

Sport Mental Training For Greater Athletic Performance

Over the past several years, both coaches and athletes have started to realize that strength, speed and other athletic skills are not sufficient for the production of championship athletes. Athletic performance has three parts: physical preparation, technical skill, and mental readiness. This model suggests that if any of the above areas are neglected, athletic performance will decline. However, mental preparation is the component that is most often neglected by athletes and coaches alike.



Athletes from children's and community or corporate teams to professionals are finding and using hypnosis to improve their performance. Three of the major factors which make this possible are the ability to improve focus and concentration, to relieve unnecessary stress while leaving sufficient "edge" to perform optimally, and to practice through visualization all of the moves needed to make the desired improvements to perform better.

Why Mental Training?

Let's suppose you owned a miraculous and sophisticated device that was capable of achieving an infinite number of amazing things. But, what if the computer that operates that wonderful creation was programmed so it performed at a only small percentage of it's capabilities?

Would you be satisfied?

If you could reprogram the operating computer to do more wouldn't you? Know what? You do own such a machine. It's your body and the computer that operates it is your mind.

At this point it is important to note that virtually every athlete has yet to achieve his/her highest possible level of performance. This, most likely includes you. Therefore, it's almost a certainty that your mind/computer is in need of some (or perhaps a great deal of) positive re-programming. **This is the job of the Sports Mental Coach.**

Let me state that in a slightly different way: **You will only perform up to the level for which you are programmed even though you are capable of doing much better.**



Here is another computer/sports performance analogy. Now lets suppose that the computer that operates your miraculous and sophisticated device is programmed for maximum performance and the device has been operating at an extremely high performance level. Then the computer gets a virus, resulting in a severe drop in performance — a slump. **How do you fix the situation?**

Frequent injuries are indicators of faulty mental programming, but there are numerous others.

There are many coaches and teachers that do recognize the great importance of mental preparation, yet have little or no knowledge of how to do it. Most of them recommend the only thing they know.

Typically their only answer to mental prep is more physical practice. This is like changing a spark plug when your problem is a flat tire. It may make your engine run better, but you still won't go fast.

Athletes are constantly under severe levels of stress and anxiety to perform well.



They fight for every inch and often put their bodies through excruciating pain to secure a win. Yet how is it done? How does one get the subconscious mind and body to work together without consulting the conscious and rational mind---which surely would prevent such nonsense from continuing?

The trained mental coach has the answers!

As is the case with any competition, there are situations that require the utmost concentration in face of difficult circumstances. These can be caused by anything from being a half boat down with 500 meters left in a crew regatta, to having to make one more touchdown to secure that extra point over your opposition. If you are able to maintain mental toughness then success will be yours. Though, what happens if you fail? You dropped the ball or jumped your slide—do these setbacks shake your self-belief and lower your motivation or do they act as a channel for even greater accomplishments? Mental toughness is clearly vital to combating pre-performance anxiety and athletic success. By learning to train the mind to work along with the body, one will increase real performance by decreasing anxiety. This is one of the key areas of focus for sport mental training, which I will go into greater depth throughout this booklet.

What is Sport Mental training?

Sports coaches around the World have discovered that optimal performance is contingent upon mental preparation and psychological strength just as much as physical preparation and technical skill. To address this sport mental training is an emerging new field within the world of athletics that concentrates on preparing the mind of the athlete as thoroughly as the body.

What is Sports Mental Coaching?

Sports Mental Coaching, also known as sports mental training, is that segment of sports training that concentrates specifically on helping athletes break through the mental barriers that are keeping them from performing up to their peak potential. By focusing on the mental skills needed to be successful in any sporting competition, mental game coaching achieves the overall goal of performance improvement. The trained professionals, who do this mental coaching, employ proven techniques to accomplish this important work.



Goal Setting, Why Is It So Important?

You can't get "there" until you have identified "there".

Without well-defined goals you wander from event to event, experiencing a hodge-podge of results with only limited success. In order to be truly successful in your sport you must first decide what success is for you. Everyone is different with different desires, so in order to be successful in your sport you must determine what **you want** to achieve in that sport. It is part of the mental coach's job to guide the individual athlete through the process of determining and setting goals. It is the job of the team coach to set the goals for the team.

