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## The Mental Approach to the Game of Baseball: A Handbook for the Player/Coach

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**THE MENTAL APPROACH TO THE GAME OF BASEBALL:  
A HANDBOOK FOR THE PLAYER/COACH**

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A Culminating Project Presented to the Faculty of the  
Graduate School of Lindenwood University in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Communications

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will focus on the mental attitude required to succeed in athletics, in particular baseball. Stressing the link between the mind and the body, this paper intends to make practical applications for both coaches and players.

Research has shown that in communication information is transmitted through two primary inconsistent and unbalanced methods: content and emotions. Due to the often interaction of coaches in communicating with their players, there is a large margin of error, lost information, from the transmission by the coaches to the reception by the players. It is necessary, thus, to explore the link between the mental and the physical aspects of athletics.

There have been numerous books written by scholars, coaches, and psychologists on the subject of effective communication. They have stated that the most frequent cause of failure to achieve successful dialogue is related to the frame of mind of the individuals. They hold to the opinion that in order to achieve the transmission and reception of

information each participant must make a voluntary effort to concentrate on the process.

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the needed development of the single most important skill in effective communication. Specifically, many athletes have experienced the irate coach whom, during intense competition, demonstrate more emotional elements than informational content in communication. Some athletes will have difficulty focusing on the competitive event or the communication of the coach when the coach's behaviors are inconsistent. Both elements, content and emotions, are important to the communication process but a balance between the two seems to be necessary for effective communication.

The results conclude that improving communication skills is an ongoing process, which requires constant attention and effort on the part of the coach and the athlete. Since communication is probably the most important skill that the coach or athlete can possess, effort should be directed toward developing effective communication patterns which not only involve sending messages, but receiving and understanding messages as well.



COMMITTEE IN CHARGE OF CANDIDACY:

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Chairperson and Advisor

Associate Professor Dr. Gary Gardiner

Associate Professor Glen Cerny

This project is dedicated to my mother, Sandy and my brother, Lynn, who have sacrificed their lives for the happiness and well-being of others. Their effort, strength, courage, and character are an inspiration.

A special thanks to my lovely wife, Crystal, Dr. Gary Gardiner and my advisor Michael Castro, for all your encouragement and support through-out this project.

## Table of Contents

I.	Introduction . . . . .	1
	Steps for Improving Communication Patterns . . . . .	7
II.	Literature Review. . . . .	15
III.	Research Methodology . . . . .	28
	Training Your Mind: The Winning Feeling. . . . .	33
IV.	Results. . . . .	36
	Some Questions and Answers About Mental Preparation . . . . .	55
	Self-Assessment Test #1. . . . .	59
	Self-Assessment Test #2. . . . .	61
V.	Discussion . . . . .	63
	Benefits of Mental Imagery for Athletes . . . . .	68
	Works Cited. . . . .	73
	Vita Auctores. . . . .	75

## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the single most important coaching skill that needs to be developed is that of effective communication. Every coach and athlete knows the importance as well as value of having efficient and effective communication skills. This means establishing communicative behaviors and skills, which can be translated and clearly understood.

Communication is dynamic and must be viewed as a two-way process. Communication involves sending as well as receiving and interpreting messages. The process of communication involves sending a message to someone or some group and then assessing what effect the message had. In other words, as a coach or athlete, you have definite information you wish to communicate. The purpose of the communication might be for: a) persuasion, as in a pre-game performance; b) evaluation, as in assessing an athlete's performance; c) information, as teaching a new skill; d) motivation, as in a half-time speech; or e) problem solving, as in dealing with team conflict.

The information that you wish to convey starts in the form of an idea, emotion, or feeling and is then translated into a thought pattern. The thought pattern is translated through either a verbal or nonverbal channel or both. Using one or both channels, the message is directed to the intended athlete or teammate. The athlete receives and interprets the message according to the expectations regarding the type of message the sender might produce. The message is also interpreted according to the receiver's ability to understand the message content and within the framework of the previous communication (Brawley 20-22).

Communication does not occur unless the receiver is affected in some way by the message that was transmitted. As noted, communication is a two-way process and imparting information of some type does not denote communication until there is a reaction from the receiver (Deci 28).

When one communicates, two aspects must be considered. Firstly, the amount of information or content that is included in the transmission of the message. In other words, what was the intent of the message? Secondly, the content of the message, the actual meaning of the words being used, can be conveyed

in different ways. The emotional elements in the message as well as in the delivery are critical (Heyman 30).

The emotional element of the communication process includes the manner in which the message was expressed. What voice quality did the communicator use? Was the message intense, rapid, loud, or softly spoken? Facial expressions and body language or movement also influence how the message is to be interpreted. The receiver does not process the content of the message without interpreting the emotional element (Klavora 21).

Many athletes have experienced the irate coach who, during intense competition, demonstrates more emotional elements than informational content in communication. The speech may become high pitched, faster, and more intense than under normal conditions. The communication pattern may be entirely different from that during a practice situation. Some athletes will have difficulty focusing on the competitive event or the communication of the coach when the coach's behaviors are inconsistent. Both elements, content and emotions, are important to the communication process but a balance between the two seems to be necessary for effective communication.

Much of our communication behavior is habitual in that we do not give conscious attention to the matter in which we produce communicating signals. For instance, coaches give a lot of attention to verbal communications such as instructional information, offering encouragement, and evaluating results but may be unaware of the behaviors that accompany verbal remarks. These behaviors may speak as loudly and in some cases, more loudly than the verbal communications (Cratty 26-27).

Communicating behaviors fall into two categories: verbal and nonverbal. The verbal channel of communication serves primarily to convey content or information. The nonverbal communication channel serves to support the verbal channel as well as communicating interpersonal attitudes. Interpersonal attitudes are communicated through appearances, gestures, bodily movement, and facial expressions. Nonverbal communication also serves to replace language, express emotions and convey information about the individual who is doing the communicating. One does not need the results of a contest to determine who won or who lost. The behavioral postures of the players and coaches easily distinguish the happy and elated from those who are disappointed (Mahoney 39).



Athletes and coaches are quick to point out specific gestures or nonverbal behaviors which reflect a certain attitude or feeling. A shrug of the shoulders, a facial expression, turning the back, or clenching the fists represent nonverbal behaviors, which express feeling or attitudes with which we are all familiar. These nonverbal communications are interpreted in accordance with other communicating signals in which the communication is occurring. A clenched fist may mean victory or anger depending upon which actions or signals precede the nonverbal communication (Leonard 42-43).

There is no one most effective way or best communication method or technique. The same message can be conveyed on many different levels. For example, encouragement can be verbalized as well as demonstrated by facial and body movements. Anger can be similarly expressed. Whatever the channel of communication, it is important that both athletes and coaches share an interest in creating open, honest, and understandable communication, which leads to improved performance.

Communication breakdown can also occur if the messages transmitted are always negative. Athletes need positive reinforcement for their efforts and information that is relevant to the situation and which

contributes to the correction of errors. The athlete is the first to know when a performance is sub-par or when a mistake has been made. However, coaches are usually the first to remind the athlete of a missed shot, a turnover, an error, or failing to carry out the assignment successfully. Positive communication rewards will almost always produce better results than negative messages. An overload of negative communication does little to aid in correction or to motivate the athlete. Being made to feel good about yourself makes you try harder. Knowing how to "push the right buttons and pull the right strings" through communication will inspire anyone to greater heights (Orlick 19-22).

All of us need work on our communication skills, as poor communication or miscommunication causes the majority of interpersonal conflicts and problems. We need to become aware of both our verbal and nonverbal signals and make sure that we say what we mean and we mean what we say! Good communication among all involved in the sports environment, or any environment for that matter, is essential. When communication breaks down between two individuals, motivation, commitment, and performance will suffer.

