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skills, you can improve your fitness – but the higher up you get, the more you’re defined by your mental performance. The way you think, the way you behave – all these things interact to give you your performance.”

**THE MARGIN BETWEEN GOOD ANGLERS AND GREAT ONES**

If you have witnessed a top angler in action it can be hard to put your finger on what makes them so good. A competent carper can probably tie a knot just as well as Terry Hearn and play a fish like Dave Lane, but can they think like them?

“Any sport or activity is a psychological thing. I’ve worked with anglers to international standard before and they are very similar to other sportsmen. Over-analysis tends to be really big with anglers. They have an idea and then they over-think the strategy and then they get to a state where they’re thinking rather than doing.

“You can get people with a lot of skill who get to a high standard, but who are extremely ineffective in the mental side of things. In many cases, it can make quite a significant difference to performance and general wellbeing. There’s no point having a top performance when you don’t enjoy it, either.

“I always thought when you had Phil Mickelson and Tiger Woods battling it out for number one in golf that Mickelson was a more successful person. Yes, Tiger Woods

was winning all these tournaments, but Mickelson had it all. He enjoyed being on the course, he enjoyed giving autographs and he had a good family life. Usually when you’re enjoying yourself you perform better.”

**CONTROL YOUR CONFIDENCE**

In angling, confidence is a huge concept. That feeling you get when you arrive at a venue and sense your session will be successful is often seen as something that happens outside your control.

“My job is to make confidence a choice,” says Andy. “Confidence is a big thing for all sportsmen. I was talking to a footballer the

other day about ‘confidence players’. They call themselves confidence players, which is a bit of a ridiculous title if you think about it. It really restricts you because it suggests that confidence isn’t in your control, as though it depends on what side of the bed you wake up on, or whether you can find your lucky pants. It means the world is going to dictate whether or not you are confident.

“You can find ways to tap into your own confidence. A lot of people think ‘is that up to me?’ but it is. It’s about creating habits that develop that confidence – if you repeat patterns that you would do on a confident day then you are more likely to be confident.”

**“ANGLERS GET TO A STATE OF THINKING RATHER THAN DOING”**

Most carp anglers know someone with a lucky mascot or an obsession for getting their reel handles perfectly level, and Andy says he’s happy to promote superstition if it can be managed.

“I will encourage superstitions – I like to call them rituals, myself – if they are something that is in your control,” says Andy. “If you have to see a black cat before you go fishing, or avoid a couple of magpies, then it’s not in your control and that creates uncertainty. But actually routines and rituals are very good at getting you in that zone state. You think of Jonny Wilkinson when he’s taking a kick, or a golfer taking a tee shot, everything is the same. Those routines get you focused on the series of steps you are performing, rather than thinking of your outcomes. It keeps you in the moment rather than thinking too far ahead.”

If you’re not superstitious then even the way you plan your session could help, according to Andy. “Lots of top sportsmen like Rafa Nadal and David Beckham have OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder), so I suggest people set their own routines. Say you’re going away to France or for a long session, there are things you can do the night before you leave, such as the way you pack your gear. You could have some relaxation techniques, you could eat at a certain time, you could sleep at a certain time.”

**RESEARCH YOUR QUARRY AND SET GOALS**

Another aspect of carp fishing that Andy encourages is the concept of the ‘target fish’, the one fish in your water that you really want to catch.

“If we don’t have a goal for something we are very unlikely to achieve it,” he says. “You never got someone who went out for a walk and found themselves at the top of Everest.

“The most successful people in any sport are people who set effective goals. I believe it’s fine to have a big goal, but then it’s all about the interim goals in the middle. You have to set small and medium-sized goals along the way, and it’s actually the smaller ones that are most important as they’re the ones you have to focus on. If you are not focused on those, you’re in the wrong place.

“However, you have to perform in a way that means you’re more likely to catch that fish. Just having the goal isn’t going to bring it to you. You need to learn what bait or tactics have caught that fish in the past, or in what area it gets caught. You need to learn what’s going to get you there, perhaps by talking to people who have already caught it and seeing what they have done. You’ve also got to be prepared to make mistakes, because all learning is about evolving from mistakes.”

**KEEP A DIARY**

Lots of anglers keep records of their captures, but Andy suggests a simple list of catch weights is not enough to help your improve.

He says: “Charting your progress in a diary is handy because it lets you know if you’re on target or not. What’s also useful is not just charting the statistics or the weights, but also charting how effectively you did things. You could have had a poor day for catching but you could have performed very well, so maybe you write down three things that you did well that day. It could be your concentration, your technique or your strategy, so you’re re-affirming the things that you want to repeat. A lot of people tend to focus on the things they did wrong, which tends to mean they’re mentally rehearsing the things they did wrong which in turn means they’re more likely to repeat them unconsciously. You want to remember the good things, not the bad things, and build from them.”

**POSITIVE THINKING AND DECISION MAKING**

The quest for a positive outlook permeates through a lot of what Andy has to say. Negativity, it seems, breeds negative results.

“We seem to find it easier to find negatives rather than positives and then it becomes a habit. We even talk in negatives. You ask someone how they’re feeling and they say ‘not bad’ – which is exactly what they’re not feeling!

“The more your internal dialogue kicks in the more likely you are to talk yourself out of performing well. You need to be talking to yourself in a positive way, your internal voice has a tone to it and we decide to take it. We sometimes think that’s just how we think, but you can choose how you think.

We can change the voice in our heads to something really confident.

Andy adds: “In terms of decision making, you can work on the basis that they’re all good decisions. You can think ‘I’ve got this bait and this bait, I can take this strategy or this strategy’ – they’re all good, so let’s just commit to one. And be prepared, if the strategy isn’t working, to take on plan B and do so decisively.”

As we all know, the problem with fishing, and what makes it uniquely frustrating, is that the carp are not bound by any rules. Even the greatest anglers can only do so much to influence the outcome of their sessions. Added to this, the rise of carp matches and the popularity of some venues mean we are increasingly competing against fellow fishermen as well as the fish.

“As much as possible you’ve got to focus away from what someone else is doing,” suggests Andy. “You focus on your own strategies, your own rhythms, your own movements. You can also only do what you can. I know you get certain favourable spots – you can’t do much about that except do the best fishing you can, and that’s part of the deal.

“You have to make the best of where you are and sometimes by doing that you can learn more because you have to use a more effective strategy to even compete. Ultimately, in the long term, that’s quite useful, even if it’s frustrating in the short term.”

It’s difficult to come away from a chat with Andy without a desire to improve. Carp fishing might be a tangle of variables and factors beyond our control, but top anglers, like all good sportspeople, are not elevated beyond mediocre ones by mere luck.

Maybe, just maybe, your mind is the sharpest tool in your tackle box. It’s certainly something to think about. **UKC**



**Give some thought to what you think about when fishing.**



**Do top carpers like Terry Hearn have a certain mental outlook?**

**“MY JOB IS TO MAKE CONFIDENCE A CHOICE”**