Ending bad habits: Hypnosis can't make you suddenly give up your vices, and attempts to use it for weight loss have had less-than-perfect results. But if you don't expect all the work to be done for you, it can be a helpful tool. For instance, if you've had trouble sticking to your workout program, hypnotic suggestions might help you get over your resistance. Barabasz says he's used hypnosis to change the taste of foods so that clients enjoy steamed vegetables as much as, well, steamed vegetables with butter. Of course, this isn't magic. "It works for people who want to make dietary changes," he says

One of the greatest success of hypnosis has been in the area of pain management, either by reducing it or eliminating it altogether. It is such a powerful technique that hypnosis has been used as an anesthetic for surgical procedures. It seems to work by focusing the individual's attention on something other than the pain, often a sensation in another part of the body. Another method is to have the individual imagine that the painful area has been deadened with an anaesthetic such as novocaine.

Although the mechanism by which it works is not clear, it works for many pain sufferers, regardless of whether the pain is acute or chronic without the negative side effects of addictive drugs.

Clearly, there are many uses for hypnosis within the field of athletics. Whether you want to use it for overcoming fear, pain management, anxiety control, mastering techniques, maximizing exertion or exercising, the effects can be dramatic when the hypnosis is done by a highly qualified professional mental trainer.

Typically, people enter this state with the help of another individual (the hypnotist) but some people can hypnotize themselves (self-hypnosis). It is important to note that a trained professional should conduct deep hypnotic induction (if you are interested in receiving a referral simply contact us using the link at the bottom of this page). This is not to say that self-hypnosis can not be conducted.

Hypnosis effects memory such that if the subject is asked to forget everything that happened during the trance, the individual will comply but will respond to suggestions planted during the trance. This is called a post-hypnotic suggestion. The applications in the realm of sport are limitless.

How It's Used

While hypnosis in sports is not a cure all, but it's close. Case studies involving efforts to enhance performance in athletes by means of hypnosis appear to be universally successful, it is important to understand its uses and limitations.

What can you get out of hypnosis practice?

These are just the highlights.

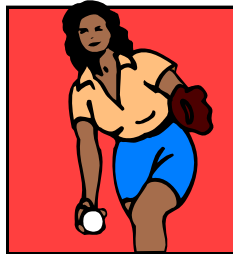
Relaxation: One of the primary success busters an athlete faces is nervousness. Imagine you're at the free-

throw line, calm and brimming with confidence. You have at least a chance of getting the ball through the hoop, right? Now imagine the same situation, but you're full of worry that you'll miss--your odds just went down considerably. Accordingly, one study of college basketball players found that shooting accuracy improved significantly after hypnosis training.

Performance enhancement: Hypnosis can help you control physical sensations such as pain. It can also put you into a more effective place mentally, providing relaxed concentration, also known as "flow" or "getting into the zone." In fact, Barabasz contends that "maximum performance can only occur with variations in mental state or control." That includes workout performance, since completing those difficult final reps--the ones that push your body into building more muscle--is as much about mental will as it is about physical ability.

Visualization: Practicing something in your head, whether it's a bench press or a presentation at work, can mean the difference between a mediocre performance and a spectacular one. "The brain thinks very much in pictures," says New York City clinical psychologist Benjamin Fialkoff, Ph.D., director of the New Jersey-based Center for Peak Performance. "If you can call up a picture in your mind, you have a powerful way of getting something done." Hypnosis can intensify that mental imagery, Fialkoff adds, making it much more vivid, lifelike and effective.

Gaining overall confidence: Not going for a goal, missing that final rep--or, for that matter, not asking someone out--often is the result of a failure of nerve that hypnosis can help you overcome. A therapist can give you confidence-building suggestions, or you can call up a mental picture of a time when you felt especially confident or achieved something important. You can then "anchor" that feeling to a bodily gesture so that when you make a fist or curl your toes you'll experience it again.



