

## Transcript

### 10 incredible people whose stories you'll find on OpenLearn

*Chris Hoy's experiences of using sport psychology*

**Michael Johnson:**

So we're in Manchester, on the way to see Chris Hoy and talk to him about his mindset, talk to him about his career and his journey to Olympic success. One of the things that I've always gathered from Chris is that he's a very, very tough competitor mentally. And that is one of his strengths, one of his weapons.

**Michael Johnson:**

Hi Chris, how are you? Good to see you.

**Chris Hoy:**

Are you well?

**Michael Johnson:**

I'm well. How about you?

**Chris Hoy:**

Yeah, good thanks.

**Michael Johnson:**

Good.

**Chris Hoy:**

Busy?

**Michael Johnson:**

Always. Yeah.

**Michael Johnson:**

Chris, I think most people would think, you know, going to see a sports psychologist, there must be something wrong. But that wasn't the case with you. So what was it that prompted you to go and seek the sports psychologist's help?

**Chris Hoy:**

The reason that I engaged with Steve Peters initially, was because I just felt as though I wanted to be as well-prepared as possible. So I knew that I wanted to tick every single box that I could, to get to the start line knowing there was nothing more within my powers that I could have done. It wasn't like I had any major issues with dealing with pressure or lack of focus in competition.

But there was an example in 2003, at the World Championships, where I changed my strategy based on watching a rival's race. So I saw someone do an incredibly fast time. Instead of thinking, maybe it was a fast time because the conditions are really quick and we're all going to go quick, I changed the gear on my bike and I attacked way too hard at the start. And I died off at the end and did a really poor performance.

So, it was just little areas I thought, if I go and see him, even if it makes no difference at all, then I can feel that I've done everything within my powers to be in the best possible shape when the race starts. And with Steve, I think what he was great at explaining was, he can't magic some performance out of thin air. You can't, you know, you don't find some superhuman strength out of nowhere. But what you're aspiring to do, is to be able to do what you know you can do, what you physically are capable of doing, under the most extreme pressures.

So stepping up there could be the one shot in your whole career like you've experienced, I experienced, in front of a home crowd at an Olympic Games, this is your one shot, you know, you're never going to get this chance again. And if you get distracted, if you focus on the wrong things, as you well know, and you dealt with it. I'm not sure how you dealt with it yourself, but for me, it was about focusing on my performance. And Steve really helped me just to say, anything that's irrelevant, anything not within your control, forget it, hone in on the ABC, that kind of process. Not the outcome. If you focus on the process, you know, the result will take care of itself.

That really helped me in many ways. It helped me in Athens. Two weeks before, we were at a training camp in Newport. Steve was there, and he said to me, what are you going to do if somebody breaks a world record right before you step up there? And I was like, well, I just won't think about it. And he said, well, if I say to you right now, don't think about a pink elephant, what's the first thing you think about?

**Michael Johnson:**

Pink elephant.

**Chris Hoy:**

This pink elephant pops in your head. He said, you can't say I'm not going to think about something, you have to focus on something else to displace this negative thought and focus on what you want to do.

And he said, from now on, whenever you get a negative thought, any anxious thought between now and the games, two weeks to go, I want you to visualise your race. It's only a minute long. Do it in real time, from the moment you're in the start gate, the countdown, your deep breaths, the snap out the gate, the first half lap, the second lap, visualise the whole race.

I was like, yeah, OK, no problem. Went back to my room, logged onto the internet. One of the cycling websites announced that one of the French riders had done an amazing time in training, initial rush of adrenaline, that feeling of, oh my god, he's going to be going really well. I thought, oh, hang on, I'll just use this little technique. And that's when I started doing it. And from then on, I don't know how many thousands of times I must have gone over this race in my head, got to the race on the night itself. It was like he had some sort of crystal ball. Four riders to go, the guy broke the world record, three riders to go, another one. The guy right before me broke the world record again to a point we never thought anyone would go that fast. And instead of panicking and changing my strategy, I just, I didn't even, I wasn't even – I was aware of it, but not consciously. I was just so focused on myself and getting this ride that I knew, or I hoped that I could do.

**Michael Johnson:**

Do you think that people in sport are starting to embrace that a little bit more, where athletes are starting to understand on the athlete side, that there doesn't have to be something wrong in order to see a sports psychologist and to benefit from that? But also on the sports psychologist side, that you don't have to automatically seek to find something wrong with this individual if they come to see you. Your job is to help them to be better in terms of their mental preparation for a competition.

**Chris Hoy:**

Without doubt, absolutely. And that's the key. And also, just because someone is a sports psychologist, it doesn't mean to say they're a good sport psychologist. There's good ones, bad ones, there's good mechanics, bad mechanics, good coaches, bad coaches. And it's working out what's right for you. I know many guys on the team that never actually engaged with Steve at all and still produced great performances. But that's not to say they couldn't have improved performances without him.

And likewise, there's some people who spent a lot of time with Steve and they may not have improved at all. But it's such a personal thing. And it's how you engage with it. It's how you use the information. And that's why it's such a personal thing.

That's what makes sport interesting. It's the way that people deal with pressure. It's the way that there's always that question. I still think that psychology is becoming a bigger part of sport. But it's fascinating. It's what we love about it. I think that's the most exciting part of sport.