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## Battle of the Ashes minds

How sport hypnosis could get England firing again

By Mark Ashenden

It's the first Ashes Test at Lord's last July and Steve Harmison bangs in two screamers at Justin Langer. It seems like a decade ago.



The changing face of Harmison over 16 months

The Aussie opener recalled the moment in his column on this website.

"Harmison's body language symbolised the attitude of his entire team. It set the scene for the summer."

Move forward to the Gabba last week. Same two performers, different stage, and a very different opening script.

Langer said: "It was as if England were deflated and almost unable to come back from the disappointment throughout the remainder of the Test."

So how can England get fired up for Adelaide and the rest of the series after such a dismal showing?

Harmison revealed he had frozen before his first ball in Brisbane. "I let the enormity of the occasion get to me. My whole body was nervous. I had no rhythm, nothing."

The key to success is all "in the head", says Marisa Peer, **hypnotherapist** and psychotherapist for some of the world's best sporting talent.

"The most powerful force in every human being is the mind - your body matches everything that's going on in your thinking.

"So you have to believe winning is everything. In sport you don't remember who comes second. It's a shame because English sports people don't believe in themselves enough.

**Eventually they became like finely-tuned lions going in for the kill**

Marisa Peer on the GB bobsleigh team

"When they do well they think it's a fluke and not down to their phenomenal skills. It's the belief system that makes people outstanding.

"If you have a phenomenal gift or skill in sport you will do well. Without belief you will struggle. Muhammad Ali, George Best, Brazil's footballers. They all believed."

So where does Peer come in? **Hypnosis** is the answer, which, according to her, does not involve putting someone to sleep, but "waking them up".

"I take people with the gift and give them unstoppable belief. When you're conscious you have a critical factor in your brain that screens all your thoughts and raises doubts.

"**Hypnosis** is about being in the zone and shutting out the voice that says you can't do something."

Whether it's Olympic athletes, young cricketers, golfers, or Premiership footballers, Peer will change her client's focus and fill their minds with positive images and words to replace all the negative thoughts.

Over time and continued positive thinking, the mind becomes naturally tuned and more focused in the sporting arena.

Peer says the really top athletes learn to shut out things like the crowd and focus on how they want to be. Hahmy take note.

"Your voice is like two radio stations - one good, one bad. You need to visualise leading the team, being strong, having great energy, scoring that goal.

"Use all your senses, see your muscles getting stronger, hear it, feel it, imagine it. Doing this keeps your mind off the opposite."

But it's not just about individual **hypnosis**.

"I worked with the British bobsleigh team who just didn't get on," Peer adds. "I got them thinking together like a pack of hunting dogs.

"I synchronised their brainwaves, so eventually they became like finely-tuned lions going in for the kill.

"I also got the rowing team visualising breaking a world record over and over again. I activated their senses exciting their imagination, getting them to hear the crowd, see the clock.

"They felt the medal around their neck, almost smelling it, touching it, hearing it.



Can Freddie turn his team into 'killing machines'?

"If you can see something, you can accomplish it."

According to Peer (she splits her time between London and Los Angeles), sports psychology has always "quietly" been going on in the U.K., but "is now more popular and becoming more acceptable because it works."

"In Britain people want to be **hypnotised** to improve their skill and focus," she says.

"In America they want to become killing machines and terrify their opponents.

"But you have to believe and it has to be authentic. If you believe it, your opponents will believe it too."