

Playing mind games

Sport psychologist ready to help 'everyday' athletes

By Peggy Foster

GRAFTON - Tiger Woods, Steve Nash and Wayne Gretzky are three top athletes who have sought the help of sports psychologists to hone their game by working on the mental side of sport to complement their physical prowess.

Grafton-area psychologist Dr. Douglas Smith, 61, has been working with top athletes for decades to teach mental techniques such as positive thinking and how to deal with feelings, thoughts and behaviours that can have adverse affects on play in any sport or in everyday life.

"For a competitive edge you must know as much about the mental game as you do about the physical game," Dr. Smith says. "At the highest level of every sport it is the mental edge that makes all the difference."

Now Dr. Smith is bringing his theory to everyday athletes from the home and office he shares with his wife Donna on the shores of Lake Ontario, south of Grafton.

"Through sport I want to teach people to be healthy and happy and excited about life," he said. "Thoughts and feelings change the chemistry in your body. When you are afraid, if you don't have control over your thoughts, words and actions, unconscious things start to take over."

When a golfer is on the golf course, his or her whole life problems impact the result, or when a hockey player is on the ice his or her whole life, good and bad, impacts the focus the player can give to the game and the results, he says.

Mental techniques such as visualizing a desired result and positive self-talk help an athlete focus.

Dr. Smith says in order to play a sport well, one has to be instinctive and reactive.

"You have to be mentally prepared before you start to play," he says. "It's all about understanding. To play well you have to be relaxed and feel safe and secure."

As an example, Dr. Smith says the world's greatest golfer Tiger Woods started working with a licensed psychologist at age 11 to learn how to boost his confidence and self-esteem, block distractions, focus on the game and think and react more clearly and calmly under pressure. These are some of the things Dr. Smith says he can do to help average golfers become exceptional.

"Golf is an intimidating sport and you need confidence and guts to

play it," he says.

"There is a fear of failure, embarrassment and rejection. We go to the root of the problem and pull out the stuff the person isn't aware of that's creating tension and affecting play."

As a licensed psychologist with a PHD in clinical psychology and a life-long athlete, Dr. Smith says it is important to develop inner strength. His program helps people understand how they sabotage themselves on the golf course in life in general.

"I take the theoretical and make it practical, simple and useful," he said. "I teach people not to be afraid. Ninety-five per cent of what we do is unconscious. Unconscious negativity, fear and expectations stop us. I believe we can teach people to accomplish things they never dreamed were possible. When we create the right attitude and environment people become healthy and happy. Through character development they are confident, humble and able to help others."

Dr. Smith says he wants to teach people who didn't have great athletic families and show how they can be better than average.

"I will reach inside and pull out strengths they didn't know they had," he says "I teach athletes it's okay to make mistakes instead of the culture they may have been taught that if you can't be perfect, don't even try."

"Seventy-nine per cent of disease today is lifestyle and stress related. We must focus on what we can control. What we put into our brain, body, the amount of rest we get and vacations we take. I am training people to be exceptional."

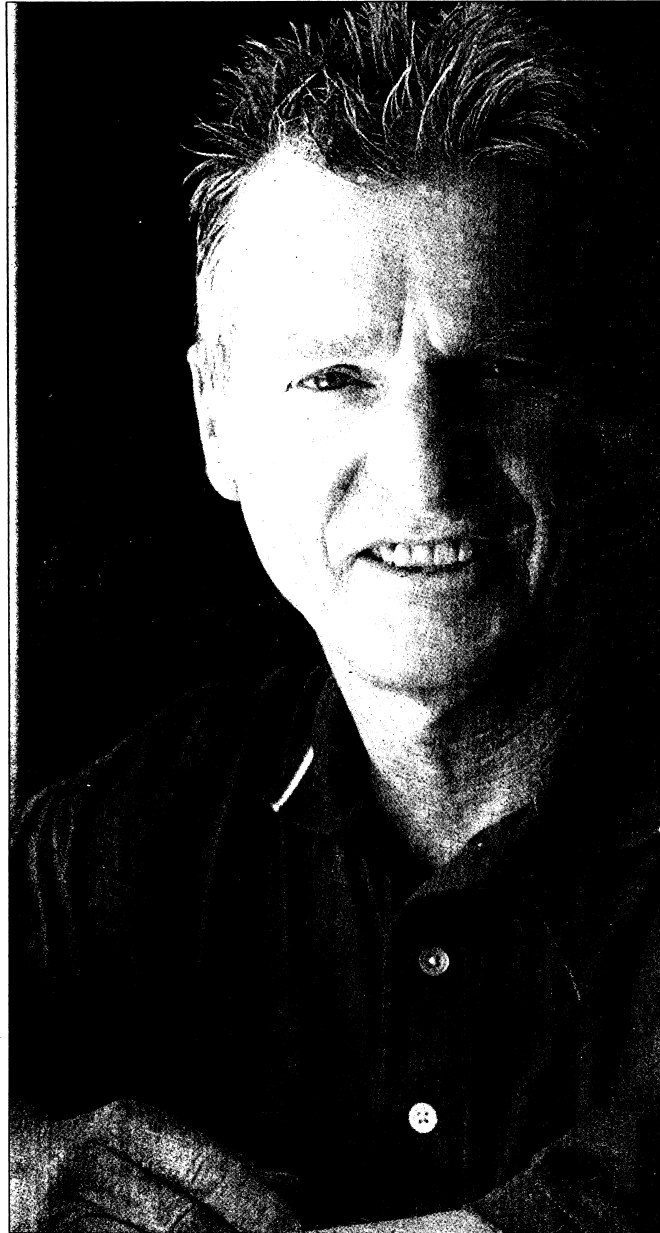
Dr. Smith also works with people in the vast health and wellness side of psychology. Some of the reasons why people seek his services are for marriage repair, grief counseling, stress at work, parenting stress, weight loss, procrastination, loss of confidence/self doubt, feeling trapped, cancer, high blood pressure, smoking/alcohol, depression, phobias and anxiety panic attacks.

Dr. Smith is in the process of writing a book about his strategies. In the meantime he will be conducting public seminars at his home this summer.

He has shared his Promind concepts with students at the Canadian Chiropractic University, the Royal Canadian Golf Association, insurance companies and the Royal Bank of Canada.

The techniques Dr. Smith teaches cover a wide variety of sports, from golf and hockey to figure skating, tennis, gymnastics, running, lacrosse and track and field.

For more information visit the website at www.promind.ca.



Peg McCarthy/Northumberland News

Dr. Doug Smith is a sports psychologist who lives on the Grafton shoreline. He says people can become better athletes in any sport by learning how to focus and visualize a desired result.