



“Got Game”

A Manual for
Developing Consistent
Top Performers

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“Got Game”

Developing Consistent Top Performers Manual

Purpose:

To introduce, explore and experience a progression of mental training techniques that can be taught to coaches with the purpose of helping Special Olympics athletes perform their very best on a more consistent level regardless of the pressures they face.

Mental Training Techniques introduced are:

- ✚ Ideal Performance as a Mental State
- ✚ Self-talk & Related Motivational Strategies
- ✚ Performance Relaxation
- ✚ Focusing and Concentration Techniques

Method of Delivery:

This information is delivered in an interactive and applied way that allows the participants to experience and build their own confidence in teaching the mental training techniques to coaches. The following manual includes a tool kit with mental training techniques and additional information to use as a resource when working directly with coaches.

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Chapter 1: Ideal Performance State



<p>In the Zone</p> <p>What does it look like if the athlete is skilled?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High energy level that is directed and focused • Uses more positive talk • Mentally relaxed, loose and a sense of inner calm • Loss of fear – no fear of failure • No conscious thinking about performance • Total immersion in activity – being 100% in the present • Effortless performance • Being determined and motivated
<p>Out of the Zone</p> <p>What does it look like if the athlete is unskilled?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluctuating energy levels and often energy is misplaced • Tense facial expressions (wide eyed, clenched jaw, etc.) • Short concentration span during coaching conversation • Erratic decision making and high number of performance mistakes • Shallow, quick breathing • Rushes through plays, skills, and drills
<p>Why Do It</p> <p>What can you say to sell this skill to athletes?</p>	<p>Under pressure, most consistent high performing athletes acknowledge “state of mind” as the key to success in their event and/or sport performance. Yet this psychological side is unfamiliar territory for many athletes with intellectual disabilities (ID) and their coaches. Such phenomena as “momentum, “choking under pressure” and “psyching out’ are very real in Special Olympics around the world.</p> <p>For this reason, there will always be the mental “winning edge” to prepare the athlete with ID for their sporting event. If your athlete is not in the proper frame of mind, there is no way that she/he can achieve their full potential. How to put an ID athlete or athletic team on its competitive edge is a skill that Special Olympics coaches of all sports must develop.</p> <p>If you are motivated to develop your athletes into consistent top performers, then psychological conditioning should be included in your training. Remember, mastery of the psychological elements in sports is as real an ability as coordination, strength, or physical endurance.</p> <p>In conclusion, keep in mind that beyond physical consideration, the psychological aspects of Special Olympics will always be a critical concern for athletes and coaches that must not be ignored.</p>



The Playbook

What are some exercises you can use?

Ideal Performance State Assessment

Purpose

This assessment can help both the athlete and coach understand what is occurring when she/he performs at their best, and help the athlete determine how close her/his last performance was to the ideal performance state.

Directions (see handout)

Sport psychologists who work with athletes from all sports have determined that Peak Performance is more likely to occur when the athlete uses the Ideal Performance State Assessment and is able to score in the “almost always” category in most of the items listed on a consistent basis.

With the help of the coach, have the athlete fill in the assessment provided after each competition to evaluate her/his mental performance state as they competed. Use it as a learning tool to help the athlete decide which mental training techniques needed for his/her competitive plan.

Ideal Performance State Descriptors

Use as an educational tool to teach the athlete and parents about mental training state of Peak Performers.

“It’s the Mind that Matter” Article

Can be shared with athletes/parents to help them understand the power of mental training.

Training Handouts

What are some handouts you can give to athletes?

Chapter on Ideal Performance State
Ideal Performance State Descriptors
Ideal Performance Sate Assessment
“It’s the Mind that Matters” Article

Ideal Performance State Descriptors



Peak Performance means getting it all together. It is a state of superior functioning that characterizes optimal sport performance, resulting in personal bests and outstanding achievements. Athletes describe it as being characteristic of the feelings they have at those moments when they are doing something extraordinarily well. The elements of the Ideal Performance State are fundamentally the same for all performers in all competitive arenas. Peak Performance does not occur by accident or by chance. Performing your best on a regular basis requires the proper combination of body conditioning, physical skills training and strategic mental training.

Sport psychologists who work with athletes from all sports programs have determined through research that Peak Performance is more likely to occur when the following characteristics are present:

1. Mentally relaxed, loose and a sense of inner calm.
2. Loss of fear – no fear of failure.
3. No conscious thinking about performance.
4. Total immersion in activity – being 100% in the present.
5. Highly energized.
6. An absence of forcing and trying too hard – effortless performance.
7. Feeling of being totally in control – athlete has an expectation of success.
8. Being determined and motivated – exercising competitive toughness.
9. Confident and optimistic, with a generally positive outlook.
10. Experiencing a feeling of unity or oneness. This may be experienced as a union of mind and body or a sense of oneness with others.

The Ideal Performance State Assessment



Name _____ Date _____ Event _____

Directions - To be used after an athlete has completed a competitive performance.

Put a check mark on the rating which corresponds to how you “felt” during your performance. Use this as a teaching tool to learn about what peak performers feel like when they perform their best and how close you are to being in a peak performance state of mind while competing.

