

# The Importance of the Self Talk in Mountain Running Athletes

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## ABSTRACT

This research was carried out at the European Mountain Running Championships held in Portugal on 03.07.2015, the World Mountain Running Championships held in Wales on 19.09.2015 and the European Mountain Running Championships held in Italy on 04.07.2016. An interview was held with Turkish national team athlete one, who won the bronze medal in the U-20 Men's category in the European Mountain Running Championships, to determine the importance of self talk in mountain running. Interview method was used in the research. The necessary literature review was conducted by the researcher and the participant who would participate in the research was determined. Afterwards, the participant was informed about the research, and 5 predetermined questions were asked to the participant and he was asked to answer the questions sincerely. As a result of the research, it is understood that the self-talk method is important for the sport of mountain running and it is an important factor for success by increasing the motivation of the athletes by using the self-talk method both in training and during the competition, especially when their motivation decreases.

**Keywords:** Mental Training, Self -talk, Mountain running, Athlete, Sports

## INTRODUCTION

Mountain running; It is an athletics discipline that is very challenging in terms of competition conditions, where hill descents and hill climbs are dominant in the competition track, or where both hill climbs and hill descents are located on the same track, there is very little flat area on the track, and it is done in a natural environment in nature. This sport, which is very difficult and requires a lot of effort, is done in natural environments as much as possible, and it is a more ideal sport for people living in natural environments. The most important feature of mountain running is that endurance and patience are at a very high level. In these competitions, which can last around one (1) hour, the heart rate is constantly changing and is constantly approaching the maximum level. Muscles worn out in the competition are in a struggle against the slope and gravity on the track. The course features are not the only difficulties in this competition. In mountain runs where the conditions are quite different, you can start the race at 20 °C on the seaside and run at an altitude of 1200 meters at an altitude of 5 °C, on difficult and stony roads. This means being prepared for all kinds of weather conditions and difficulties by fighting against slopes, cold, heat, decreasing oxygen density and slippery ground'.<sup>1</sup> It is thought that it would be a great mistake to see that such a difficult sport, in which such conditions and the track are constantly changing, is only related to physical capacity. Because in mountain running, it can be a known situation that athletes have difficulties cognitively as well as physically. One of the most common cognitive strategies used by athletes is self-talk. Self-talk is central to cognitive and behavioral interventions and has recently become an important research topic in the field of applied sports psychology. Self-talk refers to statements people make to themselves, internally or externally. It is defined as an internal dialogue in which individuals interpret emotions and perceptions, change and regulate their evaluations and consciousness, and give instructions to themselves'.<sup>3</sup>

Recently, there have been many studies emphasizing that psychological factors are important for success in sports. However, it is seen in studies that talking to yourself in sports is an important psychological factor. Mountain running, on the other hand, can be seen as a sport in which physical and psychological boundaries are pushed due to competition conditions. It is a self-talk method in a discipline where both physical and mental states are at the forefront. This research was carried out considering that this method is important in mountain running as it is important in all sports branches. In this research, it is aimed how important it is to talk to your own cat in mountain running.

## METHOD

### ***Data Collection***

The researcher determined the study group and a structured interview technique from qualitative research methods was used. An interview form consisting of 5 questions was created for the data collection tool. The participant who will participate in the research was given preliminary information and asked to answer the questions sincerely. The purpose of the interview is to reach the inner worlds of the participants and determine their unique perspectives. Interviewing provides access to unobservable information such as the experiences, different experiences, attitudes, thoughts, intentions, comments, mental perceptions and reactions of the individual about the researched subject'.<sup>5,13</sup> Although the preparation before the interview requires the researcher to be mentally and emotionally prepared, it is also important to prepare the interview form'.<sup>10</sup> Particularly during the interview process, the questions were directed to the participant in a clear and understandable way, and the researched topic was deepened with additional questions when necessary. Quality rather than quantity is important in interviews, and even a single participant can provide the necessary data to solve the research problem'.<sup>11,12,14</sup>

### **Results**

In the findings of our study, the participant was asked five (5) pre-prepared questions about the importance of self-talk in mountain running and it was thought that he answered these questions sincerely.

#### ***1. What do you think about the effect of self-talk on success in mountain running?***

Mountain running is also a very difficult and heavy sport physically. In order to be successful in a competition where physical strain is at a high level, psychological factors must be strong. Mountain runs can be between Five (5) and Ten (10) km according to age categories, but the competition may take more than one (1) hour due to very difficult hill climbs and descents. Especially in places where the slope is very hard, the athlete's motivation by talking to himself causes him to stand up in the face of difficulties and not decrease his performance. By using the self-talk method, the athlete stays psychologically standing and can take one step ahead of his opponents in the face of difficulties. In this way, he can be successful in the competition. So talking to yourself is an important detail in order to be

successful in mountain running. I can say that I have personally experienced this in national and international competitions.