The 4Cs OF Sports Mental Training

Concentration, confidence, control and commitment (the 4C's) are generally considered to be the main mental qualities that are important for successful performance in most sports and the development of these within the athlete is a major part of the work of the mental trainer.

- Concentration - ability to maintain focus
- Confidence - believe in one's abilities
- Control - ability to maintain emotional control regardless of distraction
- Commitment - ability to continue working to agreed goals

The techniques of relaxation, centering and mental imagery as taught by a professional mental coach can assist an athlete to achieve the 4C's.

Concentration: This is the mental quality to focus on the task in hand. If the athlete lacks concentration then their athletic abilities will not be effectively or efficiently applied to the task. **Research has identified the following types of attention focus:**

- Broad/Narrow continuum - the athlete focuses on a large or small number of stimuli
- Internal/External continuum - the athlete focuses on internal stimuli (feelings) or external stimuli (ball)

The demand for concentration varies with the sport:

- Sustained concentration - distance running, cycling, tennis, squash
- Short bursts of concentration - cricket, golf, shooting, athletic field events
- Intense concentration - sprinting events, bobsleigh, skiing

Common distractions are: anxiety, mistakes, fatigue, weather, public announcements, coach, manager, opponent, negative thoughts etc.

Strategies to improve concentration are very personal. One way, which is taught by mental trainers, to maintain focus is to set process goals for each session or competition. The athlete will have an overall goal for which the athlete will identify a number of process goals which help focus on specific aspects of the task. For each of these goals the athlete can use a trigger word (a word which instantly refocuses the athlete's concentration to the goal) e.g. sprinting technique requires the athlete to focus on being tall, relaxed, smooth and to drive with the elbows - trigger word could be "technique"

Athletes will develop a routine for competition, which may include the night before, the morning, pre competition, competition and post competition routines. If these routines are appropriately structured then they can prove a useful aid to concentration.

Confidence: Confidence results from the comparison an athlete makes between the goal and their ability. The athlete will have self-confidence if they believe they can



achieve their goal. (Comes back to a quote of mine - "You only achieve what you believe").

When an athlete has self confidence they will tend to:

- persevere even when things are not going to plan
- show enthusiasm



- be positive in their approach
 - take their share of the responsibility in success and failure
- To improve their skill and self confidence athletes can use mental imagery to:**
- visualizes previous good performance
 - to remind them of the look and feel imagine various scenarios and how they will cope with them
 - correct previous mistakes
 - learn new techniques

Control: Identifying when an athlete feels a particular emotion and understanding the reason for the feelings is an important stage of helping an athlete gain emotional control. An athlete's ability to maintain control of their emotions in the face of adversity and remain positive is essential to successful performance. Two emotions which are often associated with poor performance are anxiety and anger.

Anxiety comes in two forms - Physical (butterflies, sweating, nausea, needing the toilet) and Mental (worry, negative thoughts, confusion, lack of concentration). Relaxation is a technique that can be used to reduce anxiety.

When an athlete becomes angry the cause of the anger often becomes the focus of attention. This then leads to a lack of concentration on the task at hand, performance deteriorates, confidence in ability is lost which fuels the anger - a slippery slope to failure.

Commitment: Sports performance depends on the athlete being fully committed to numerous goals over many years. In competition with these goals the athlete will have many aspects of daily life to manage. The many competing interests and commitments include: work, studies, family/partner, friends, social life and other hobbies/sports.

Within the athlete's sport commitment can be undermined by:

- a perceived lack of progress or improvement
- not being sufficiently involved in developing the training program
- not understanding the objectives of the training program
- injury
- lack of enjoyment
- anxiety about performance - competition
- becoming bored
- athlete not working as a team
- lack of commitment by other athletes

Setting goals with the athlete will raise their feelings of value, give them joint ownership of the goals and therefore become more committed to achieving them.



perform optimally, and to practice through visualization all of the moves needed to make the desired improvements to perform better.

One can learn how to get into "*The Zone*" at will with training and the use of hypnosis technology.