Improving communication skills is an ongoing process, which requires constant attention and effort on the part of the coach and the athlete. Since it is probably the most important skill that the coach or athlete can possess, effort should be directed toward developing effective communication patterns which not only involve sending messages, but receiving and understanding messages as well. Several steps are listed below which will aid you in improving communication patterns.

#### Steps for Improving Communication Patterns

1. There should be conscious effort directed toward improving communication skills, both verbal and nonverbal. Since athletes as well as coaches respond in different ways, there is a need to determine what is the most effective communication method for each individual.

2. Become more familiar with what your nonverbal behaviors are saying. Nonverbal communications may be perceived as expressing more than verbal communications. If coaches and athletes are not aware of what their nonverbal channel is saying, communication could be confusing as well as inconsistent.

3. Do not assume that the communicator and the receiver will interpret the information in a similar manner. It is important to make sure the information is presented in a variety of ways so individuals who did not understand the first presentation have another opportunity. For instance, visual communication may be the most effective communication style for some athletes while others may communicate best by having a coach explain and then use some form of visual aid.

4. Athletes do not need to be negatively informed when they have performed poorly. They already know it most of the time! Critical but constructive comments are important for improved performance but coaches and athletes must be aware of the best and, therefore, most effective communication channel to be used.

5. Be positive when communicating. Athletic performances are readily evaluated and athletes usually have some indication of how they played regardless of whether or not the team won or lost. Coaches should avoid yelling, insulting, and berating athletes. Positive instruction can provide a constructive environment, which enhances and encourages learning and improvement.

6. Communicate in a consistent and fair matter. Athletes need to be treated alike whether or not they are on the starting lineup or substituting for a first string player.

7. Communication during the competition should be minimized to avoid disrupting the athlete's concentration, procedures for communicating during critical times in a competition should be developed, discussed and practiced prior to the contest.  
(Nideffer 15-23)

Developing and improving effective communication skills are both essential for the coach and athlete on the field and off. Traveling one step further, one might say that effective communication skills are essential for many aspects of life.

What do we mean when we say "That athlete has got it together?" What is there to get together? A science of athletic performance is evolving. With that comes an increasing body of knowledge and an increasing awareness of the necessity of integrating the mental and physical aspects of performance. Traditionally,

coaches and athletes have devoted most of their attention to the physical components of performance. Practices have focused on the skills, techniques, and strategies involved in sport or how to use x's and o's to win. Almost no attention has been given to the cognitive aspects of performance. Yet, attributions given by the coaches and athletes for not performing up to expectations generally involve those related to the mental aspects of performance! "They weren't hungry enough;" "We lost our momentum;" "I got psyched out;" These are comments frequently used to describe competitive disappointments. Rarely do you find a coach who says that the team has not been taught the proper mental preparation skills and strategies. An athlete seldom concludes that a loss was related to poor or inadequate mental preparation. However, after the game, the greatest percentage of excuses are generally attributed to the mental and emotional aspects of the game. Yet, almost no time is spent in incorporating these issues into the training routine. Usually it is back to the drawing board for new strategy or increased practice time.

It is becoming obvious that outstanding athletes differ from their teammates who do not perform as well. The physiological and bio-mechanical differences among

these athletes are much better understood than the cognitive differences because research and attention has been devoted to those considerations in performance. It is much easier to evaluate cardiovascular or mechanical differences between athletes than it is to evaluate different athletic "mind-sets" about performance. This point is best underscored when trying to understand why two athletes with identical qualifying times in track and field do not have the same finishing time, or why their performance differs on given days, or even in the same event (Rushall 11-12).

One of the biggest problems in sport, whether it be competitive or recreational, is lack of concentration. A wandering mind can create mental lapses and cause mental errors during any performance. Many times you hear an athlete say, "I lost my concentration, I just couldn't get it back together." Or, a coach will say, "They lost their concentration and lost the momentum." Coaches are notorious for attributing lack of an athlete's or team success to loss of concentration.

Concentration or paying attention to what you are doing and what is going on is a skill that can be learned and it must be practiced regularly to be

maintained at a high level of efficiency. Sport, by its nature, enhances concentration but specific practice improves it beyond that point. Among athletes, or any other group great individual differences exist in ability to focus and attend to something over a length of time (Kauss 20-23).

Concentration or selective attention involves being able to attend to what is going on, the degree to which you can attend, and how long you can continue to attend to what is going on around you. Selective attention is being able to choose to attend to specific things going on and to ignore others, or the ability to put the mind on one thing at a time or on all the things that relate to what is going on at that time. The more you have the ability to attend to what you want to, the better the response and the performance.

If you are not focused one hundred percent on what you are doing, then performance cannot be maximized. When you are concentrating and giving your undivided attention to the task at hand you are aware of nothing else. Some athletes explain this state by saying things such as, "I felt spacey, as though I was not even there." Others describe it as a situation where things slow down and one has all the time in the world to execute and perform. They feel and see exactly what is

happening and they know what is going to happen next. Others say, "I wasn't even aware of anything, it was as though I was not even thinking about what was going on, it just happened." Some athletes feel capable of doing anything they wish; everything goes just right without any special effort (Bale 30-33).

When athletes enjoy what they are doing, they report specific changes in their attentional processing. They report that they narrow their attention so that it is focused exclusively on the task at hand. This is what we call "concentration." This focused attention is the prerequisite for maximal performance or working at the peak of your capacity at whatever you are doing. It is certainly essential for maximizing your performance in sport (Horn 52).

Maximal sport performance occurs when intense concentration of attention is focused on a limited stimulus field. In other words, the athlete must be able to select the relevant cues from the multitude available and focus solely on them. All irrelevant stimuli are eliminated, shut off, or ignored (Fisher 11).

Peak performance occurs when you voluntarily concentrate on the cues in the environment and perceive them to demand an action that is within your ability to



execute. In other words, the challenge of the situation must match your perceived ability in order to maintain the concentration throughout the execution. If there is an imbalance between the challenge and the skilled, attention will waver. That is, if your opponent is much more skilled, concentration will lapse. Or, if you are much more skilled than the opponent, concentration will lapse. This explains the classical upsets that occur in sport season after season. The relationship between the balance of the challenge and skills and sustained concentration has been observed not only in sport but in many other leisure and/or occupational pursuits (Kirschenbaum 7-12).

Learning to become responsible for your own concentration is essential for maximal performance. Total involvement or total concentration in terms of how the attention is directed, where it is directed, and who is in control of the process, must be your responsibility (Orlick 41-42).

Mental errors are generally caused by lack of attention or just laziness due to lack of motivation. If practices allow this type of inattention, then the performance will be much like the practice. The quality of the practice has to be such that the

athletes are challenged to give their undivided attention throughout the practice. Far too many practices are boring, repetitious, and nonproductive, with athletes standing around waiting for instructions that take too long. If the quality of the practice is improved, less time is needed for practice, and the attention given to the practice by athletes will be much more intense.

The basic objective of this handbook is to establish a mental awareness to help enhance mental preparation techniques for the young player/coach. Confidence, total focus, mental toughness, control under pressure and consistency are skills that with proper training - mental training...can be learned. Keep in mind that this manual is very similar to any other exercise or training manual. At a glance, you may be tempted to try everything at once; or you may instead feel overwhelmed at the variety of goals to be reached. As with any other training procedures, *mental* training skills are acquired one step at a time. Be patient and consistent in your practice, remember "practice makes perfect."

Chapter II  
LITERATURE REVIEW

The key to achievement in sports—and in life—lies just as much in your mind as in your body. Now Lawrence Brawley, a leading authority in sports psychology reveals the Olympics-tested secrets of how to attain peak performance. The book Maximum Performance written by Lawrence Brawley, captures the spirit and methods of a major new direction in sports training... provides information and skills that will benefit athletes of all levels. Maximum Performance provides proven ways to produce measurable increases in athletic achievement. Maximum Performance is a detailed, well-founded training program for increasing mental input in sports performance by illustrating how star athletes and Olympic winners have achieved their best physical performance through a series of mental exercises.