	ALMOST ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	SELDOM	NEVER
1. Muscles relaxed, loose & sense of calm	_____	_____	_____	_____
2. Loss of fear & anxiety	_____	_____	_____	_____
3. Performance was automatic & instinctive	_____	_____	_____	_____
4. Total immersion in activity – 100% in now	_____	_____	_____	_____
5. High energy	_____	_____	_____	_____
6. Performance was effortless	_____	_____	_____	_____
7. Felt in-control – as if I could do anything	_____	_____	_____	_____
8. Felt determined & motivated	_____	_____	_____	_____
9. High self-confidence & positive outlook	_____	_____	_____	_____
10. Mentally tuned-in & feeling of low anxiety	_____	_____	_____	_____

“It’s The Mind That Matters”



Why is it that some athletes with the necessary physical attributes never really excel? The answer lies in the psychological factors found in all sport competition for all kinds of athletes. Under pressure, most consistent high performing athletes acknowledge “state of mind” as the key to success in their event and/or sport performance. Yet this psychological side is unfamiliar territory for many athletes with ID and their coaches.

Such phenomena as “momentum,” “choking under pressure” and “psyching out” are very real in Special Olympics around the world. For this reason, there will always be the mental “winning edge” for which to prepare the athlete with ID within their sporting event. If your athlete is not in the proper frame of mind, there is no way that they can achieve their full potential. How to put an athlete or athletic team on its competitive edge is a skill that Special Olympics coaches of all sports must develop.

If you are motivated to develop your athletes into consistent top performers, then psychological conditioning should be included in your training. Remember, mastery of the psychological elements in sports is as real an ability as coordination, strength, or physical endurance.

In conclusion, remember the greatest barriers we confront in our pursuit of excellence are psychological barriers, which we impose upon ourselves sometimes unknowingly. Beyond physical consideration, the psychological aspects of Special Olympics will always be a critical concern for athletes and coaches that must not be ignored.

Roberta V. Kraus, Ph.D.

Chapter 2: Self-Talk



<p>In the Zone</p> <p>What does it look like if the athlete is skilled?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Uses more positive talk• Productive practice habits• Performance viewed as opportunity to succeed• Reports success-oriented thoughts• High levels of confidence and lower levels of anxiety• Following performance, quick to analyze what they CAN do better next time
<p>Out of the Zone</p> <p>What does it look like if the athlete is unskilled?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Uses more negative self-talk• May personalize criticism by coach• May have doubts about performance• May have a sense of worry or choking under pressure• Report fear of failure oriented thoughts• Following performance, quick to analyze what they SHOULD have done better
<p>Why Do It</p> <p>What can you say to sell this skill to athletes?</p>	<p>Personal excellence in any athletic competition is largely a question of being convinced of our own capabilities. We must believe in our ability to attain a consistent top performance. The motivational driver behind our belief is our self-talk. Specifically, in reference to athletic competition, your best performers use significantly less negative self-talk or gestures than those who performed poorly on a regular basis.</p> <p>It has been said many times in the competitive arena that the only difference between consistent top performances and marginal performance is the variation in the performer's self-talk. Research shows that the single most outwardly identifiable behavior demonstrated by a consistent top performer is that of positive self-talk – pure and simple optimism.</p> <p>Our behaviors and our performances on any given day of competition are influenced by how and what we think of ourselves and our athletic abilities. Basically, if we think we can do something, we usually can or are at least willing to give it our best shot. Therefore, athletes can directly pre-program their performance and behavior by directing their thoughts and actions through their self-talk.</p>



Teach athletes that they perform the way they feel. And those feelings are a direct product of the way they talk to themselves. So if they want to change the way they are performing, first they must change the tape playing inside their heads. If this can be learned, situations will less likely develop where the athlete feels out of control.

Self-talk can provide that sense of control if athletes learn to become aware of negative self-statements and direct them in a positive manner. Therefore, the first step in gaining control of their self-talk is increased awareness. Coaches should help athletes identify and understand what kind of self-talk thoughts enhance or hinder their performance.

As one competitive athlete on our Olympic team said, “It is not the competition or playing the sport that makes me nervous and anxious; the situation does not do anything to me. I cause the anxiety and fear because I say or think things to myself that produce worry and anxiety about how I will perform. I must think positively”.

The Playbook

What are some exercises you can use?

Positive Self-Talk Morning to Bedtime

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to condition the mind to pay attention to the positive things going on in one’s life.

Directions

1. Teach your athletes to keep a “little wins” or “green light” learning journal.
2. At the end of each day, record three things that went well during the past 24 hours.
3. Do not be tempted to restrict your thinking to the athletic arena. Example might be: “*I got all my chores done for the day.*” “*I helped an athlete carry their equipment.*” “*I said thank you to my teammates several times during practice today.*”



Problems as Opportunities

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to get the athletes aware of how they talk negatively to themselves throughout the day and how to use the power of self-talk to change the voice in their heads to a productive positive command.

Directions

1. Have the athletes make a list of the things that challenge them most in their lives - the things that get in the way of them liking who they are, what their lives are all about at this point in time.
2. Write one or two sentences describing each challenge.
3. Then rewrite the description; only this time, view it as an opportunity or exercise to challenge their creativity. For example, an athlete may write *"I lose my confidence in school when I am so slow and then I give up."* The athlete could rewrite the description to say, *"In school, I have lots of opportunities to show my love for learning - so bring it on!"*

Positive Action Thoughts – P.A.T.

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to make the focus of switching negative self-talk from the competitive athletic arena into positive action words that the athlete believes in about self and the athlete's performance.

Directions

1. Have athletes write down all the ways they talk themselves down during a performance on the left side of a piece of paper.
2. This should be written in the exact language used in each athlete's head when she/he is not happy about a performance.
3. Once the list is complete, go back over each item and on the right side of the paper, write proactive, true statements countering the negative thought with a positive thought.
4. For example, the athlete may write *"you stink"*, which could be followed by, *"he beat me this time, but I'll get him next time."*
5. This activity can also be used at a team level by getting the team to acknowledge the ways they talk themselves down (out loud or in head) and re-write the script to include words or statements that gets them thinking positively.



