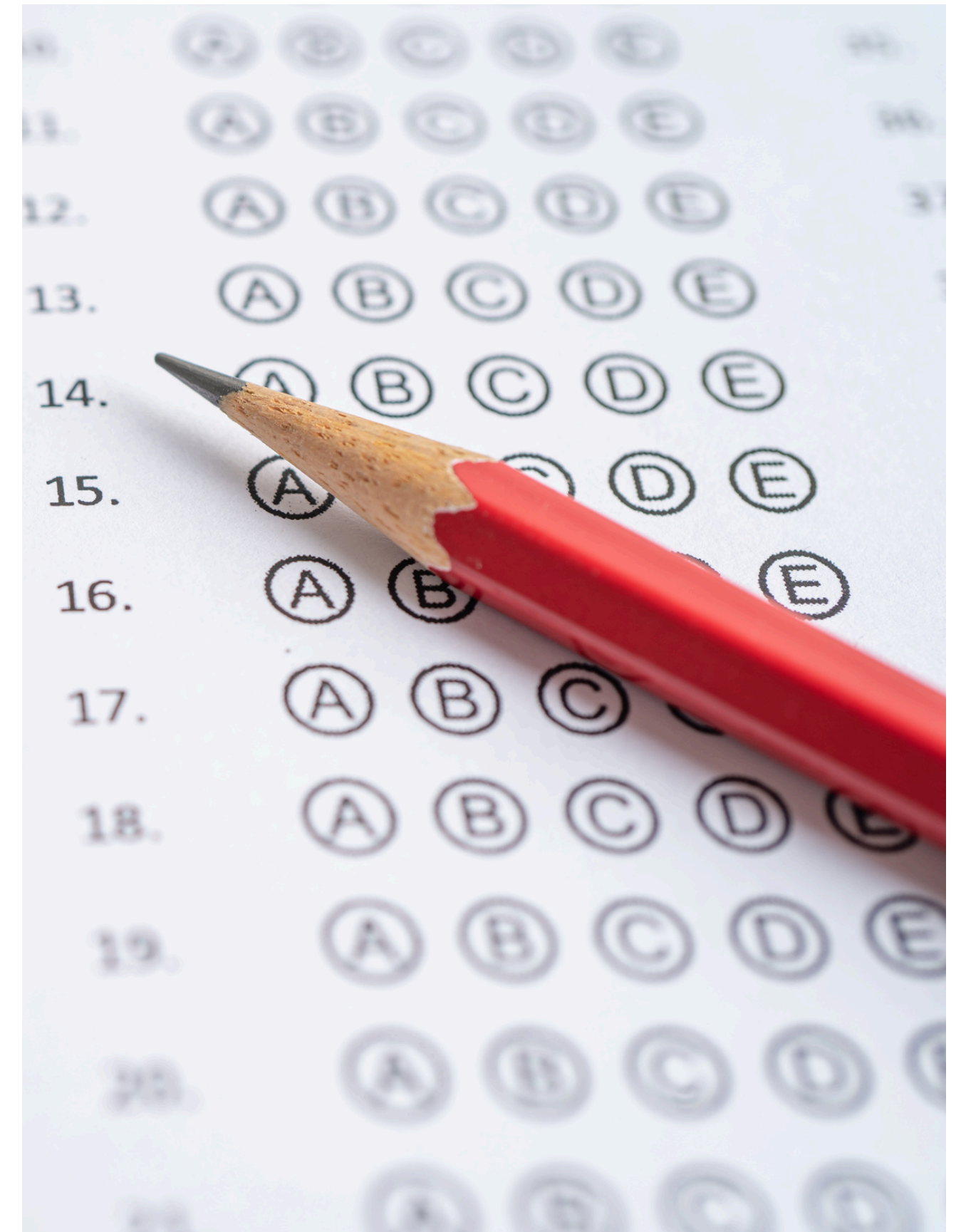


Sport psychology assessment

- **voluntary application or referral** by a sports federation, coach, or sports medicine team
- **assessment includes:** cross-sectional psychological status, current mental state, personality functioning, cognitive abilities (attention, concentration), coping mechanisms; in team sports: dynamics (communication, conflict management, rivalry), roles, team cohesion, relationship with coach

Question: Can the coach be informed about the athlete's results?

- → requires informed consent, protection of personal rights, adherence to professional and ethical guidelines, and confidentiality



- **Individual:**



Application



Assessment

- first interview, anamnesis → hypothesis
- assessment (usually paper-pencil) – one test is not enough!
- feedback, goal-setting



Counselling

- collaborative work between athlete and psychologist
- possible consultation with others
- closure, follow-up

- **Group session-** e.g. team dynamics, cohesion, within-team conflicts
- **Prevention, education-** e.g. stress management, burnout (for parents/coaches/athletes)
- **Rehabilitation-** e.g. injured athlete (coping with injury event, support during recovery)

common issues: "lack of motivation", performance drop, concentration difficulties, team dynamics, anxiety, low self-confidence

- **collaboration with other professionals!**

Relation to Medicine

- Sports Medicine / Sports Physician (screening, medical clearance)- referral
- Prevention and Health Promotion- cooperation

(programmes and counselling aimed at behaviour change related to healthy lifestyle, physical activity, motivation, psychological well-being, etc.)

- Paediatrics (psychological aspects of symptoms and medical conditions)
- Psychiatry and Psychosomatics (e.g., substance misuse, eating and body-image disorders, anxiety and mood disorders, psychosomatic issues)
- Rehabilitation (e.g., return to sport, injury-related anxiety)

Recognition → Referral → Support / Follow-up



Commonly used methods

- Relaxation techniques (autogenic training, progressive relaxation)
- Breathing techniques
- Mindfulness
- Self-suggestion
- Imagery
- CBT techniques (identifying cognitive distortions, reframing)
- Positive self-talk
- Thought-stopping
- Goal-setting

more:

https://psycho.unideb.hu/sportpszichodiagnosztika/fejezetek/cscs_angol_itsp/_book/methods-of-sport-psychology.html#relaxation-methods



What makes someone a successful athlete?



Gyömbér & Kovács, 2012: Fejben dől el

ATTRIBUTE	TALENTED/ SUCCESSFUL ATHLETE
self-confidence	have greater confidence in themselves and in their abilities
concentration	less likely to be distracted by external stimuli and able to maintain continuous attentional control without becoming overwhelmed or confused by their thoughts or feelings
commitment	their thoughts, mental images, and aspirations are frequently focused on and connected to sport
anxiety management	show lower anxiety before and during competition and are better able to regulate it effectively; they experience arousal positively and perceive it as something that can enhance performance
attitude towards mistakes	able to learn from their mistakes and use them constructively

Literature

- Gyömbér, N., Kovács, K. és mtsai (2012). *Fejben dől el: Sportpszichológia mindenkinek*. Budapest: Noran Libro.
- Goschi, G., Pálvölgyi Á. És mtsai (2022). *Dobbantó- A sportpszichológia tankönyve I*. Budapest: Sport és Lélek Sport-pszichoterápiás Egyesület.





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**Thank you for your
attention!**