Lawrence Brawley is a faculty member of the Department of Kinesiology, University of Waterloo, Ontario, where he teaches basic and applied social psychology as relates to physical activity, health, and rehabilitation. His interest in the psychological

aspects of sport comes from personal experience as a former competitive swimmer and intercollegiate swimming coach. Brawley's current research interests include social cognition, attributions, intrinsic motivation, attitude-behavior relations, and group cohesion. As well, he is interested in the cognitive and social aspects of weight control, coronary-prone behavior, and preventative health care. Though his research and experience, Brawley states that, "communication is dynamic and must be viewed as a two-way process."

For readers with little or no background about mental preparation in sports, Bryant Cratty's book Psychological Preparation and Athletic Excellence will be a revelation. In non-technical language and with an abundance of illustrations, Cratty introduces mental techniques to enhance the mental awareness in a student/athlete or coach. Cratty's lively text draws on his own ground-breaking research and makes frequent reference to the work of other scientists who have contributed to our knowledge of sports psychology. "Psychology is interesting to practically every person," he writes. "But one of its branches--the one dealing with mental preparation, preparing the mind for action--is relatively neglected."

Bryant Cratty is currently a professor of Kinesiology at UCLA, where he is focusing on mental activity in athletes. A former high school and college-university level coach in swimming, water-polo, basketball, and football, his publications include over 50 books and monographs that have been translated into 16 languages. Cratty submits that success or failure is directly related to how we communicate, he states that, "much of our communication behavior is habitual in that we do not give conscious attention to the matter in which we produce communicating signals."

The Mind/Body Effect is the brilliant successor to the highly acclaimed and best-selling book, The Brain. Based on a nine-part television series airing on public television nationwide, The Mind/Body Effect is a fascinating exploration of that crucial aspect of the self that makes human beings unique. The search for the mind is the search for who we are. Those creations that are our greatest achievements---literature, art, music, is the mind at its most sublime. Passion and reflection, thought and emotion, are aspects of the mind. Yet what mind is has remained mysterious until recently. The Mind/Body Effect takes a giant step by joining the mind and body, which focuses on the mind and the body working together to create a total 100

percent effort. Both genetic and environmental factors affect aspects of the mind/body such as depression, alcoholism, suicide and violence. Because of this, we face some ethical and moral dilemmas. How free are we? How much are we determined by forces we do not control? If a genetic factor is found to play a part in mental illness, such as manic depression, should individuals be tested for the factor? And if it's found, then what? The Mind/Body Effect deals with many of these issues and relates its actual research and conclusions to everyday life experiences. Other ideas found in this source are the idea of "thinking". What happens when you see something in your "mind's eye?" When a word is caught on the "tip of your tongue?" What are the factors involved in thinking? All of these questions and many others are answered in The Mind/Body Effect. The author of The Mind/Body Effect, Ed Deci is professor of psychology at the University of Rochester, New York. His studies of human motivation, conducted over the past fifteen years, have been summarized in three books: Intrinsic Motivation, (Plenum, 1975); The Psychology of Self-determination, (D.C. Heath, 1980); Intrinsic Motivation and Self-determination in Human Behavior, (Plenum, 1990). Ed received his Ph.D in psychology from Carnegie-Mellon University.

"Communication is a two-way process and imparting information of some type does not denote communication until there is a reaction from the receiver," declares Deci.

Body-Mind, by Steve Heyman, is a book that describes how the body and mind can work as one. In the last decade, the scientific community has made dazzling advances on one of the most fascinating and mysterious medical frontiers---the human brain. This source shares revolutionary discoveries that will change our conception of ourselves and the world in which we live. The research found in Body-Mind will help us find out what makes us tick mentally and physically. Learn how brain cells communicate with one another, why the brain has two hemispheres, where our emotional "switchboard" is and how it works, what happens when we sleep, why we dream. Body-Mind also explores the origins of sexual attractions, what the sure signs are that two people have fallen in love. Discover why psychology is both an art and a science, what is meant by "normal," what role myths and fantasies play in our lives. The author, Steven Heyman, is a licensed clinical psychologist, who

received his Ph.D from Louisiana State University. His teaching is primarily within the clinical psychology program but has developed courses on sport psychology. His research interests in sport psychology include the areas of personality and performance, high-risk sports, and hypnosis. He has worked primarily with individual athletes, including amateur boxers, wrestlers, power lifters, and swimmers. He believes in the tangibility of the sub-text and its constant presence in any and all text. He sums this idea up by saying, "when one communicates, two aspects must be considered, what was the intent of the message? Secondly, the content of the message, the actual meaning of the words being used can be conveyed in different ways."

Dr. Thelma Horn is the author of the book Progressive Relaxation. In this book or source we find the idea of independence, making our own choices. The one thing in this world that we have absolute control of is self-control. No one can make us react or think in any way except what we decide. Others may influence us or have physical power over us, but our inner self is completely within our control. Self-control is so obvious that we may not realize we possess it. Stop and think about how you are feeling at this moment. Do you have control of your feelings? Can you change



them? The answer to these questions is "yes". This is the type of questions, answers, and over-all material found in Progressive Relaxation. Another example, your teacher can assign you homework. You may think that is beyond your control, but it isn't. You decide whether you are going to do it or not, and your decision is based on experience. You know that not doing the homework will result in an "F" grade. That failure could affect your class grade, not to mention the teacher's attitude toward you. Finally, you might be concerned about how your parents would react to the results of your decision not to do homework.

Progressive Relaxation has similar exercises and examples through its reading. These types of situations help this writer grasp the concept of mentally preparing our minds for action. Dr. Horn received a Ph.D degree in Sport Psychology from Michigan State University. Her major research interests center around the study of children's perceptions concerning their physical competence and the influence teachers'/coaches' behavior on children's psycho-social growth. "Concentration", says Dr. Horn "is the prerequisite for maximal performance or working at the peak of your capacity at whatever you are doing."

Championship Thinking by Dan Kirschenbaum, is a book that looks at our right to control our lives and then follows up with a discussion of how to develop that control. Kirschenbaum examines restraint and composure at home, in the classroom, and at work. Perhaps the most difficult test of mastery of your own life is dealing with peers. Are you swayed by others or are you adept at governing your own behavior? These ideas and exercises stated above are addressed by Kirschenbaum in a very clear and distinct matter through-out the book Championship Thinking.

Understanding how to determine attitudes gives one authority and power over one's actions. It is possible to possess a positive self-image and move your life toward successful relationships and endeavors. As described in Championship Thinking, self-control is your privilege and right. Maintaining it in a positive framework is your responsibility. The result of losing self-control is destruction. The rewards of developing and possessing it are independence, freedom, and high quality of life. Daniel Kirschenbaum, is a clinical psychologist who received his Ph.D at the University of Cincinnati. He has taught at the Universities of Cincinnati, Rochester, and Wisconsin. Dr. Kirschenbaum

conducts research in the broad area of self-regulation. This research has included studies of planning, affect, choice, and a variety of related topics with applications to obesity, study skills, classroom management, and sport performance. Dr. Kirschenbaum maintains that, "peak performance occurs when you voluntarily concentrate on the cues in the environment."

The source Mental Toughness Training for Sports, by Michael Mahoney develops the idea of inner fitness. Mahoney states, "when it comes to improving the way we function and communicating with others, we must change at the core to rediscover our true, inner-selves." Mental Toughness leaves behind the preventive "I Should" lifestyle, based on anxiety and apprehension, and embraces the "I Choose" lifestyle, with the courage to risk, to dare, to act. Mahoney continues by saying, "surviving and succeeding in today's complex, competitive world calls for a strength and clarity of vision and judgement". Mental Toughness moves beyond physical fitness, to inner fitness. Inner Fitness is the first step to conditioning the mind and the emotion. Mental Toughness provides an easy-to-follow program, which helps us realize that our instincts and intuitions can be every bit as valid and valuable as

our rational thought and reason. Mental Toughness empowers us to create possibilities for personal choice in our lives.