“At Your Best” team activity: Creating a Positive Environment

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to raise awareness of how much positive team talk can impact an athlete’s behavior on a daily basis.

Directions

1. Have team members get in a circle, standing right next to each other.
2. Coach starts by turning to the athlete on the right, saying the athlete’s name and completing the following statement out loud. “Ben, at your best today you..... (Fill in the statement with something true about Ben you observed at practice or in competition that day). For example, the coach might say: *“Ben, at your best today, you did a great job running to the ball.”*
3. Then it becomes Ben’s turn. He turns to the next teammate on his right and says her name and then repeats out loud the statement *“Mary, at your best today you...”* Key being, research tells us that you become like the people you hang around with the most. It is critical that everyone in the program surrounds themselves with athletes who give put ups not put downs about other players, the team, the coach, and the program.
4. On a daily basis, vocalize your optimism and positive expectancy about your sport and look for athletes who do the same.



Cognitive Restructuring or Thought Stoppage

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to teach the athlete how to “switch channels” and eliminate a certain thought that is negatively impacting the athlete’s performance. This can be a very powerful exercise to get the athlete to blow up a negative thought and replace it with a positive action oriented thought.

Directions

1. To begin, the athlete sits quietly with eyes closed.
2. Have the athlete visualize a mistake made during practice or a competitive event. The athlete needs to replay in her/his mind the exact thing done and all the negative self-talk said at the time of the poor performance.
3. Get the athlete to visualize it in as much detail as possible.
4. Repeat the mistake over and over again quietly in the athlete’s head.
5. After a short period of time with eyes closed, you yell “STOP.” This action will momentarily blow up any thought in the athlete’s mind.
6. Repeat the exercise, this time making sure that after the athlete hears the word “STOP” with mind going blank, that the athlete replaces the thought with some positive trigger word or visual picture of doing something right in the performance.
7. This positive action oriented thought should also be visualized in as much detail as possible.
8. You can transition from yelling the word “STOP” to having the athlete put a rubber band on her/his wrist. The athlete visualizes the mistake, then pulls the rubber band away from the wrist and lets it snap back and pinch the skin. The nerves will react to the pain and momentarily forget about the negative thought.
9. Quickly replace the attention from the snap to a positive action oriented thought. Eventually, during a performance the athlete should be able to recognize negative thoughts, say with a commanding voice in her/his head, “STOP” and replace it with a trigger word or picture of how the athlete wants to perform in the moment.

Training Handouts

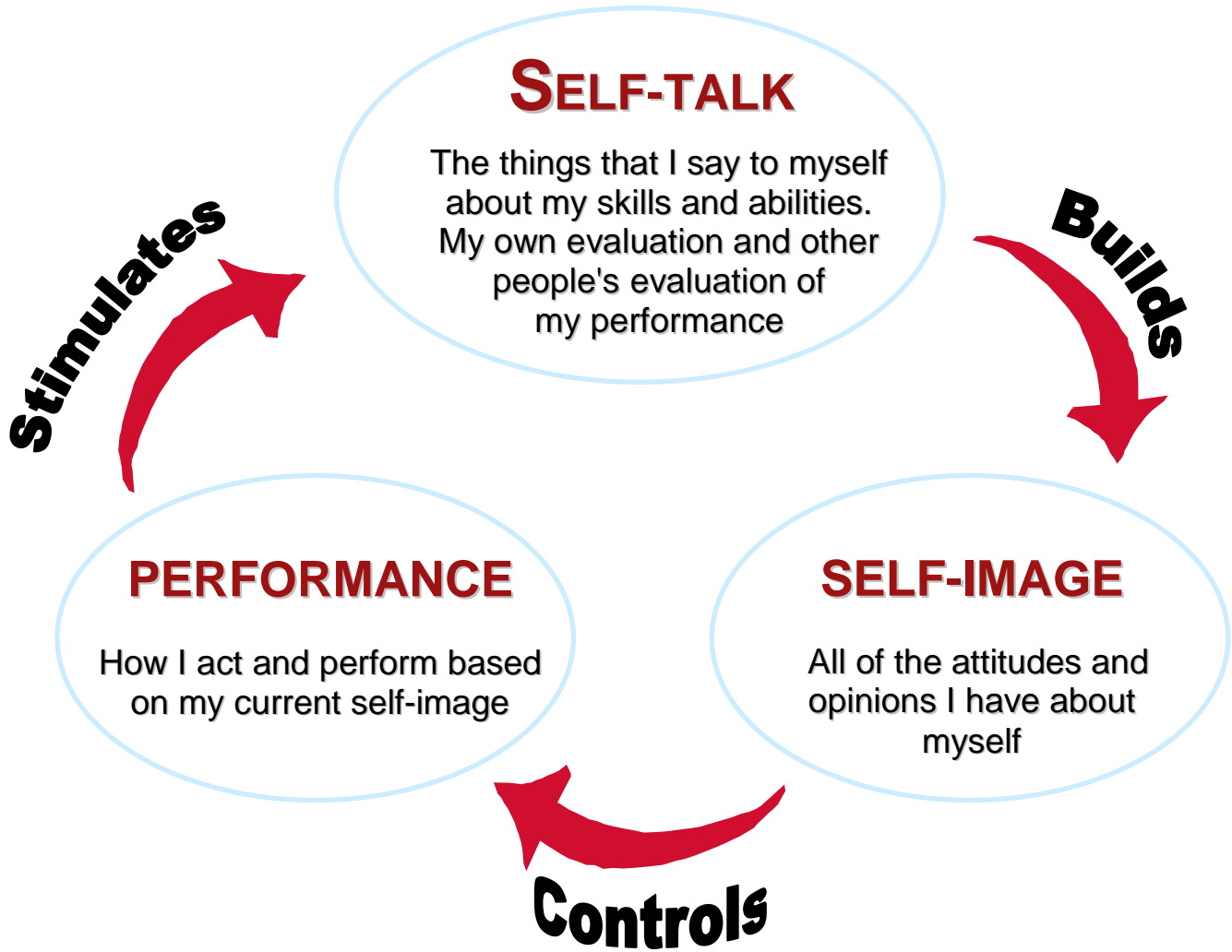
What are some handouts you can give to athletes?