***2. In which competition did you notice that the Self-talk Method was used first? What Do You Think About Its Effect on Motivation and Performance?***

I first used the self-talk method in the Mountain Running national team qualifying competitions held in Kütahya-Gediz in 2015. After the fourth (4th) km of the eight (8) km track, the conditions of the track started to get difficult and the signs of fatigue were now at a high level. My coach told me to increase my motivation by talking to himself after I started to have difficulties. From that moment on, I started using the self-talk method and I think that I am self-motivated. I always tried to keep myself psychologically strong by using this method. In this way, I think that I had a very successful competition from the beginning to the end of the competition without losing my belief that I will be successful. At the end of the competition, I qualified for the national team for the first time as the third (3rd) in Turkey.

***3. Can you tell us what kind of speech you gave while using the self-talk method in training?***

I take care to train in places close to competition conditions. In this way, I prepare myself both physically and psychologically for the competition. Accordingly, when I have difficulties in training, I say to myself that I cannot be successful in the competition without having difficulty in training, that I must do my training well in order to reach higher levels and gain success, that the difficulties I will encounter in the competition will be like this, and that I have to perform better in training to be better than my opponents. While using this method, I always tried to motivate myself in a positive and positive way by talking that I was ready for this competition both physically and mentally, that I was not different from others, that I was better prepared, that I had superior abilities.

***4. When to Practice Self-talk in Competitions? And how often did you use it? What Can You Say About Its Effects?***

When I started to have difficulties in the competition, I started to talk to myself. I try to keep myself at the highest level psychologically. I was telling myself that all my opponents were struggling equally and that whoever was more patient would win. I was saying that winning has a price, and that I have to pay this price by being patient when I have difficulties and by preventing my performance from deteriorating. I talked to myself that the course was equally difficult for all competitors and that I had

to prove to everyone that I was better than my opponents. I have always tried to use this method. However, I used this method especially when my performance started to decrease physically and mentally and I realized that my anxiety started to increase and I will still use it in each of my success stories.

### ***5. About the Importance of Self-talk, Who, When, and Why Was He Recommended?***

It was recommended by my coach in the national team qualifying competitions held in Kütahya - Gediz in 2015. I had narrowly missed entering the national team many times before. Actually, I was working well in training, but I could not get into the national team. Later, my trainer had long conversations with me. He mentioned that one of the reasons for not being in the national team could be psychological factors. However, he would always tell me to talk to myself and keep my motivation high in this way. When I started to apply what my trainer said, I observed an increase in my training performance. My trainer told me to do it this way in competitions and to keep my motivation high by talking to my cat all the time, so that I will be successful. After I started to apply what my coach said, I started to join the national team regularly. I won medals in international competitions and I think that I have become one of the most important athletes in Europe and the World in my own category in mountain running.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

As a result of the research, it is understood that in a difficult sport such as mountain running, the athlete is motivated by using the self-talk method to overcome these difficulties that he encounters many difficulties both in competition and training. It can be concluded that the self-talk method comes into play when it starts to be difficult in the competitions, and thus, it prevents the individual's mental and physical performance from falling and he is successful in this way as a result of the competition.

In the literature review, studies supporting our research result were found;

- Theodorakis et al. (2000) examined the effect of the self-talk strategy on performance and concluded that there is a positive relationship between the self-talk strategy and performance and the motivation of the individual'.<sup>15</sup>
- Hardy et al. (2001) reported that athletes frequently resort to the self-talk strategy to stay motivated'.<sup>9</sup>

- In the study conducted by Bingöl (2020) on martial athletes, it was seen that there is a positive relationship between motivation and self-talk in athletes'.<sup>6</sup>

- In the study conducted by Beauchamp (1996), it was concluded that the self-talk strategy of golfers has a positive effect on performance'.<sup>4</sup>

- According to a study on amateur athletes by Goudas et al. (2006), they concluded that self-talk has a significant effect on the performance of athletes and that self-talk can further increase the belief in the goal and concentration'.<sup>8</sup>

These results seem to support our research result.

Considering that mountain running is an endurance sport, although the branches are different, it is seen that the researches on endurance sports in the literature review support our research result.

- Blanchfield et al. (2014) examined the effect of self-talk on effort and endurance, and it was concluded that self-talk had a positive effect on endurance performance'.<sup>7</sup>

- Barwood et al. (2015) on cyclists, it was concluded that motivational self-talk increases endurance performance and causes higher power output. It was concluded that these studies supported our research result'.<sup>2</sup>

In the literature review, it is seen in many studies that the self-talk strategy contributes significantly to motivation and performance. It was concluded that all of these results support the result of our research.

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