Dr. Mahoney has become one of the most productive scholars in psychology. Since 1978 he has written 12 books and 96 research publications. His work with collegiate and Olympic athletes over the last seven years has focused primarily on the psychological skills of concentration, self-confidence, mental practice, motivation, and psychological preparations for competition. The latter has included relaxation training, the pacing of pre-competitive preparation strategies for channeling the high energy of competition into optimal athletic performance. He is also interested in broader issues relating to physical and mental well-being as the role of science and education in recreational physical activity. "Communicating behaviors fall into two categories: verbal and nonverbal," reports Dr. Mahoney.

Clear, comprehensive, and up-to-date, the book Sports Psyching, by Thomas Tutko, provides an ideal introduction to or review of the fundamentals of sports psychology. It is designed to be used in several ways: in conjunction with any of the standard general psychology textbooks, as a supplement to classroom or

laboratory instruction, or as a concise text. Tightly organized by a series of subheads that represent the major topics in sports psychology, the book presents facts, principles, and theoretical explanations. Examples based on real life situations or the research literature enhance understanding of the sports psychology field.

Dr. Tutko is a Co-Director of the Institute for the Study of Athletic Motivation. His previous publishing accomplishments include two books and over 20 journal articles in the area of the psychology of sport. For the past seven years, his activities have included consulting work with professional, college, and high school athletic programs. He believes that, "through sports it is possible to expand our ability to handle the game of life in ways that bring satisfaction and creativity to ourselves and the people around us."

Relax and Win introduces the simple idea of "just do it". The book is authored by Len Zaichkowsky, and explains six simple yet ingenious tools for living, each tied to an easily remembered visual cue. These form a mental training circuit that teaches us to:

- 1) Delay our responses, and take time to fuse Feeling and thinking.
- 2) Recognize and act on our own inner warning signals.
- 3) Stretch our minds, locate

new options, take risks. 4) Blend passion and practically, and follow our true fascinations. 5) Understand the ongoing effect of time, and the ongoing effect of our actions. 6) Perceive the difference between what people seem to say and what they actually mean. Filled with keen insight, Relax and Win is a clear and concise program for the maximization of mental preparation for sport and life.

Len Zaichkowsky is an associate professor of education at Boston University whose teaching and research specialty is the psychology of human development and performance. He has authored 3 books and over 30 articles in sport psychology and related topics. Len played and coached semi-pro baseball and hockey in his native Alberta, Canada. His current research and clinical interests are in preparing athletes from a psychological perspective and evaluating outcomes of intervention. "Competitive sport can provide great opportunity for teaching personal growth and the development of skills and strategies relevant to the situation in which they are taught," declares Zaichkowsky.

The information stated above presents the educational experience and personal experience of the sources used in this research. All the authors above

have some type of research methods, personal experience in playing or coaching a certain sport, or have educated themselves in the field of sports psychology. All of the above information helps one have a better understanding of the mental preparation needed to become successful in any area of sport or life. The authors above were chosen as sources not only because of their educational background but also because of the experience they have achieved personally. They represent a cross section of current thinking regarding the combination of mental and physical preparation in training athletes.

## Chapter III

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Ever since Tim Gallwey missed a heartbreakingly easy volley on match point in the National Junior Tennis Championships at the age of fifteen, he has been fascinated with the problem of how human beings interfere with their ability to achieve and learn. His search for practical ways to overcome the mental obstacles that prevent maximum performance led to the basic discoveries first described in his best-selling classic, The Inner Game of Tennis. The principles and methods of the Inner Game were next applied to skiing, and Inner Skiing revolutionized the approach to the teaching of that sport. With the completion of The Inner Game of Golf, which Mr. Gallwey calls "my most difficult Inner Game challenge," he is spending most of his time, in the Los Angeles offices of the Inner Game Corporation, developing an Inner Game approach to such diverse fields as selling, management, stress, diet, music and the quality of work (Gallwey 18).

For years the author played once or twice a year with his father, averaging a score of 95 or more. By using the Inner Game precepts, without taking a single



lesson, and, like most weekend golfers, playing only once a week, in little over a year he knocked 15 strokes off his game and now breaks 80—proof that the Inner Game really works.

People would generally agree that one's mind, emotions and confidence play a much larger role in golf than in almost any other sport. For example, in tennis the player is hitting a moving ball over and over again on the run, and in skiing, the skier is hurtling down a mountain, so their reactions are much more instinctual than intellectual. But in eighteen holes of golf, the player actually hits the ball for no more than three or four minutes during a four-hour round, and it is the time between shots that is the bane of the average player. Whether he is brooding over having flubbed his last drive, dreading his next shot from a sand trap, or trying to line up a tricky down hill six-foot putt, he is constantly grappling with self-doubt, anxiety, fear of failure and tension.

Gallwey's approach has seemingly wrought miracles; his method is simply to help players to observe what is, to quiet the mind, to control anxiety and to think positively.

Gallwey's research was a vital source in explaining how sports performance could be if every

aspect, every participant had a broad understanding of the integrated, holistic working of the physical and mental processes necessary to attain one's potential in any pursuit. The emphasis would be on the athlete's own capacity and ability to feel and to experience what is going on in his or her body, to experience cognitively and physically in a fine-tuned, integrated manner what involvement in exercise and sport is all about. The focus would be on the athlete's own internal state as a function of performance in every endeavor, sport or otherwise. The athlete would become a conscious participant in the process of learning how to tune in his or her body, read the signals, and regulate them to maximize the potential there. This approach places heavy emphasis on self-awareness and on the individual assuming responsibility for his or her own arousal and control under all conditions. This approach would provide creative insight into how to extend the limits of our abilities.

Dr. Richard Suinn is a member of the steering committee for the Sports Psychology Advisory Panel of the U.S. Olympics Committee's Sports Medicine Council. He was the team psychologist at the 1976 Winter Olympics for the U.S. Biathlon Team and the U.S. Olympic Nordic Ski Teams, and consultant to the U.S.

1987 Ski Jumping Team. As team psychologist, he prepared the U.S. Women's Track and Field Teams for the 1980 Summer Olympic Games. Dr. Suinn has been a major consultant to the U.S. Elite Athlete Training Project, and was a key person matching psychologists to serve with various National and Olympic Teams in preparation for the 1984 Winter and Summer Games. He has been a consultant to the U.S. Alpine Ski Teams, the U.S. Modern Pentathlon Team, and the U.S. Marksmanship Unit as well as to individual athletes in a variety of sports.

Dr. Suinn is the editor of the book Psychology in Sports: Methods and Applications and has written extensively on sports psychology. His writings have been translated into Russian and Chinese. He serves on the editorial board of the Journal of Sports Psychology as well as of three other major psychological journals. He is currently Professor of Psychology and Head of the Department of Psychology at Colorado State University.

"Your thoughts influence your actions more than you believe. Think about a situation that really irritates you, and you'll find yourself getting angry. What you do with your thoughts can change your life- and your performance". This quote from Dr. Suinn was a major influence in developing a lot of the training

material found in Chapter five. Dr. Suinn's research explains the idea of training negative thoughts.

Successful and unsuccessful competitors are subject to negative thoughts. What distinguishes the winner from the loser is what you do with the thoughts. To be prepared the successful person considers what might go wrong; the unsuccessful person is afraid to pay attention because the thoughts cause negative emotions. The real secret, discussed by Dr. Suinn, is to make use of negative thoughts. Most problem thoughts are problems because they feed on themselves: "I'm getting tired, what if I tie up" --and this thought leads to fear or tensing, and indeed you perform poorly. Or you think: "I don't feel ready, I don't feel right today, I'm not going to have a good day" -- and indeed you don't.