Chapter on Self-talk
Self-talk Model
Self-talk Questionnaire
Team-talk Chances for Success Diagram

A Self-Talk Model



Consistent Top Performance



Self-Talk Model Questionnaire



Directions - Use as an awareness tool to help the athlete pay attention to her/his self-talk from the time she/he gets up in the morning to the time she/he goes to bed at night:

Read each statement several times out loud and ask the athlete to fill in the blank with a word or phrase that is true for the athlete most of the time. Once completed, re-read the questions out loud and ask the athlete to give a (+) positive or (-) negative grade on each question (depending on what words used for the athlete's answer). When the athlete is finished, see if the athlete has a tendency to be negative in all aspects of her/his life or is the tendency more positive in the athlete's self-talk about her/his life.

IN THE MORNING WHEN I FIRST WAKE UP, I USUALLY FEEL LIKE _____?

THE SPORT(S) I COMPETE IN CAN BEST BE DESCRIBED AS _____?

MY EATING HABITS CAN BEST BE DESCRIBED AS _____?

THE ATTITUDE/BEHAVIORS OF MY COACH CAN BEST BE DESCRIBED AS _____?

WHEN TEAMMATES PRAISE ME I USUALLY THINK TO MYSELF _____?

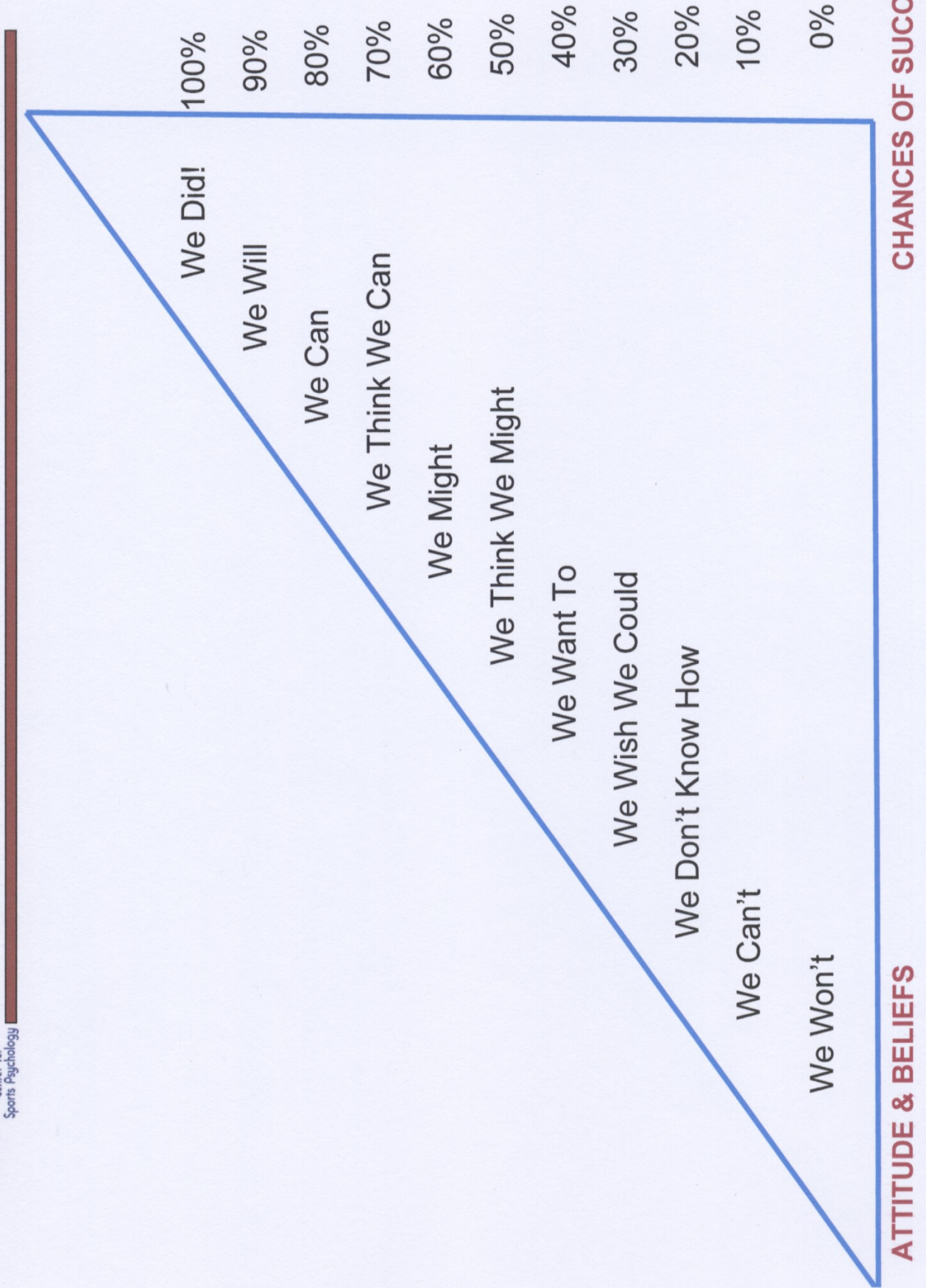
MY PHYSICAL APPEARANCE CAN BEST BE DESCRIBED AS _____?