Though most do not want it generally known, many individual athletes and some pro teams have a hypnotherapist with whom they consult regularly or in some cases travel with them to coach them in the use of hypnosis and self-hypnosis to improve and maintain their performance.

Misconception About Hypnosis

Hypnosis is a highly misunderstood practice. When you ask most people what they think hypnosis is, their answer strongly resembles the images seen in a late-night horror movie or a Las Vegas stage act. They have a vision of Bela Lugosi's eyes staring intently, forcing a person to do things against their will. Or they have the misconception that a hypnotist will put them in a sleeplike trance where they have no control and no memory of it later. None of these are based in fact.

There are many misconceptions about hypnosis that have been impressed on us by books, movies, cartoons and television programs. Hypnosis, therefore, has been associated in the minds of many people with control and the super natural.

Nothing can be farther from the truth. Hypnosis is a natural state of consciousness that we have all been in before. Although the word sleep is used to describe the trance, the athlete is far from being asleep. A person in hypnosis is aware of his surroundings in a detached sort of way and is more receptive to acceptable suggestions and directions. The mind is concentrated on the suggestions and pays very little attention to anything else (much like being deeply involved in a movie or reading a book).

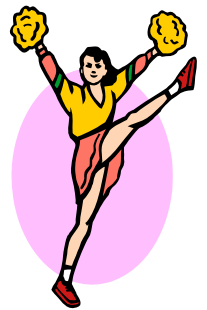
Hypnosis is not:

- sleep or a state of unconsciousness
- dangerous
- a loss of self-control
- an indication that a person is weak-minded
- a method of controlled by someone
- a technique which allows the hypnotherapist to control the subject's mind
- a technique to make a person do things against their will

What Is Hypnosis?

Perhaps you now find yourself looking for anything to help you break out of a slump. Maybe you are just looking for that extra competitive edge that leads to a peak performance. Whatever the reason, hypnosis will most likely be beneficial to you. However, it first is important to understand exactly what hypnosis is.

Hypnosis is a temporary, trance-like state, which is characterized by the individual being exceedingly suggestible. If a deeply hypnotized individual is told that he cannot move his arm, then he will act as if that limb has been paralyzed.



Coaches of youth athletes are arguably one of the strongest yet most under-recognized



influences on our culture. They can make or break a community's pride. Some children spend as much time with them as with schoolteachers. Nevertheless, youth coaches, to a large degree, remain drastically unprepared for the rigors of nurturing athletes. Few are trained in child psychology or have any idea of how to mentally and/or emotionally prepare a youngster for

maximum performance, much less life.

Many youth coaches become overly obsessed with winning rather than with helping players reach their potential. Others simply don't know how to effectively motivate their charges and teach them to become healthy competitors. Though seldom employed, professional mental coaches can be of huge benefits to the young athlete.

As a group, sport mental trainers are working to elevate coaching to a new level of sophistication. They are using their research to develop training programs that help coaches at all levels more effectively inspire their athletes.

Hypnosis in Sports Mental Training

Many of us have heard of professional athletes who are in the midst of a slump but cannot figure out how to correct the problem. In some instances, you may have heard that the individual turned to the technique of hypnosis in order to correct it.

Though most do not want it generally known, many individual athletes and some pro teams have a hypnotist with whom they consult regularly or in some cases travel with them to coach them in the use of hypnosis and self-hypnosis to improve and maintain their performance.

Of all the fitness-promoting mental techniques available, hypnosis may be the one men are least likely to try. And that's too bad. When used correctly, hypnosis can be a highly effective way to improve your workouts, not to mention perform better on the playing field and in the workplace.

From Tiger Woods to a variety of Olympians high performance athletes have used hypnosis to help visualize optimal performance and overcome self-doubt. In fact there has been a long history of hypnosis in sport, often used under different names such as mental or autogenic training. According to Les Cunningham in his well known book "Hypnosport", during the 1978/79 tour of Australia, England cricket captain Mike Brearley consulted a medical hypnotist.