Some refer to having that "winning feeling". This refers to the feeling that surrounds an athlete during his/her personal best performance. Capturing and controlling this feeling can help to establish the winning frame of mind. The exercise below is a spin-off of a similar exercise used by Dr. Suinn. The outline of the material below was an influence on other training activities found in chapter five.

### Training your mind: The winning feeling

1) Pick a competition where you had this winning feeling and identify when it was there. It might have been present the night before or just when you started to warm up. 2) Do some centering, to relax yourself. 3) Now, take yourself back to that competition. Let yourself be flooded with the experience. Gradually pay attention to more and more details of that winning feeling in the following order:

-First what was the overall feeling like? Loose?

Excited? Mentally alert? Feeling strong? Goose Bumps?

-Next, think of some phrase you can use to recall this overall feeling. "Personal best"? "The tower-of-strength feeling"? "Unbeatable"? "Flow"?

-Now, during your daily training, picture that winning feeling again and repeat your phrase. Use this to recreate the winning feeling again in your body (Suinn 15).

Using Dr. Suinn as a source, generated many new ideas which in-turn produced most of the training material discussed in chapter five.

Tony Watson has been involved in research and teaching programs at the universities of Aberdeen and Ibadan, University College, Galway and the National College of Physical Education, Limerick and has worked for a number of sporting organizations.

Watson is the author of Physical Fitness and Athletic Performance. This important new book is concerned with the biology of athletic performance. In particular it discusses in depth the effects of different types of training and the important physiological and biochemical adaptations to physical activity. Watson's research bridges the gap between theory and practice to provide an informative and well-prepared text and reference book.

The book begins with an account of the biological factors, which influence human performance. This is drawn from the most recent research findings and questions many traditional assumptions regarding exercise and training. The influence of innate factors upon physical performance is emphasized and the limitations of achievement through training are discussed. Consideration is given to injury prevention and the health of the athlete.

A section on the principles of training follows. This deals with the basic features of methods of

improving physical fitness. Watson then progresses to more advanced and specialized techniques and examines modern methods of training in the light of recent research findings on the effects of different types of training. Consideration is given to the important biochemical and physiological effects of different types of training and their implications for various types of athletes.

The final part of this source deals with evaluating fitness levels. This is designed to assist the exercise practitioner in developing training programs suitable to the specific needs of athletes. A number of techniques are considered in this section which allows individuals of varying levels of experience to develop training programs that are relevant and effective.

Many of the ideas and approaches found in Suinn and Gallwey, as well as, some of the authors discussed in Chapter 2 and my own thoughts based on experience as a professional baseball player are applied in the following chapter, "The Mental Approach to the Game of Baseball."

## Chapter IV

### RESULTS

Good defense consists of fielders being ready for the ball to be hit to them at any time. They never know when the ball might be hit to them, so to play well, they must expect it on each pitch.

Thus, the essence of gaining a desired outcome... winning a game... is played one pitch at a time. Both in the field and at the plate, you need to be totally focused on each pitch. As obvious as this may sound, it is rarely done with any consistency or depth.

In particular, most players will tell you that the game revolves around confidence. When they're feeling confident, they play well and when they are not feeling confident, they don't play well.

It should also be stressed that working on the mental game is not a substitute for hard physical work. Regardless of how good your mental game is, if you're not putting in the effort on your physical body, getting strong and flexible, developing solid techniques in the various skills of the game and learning the strategies of the game, you will not find out how good you can be. Also, keep in mind that the



ideas presented in this chapter not only can enhance your performance on the baseball field, but they can also be used to enhance your performance in other aspects of your life as well.

Most players have had great games or at least great moments within games. You know the feeling: those times when everything is clicking, you feel as though you are in control of the situation and yourself, that the ball and the other players seem to be moving in slow motion and you have supreme confidence that you are going to perform great and you do.

For the hitter, when you're in this state, you simply know you're going to rip the ball. You can't wait for the next at-bat. When you are at the plate you are energized but relaxed, excited but completely under control and balanced. You see the ball extremely well.

On defense, these moments usually include having a strong desire for the ball to be hit to you and a feeling of certainty that you will make the play. You are loose. You love being there. Few things are more special than those times when you're in "the zone," have a "peak performance," "playing great ball", you're really feeling the rapture of being alive. It is

alive. It is important to realize that even the best players in the big leagues are not in the zone all the time. In fact, they're there only slightly more often than players at the lower levels.

Although it may be tough to get ready to play every day, because so much of baseball is timing and feel, it really gets tough when you don't play every day! The key to being a good player then is to do the best you can with what you've got on each day. Baseball is a game of adjustments. The best players make the most of what they've got to work with physically and mentally each day. They possess what everyone wants to see in a player: mental toughness. The challenge facing each player is thus to first possess an understanding of the mental game of baseball and then to develop the skills necessary to make those adjustments. One of the commodities coaches (and general managers) seek the most is consistency. Coaches want to know what they're getting when they put you out on the field. One of the primary objectives of minor league coaches, for example, is to develop consistency in young players.

## An Approach to the Mental Game: Learn How Good You Can Be

Confidence, total focus, mental toughness, control under pressure and consistency are skills that with proper training - mental training...can be learned.

There are no guarantees that mastering the mental game will result in your making the big leagues. Your natural physical abilities, the "tools" you are born with, play a major role determining how good of a baseball player you can be. You've seen those guys who do not put in nearly the effort that you do, but still perform as well, if not better than you. The issue is how good are you going to get with the tools that you have?

### Mental Skills Are Like Physical Skills

First of all, there are some basics to the mental game, basics upon which there is nearly a universal agreement. These include the importance of confidence; the need for concentration, commitment, mental preparation and the use of visualization and self-talk to name a few.

Everyone agrees that mental preparation is important. How you prepare for a game or an at-bat

plays a large role in determining how well you perform. But how should you prepare for a game? The issue with mental preparation then, is to figure out what you need to do to get ready to play. The question of what is right or wrong to do is determined by what works best for you, not somebody else. So again, take this stuff and adapt it to your own personality, your own mental capability, your own style.

### The Role of Mechanics

First of all, there is no question that mechanics are important. The more fundamentally sound and effective a player's movements, the more success he is likely to have. Considerable hard work and practice on your mechanics is necessary if you want to find out how good a player you can be.

So what is suggested is that mechanical problems that develop in a previously sound movement are a manifestation of bad thinking first and foremost. Most guys lose control of themselves before they lose control of their mechanics. Most of the guys will lose control of themselves and as a result, they lose control of their mechanics. You have to have control of yourself.

So if mechanics are important but you don't want to be thinking about them during a game, how do you find the balance between the two? A useful distinction can be made here between a practice or "training" mindset and a game or "trusting" mindset. Your training mindset is where you think about your mechanics and you focus on, for example, what your hands or feet are doing. This is usually a necessary step when you are learning a new skill or are making an adjustment in an old one. Again, this self-conscious approach is used in practice. Your "trusting" mindset, on the other hand, is where you focus only on what is important to focus on when you are performing in a game, the ball or your target. You let go of your conscious thoughts and you trust your body to do what you have trained it to do. This is where you want to be in a game.

If you want to be in a trusting mindset when you perform in a game, you had better spend plenty of time developing your ability to get there in practice.

### Work the Process

The outcome of the game is in the future and you have no control over the future. The only place you

have any control is in the present, right now, this pitch.

Confidence: The Name of the Game

Think about this: If you were coaching a team that needed a hit to win a ball-game, which player would you send up to hit... a player with great mechanics and no confidence or one with poor mechanics but total confidence?

Players' definitions vary, but confidence is usually described as a feeling, a belief or a knowing, that one can successfully perform the task at hand. Whether that's getting a batter out, hitting the baseball, making a defensive play or stealing a base, the player has a sense of certainty that he is going to do it well, that he'll get the job done. Also, the confident player has positive thoughts running through his head.

You can tell the best players by the way they move, the presence they have. They look calm and in control of themselves. They stand tall, have their chest out and may even cross the line into what many would call "cocky". (By the way, the thing you notice

about "cocky" players is that even if you don't like them, they tend to be good!)