ATHLETES ON OUR TEAM WOULD DESCRIBE ME AS _____?

MY HOME LIFE CAN BEST BE DESCRIBED AS _____?



A Self Talk Model



CHANCES OF SUCCESS

ATTITUDE & BELIEFS

Chapter 3: Performance Relaxation



<p>In the Zone</p> <p>What does it look like if the athlete is skilled?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High energy level that is directed and focused • Is able to complete competition without high fatigue • Makes constant eye contact during coaching conversation • Muscles look relaxed and loose (face and shoulders) • A sense of calmness and effortless performance • Periods of rest are used for breathing exercises • Deep, slow breaths
<p>Out of the Zone</p> <p>What does it look like if the athlete is unskilled?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluctuating energy levels and often energy is misplaced • Tense facial expressions (wide eyed, clenched jaw, etc.) • Short concentration span during conversation • Makes a high number of performance mistakes • Shallow, quick breathing • Rushes through plays, skills, and drills
<p>Why Do It</p> <p>What can you say to sell this skill to athletes?</p>	<p>Sports researcher and psychologist James Loehr reported in Sports Journal that “an athlete’s level of performance is a direct reflection of the way she/he feels inside” and that performing toward the upper range of one’s potential is a natural consequence of the right kind of internal feelings that can be brought on by performance relaxation.</p> <p>Performance Relaxation is a learned skill, meaning that it can be taught and must be practiced at regular intervals to impact “on court” performance. Performance relaxation uses a variety of breathing and imagery techniques to reduce anxiety & tension and reach an optimal level of intensity.</p> <p>What is intensity? Intensity is the most critical factor an athlete must control prior to competitive performance. No matter the athlete’s level of confidence, talent, or motivation, if the body is not at an optimal level of intensity, performance suffers. The optimal level differs from athlete to athlete, but is commonly referred to as the “flow zone” or “Ideal Performance State.”</p> <p>To determine the behaviors associated with an athlete’s flow zone, use the “Stress Response Questionnaire.” This questionnaire will allow you to determine each athlete’s need for performance relaxation based on the low or high number of check marks the athlete identifies as her/his body’s reaction under competitive stress. The higher the number of check marks, the greater the need is for mastery of Performance Relaxation.</p>

The Playbook

What are some exercises you can use?



Heart to Heart (Introductory Activity)

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to introduce the athlete to the power of relaxation on the body.

Directions

1. Have each athlete take her/his heart rate for 20 seconds.
2. Have each athlete write down the number of beats and help the athlete multiple it by 3. That is the athlete's resting heart rate.
3. Have each athlete practice "deep breathing" (see next exercise on Deep Breathing).
4. Take the heart rate again and compare the drop in the number of beats (which puts the athlete closer to the flow zone).

Deep Breathing

Purpose

To help athletes gain a basic skill level with performance relaxation.

Directions

1. Tell the athletes to break their lungs into three areas: low (stomach area), mid (rib cage), and high (upper chest).
2. Begin by releasing all air from the lungs by breathing out and pushing the stomach (diaphragm) towards the spine.
3. Inhale slowly (7-10 seconds to finish of inhale) by pushing the stomach (diaphragm) out and filling the lower part of the lungs. Then feel the air moving to the middle of the chest and finally to the upper chest. Chest should be out and shoulders back at the end of the breath.
4. Exhale slowly moving in reverse order from the upper to the lower part of the lungs and ending with the stomach (diaphragm) pushing towards the spine.
5. Repeat 10 times.



Five Minute Body Scan

Purpose

This technique can be used shortly before competition or practice to get the body as calm and relaxed as possible. This exercise is also beneficial in preparation for imagery/ visualization.

Directions

1. Sit comfortably with your eyes closed. Begin “deep breathing.”
2. You are going to scan your body starting at your head and going down to your toes to see if there is any tension. As you do this, breathe slowly and deeply. Keep the pattern regular. Every time you exhale, you become even more relaxed.
3. As you mentally examine each muscle group, check to see if there is any tension. If there is, just let it go. For example, check your forehead and eyes. If you feel any tension, release it. Say “forehead let go” or “eyes let go.”
4. As you progress through each muscle group, periodically recheck your breathing to make sure it is slow, deep, and regular – relaxing even more with each exhalation.
5. Go through the muscle groups in the following sequence:

1. Forehead and eyes	6. Lower arms	11. Hips
2. Jaw-chin-cheeks	7. Chest	12. Buttocks
3. Neck	8. Stomach	13. Thighs
4. Shoulders	9. Upper back	14. Legs
5. Upper arms	10. Lower back	15. Feet
6. When finished, quickly rescan your body starting at the head and working down to the feet. Wherever you feel tension, just release it.

Progressive Relaxation Therapy

Purpose

Progressive Relaxation Therapy (PRT) is used in non-competitive environments (home, hotel, etc.) to teach the body the “feeling” of total relaxation. Mastering this exercise will allow the athlete to get her/his body to a point of optimal intensity during competitive situations. If practiced correctly, PRT should take about 30 minutes. The end of PRT is the best time to practice competitive imagery.

Directions

1. See script titled “Progressive Relaxation Therapy”



Rapid Relaxation

Purpose

Rapid Relaxation is a good technique to use during competition (e.g., just before serving, shooting a free throw or penalty shot, or standing on the diving board.) To do this effectively, PRT (see above) should be practiced over an extended period of at least 2 – 4 weeks.