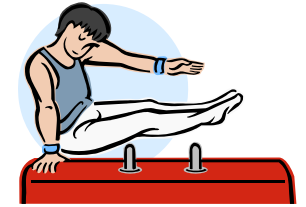
In the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, the Russian team took no less than 11 hypnotists. You don't need to look too far in any sport to find great champions using hypnotic techniques to improve performance. The reason most of them don't like to talk about it is because of the age-old myth that hypnosis is a magical power to make you do things.

But if you want to get more out of your time at the gym, it can help there, too. All in all, hypnosis may be the most fitness-friendly thing you can do while parked on a couch.

Three of the major factors which make this possible are the ability to improve focus and concentration, to relieve unnecessary stress while leaving sufficient "edge" to

What does it mean to be "in the zone"?

"The Zone" All pro athletes know it, strive for it, prize its attainment. It is that realm of play in which everything-skill, training and mental discipline-comes together, and players feel themselves lifted to a level of peak performance in which limits seem to fall away.



To teach an athlete to enter the zone at will is perhaps the most important function a mental coach can perform. Hypnosis by a trained professional allows the athlete to enter and remain in the zone by means of a post-hypnotic suggestion. However, not all sports psychologists and mental game coaches are sufficiently trained in hypnosis to use it effectively.

The zone is the essence and pinnacle of the athletic experience, for it reveals that, at their root, sports are a theater for enacting the drama of self-transcendence. Athletes and fans alike, focused as we so often are on the game of winning and losing, miss the deeper significance that is right before our eyes. But in the zone, the extraordinary capacities that lie within each individual are made manifest. To grasp this hidden dimension is to transform the very meaning of athletic play.

Sports psychology demonstrates that consciousness plays an essential role in athletic training. But the zone is about much more than the goal of peak performance. It provides a touchstone for approaching athletics as a spiritual path. Though largely forgotten in contemporary culture, this understanding has been part of sports throughout history, from the Olympic games of ancient Greece to the marathon runners of Native America to the Ways of the martial arts.

The term, **The zone**, is a fairly new development in the lexicon of sports culture, perhaps less than 20 years old. It denotes a place, as in the dictionary definition, but much more than that. It calls up imagery of the supernatural ("the twilight zone") and carries an implicit connection to altered states of consciousness ("zoned out" or "lost in the ozone"), a connection made explicit by less popular related terms: "He was playing *out of his mind*." "She went *unconscious*." But **the zone**, with its rich ambiguity and layers of meaning, says it best. It is indeed a place, but a map won't get you there.



Characteristics of "Being In The Zone"

1. Relaxed: The days of getting psyched up to play are over. Research has shown over and over that the best performances occur when you are just slightly above your normal state of arousal, not at the extreme end of the spectrum as once thought. You are energized, yet relaxed it's a subtle balance of quiet intensity. Your mind is calm and your body is ready to go. You feel relaxed, but you are able to move with great strength and ease.

2. Confident: Not letting a lapse in performance undermine your belief in your overall abilities is at the core of this characteristic. When you are playing well, you feel



confident that no matter what you are up against, you are going to come out on top. You just exude with confidence and pride, and it is evident in your performance. There is no fear. Confidence on the inside is outwardly shown by way of your presence, your walk and your facial expressions. You should expect to be successful, not hope or wish to be successful. You must adopt a confident, winning attitude. It is trusting your instincts and intuition to do the right thing at the right time; and if you are prepared, you can be confident that this will happen. This complete faith allows you to just know that you are going to do everything necessary to be successful without the

conscious use of reasoning or analyzing.

3. Completely focused: You are totally absorbed in the moment. You have no memory of the past and no qualms about the future; you are here now. The only thing you are concentrating on is the task at hand. You are oblivious to everything else going on around you, consumed by the moment. Like a child playing with his toys, you are so absorbed in the moment that nothing outside can effect you. You have no real sense of time, and before you know it, the game is over. The game seems to have flown by, and at the same time, everything you did seemed to happen in a slowed-down pace with great precision and concentration. Having the ability to stay in the moment is a gift that all of peak performers have.