As much as confidence is characterized by the presence of these things, it is also defined by a lack of something: FEAR. Confident players often feel special sensations in their bodies before they perform too, but they generally label them in positive ways such as excitement and the body getting ready to do battle. These feelings are used by confident players to enhance their performance rather than letting them disrupt it as is usually the case with unconfident players.

If a player feels that his value as a person is riding on how well he hits a baseball, for example, he's going to be detrimentally nervous about each at-bat. It's a sad but relatively common scenario that a player feels that because he made an error or is playing poorly, he is not a valuable human being. Most of us have sat down to take an important exam not having prepared, for example, or have heard a teacher announce a "surprise" quiz when you haven't done the reading. A lot of fear can come from feeling unprepared.

Your mind means well, it wants to help, but it often gets in the way and keeps your body from

preparing at its peak, especially if your mind is "untrained." In many ways, then, the purpose of working on your mental skills is to enable you to remove the obstacles you put in your own way.

Confidence frees you up. It removes all obstacles and allows your body to do what it knows how to do. A key word here is trust. Trust basically means that you have faith that, without you really doing anything, what you expect to happen will happen. In fact, confidence takes care of nearly all of the mental demands of playing baseball. A confident athlete stays relaxed and under control (why worry when you're confident you'll succeed?). But regardless of how confident you may feel you must maintain your respect for the game.

Repeated failure over time erodes or thins your confidence and fills you with doubt and fear. Distractions, boredom, fatigue and injury also all work against you on a regular basis. The real answer, though, is your own thinking. It isn't failure that diminishes your confidence, but your thoughts about those failures - the way you perceive them.

Being ready isn't enough. You have to be prepared. Preparation demands mental and physical conditioning and conscious planning. A player who is



just ready and not totally prepared simply increases risk and is a liability to the team. What you need to be prepared for is not just the physical and mental demands of performing but you must also be prepared for the adversity that is sure to come your way. Anyone can be confident when you're in the "zone" playing well and winning games.

Most athletes wait around for confidence to happen. They work hard, practice and so forth but they don't take a conscious systematic approach to becoming confident.

Arguably, the best way to gain confidence is to be successful. Usually the most confident players in baseball are the ones who have had success throughout their lives. They're typically physically superior to most players, so from the time they were young they've just plain been able to hit, throw, run and catch the ball. As a result of this long-term success, they know they can play the game and have no reason to question their ability. No big fears, no big doubts.

What becomes necessary then is to define success in terms of things that you can control. Focusing on the process rather than the outcome opens up avenues for success to be achieved. It turns the quest for success into something you can control.

What's your approach? The approach is "trust the ingredients." Let's not relate everything to base hits and strike-outs. Relate it to the quality of the experience - the experience being what you put into it. A great At-Bat can be: foul off 5 pitches and then walk or get out. Now the player has more opportunities to gain confidence because he becomes less "results" conscious and more "ingredients" conscious, thereby, he's able to accept "failure" on a little different terms. Through the day in, day out process of being a baseball player, it's much easier to deal with all that happens to you when you focus on the process. You have a better chance for the player to go through experiences that other people wouldn't recognize as real positive, but you reinforce, as a coach, that it was positive. Hopefully the player reinforces to himself that it was a positive and his teammates do the same. Now the player can say, "I was 0 for 4 today but I had 3 quality AB's, some hard contact and I moved two runners." Now it's built in. Now you have an opportunity to gain more confidence because you're coming from a whole different approach.

A second major source of confidence is preparation. First of all, it's important to prepare physically. "When I put in my hard work physically, I

felt like I deserved to do well," said a 16-year major leaguer.

You can't afford to be thinking about your mechanics while you're performing. Good mechanics must be practiced to a point where they become a habit, where they're automatic and they show up in pressure situations.

### The Mentally Prepared Player

Typically there are two times when players look for help with their mental game. The first is getting mentally prepared for the "big game." The other time people are looking for help is when they are struggling when they are in a slump. Things go bad so they are looking for a quick fix.

The key to both the "big game" and the slump is in practice. Practice is where it's at if you want a strong mental game. You don't "turn it up a notch" for the big game. You do the things that you do each day in practice and for each "regular" game. Similarly, you don't start groping for a mental game after you're into a season and playing so poorly that you're at the end of your rope.

Concentration, relaxation, regrouping after a mistake...visualization. These are skills that need to be learned in practice. The emphasis is thus on having quality practices. If you have quality practices, the big games will take care of themselves.

Finally, the orientation needed to become a prepared player is that of a desire to learn. Getting good at learning and practicing will make performing come much easier.

#### Reason to Believe

Confidence removes the obstacles you often place in your own way - fear, tension, doubt - and leads to trust. Trust allows your body to perform as well as it is capable of. Your ability to trust yourself (or anyone else) is largely determined by the strength of your conviction that you have clear reasons to trust, clear support for your belief.

Top athletes are driven by their values, by their sense of purpose, by their mission. It takes discipline and commitment to work hard physically and mentally everyday. If you want to be a great baseball player, acting in harmony with your mission will move

you a step closer to your dream, otherwise you're in for quite a struggle.

Discipline and commitment can be defined as putting what you feel like doing second priority to your mission. In other words, you do what your mission "says" you should do, rather than what you feel like doing. Committed athletes don't necessarily feel like working hard all the time, but their actions are driven by their purpose and not by how they happen to feel on a given day.

For players on a mission, decision making is easier because their priorities are set. The question for the man with a mission is not "Should I work-out today? It is, for example, "When am I going to work out today?" There is a big difference between those two mind-sets.

### Taking Control

"No sense worrying about something you can't control, because if you can't control it, there's no sense worrying about it."

-Mickey Rivers, former N.Y. Yankee



Losing control is one of the least fun things that can happen in baseball. It's also many players' biggest fear. In fact, players are often more concerned with avoiding being the guy that loses the game than they are with becoming the guy that wins it! A critical element to peak performance is self-control. You can't control your performance if you are not first in control of yourself.

The critical point here is that what you think about determines how you feel and how you feel largely determines how you play. Clearly it is therefore vital to choose what you think pretty carefully.

A major key, if not THE key, to the mental game is to take responsibility for your own thinking. This means, choosing to think effective, helpful thoughts rather than simply reacting to what goes on around you. Taking responsibility for your own thinking means you choose to think confident thoughts, run positive images through your head and act in a confident manner in spite of your recent shortage of hits. Instead of thinking you're in a slump, you're thinking you are "due" for a hot streak. Clearly, the player taking responsibility for his own thinking has a plan for what he wants to do. He knows he wants to respond in each situation and chooses to execute his plan.

Just remember, you are a human-being playing an extremely difficult game. Even when you are in the "zone" you don't get everyone out, get a hit every time, or make every defensive play. However, it does give you your best chance of being successful. As a human-being, that's all you can ask for.

### Attitude is a Decision

One of the most important choices you make is your attitude. Coaches and players always talk about how important attitude is to a team or an individual's performance and everyone seems to understand what is meant by the term. But what is an "attitude?"

You can say it's the lenses through which we see the world. Owners of sunglasses such as Oakleys, know that you can buy different lenses for them. Each lens results in your seeing things differently. The same is true of the "glasses" in your head - your attitude. Baseball can look bright and happy or it can look dark and gloomy, depending on the attitude you take. As we said, it isn't what happens to you or what you see that determines how you feel, it's how you view or interpret what happens to you that determines how you feel. Your

attitude thus determines how you respond to a given situation.

Controlling your performance is what it's all about. Your goal is to play as well as you can. Before you can perform at your peak, however, you've got to be in control of yourself. You need to remove any obstacles (such as tension, doubt and thoughts about what might happen in the future) that you've put in your way. Only then can you have the "free-breathing" performance you're looking for.

