

HALF TIME



Sometimes coming second is all the motivation we need, TARNYA DAVIS writes.

AS WE near the end of the winter sporting season, whichever code you follow, it's interesting to consider the psychological impact for a team of the score at half time.

I've spoken before about the longer-term greater benefits for Olympic silver medallists when it comes to lifespan and employment opportunities compared with their gold medal counterparts. There's something about coming second that drives them further in life post-Olympics. It also seems that the psychology and the drive associated with being close behind is better than even being just ahead at half time, whatever the game.

Berger and Pope have researched a huge number of sporting teams in the US and found that teams that are ahead by six points or more at half-time win 80 per cent of the time, but a team just behind at half-time wins more often than a team just ahead.

There can be a slight cockiness for the team just leading at half time, but statistically they are actually less likely to win than their opponent. The team just behind not only scored more in the second half but do so most strongly just after the second half starts. Being behind but close means we can believe we can achieve our goal and motivates us towards that, even more than the team who might think they have it in the bag. It seems the key to motivation is to encourage people to see themselves as slightly behind others. Too far behind and they'll think there's no hope. Too comfortable, there'll be no drive. Perhaps the best motivator is to feel that the winning prize is just out of reach.

Tarnya Davis is a clinical and forensic psychologist and principal of NewPsych Psychologists