4. Effortless: Things just sort of happen with little or no effort whatsoever. All your moves are smooth and for that time, your sports seems like the easiest thing in the world. You are in a state of mind and body where you can accomplish great things with little effort. Your mind and body are working with one another in perfect unison. The grace and ease that you display make everything you do seem like the simplest task in the world. You have a sense of finesse and grace, even when the task is very grueling and demanding. That sort of connectedness and moment of greatness is an awesome thing to both witness and take part in.

5. Automatic: There is no interference from your thoughts or emotions. Things are just happening, both without protest and without consent. You are on auto pilot - just reacting to whatever comes your way. Your body just seems to know what to do without any directive from you. There is no conscious thought involved; you're going strictly on your instincts. If you think less, you will achieve more.

6. Fun: When you're in the flow, the enjoyment is incomparable to anything else. You feel like when you were a kid enjoying your sport with pure and innocent delight. Anyone can see in your eyes the satisfaction and fulfillment the sport gives you. You feel like your sport is giving you back something that you can't get from anyone or anything else. This is a key factor because if you don't enjoy your sport, your future in it will be limited.



– those who believe in the benefits of sports mental training try harder and really achieve desirable goals (e.g. learn how to deal with emotions under tense circumstances in competition, learn how to calm down when it's critical to do so, etc.). This is known as self-fulfilling prophesy.

It is important to devote enough time for mental preparation. Five minutes a week is not enough. If an athlete is working on some psychological skill (e.g. visualization), then specific psychological exercises can be done every day before, during and after practice where appropriate and it would take just 10—15 minutes overall. In addition, when a skill is acquired, a considerable attention should be paid at its maintained. To put it shortly, psychological preparation/skills training should be maintained throughout the athletic career. One more thing that should be mentioned with regards to time guidelines is that one should not expect quick results. Coaches and athletes often mistakenly believe that they will contact sport psychology counselor right before the important meet and that he will teach how to deal with the tension.

Unfortunately, learning how to adjust one's pre-competitive state, how to relax in difficult situations and other psychological skills are trained, which means they take time to be mastered.

Mental training is most efficient when it is oriented towards a particular athlete, his features, strengths and weaknesses. And particular situation.

Myth #3: Professional Mental Training is required only by professional (elite) athletes. High performance, professional athletes, definitely make use of mental training. However, this kind of support is equally, and sometimes even more important for younger (lower performance) athletes. It is these athletes who often lack expertise, have less knowledge and skills to manage different sport-related emotional problems. Mental skills training to develop the most relevant characteristics for the particular sport is essential in the early stages of the athlete's career. This is when a good foundation is formed that later helps to aim at higher achievement.

Myth #4: A Professional Mental Trainer is not necessary, the sports coach is enough. A coach is really a very important person in every athlete's life and very often he takes the responsibility for athlete's psychological preparation even though he may not be qualified in this area. The most important thing is that athletes received qualitative psychological support and training.

A professional mental trainer will almost always be of great help to a sports coach. A coach needs to have knowledge in a broad variety of area – specifics of the sport, principles of physical preparation, basics of sport medicine, management, psychology and so on. It is too hard to have an exceptionally good knowledge of every single area. Of course, a coach should know how to provide first medical aid to the athlete, but it's hardly believable that he would heal the injury, instead an athlete would go to a physician. An analogy with mental training can be drawn here – a coach knows fundamentals of psychology, but a professional sports mental trainer knows more.

It is not to say that a mental trainer should replace a coach. Instead, I would suggest imaging a coach as a team captain who has different professionals – physician, mental trainer, physiotherapist, etc., on his team. And that is what makes a team unbeatable!



are one of these individuals and would like to change this, self-hypnosis (which can be taught to an athlete by a qualified professional mental coach) may be of help. Individuals who are not accustomed to performing at maximal level usually experience gains in muscular strength and endurance when administered suggestions in a hypnotic state. It is important to note that hypnosis without suggestions for enhanced performance did not influence strength or endurance.

Self-hypnosis techniques can even be used in exercising. Perception of effort during exercise can be systematically increased or decreased with hypnotic suggestion even though the actual physical workload is maintained at a constant level. This means that on those days when you feel that you have no energy, you can use self-hypnosis in order to reduce your perception of the workload.