Directions

1. Close your eyes and take three deep breaths (see deep breathing).
2. During each inhale, make a fist. During each exhale, release the fist and relax your muscles.
3. Throughout the three breaths, your mind should be focused on a cue word for your “flow zone.” If you do not have a cue word, then use the word “flow.”

Training Handouts

What are some handouts you can give to athletes?

Chapter on Performance Relaxation
Stress Response Questionnaire
Progressive Relaxation Script



Stress Response Questionnaire

Directions: Read the question below and check as many of the behaviors as are applicable. This checklist could be shared with coaches and teammates and used as cues to when a mental training technique, such as performance relaxation, might be needed.

How does your body respond to stressful situations, such as before tryouts, the first game of the season, a match against a rival, or a season ending tournament?

- | | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| ___ Skin oiliness | ___ Hand Tremors (shakes) | ___ Bloodshot eyes |
| ___ Hands Cold | ___ Shallow, rapid breathing | ___ Eye dryness, pain |
| ___ Hands Sweaty | ___ Shortness of breath | ___ Headaches |
| ___ Feet Cold | ___ Constant yawning | ___ Back pain |
| ___ Feet Sweaty | ___ Individual muscle spasms | ___ Hands clenched |
| ___ Burping | ___ Difficulty sleeping | ___ Fist over thumb |
| ___ Gassiness | ___ Constant sleep | ___ Menstrual disruption |
| ___ Need to urinate | ___ Tightness in shoulders | ___ Increased mucus |
| ___ Diarrhea | ___ Wrinkle brow | ___ Asthma attacks |
| ___ Tight stomach muscles | ___ Itchiness | ___ Joint ache |
| ___ Acid stomach | ___ Hyper & loud | ___ Lack of focus |
| ___ Palpitations | ___ Talks less than normal | ___ Other: _____ |
| ___ Face flushes | ___ Short fuse (quick temper) | ___ Other: _____ |
| ___ Face feels hot | ___ No Appetite | ___ Other: _____ |
| ___ Clench teeth | ___ Jittery | ___ Other: _____ |

Images of Desired Behavior



Consistent Top Performance



Progressive Relaxation Script



Purpose

Prior to addressing specific techniques to improving performance one must be able to first examine the environment with a clear head. The first step in this process is reaching a state of higher focus and relaxation by reducing anxiety and/or stress. Excess anxiety/stress can produce inappropriate muscle tension as well as a loss of concentration, which in turn can diminish focus and performance. Breathing techniques, such as progressive relaxation, are one of the best ways to clear one's head and reach a state of relaxation where you can more objectively assess your environment and then begin to change it.

Directions

Practice progressive relaxation once a day at the same time (either early morning or at night before bed usually works best.) During progressive relaxation pay close attention to how it feels to be relaxed as opposed to tense. Each phase should take about 20 to 30 seconds. For each muscle group, beginning with the toes and moving toward the head, perform each exercise twice before progressing to the next. During each phase, keep your breathing as slow and deep as possible (5-7 seconds on the inhale and 5-7 seconds on the exhale).

1. Find a quiet place, dim or turn off the lights, and lie down in a comfortable position with your arms at your side and your legs uncrossed. Take about 10 breaths. Inhale through the nose slowly and deeply making sure that your stomach expands with each breath. Hold the breath for a second or two and then exhale through the mouth. Try to clear your mind of distracting thoughts and concentrate only on your breathing.
2. Concentrate on your toes and feet. On the inhale, curl your toes and point your feet away from your body tensing your calves. After 5 seconds, exhale and relax all the muscles in your feet and toes. Then repeat.
3. Extend your legs and lift them 6 inches off of the ground making sure to tighten the thigh muscles. Hold for five seconds then relax. Then repeat. Don't forget to inhale when you tense the muscles and exhale when you release.
4. Tense your gluts and hold for five seconds. Relax for 5-7 seconds and then repeat.
5. Tense your stomach muscles as tight as you can for 5 seconds, concentrating on the tension. Let the tension out and relax your stomach muscles completely. Then repeat.



6. Now concentrate on your legs, gluts and stomach and make your lower body as relaxed as you can for thirty seconds. Make sure you are breathing deeply by inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the mouth. Remember to inhale has you tense the muscles and exhale as you release.
7. Tighten your chest and shoulder muscles by pressing your hands together (like you are praying). Hold for 5-10 seconds and release. Then repeat.
8. Push your back to the floor has hard as you can and tense your back muscles for 5-7 seconds. Relax your back and shoulder muscles completely, focusing on spreading the relaxation over the entire area. Then repeat.
9. Tense your arms and hands by lifting your arms off the ground about two inches and making tight fists. Hold the tension for 5-10 seconds then release. Relax for 10 seconds and then repeat.
10. Keeping your torso, arms, and legs, relaxed, tense your neck and muscles by bringing your head forward until your chin digs into your chest. Hold for 5 to 10 seconds then release and relax for an additional 10 seconds. Repeat.
11. Tighten your face muscles by opening your mouth as wide as you can and raising your eyebrows as high as possible. Hold for 10 seconds then relax for an additional 5 to 10. Repeat.
12. Take a deep breath by inhaling through the nose slowly until the lungs are filled. Make sure that you are breathing correctly by expanding your stomach (not your chest) while you breath. Then exhale slowly for 10 seconds while concentrating on relaxing your entire body. Try to think of your body sinking into the floor. Repeat this process until you feel like your body is completely relaxed and you are focused.
13. Cue-controlled relaxation is the final goal of progressive relaxation. During this time of deep breathing try to picture a place where you feel most comfortable and surround yourself with the smells, sounds, and feelings of this place. Do this for about 2-3 minutes.
14. Open your eyes and spend a couple of minutes feeling your body and mind totally relaxed.



