



Introduction

Imagine the final minute of a national championship match. The fate of the game relies on the final scoring opportunity. The top player receives the ball and the coach is relying on this player to take the winning shot. Instead, the player passes the ball to a teammate, who shoots and misses. The team loses.

Scenarios like this are common in the world of sports. Talent and ability are not the only variables impacting the performance of athletes, teams, and coaches. In the previously described scenario, what causes the star player to pass rather than shoot? The influencing variable may be more difficult to identify than one would think. It requires the consideration of individual differences, and how these differences impact team dynamics and overall performance. The Hogan Assessment Systems suite of personality assessments enable coaches and athletes to strategically identify developmental opportunities beyond physical training. The Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI) offers insights to how normal personality impacts performance, the Hogan Development Survey (HDS) provides a look at extreme personality displays, most often hindering performance, and the Motives, Values, Preferences Inventory (MVPI) describes performance drivers.

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The use of personality to identify and drive development initiatives is prevalent across industries. The Sports and Recreation industry is a unique area where these applications are gaining momentum. In turn, consultants versed in Hogan's assessments are successfully impacting individual and team performance.

Understanding the personality of athletes and coaches provides insight to overcome natural tendencies for undesirable behavior that can negatively impact individual performance and/or team-level outcomes. Similar to traditional employee development initiatives, athletes and coaches can benefit from conscious efforts to adjust their behavior and improve performance. Hogan's core assessments provide unique insights that establish a baseline for these developmental opportunities.

Hogan researchers collaborated with Srdjan Vukcevic to explore personality in a sports context. As a business/executive coach and owner of Blue Coach, Srdjan and his team apply personality-based initiatives for the development of athletes and their coaches. With the collaborative support of the Montenegrin Olympic Committee, their research on sports performance and observations of team success (or lack thereof) shows clear evidence of the influential role of personality in individual performance and social team interactions.

Personality of Athletes

Blue Coach works with national and professional teams in European countries with smaller populations. The size of these populations limits the number of players available to build high-functioning teams. Famed Montenegrin water polo coach Petar Porobic states: “When you don’t have a large pool of players, you need to work with them.” In other words, small player pools require strategic methods to develop available athletes. This created an opportunity for Blue Coach to promote growth based on self-awareness of characteristics that are important for, or detrimental to, success. Srdjan emphasizes that the personality of players does not change, but identifying characteristics relevant to success in a specific sport, or position, can help drive personnel initiatives.

Each player brings a unique personality to the team and certain personality profiles can be more successful in one position over another. For example, Blue Coach consultants recognized the best handball wings on a premier women’s handball team scored high on the HDS Excitable¹ scale. “These girls are on fire,” Srdjan explains, referencing a song by singer Alicia Keys. “They are quick, and in an instant can steal the ball, take off, and score.” This intensity results from high HDS Excitable scores and improves performance in the position. In contrast, these same tendencies would be detrimental to a more central member of the team. “These high scores would be dangerous for the main player; she needs to have a clear head.”

¹Players that score higher on HDS Excitable tend to be described as intense and energetic; HDS Excitable with Handball Game Performance ($r = .18$).



Blue Coach and its team of consultants also link personality to practice behavior and game performance. They found, in general, the best athletes tend to score higher on the HPI Prudence and HDS Diligent² scales, making them more likely to be self-motivated and focused at practice. Athletes that are lower on these scales tend to require constant reminders to practice and complete drills, especially when their coach is not present to keep them accountable.

²Players that score higher on HPI Prudence and HDS Diligent tend to be described as attentive, dependable, and perfectionistic; HPI Prudence ($r = .30$) and HDS Diligent ($r = .43$) with Training Performance.

Although some characteristics can improve performance, others can cause athletes to become less effective. For example, Blue Coach suspects lower scores on MVPI Power³ represent a lack of competitiveness (e.g., a player avoiding the game-winning shot when they are the most capable). Similarly, higher HPI Sociability⁴ and MVPI Hedonism⁵ can “destroy the potential” of an individual team member. Athletes with higher scores on these scales are less likely to respond to feedback and are more likely to engage in behaviors that negatively impact performance, such as going out for drinks the night before an important match. To highlight this interpretation, Vladan Gojkovic, the national water polo coach for Montenegro, describes a situation he witnessed during his work with a team:

‘The team was traveling for a very important game and the players asked if they could go to a soccer match the night before that was over 200 kilometers away. This is the type of behavior that impacts their performance as a team.’

³Players that score higher on MVPI Power tend to be competitive and achievement oriented; MVPI Power with Overall Performance ($r = .26$).

⁴Players with higher scores on HPI Sociability tend to be socially proactive and distractible, but may also be team oriented; HPI Sociability with Off-Field Public Behavior ($r = -.13$).

⁵Players with higher scores on MVPI Hedonism tend to make their own rules and want to have a good time; MVPI Hedonism and Overall Performance ($r = -.18$).