You can even make your body believe that it is exercising when you are resting and get the same benefits as with physical exercise. Researchers have found that hypnotic suggestion of exercise in the non exercise state is associated with increased cardiac frequency, respiratory rate, ventilator minute volume, oxygen uptake, carbon dioxide production, forearm blood flow, and cardiac output. These metabolic changes often approximate responses noted during the actual exercise conditions of individuals. Of course the level of hypnosis needed to achieve this is so deep that a trained professional should only attempt it.



Myths About Sport Psychology And Mental Training

Myth #1: Only “disturbed”, “weak”, “abnormal”, etc. athletes need psychological counseling. Sometimes I hear coaches’ or athletes’ comments that “mentally tough athletes manage problems themselves and that there’s no place in sports for the mentally weak athletes.” In some cases, an athlete would like to approach a mental trainer, however he is afraid of what his coach and team/club mates would think of him, i.e. that they would think he is “psychologically weak”, “mentally ill” or “incapable of dealing with his problems himself.”

The truth is that sport psychology and mental training have little to do with any of these! Sport psychologists’ primary focus is on “healthy” individuals... those athletes that do not have mental disorders. Sport mental training aims at increasing human potential, not eliminating disorders. In other words, it looks at how athletes could be helped to fulfill their talents, make another step and improve their athletic performance.

Myth #2: Mental training won’t make a difference. This attitude very often comes out indirectly, for example, when an athlete says: “we can try, it won’t get worse”. This saying reflects an expectation that changes probably won’t occur in the work with a psychologist. Unfortunately, there’s a high probability that without believing in the use of collaboration with a sport mental trainer, a coach or an athlete will work less, will put in less effort which in turn will result in unessential changes which will “prove” once again how correct it was to believe that psychological counseling/preparation can’t bring in positive changes! And on the contrary



7. In Control: You feel that no matter what, you are in control. What you think and want to happen will. You have ultimate command over your emotions as well - you are controlling them, not the other way around. When you are in control, you are in charge. You govern your own destiny. When you feel this strong of a command over your game, great things are sure to happen. The authority is yours, and no one else’s.

Effects of Pressure, Stress and Anxiety upon an Athlete

Stress is a state that results from the demands that are places on the individual which require that person to engage in some coping behavior. Anxiety results when the individual doubts her or her ability to cope with the situation that causes him or her stress.



As the pressure to succeed and perform consistently over time increases, athletes continually add both physical and emotional stress to their bodies. Mental toughness, or the ability to perform at one’s optimal level regardless of circumstances, is consequentially a vital tool in helping one cope with such strenuous situations. Our study of sport mental training focuses upon an important premise: that a change in an athlete’s mental state is consciously or unconsciously accompanied by a change in his physical state.

If muscle tension occurs due to feelings of anxiety or worry, it interferes with the athlete’s performance because the nerves are focused on the cause of tension rather than the coordinated movement for muscles. Thus, the more tension in the body, the more difficult it is to perform the coordinated actions.

Anxiety affects more than simply the physical aspect of an athlete. There are accompanying physiological and psychological behavioral responses as nerves and anxieties build about an upcoming performance. Reactions to this type of anxiety may be either positive or negative (rarely both). With positive reactions—called the “fight reaction”—the person is excited about the test and thrives on the challenge.

However, most people usually experience the negative reaction—or the “flight reaction.” In response to this reaction, athletes get extremely nervous, to the point of nauseating, before a race and begin to focus primarily on the negative aspects of the upcoming performance. They look for excuses for a potential poor performance and thus, in effect, prepare themselves for one. The professional mental coach can reverse these negative attitudes.



Performance Enhancement Through Mental Training

It is important to realize that the athlete himself is his own worst enemy. This occurs by letting inconsequential occurrences defeat him well before any opponent does. So the question is then this: how does one program into his or her subconscious the beliefs that will drive their performance rather than hinder it? I have found that hypnosis and self-hypnosis are the answers.

Some individuals don’t give their all when they are on the playing field. It’s like they are consciously or unconsciously saving something for the next time that they play. If you