

# THE FIFTH ELEMENT

By Martin Fairn, CEO, Gazing Performance Systems International

Whether you are reading about Wayne Rooney's latest difficulties on the football pitch when applauding a referee for issuing him with a yellow card or the England cricket team's wonderful tightly fought Ashes victory, there is an ever-increasing focus on the mindset required to win, or the psychological frailties exposed in these highly pressurised sporting environments. Observation would seem to point to a significant link between the mental state of an athlete and their actual performance.

Much of the media coverage focuses on the suggestion that athletes whose performance breaks down have something wrong with them. An example of this was the suggestion that Wayne Rooney needed to get some treatment for his "problem". Another, was the reaction to England's first test capitulation to Australia, that England's cricket team have not got the belief needed to win anything". Do we really think that "belief", mysteriously turned up for the remainder of the test series and allowed England to regain the Ashes under the most intense pressure?

Surely a more thoughtful and credible analysis of this critical aspect of performance is required? Over the last 7 years Gazing Performance have been developing a unique perspective on the mental component of sporting performance. The two main elements of this perspective are that firstly the mental component does not work in isolation from other critical elements, and secondly that it should be regarded as a skill which can be learned and developed like any other skill. This view is best represented in the form of an equation which looks like this:

$$\text{Performance} = \text{Physical Conditioning} + \text{Technical Skills} + \text{Tactical Ability} + \text{Logistics} + \text{Mental Skills}$$

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The 5th Element

Hence the description of "Mental Skills" as the "fifth element" of performance. The implication of this equation is that sporting performance is made up of a combination of the equation's elements.

Therefore just like technical skills the mental skills associated with high performance under pressure can be learned, understood and improved.

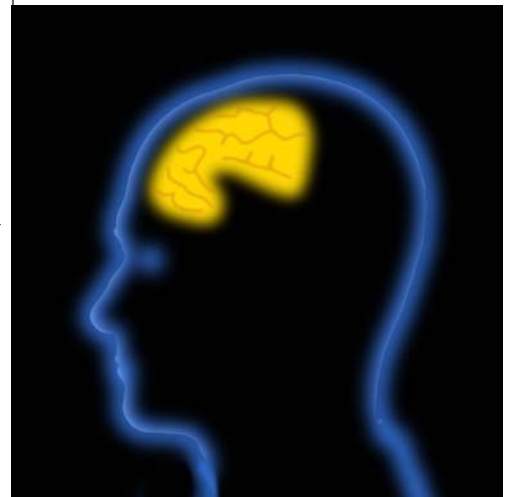
In a recent interview after winning his 53rd world cup race, Herman Maier said "It's not easy to get it all together; today I was thinking clearly and it worked".

We know it can. Facing relegation from the Premier League last year, Phil Davies, coach of the Leeds Tykes brought in Gazing to work on the players' mental conditioning. And the results were phenomenal. Phil brought Gazing in because of the practical simplicity of the concept, which means that coaches and athletes can use it together. Far from introducing a language more akin to the psychologist's couch, Gazing use a simple common approach, which quickly becomes part of the individual or team's performance development programme working closely with their coach. There are no magic wands for this crucial area of sporting performance, but equally there is no need for it to be shrouded in mystery.



gazing  
performance  
systems

Gazing Performance Systems  
International Limited  
Capital House 67 - 69 Johns Road  
Isleworth Middlesex TW7 6NL  
United Kingdom



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www.gazing.com  
E: gazing@gazing.com  
T: +44 (0)20 8568 0298  
F: +44 (0)20 8568 9782

