

TEKST 3

Start Rites

What makes a sports player successful? Is it rigorous training and iron self-discipline, or that lucky pair of dirty socks? SAM MURPHY digs into winning superstitions

FITNESS

1 **I** always use a special pair of thin leather gloves and I have a lucky T-shirt that I wear even if it's dirty. I don't speak to anyone in the morning. I get myself totally

5 focused from the minute I get out of bed. Just before we start, I tape the helmets of the rest of the crew.' Is this the leader of some bizarre cult? Is he suffering from some form of obsession, perhaps? No – it's Sean Olsson, driver of the British bronze

10 medal-winning bobsleigh team talking about his pre-race preparations at the last Winter Olympics.

2 And this behaviour is not unusual. In fact, the sporting world is well-known for its rituals and superstitions. It is not surprising – weeks and

15 months of preparation and training, yet everything hangs on that single fleeting performance. Athletes will do anything and everything they can to get a leading edge.

3 'If a player eats a particular food, or prepares in a certain way, and he is successful, he'll ask himself: 20 "What did I do to run such a great race or score such a great goal?" The behaviour is associated with winning in his mind, so he repeats it and it becomes a ritual,' says Chris Humpage, a performance

25 consultant who works with athletes of all levels. It is said that Newcastle striker Alan Shearer once raised his right arm after scoring a goal, and it turned out to be the start of a great goal-scoring run for him. Now he does it every time he scores.

4 30 But do such rituals work? Sports scientists have been researching this for years and there's no right answer. Of course, sporting success comes down to more than the order in which you put on your boots – but training isn't just about reaching your physical

35 peak, or perfecting your technique, it's also about your mental state. Sports psychologists talk of getting into the 'zone' – when mind and body are optimally prepared.

5 Dr Christopher Shambrook, sports psychologist 40 and co-author of *The Mental Game Plan* says: 'Sports people have to go through change every day. Their environment is constantly changing – different

crowds, pitches, climate, food and

45 so on. In the middle of such instability, a

strong fixed routine gives order to something which is otherwise out of their control.'

6 50 How well such a ritual works can depend on how it was developed in the first place. 'With recreational athletes, it's usually trial and error,' says Shambrook. 'An amateur golfer might waggle his club three times and then hit a great shot. So he

55 repeats it to try to repeat the success – it's not very refined.' Top athletes, on the other hand, have incredibly refined rituals to get them into the right state of mind. 'These rituals are a sort of mental

60 warm-up, just as a physical warm-up prepares the body,' says Shambrook. 'Once the pre-performance ritual is complete, it acts as a mental trigger that says "Time to perform",' he explains. 'Once you cross that line onto the pitch, it is the signal that this is where the work starts.'

7 65 Rituals and talismans may help to increase self-confidence, but can they go too far? Tennis star Goran Ivanisevic's ritual involves not touching his head or facial hair during a tennis tournament, listening to two specific Croatian songs every

70 morning before leaving the house, and using the showers in the locker room in a particular order.

8 'If superstitious behaviour becomes obsessive, or separate from the pre-performance ritual, it can be a potential 8,' says Shambrook. 'It puts

75 performance at risk. What happens if, for example a lucky vest goes missing just before a game?'

9 Chris Waddle is one footballer who has put his superstitions in perspective. After being injured when his hair was short and again when it was long, 80 he had a short-on-top, long-at-the-back cut to hold off injury. When he was injured again, he became sceptical. 'If you win, it's not because you put your left boot on before the right one.' Couldn't agree more Chris. Still, just in case ...



Alan Shearer

'The Sunday Times'

- 1p ● 3 What is described in paragraph 1?
A how important physical warm-ups are for a sportsman
B how tough training schemes can be for top athletes
C the routine a sportsman goes through before performing
D the special clothing some athletes need for their kind of sport
- 1p ● 4 'In fact, the sporting world is well-known for its rituals and superstitions.' (lines 12-14)
What is the function of these rituals and superstitions?
A Athletes feel they give them an advantage on their rivals.
B Athletes use them to disturb their rivals' concentration.
C They are the athletes' reaction to the long and often boring training sessions.
D They help athletes to get rid of the high tension after performing.
- 1p ○ 5 'it becomes a ritual' (regels 23-24).
→ Waarom maken sportlieden van bepaalde handelingen een 'ritueel' volgens alinea 3?
- 1p ○ 6 → Waarom is het volgens Dr Shambrook juist voor topsporters zo belangrijk om iets te hebben wat houvast geeft? (Zie alinea 5.)
- 1p ● 7 'it acts as a mental trigger' (line 61).
What does 'a mental trigger' do?
A It alerts the athlete.
B It confuses the opponents.
C It disturbs other athletes.
D It relaxes the athlete.
- 1p ● 8 Kies bij 8 in alinea 8 het juiste antwoord uit de gegeven mogelijkheden.
A relief
B reward
C solution
D stumbling block
E success formula