

The Times

SPORTS

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Through sports psychology, athletes are gaining ... **A mental edge before the physical challenge**

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Last season's holiday break was not just long for The College of New Jersey men's basketball team because four weeks passed between games. The days also moved slowly because the Lions couldn't escape their 4-4 record, which they felt was underachieving.

The monotony changed on the day the players arrived at Packer Hall and found not basketballs awaiting them, but a visitor along with head coach John Castaldo and his assistants.

The players had no idea what was in store for them. There was no dribbling or shooting that day. The visitor, Keith Waldman, led them through a sports psychology workshop.

"We thought it was another one of (Castaldo's) tricks," forward Derrick Grant says with a laugh more than a year later.

Castaldo, then in his 11th season at TCNJ, had thought long about the benefits of having his players learn through sports psychology. Considering some of the team's key players were coming off being injured, the team lacked overall chemis-

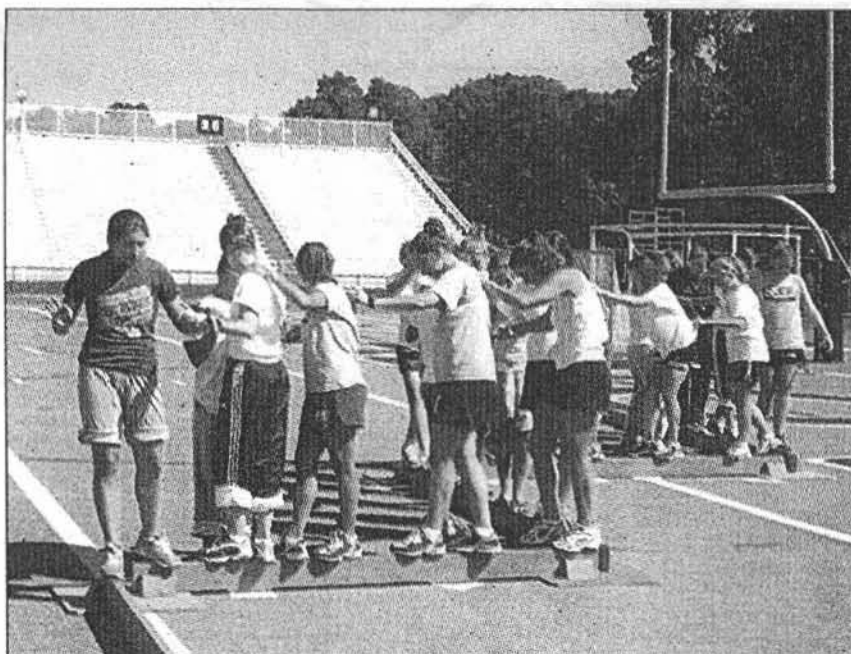
try and that TCNJ women's soccer coach Joe Russo had caught Castaldo's ear about his program's successful work with Waldman, Castaldo thought this was his ideal opportunity.

More than three hours later, the TCNJ coaches and players ended practice believing what other people have discovered — that sports psychology can boost athletic performances. Such work can teach an athlete how to prepare better mentally for competition and concentrate and relax more during it.

After five straight seasons of hovering around .500, TCNJ won its first four games out of the holiday break and went on to enjoy an 18-9 season while making the New Jersey Athletic Conference playoffs for the first time since 1998. Exactly how much credit should go to Waldman couldn't be answered. The Lions, though, were positive that he helped them find their way.

"I think what he did," Castaldo said, "was not so much what he did that benefited us during those three, four hours that he was there. I think it was more the after-effect, the relying on each other, what tools do you learn (for) in January

(over)



Villanova field hockey players participate in "Tittle March Toward Success," a team-building activity during a workshop with Optimal Performance Associates. The activity teaches athletes not to look too far ahead during their season.

Photo courtesy of
Optimal Performance
Associates

