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MENTAL TRAINING: TECHNIQUES AND TOOLS

Many sports not only require physical skills, but a strong mental game as well. Most coaches believe that sports are 90% mental and only 10% physical. Especially in sports where hundredths of a second or tenths of an inch separate the champions from the mediocre athletes, an extra edge can be extremely crucial. Hence, numerous athletes are turning towards mental imagery to take their game to the next level. Different uses of imagery in sport include: mental practice of specific performance skills, improving confidence and positive thinking, problem solving, controlling arousal and anxiety, performance review and analysis, preparation for performance, and maintaining mental freshness during injury (Porter & Foster, 1990). This article focuses on tools for improving confidence and staying motivated.

POWERFUL TOOLS

Training the mind is simple- but it takes is consistency, patience and little bit of time each day. Here are some common tools for improving your confidence and training your mental strength.

Attitude is everything. Poor attitude = poor performance. The mind body connection is so strong that our thoughts can effect our emotions, our physical abilities and our performance. If you don't think you can do it- you can't. It is that simple. Practice positive thinking and negative thought blocking every single day. Over time you can train your minds eye to see the world with more confidence and positive perspective. For some people this may seem as difficult as the physical training required for their sport but we all have the power to improve this skill with practice. We have all heard of amazing human feats of strength that occur- all with the amazing power of positive thought.

Visualizations. Perfect practice makes perfect performance on the track, in the court and in your minds eye. This powerful tool needs to be practiced consistently in order to sharpen your skills. By visualizing a perfect practice or skill you can continue your training program without additional fatigue. Studies have shown activity can occur within the musculoskeletal and nervous systems during visualization. Visualization techniques are also very useful for relaxation and calming nerves before events. Injured athletes can benefit from the power of visualization when they may not be able to physically practice their skills/event.

Mantras. The powerful phrases, words that are presented to your mind repeatedly can have a huge effect on attitude and performance. If you tell yourself you are weak, tired, & pathetic over and over and over...how would that make you feel? The opposite is also true. Preparing for an event should include verbal and written mantras that are visible, dynamic and powerful. Words such as STRONG, POWERFUL, SMOOTH, FAST, FLOWING etc are examples of mantras that may work for you. The important thing is selecting a word or short phrase that resonates with you. Repeating this word during your practices, and events can become an excellent tool for positive performance.



FITNESS ADVENTURES



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Event Preparation. There is more to a good performance than simply hard physical training. Your event will always be won in your head-regardless of finishing times and places. Start practicing your mental homework...

MENTAL HOMEWORK

Here is a checklist for training your mind for your next competition.

Competition Rehearsal. Weekly or daily begin visualizing your event morning, event start, different sections of the event/race, finish line/end of event (tall, strong, smiling, powerful), visualize everything in detail-with smells and sounds. Be sure to visualize potential issues that may arise on the day of competition- and picture yourself overcoming each of these obstacles without issue. You must be prepared for the good and the not so good to avoid disappointment.

Gear. Wear something that makes you feel fast or inspires you! Pick a colour or image that gets you moving (flames, flowers, lightning).

Inspirational mantras. Write positive words, with movement to them, that motivate and inspire you- power, flow, courage, I am ready, I am strong, I am fit, I am happy, smile! Leave these words where you will see them-computer, fridge, etc.

Inspiration elsewhere. MUSIC! Make a favorite play list that makes you want to sing or dance! Play it all the time while you are preparing for your event. On the way to the event, before, during and after your training sessions and during your warm up.

Reward. Have it all lined up. Perfect finish or no finish, win or no win be sure to have a reward for reaching your goal of getting to the start line.

Find out what motivates you and keeps passion in your training and competition. Keep it consistent, positive and personal and you will begin to unleash the power of the mind!

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