#### Concentration and Focus

The importance of focus to your performance cannot be overstated. Ask a player what it was like when he was in the "zone" and before long, he'll be telling you about how good his concentration was. "It was like I had tunnel vision." A hitter might say, "It was just me and the baseball out there." Ask a player about his worst performances on the other hand, and he'll soon be telling you how distracted he was, "There were so many things running through my mind. I couldn't concentrate."

One of the main things you need to understand about concentration concerns the idea of blocking out



distractions. Thus, the key to concentration is simply to figure out what you should pay attention to and get really good at paying attention to it (and only it).

Physical Posture: Carry Yourself To Confidence

The way to do this is very simple: carry yourself as if you were extremely confident. Without getting into a big discussion on the relationship between the body and the mind, let's just say that the body talks to the mind as much as the mind talks to the body. Thus, just as if you think confident thoughts, you begin to feel confident. If you carry yourself in a confident manner, you will soon begin to feel confidence growing in your mind and body.

It is easy to tell when people are feeling "down" or "low" because that is the way they are carrying their body. Their minds are telling their bodies to get into a position that expresses depression. Their bodies talk back to their minds saying, "Ya, I'm depressed all right. Look at how slumped over I am."

Pre-Game Mental Preparation: Make it Routine

"The most important thing is how a guy prepares himself to do battle."  
 -Hank Aaron

"If you fail to prepare, be prepared to fail."

-some other smart guy

### The Eyes Have It

When we are nervous or scared, our eyes tend to shift rapidly from one spot to another, not really focusing on anything for very long. If your eyes are jumping around while you're in the batter's box, you aren't going to see the ball very well.

Further, if, because of nerves or any other reason, you get your eyes to the release point late, the ball has traveled several feet toward you before you get any kind of a look at it. Having a shorter time to look at the pitch makes it seem much faster than it actually is and, of course, makes the ball appear much smaller. In other words, your eyes don't work as well when you are nervous or tight.

### Preparing For A Game

Just remember that how you think determines how you feel and how you feel determines how you play, so spend your time thinking about good stuff.

Keep in mind that your self-worth as an individual is not determined by whether you win or lose! Being a winner is a frame of mind, and attitude; it does not depend on the outcome of the competition!

### Some Questions and Answers About Mental Preparation

*What can mental preparation do for my athletic performance?*

In the past athletes were almost overeducated on physical factors and undereducated on psychological aspects of training and performance. Yet we know that the mind can clearly influence the body for whatever is your sport.

*Can you give me some examples of the mental aspects in athletics?*

One example is the many ways in which your performance can be disrupted if another competitor or fan manages to disturb your concentration. Another example becomes clear if you recall your personal best. How did it feel: easy? confident? Smooth? like you just thought and your body instantly responded? alive? strong? Now compare this with a really bad event. How did that

feel: like you were forcing? distracted? stressed out? unready? thoughts racing? Many of these differences touch on mental characteristics or the smooth flow of mind and body.

*What things can I learn and do for myself?*

Well to begin with, the good old saying practice makes perfect, is pretty true. Training and practice are as important for mental preparation as for physical skills. You cannot expect to develop strength by occasionally using weight training; nor can you expect to develop mental skills without practice. Discipline works for both physical training and mental training. The payoffs are there for you to reach for (Watson 23-26).

### Being Successful

Successful and unsuccessful competitors are subject to negative thoughts: what distinguishes the winner from the loser is what you do with the thoughts. To be prepared the successful person considers what might go wrong; the unsuccessful person is afraid to pay attention because the thoughts cause negative emotions. The real secret is to make use of negative

thoughts. Most problem thoughts are problems because they feed on themselves: you think, "I'm getting tired, what if I screw up", and this thought leads to fear or tensing, and indeed you perform poorly. Or you think: "I don't feel ready, I don't feel right today, I'm not going to have a good day", and indeed you don't.

You should learn to use negative thoughts in a positive way. Instead of letting them feed on themselves, use them to work out a solution. For example, what could you do if you begin to feel too tired to stay in the running in a distant event? Possibly shorten your stride or arm swing. To turn a negative thought into a positive event, do not avoid the thought, but prepare yourself to use it to trigger a positive and corrective action. If you think: "I'm getting tired and beginning to cramp", you would then immediately act by adjusting your stride.

You often hear people talking about holding a positive self-concept. Sometimes this seems hard to do, given life's experiences or demanding training and competitive schedule.

*So what can you do?*

1. Value yourself as a person who also happens to be an athlete. Always try to get the very best out of yourself regardless of conditions (such as weather, how organized the games/match has been, ect.).
2. Know what you want, what your goals are, what your reasons are for competing and doing well.
3. Keep your reasons for being in competition clearly in front of you. Train yourself to see your overall progress toward goals, even during setbacks. Remember what your satisfactions are to begin with.
4. Review progress, from where you started to how far you've developed. Keep a total outlook to avoid feeling down about temporary setbacks. Identify your current strengths (Greenberg 50-51).

Use the Self-Assessment check on the following page to evaluate your negative thought process during

competition. Evaluate yourself frequently to chart any changes.

Self-Assessment Check #1

A. How often do you have negative thoughts during competition?

Always                       Rarely

Often                         Never

Sometimes

B. How do they affect your performance?

Always help me

Always hinder me

Sometimes help, sometimes hinder

No effect

C. Suppose you are competing, and you've just made

a major error.

1. What are you likely to be thinking now?

2. Are these thoughts negative or positive?

\_\_\_ Negative

\_\_\_ Positive

3. Are these thoughts likely to help you adjust  
or are they useless?

\_\_\_ Useful

\_\_\_ Useless

D. Suppose you are competing, and things aren't  
going well as you had hoped or expected.

1. What are you likely to be thinking now?

2. Are these thoughts negative or positive?

\_\_\_ Negative

\_\_\_ Positive



3. Are these thoughts about strategy or do they reflect feeling or emotions?

\_\_\_ Strategy

\_\_\_ Feelings

Self-Assessment Check #2

Recall your personal best or when you had the winning feeling. Describe generally the event and what this feeling was like.

1. What was the event? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. When did you notice the feeling? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Describe the feeling: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Recall actions, preparations, thoughts, exercises, etc., which preceded this feeling...and which might have contributed to it: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Write down a phrase that would remind you of this winning feeling: \_\_\_\_\_

(Suinn 14-15)

#### A Parting Note

Establishing priorities and commitment is essential to pursuing excellence in sport. However, it is also important to develop other interests outside sport. Too many athletes put all their time and energy into sport. They end up "putting all their eggs into one basket" and then the bottom falls out, they have nothing left. Develop other interests and other social networks outside of your sport world. It will add dimension and enjoyment to your lifestyle and put more balance in your involvements. If you are forced to leave sport or reduce your involvement for any reason, you will have other interests to take up the void in your day-to-day routine. You will be well-positioned to apply the mental preparation techniques learned in sports for success in other areas of life.

## Chapter V

### DISCUSSION

This manual is written for those of you (coach or athlete) who desire to maximize your potential in sport performance. One of the largest omissions in sport skills training has been that of recognizing the mind/body or mental/physical integration necessary for learning. Traditionally repetition has been stressed as the only way to maximize skill performance. Cognitive aspects of performance were focused on the strategic components, not on individual performance as such. Incorporating both the mental and physical aspects of skill performance is long overdue.

If you are motivated to improve your performance and to become a better athlete, this manual will provide concepts, understandings, skills and strategies so that you can accomplish that goal. It will take time and effort on your part as there are no short-cuts to improving athletic performance. The prescriptions offered here are not magical nor are they cure-alls. They are, however, procedures which allow you to enter competition knowing that you control your behavior and your performance outcomes.

This manual has only one objective: to enable athletes of all levels to enhance their performance through mental training. You should keep in mind that people differ in what they need or in what will facilitate their performance. For example, consider weight training: for one sport, upper body strength may be considered important, though given your physique and conditioning the best program for increasing your strength may be somewhat different from what is best for your neighbor. This manual is designed to provide you with a self-assessment to identify ideas that may be beneficial to your development.