Often times, Srdjan recommends interpreting HPI scales at the subscale, or homogenous item composite (HIC), level. He finds that focusing on portions of the HPI Ambition scale⁶, such as the Competitive HIC, provides critical insight to an athlete's competitive nature. In contrast, the No Social Anxiety HIC is less relevant because it focuses on an individual's social self-confidence. This HIC may be important for identifying an athlete that excels during post-game interviews, but it is less important when focusing on game performance. He further highlights an atypical relationship between the Accomplishment HIC and performance outcomes:

'Lower [HPI] Ambition scores (especially lower Accomplishment [HIC] scores) may translate to a view of low achievement and that you [the athlete/coach] can always achieve more, always more.'

He believes that great athletes and successful coaches never accept that they have achieved ultimate success, and therefore are always working to get better. As Dragan Adzic, a two-time consecutive World Handball Coach of the Year declares, "...respect what you have already achieved, and do your best to achieve even more." Based on these insights, Srdjan suggests that HPI Ambition be interpreted at the HIC level.

⁶Players that score higher on Ambition tend to be competitive, energetic, and will take initiative; HPI Ambition and Overall Performance ($r = .21$).



Personality of Coaches

A team responds to the personnel decisions made by their coach. Blue Coach consultants work with sports coaches to develop effective inter/intrapersonal strategies. Similar to common leadership development initiatives, Blue Coach helps coaches become self-aware of how others perceive them. With this information, coaches see a clear path to develop both personally and professionally. Dragan Adzic describes his experience working one-on-one with Srdjan:

‘With him, I have learned the real and scientific value of incorporating personality in my coaching...Knowing all of my derailers and information I’ve got from [the] results has changed my perception of myself and of how other people see me. Since that time, I have been working on myself with the help of [the] Hogan assessments and I think that people with whom I work and live have noticed progress. I can surely control myself better and know myself better after the assessment.’

Blue Coach continues to work with Dragan to address potential inhibitors in his coaching ability. Although his team was successful, Dragan feels the HDS helped him identify specific development opportunities that were not easily pinpointed. He describes:

‘I had a strong tendency for burning my stress inside – the inner churn. My calmness was there but always with the cost. That cost was my inner battle and highly reserved [HDS Reserved⁷] behavior under stress. Because of that I usually responded to situations that required communication with silence. I knew that I need[ed] to communicate, but because of my personality I have been postponing these conversations with players until we all come into an emotionally boiling situation. I saw that as my weakness and worked on it regularly by scheduling conversations with players from week to week.’

⁷Coaches with higher HDS Reserved scores tend to be unapproachable and uncommunicative.



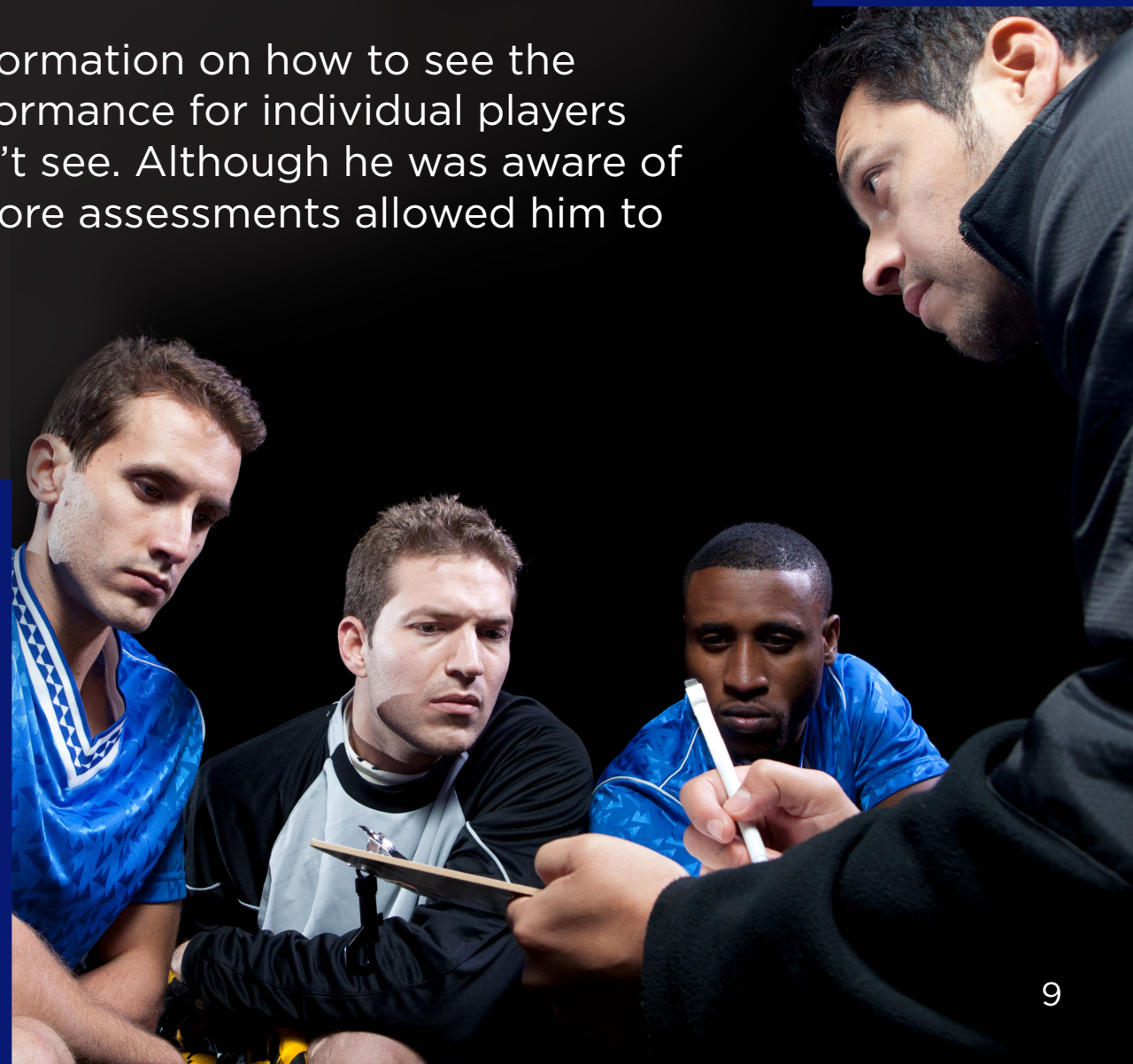
Through behavioral observations and one-on-one consulting sessions, Blue Coach provides guidance around the Hogan assessments and gains insight to what makes an effective coach. Consultants find that an effective coach is not a people pleaser. Instead, the best coaches are those who score high on HPI Prudence and HDS Diligent⁸. These coaches tend to micromanage (which can be frustrating for some), but it is the level of preparation that makes them successful. These coaches are the individuals that “get on the bus after a win and immediately start analyzing the next opponent.” What separates Dragan Adzic, Vladan Gojkovic and Petar Porobic from the rest is the attention to detail and level of focus that these successful coaches exhibit. This is what can distinguish a good coach from a great coach.

