There’s a landslide of evidence demonstrating the impact of Optimism on things that matter. Here are some of the key findings related to sports and athletic performance:

Sports

* Optimism predicted performance among collegiate swimmers (Seligman et al., 1990).
  + Swimmers identified with high optimism performed better than pessimistic swimmers.
  + After being told their times were significantly slower than they actually were, when asked to swim their event again, pessimistic swimmers swam significantly slower than their initial times, whereas optimist’s times did not vary significantly from their initial times.
    - This suggests that pessimists may reduce motivation level after a defeat, this lowering response initiation, whereas optimists facilitate a consistent level of motivation, and thus, maintain or enhance performance
* A study investigating the psychological characteristics of Olympic champions pointed out that these athletes tend to have higher than average levels of optimism (Gould et al., 2002)
* Among college students playing table tennis, the attributions of winning players were more internal, stable, and controllable (Optimistic) than those of the losers (McAuley & Gross, 1983)
* High ability players tend to make internal, stable attributions (optimistic view) for success, whereas lower ability athletes tend to make internal attributions for failure (pessimistic view) (Grove et al., 1991; Prapavessis & Grove, 1995; Santamaria & Furst, 1994).
* Optimism is positively related to the performance of baseball players, basketball players, and collegiate swimmers (Rettew & Reivich, 1995)
* Pessimist’s soccer pass completion ratio (a measure of performance) was significantly lower than optimists ratio’s following a loss but not a win, suggesting that motivation level may be significantly reduced among pessimistic athletes when their team is not winning (Gordon, 2008)
* Optimists are likely to perform at a relatively consistent level regardless of whether a team is winning or losing a game (Gordon, 2008).
* Optimism was the best predictor of performance in elite male and female cross country skiers and ski-marksman (16–20 years) and swimmers (16–19 years) (Norlander & Archer, 2002)
* Optimistic athletes were associated with using significantly more mental imagery, effort expenditure, thought control, and logical analysis coping strategies, whereas pessimists were associated with significantly less use of these strategies (Nicholls et al., 2008)
* Optimism is significantly related to mental toughness in athletes, whereas pessimism has a significant negative relationship with mental toughness (Nicholls et al., 2008)