

Mental Skills;

Take Your Game to the Next Level in Sport and Life

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Without mental skills, the game may be only half won. When thinking about the greatest athletes in the world, all have one thing in common – mental skills that put them at the top of their respective sport or discipline. We are always performing in various aspects of our lives, whether sports, career, academics, etc. Developing mental skills can assist in taking you to the top of your game in any area of life.

Change is challenging on any level. Stepping out of our comfort zones and mindless habits requires mind-full attention to facilitate change. Taking risks with doing something new requires prioritizing and clear goal setting. Create very specific and measurable short and long-term goals to develop each skill. Goal setting carries over to any area where one needs the ability to consistently evaluate and reevaluate progress.

Using mental pictures is a powerful tool and an important key to success. How you see yourself and your abilities affects performance now and in the future. Mental images can be used to practice at times when physical practice is not feasible. Creating images in one's mind sets one's intent and outcome potentials. Positive images of performance will likely result in positive results. Negative images and beliefs are limiting and likely manifest negative results.

Setbacks are inevitable in sport and in life. Often people respond by becoming upset with themselves or others, or becoming emotionally overwhelmed. Using setbacks in a positive way creates opportunity for growth. One can mentally replay a game or an activity, finding lessons in things that were executed well and in areas needing improvement.

Imaging skills must be practiced prior to experiencing setbacks. This process of self-review is imperative when taking oneself to the next level regardless of winning / losing or passing / failing. Set very specific long and short-term goals for yourself.

Coupled with mental images are beliefs about one's self. Are your beliefs helpful or are they limiting? When I asked an elite athlete how he maintains his level of confidence he relayed the importance of the images he has in his head, seeing himself imitating the moves of athletes he admires. He maintains a solid belief in his path and abilities emphatically stating, “never waver, to believe anything less is contrary to meeting my goals.”

In life, the ability to control events and outcomes are illusionary. The only true areas of control, whether in sport, career, school, or day to day activities, I label the **ABC's**;

Attitude, **B**ehaviors, and **C**hoices of how to engage in each. Outcome takes care of itself. When in doubt, ask yourself if your choices are in line with your goals or contrary and therefore limiting.

Lastly, in every pursuit, **focus** drives consistent levels of performance. Appropriate focus means staying positive and fully connected. One must choose and then commit to developing focusing skills. There are a number of techniques that aim to improve one's ability to focus so that well learned skills become automatic and effortless, resulting in being physically and mentally present at all times.

Remember, it is “mental **training**” requiring practice just as other skills. Consulting a sport psychologist can help in setting up a personalized mental training program for various performance needs whether in sport or life.