In addition, Srdjan provides player insights that help coaches understand the individual differences that drive their behavior. He says:

‘Hogan gives the coach information on how to see the underlying aspects of performance for individual players that he [the coach] couldn’t see. Although he was aware of them for a long time, the core assessments allowed him to see these outcomes in Hogan language.’

Through a deeper understanding of the personality of the players, Srdjan helps coaches take these insights and derive actionable development strategies for players.


⁸Coaches with higher HPI Prudence and HDS Diligent scores tend to be process-focused, organized, and rigid about details and rules.



Team Dynamics

At the team level, Blue Coach works extensively to curb negative outcomes driven by poor interpersonal relations. Negative feedback is common and accepted in the world of sports. It is exhibited through constructive coaching and general communication between players during practices and games. However, when this spills outside of the sport, it can have consequences that impact team performance. Srdjan describes a specific example where interpersonal issues affected team performance:

‘Game performance is perfect. The issue is the interpersonal interactions between the players. Physical performance feedback is already there and accepted. However, there are small clans within the team that are usually against each other. Sometimes this produces a little bit of conflict and competitiveness, and instead of being positive, it hits at a personal level.’

A high-angle, rear-view photograph of a rowing team in a blue boat on a body of water. The rowers are wearing blue tank tops and are captured in the middle of a stroke, with their oars dipping into the water. The water is a deep blue-green, and the boat's reflection is visible. In the background, several ducks are swimming on the water's surface.

This type of behavior is what impacts the “flow” of the team. Flow is a concept developed by famous psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi that describes a process of optimal performance, where players are 100% in the moment and playing at a high level. Srdjan believes that interpersonal conflicts can disrupt this flow and impact the performance of the team. Specifically, he interprets scores on Hogan scales such as HPI Interpersonal Sensitivity, HDS Reserved, and HDS Leisurely⁹ to help coaches strategically address issues of within-team conflict. He states that “when passive aggressive behavior turns into ‘I’m not giving you the ball in the game,’ then the team is going to have problems.” This has led to coaching initiatives that promote regular meetings with players and cohesive team development.

⁹Teams with lower HPI Interpersonal Sensitivity, higher HDS Reserved, and/or higher HDS Leisurely scores will tend to have stressed relationships among members of the team; HPI Interpersonal Sensitivity ($r = .18$), HDS Reserved ($r = -.16$), and HDS Leisurely ($r = -.18$) with Overall Performance.

Conclusion

Hogan's suite of assessments assists in promoting self-awareness for the development of managers, leaders, and employees in traditional work spaces. Similar initiatives are gaining traction in alternative areas, including the Sports and Recreation Industry. Collaborations with consulting groups, such as Blue Coach, describe how personality relates to competitiveness, achievement orientation, focus, and team-member relations in a sports context. These findings suggest that consultants interested in sports may find opportunities to work with sports teams, helping members become aware of their personalities and how it impacts overall performance.



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