Chapter 4: Focus/Concentration

<p>In the Zone</p> <p>What does it look like if the athlete is skilled?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Total immersion in performance – being 100% in the present• No conscious thinking about performance – automatic pilot• May appear to have “eyes in the back of their head”• May be very alert and respond quickly and easily to the situation at hand• Fully aware of what is going on and able to respond to relevant cues and disregard irrelevant cues
<p>Out of the Zone</p> <p>What does it look like if the athlete is unskilled?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May have a wandering mind that creates mental lapses• May feel spacey and out of control with scattered attention• May be paying too much attention on the wrong thing• May be too worried about own performance• May be thinking at the same time trying to perform
<p>Why Do It</p> <p>What can you say to sell this skill to athletes?</p>	<p>One of the biggest problems in competition is a lack of concentration. A wandering mind can create mental lapses and cause mental errors during any performance.</p> <p>A coach who demands more concentration from the athlete without teaching the skill is trying to demand something that the mind has not been trained to do. 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.</p> <p>Concentration is “undivided attention.” It is simply a matter of, for a few seconds, focusing on executing a desired skill and ignoring everything else. In order for you to perform your best, you must control your mind and make it function the way you desire.</p> <p>You know you are not concentrating when your mind is scattered, you are not able to stay in the here and now, and you are thinking while doing during any given performance.</p> <p>During performance, concentration must be adjustable, like a zoom lens on a camera capable of zooming in and zooming out. A good athlete has to respond to relevant clues and be fully aware of what lens is most appropriate for the competitive situation at hand without being distracted.</p>



You cannot concentrate on concentrating and accomplish very much. The real secret is to “just let it happen” at the conscious level. You must practice, and the more time you practice the easier it will become and the fewer times you will experience a concentration lapse. This focused attention is the prerequisite for performing at the peak of your capacity.

The Playbook

What are some exercises you can use?

S.O.P. (Standard Operating Procedure)

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to teach the athlete the benefit of establishing a personal ritual/routine/pattern for preparation, execution and dealing with mental hurdles the athlete may face during competition.

Directions

1. Have the athlete write down an outline of pre-game prep that the athlete wants to make into a routine the night before and the day of competition.
2. Have the athlete create an index card to carry around in her/his team bag that answers the question - “*At My Best I will*” - with three short statements. This card should be updated and reviewed with a coach throughout the season.
3. The athlete should be able to verbalize her/his mental game plan on how she/he is going to deal with mental hurdles before the competition begins.
4. The athlete should discipline self to follow her/his S.O.P. during competition.

Make Practice Competitive

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to get the athlete disciplined to increase her/his effort at practice and therefore maintain a higher level of concentration.

Directions

1. Have the athlete induce personal challenges during practice. For example, hitting ten 6-foot putts (in a row) before the athlete is allowed to move to a new spot. Key being, you have to practice competitive-like drills in order to not be distracted by the real competitive environment the athlete performs in during the season.



Performance Breathing and Concentration

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to practice concentrating on one thing at a time. Focusing on your breathing is a good exercise to use as breathing is always with you.

Directions

1. Comfortably sit in an upright chair. Close your eyes, relax and simply pay attention to your breathing.
2. Focus your attention by counting “one” as you inhale and “two” as you exhale.
3. When you reach ten, go back to one and start again. If you lose count or find yourself counting beyond ten, stop and trace your wandering thoughts back as far as you can before you start again at one.
4. You should plan on spending at least 3 - 5 minutes on this exercise.

Zoning In On Concentration

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to get the athlete to practice a more integrated mind/body concentration exercise.

Directions

1. Sit in an upright chair and place some type of sport-related object in front of you (like a tennis ball, golf club, volleyball, hockey puck, or ski pole).
2. Relax and keep your eyes open. Spend one or two minutes without moving, noticing as many qualities, descriptions and details of that object as you can.
3. Recall out loud to a partner as many different qualities as you can remember about the object, without looking at it.
4. You may expand this exercise by challenging yourself to move your focus to a piece of paper and write down as many things as you can remember about the object in one minute.



The String and the Washer (Introductory Activity)

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to introduce the athlete to the power of imagery to unconsciously guide the body.

Directions

1. Provide the athlete with a 12-inch string that has a washer attached to one end.
2. Ask the athlete to hold the string in her right hand while resting her elbow securely on the table (for stability).
3. With her left hand, she should hold the washer to stop it from swinging.
4. Make sure to give the instruction that she should try to keep her right hand completely still during this exercise.
5. Now, have each athlete remove her left hand from and focus all her attention on the washer.
6. Have her picture the washer swinging back and forth (to and away from her). Have her picture it moving the distance of a clothespin. (The washer should begin to move.)
7. Now, have her picture the washer swinging the length of a ballpoint pen. Then, the washer swinging the length of a sheet of paper.
8. Now, have the athlete picture the washer moving in a clockwise circle.
9. Now, have the athlete picture the washer moving in the opposite direction. Tell her to picture the circle getting smaller and smaller, and slower and slower until it switches direction.
10. Lastly, have the athlete picture that the washer is coming to a complete stop.

The exercise debrief should focus on the power of the mind to make slight contractions of muscles. The more we practice imagery, the more control we have over our physical reactions.