Athletics are for fun, fitness, and feeling better about ourselves; they can help us relax, enjoy companionship, and find civilized outlets for aggressive impulses. Athletics are also a path we take to learn about the larger game of life. Through athletics, it is possible to expand our ability to handle the game of life in ways that bring satisfaction and creativity to ourselves and the people with whom we live and work. A feeling of personal power results when the athlete learns how to remain calm, centered, comfortable, and confident in traditionally stressful situations. The centered athlete has discovered new

options and attitudes feeling clear-headed, naturally high, light and powerful and has learned to experience the sounds, smells, sights, and colors as he or she participates. Through altered perceptions, a new sensitivity to life is created.

This manual provides ideas and exercises that will allow the athlete to move into a new dimension. Through sports it is possible to expand our ability to handle the game of life in ways that bring satisfaction and creativity to ourselves and the people around us. Sports are a way of getting free of the limitations of the past, coming into the here and now, and using the limitless space of the present for our ultimate fulfillment. In short, sports are for centering. The term centering seems to have come originally from the craft of pottery. In that craft there is an intimate and immediate relationship between the potter's inner feeling of centeredness and the pot that he is creating. If the potter is feeling off-center within, it is difficult to create a balanced and symmetrical pot. When he comes into harmony with himself, the inner feeling of centeredness immediately manifests in a harmonious creation. So it is with sports, and with life (Tutko 28-31).

In sports it is equally easy to see the relationship between our inner self and the self we are expressing in the game that is being played. In each swing of the tennis racquet, for example, the way the body is held and the way the racquet meets the ball, it is possible for the player to learn about his relationship with life itself. In each mile a runner covers, in the way she breathes, the swing of the stride, and the fall of the foot, there are all the lessons she needs to learn about not only the way she runs but the way she runs her life.

Successful athletes do not play to escape life. How could they? The game is life, and life is a game. We are all ultimately in quest of the same thing: To find our true selves and to express our deepest love and creativity in ways that enrich ourselves and the world. We carry the self with us when we play sports. We can choose to deny and ignore learning about ourselves while we play, or we can choose to make sports an arena for finding out who we are, dissolving our limitations, and expressing ourselves most creatively. If we choose the latter, the possibilities are limitless (Gallwey 34).

A primary focus of the centering approach to athletics is the mastery of procedures for individual

awareness. Combining centering, visualization, and guided imagery deepens one's inner contact while sitting or moving. These processes, when combined with a physical training routine, open pathways for the simultaneous experience of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions within. This unified approach to athletic experience will develop greater athletic potential and enjoyment (Rushall 16).

Football players such as Walter Payton report that they made important gains in their own play style through the use of mental concentration. Fran Tarkenton maintains that the physical act of passing the ball is the easiest part in the game. Golfer Jack Nicklaus gives this a handy label. He calls it "going to the movies." He says that he imagines each shot from start to finish before he actually makes it--mentally setting up, swinging, hitting the ball, seeing it take off, land, roll to a stop. Ben Hogan felt that golf was 20 percent physical and 80 percent mental. Weight lifters mentally picture their lift just before the actual attempt. When they stand in front of the bar and close their eyes they are lifting it mentally. Arnold Schwarzenegger uses visualization as a part of his training. "When I train the biceps, I picture huge mountains, much bigger than the biceps could ever be

just these enormous things. You do something to the mind: You fool your mind in order to do certain things. I know my biceps aren't mountains-although they may look like miniature mountains! But thinking that they are gets my body to respond" (Dychtwald 38-43).

### Benefits of Mental Imagery for Athletes

Through the regular use of imagery, visualization, and rehearsal, the following results can and have been obtained:

1. Imagery and visualization develop the necessary level of competitive tension. Those athletes who need to psych themselves up visualize themselves in and rehearse the competitive situation; those who need to relax imagine some peaceful and calming scene (Richardson 12).

2. Imagery physically improves precision of movement, economizes energy expenditure, and controls posture. According to French doctors Boon, Davion, and Macquet, psychological mind training improves concentration and attention and enhances perception. It proves rapport with teammates and coaches. After competitions medical tests showed speeded-up recuperation, permitting athletes to run and perform in repeated trials. Relief from pain and muscle contraction caused by exertion was also reported (Boon, Davion, and Macquet 53).

3. Visualization increases self-discovery and helps to make changes in other areas of life (Richardson 33).

4. Mental rehearsal keeps motivation high and helps sustain zest for training and daily practice (Richardson 19).

5. Use of imagery eases anxieties or psychological



blocks, such as fear of failure or injury, nervousness, lack of concentration, anger at teammates, decline in performance when an opponent gets ahead (Millman 37).

6. Use of imagery heightens enjoyment of activity.

7. Visualization decreases fear. Most fear comes from a feeling of no control.

8. Visualization provides a tool to promote self-awareness and understanding.

9. Use of imagery aids in self-regulation, self-assessment, and self-control.

10. Mental rehearsal offers a vehicle to tap new energy sources.

There is probably not one of us who has not "choked" at some point in athletics, or blown our lines on stage, or blanked out on an exam, or created a problem for ourselves because we were trying too hard. Usually when we try harder, we increase our arousal which can become counter-productive. There is a great deal of discussion about stress in today's society with most of the discussion focusing on the distressful aspects. However, stress is the thing that gets our juices flowing.

Competitive sport provides an ideal laboratory for teaching us how to cope with situations that create worry and anxiety about how well we perform. We hear a lot about competitive stress in sports these days. There are long arguments about the pros and cons of

competitive sport for youth. Competition is an integral part of free enterprise and of a capitalistic society. Youth sports may provide the best laboratory for teaching youngsters early on how to control and regulate their worries and anxieties so they can maximize their potential. After all, most youngsters start out enjoying their participation in sport. They are highly motivated to learn and to practice skills and strategies that will help them get better. These coping skills and strategies that work for them in sport can also be applied to all other situations throughout life which cause worry, anxiety and stress. In fact, competitive sport provides the first and best opportunity to teach youngsters how to cope with stress (Ostrander 22-25).

Many argue that competitive sport is big business and should be taken out of the educational system. Competitive sport can be educational if it takes place within the framework of education. Competitive sport can provide great opportunity for teaching personal growth and the development of skills and strategies relevant to the situation in which they are taught. These same coping skills and strategies will last a lifetime as the principles of coping with stress are the same whether it be competitive stress, deadline

pressures, disagreements with co-workers, threats of self-esteem in personal or career situations, threats of job loss, or whatever. With all the concern about the undesirable effects of chronic or long-term stress, learning to cope may be the best lesson we can teach youngsters. It will contribute to maximizing their potential as well as enhancing well-being (Zaichkowsky 31-32).

Just think of the magnitude of the contribution to society that teaching cognitive skills and strategies to all youth through sport programs could make. Think how much more helpful it would be if all coaches and teachers of sport understood the integrated mechanisms that underline arousal, worry and anxiety and could apply that knowledge in situations that are relevant and meaningful to the learner. Picture the way sport performance could be if every aspect, every participant; athlete, coach, trainer, and spectator; had a broad understanding of the integrated, holistic workings of the physical and mental processes necessary to attain one's potential in any pursuit.

The emphasis would be on the athlete's own capacity and ability to feel and to experience what is going on in his or her body, to experience cognitively and physically in a fine-tuned, integrated manner what

involvement in exercise and sport is all about. The focus would be on the athlete's own internal state as a function of performance in every endeavor, sport or otherwise. The athlete would become a conscious participant in the process of learning how to tune in his or her body, read the signals, and regulate them to maximize the potential there. This approach places heavy emphasis on self-awareness and on the individual assuming responsibilities for his or her own arousal and control under all conditions. This approach would provide creative insight into how to extend the limits of our abilities.

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