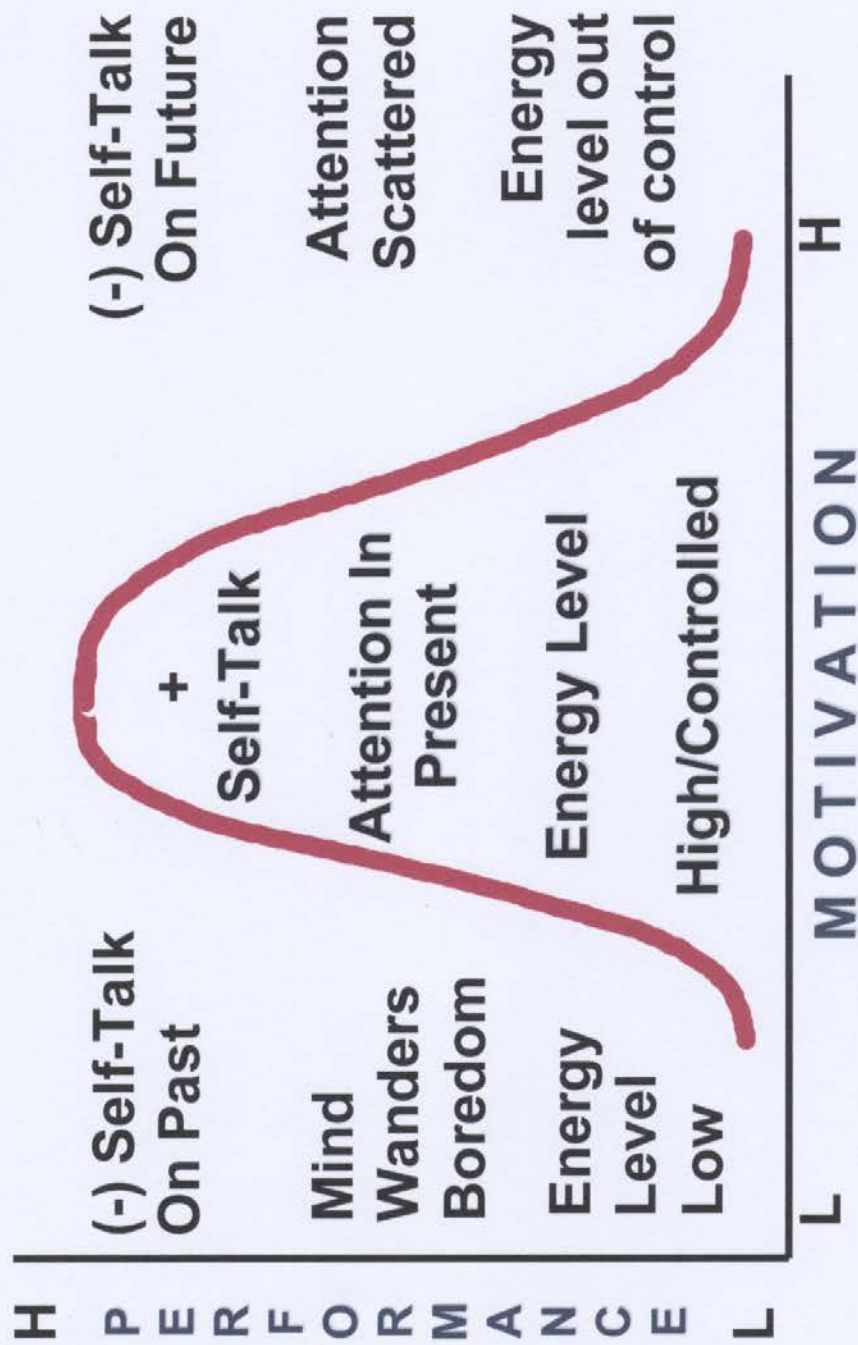
Training Handouts

What are some handouts you can give to athletes?

Chapter on Focusing/Concentration
Ideal Performance State – Focus Model
Concentration Characteristics Handout
Concentration Grid Exercises



Ideal Performance State - Focus Model



Concentration Characteristics



Concentration is characterized by:

- ✓ Focusing on one thought at a time.
- ✓ Being totally in the here and now.
- ✓ Selective attention to particular objects or thoughts and selective inattention to other thoughts or objects.
- ✓ Letting it happen.
- ✓ Willing to concentrate; control your mind from drifting.
- ✓ Regularly practice concentration skill training.
- ✓ Knowing what to attend to in the environment.

The Key to Success Is...

Your perceived ability of delivering performance needs to be equal to what the competitive situation demands you deliver.



NAME: _____

DATE: _____

Consistent Top Performance

Concentration Exercise

84	27	51	78	59	52	13	05	61	55
28	60	92	04	97	90	31	57	29	33
32	96	65	39	80	77	49	86	18	70
76	87	71	95	98	81	01	46	88	00
48	82	89	47	35	17	10	42	62	34
44	67	93	11	07	43	72	94	69	56
53	79	85	22	54	74	58	14	91	02
06	68	99	75	26	15	41	66	20	40
50	09	64	08	38	30	36	45	83	24
03	73	21	23	16	37	25	19	12	63

Form 1



NAME: _____

DATE: _____

Consistent Top Performance

Concentration Exercise

16	62	91	36	00	40	72	64	03	12
93	07	25	89	18	14	08	28	47	22
86	98	77	04	24	83	23	26	71	39
58	42	46	34	79	55	11	88	65	01
61	10	66	54	43	81	67	74	19	82
97	37	50	02	13	84	90	21	38	76
75	17	73	57	70	49	78	96	44	30
15	56	95	69	99	09	29	06	35	31
05	45	63	33	20	27	52	53	32	41
85	48	51	59	68	92	80	87	60	94

Form 2