

# **GSM International Coaching Education Articles for Developing Your Players**

## **COACHING PLAYERS PERFORMANCES WHEN THEY ARE UNDER STRESS**

### **Eleven Guidelines for You to Become a Winning Coaching by Reducing their Stress**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Stress is a direct result of an athlete or team focusing on, and trying to control the "uncontrollable" within their sport (i.e., officiating, the play of opponents, playing conditions, crowd, etc.). When a player focuses on these unruly, he/she is more likely to tighten up and "choke." The following are some brief guidelines to follow to help you train your player to manage competitive stress better.

#### **STEP ONE**

##### **COACH THE PROCESS, NOT THE OUTCOME**

When a player focuses on the importance of the game, winning and losing, or anything to do with the outcome of their performance, they can be in big trouble. This focus distracts the player from a performance focus, tightens them up physically, emotionally and mentally and ensures that players will be not good and be tentative in their match performances. Get your players concentrate on training on specifically what they have to do to win, not on winning.

#### **STEP TWO**

##### **COACH AN AWARENESS OF THE STRESS-PERFORMANCE CURVE**

If you can help your player understand the relationship between their level of nervousness and how well they perform you will have taken a significant step towards helping them to handle pressure better during training and the match. If an athlete can read their nervousness pre-performance and can tell the difference between good and bad, and not nervous enough, then they will be in a better position to be able to do something about their arousal level before it's too late.

#### **STEP THREE**

##### **COACHING COPING SKILLS, THAT DON'T WASTE YOUR TIME YELLING AT YOUR PLAYERS TO RELAX**

This is not how to teach relaxation. Instead, spend a small amount of time preseason providing your player with some mental skills that they can use to help them to better relax under pressure. Not all members of your team will need these, but you'll do far more good than not by investing a small amount of practice time offering 2-3 relaxation techniques (progressive muscle relaxation, autogenic training, breathing exercises, etc.) to everyone. Armed with ways of cooling down, your player will be less likely to fall apart under stress.

## **STEP FOUR**

### **TEACH REFRAMING IN PRACTICE**

Reframe adversity coaching your players how to use whatever trouble comes their way to boost confidence rather than erode it. Help your players see that poor weather conditions, bad call by the officials, unsportsmanlike play, fatigue, etc., can work for them. There is always an advantage in a disadvantage. Train your players to find it.

## **STEP FIVE**

### **HAVE A SENSE OF HUMOR AND USE IT**

The surest way to get your player to tighten up and play poorly is by being too serious. Peak performance comes out of having fun. You play your very best when you are enjoying the competition; regardless of the level. By using humor as a coach, you can help your player stay loose, keep the game in perspective and perform like champions. A player that is too serious is a player who has a tendency to choke under pressure.

## **STEP SIX**

### **PROVIDE A PERSPECTIVE FOR YOUR PLAYERS TO UNDERSTAND**

If you make the competition bigger than life your player performances will suffer. If the match is built up too much, or if that must win situation becomes too important, then chances are you will not get a good game from your team. Helping them handle a highly pressured situation. A player that chokes or makes mistakes usually have lost their perspective and made the competition much too valuable.

## **STEP SEVEN**

### **USE DIFFERENT TYPES OF SIMULATION DAILY**

Practice does not make perfect; perfect practice makes perfect. It's the quality of your practices that is ultimately responsible for how much your player get from practice tune and how well they handle highly pressured situations. Integrate competitive elements into your practices to help your player better adjust to the actual pressure of the game day. The more your practices resemble competitions, the less chance your athletes will have of falling apart under pressure. If your athletes have trouble with bad calls, sure playing conditions, being down early, etc., simulate these elements as closely as possible in your practices.

## **STEP EIGHT**

### **CREATE A GO-FOR-IT ATMOSPHERE WITH YOUR PLAYERS AND DO NOT LOOK BACKWARDS**

In practice create an atmosphere of nothing to lose or free to fail. When your players are not concerned about making mistakes, they will perform their best in training and matches. If your players are worried about messing up, they will be distracted enough and tight enough to mess indeed up. Encourage your players to let their mistakes go immediately and to focus on what they want to have happened, not what they are afraid will happen. Reward mistakes when an athlete has indeed gone for it when they have given a winning effort. If you can teach your athletes to become oblivious to failure and mistakes

(i.e., that they learn from them and that they are useful only for feedback on how to improve), then they will perform well for you.

## **STEP NINE**

### **SEPARATE YOUR PLAYERS SELF-WORTH FROM THEIR PERFORMANCE**

At every level of play, players get stressed out when they attach their self-worth to the quality of their performance (i.e., "I played well so. Therefore, I am a winner", "I was awful, and therefore I am a not a real person"). You set the tone for this in how you coach and interact to your athletes. Do not make the mistake of equating their performance with how you feel about them. If you do not make this separation, then they will not be able to understand, and their performance will suffer. If your ego is on the line every time you compete, you have a lot to lose. When you play with a lot to lose, you will most likely get stressed out and play poorly.

## **STEP TEN**

### **CHALLENGE YOUR PLAYERS, DON'T THREATEN THEM**

When a player or their team is threatened with consequences should they not perform well, they will consistently fall apart when the game is on the line. Threats only serve to distract the player from the task at hand and get them to worry about the consequences for failure. Focusing on the what if's of losing is the last thing you want your athletes to do before and during an important game. Instead, challenge them. Give them the message, which is implicit in any problem that you think that they can do it, that you believe in them. Players will most frequently rise to your challenges and respond poorly or inconsistently to your threats.

## **STEP ELEVEN**

### **FOCUS YOUR PLAYERS FOR A HIGHER LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE UNDER PRESSURE**

Most stress-related performance problems are a direct result of faulty concentration. The player that gets easily psyched out or intimidated does so because they are focusing on the wrong things (i.e., the actual or imagined prowess of the other player or team). Help your athletes concentrate on specifically what they have to do to play well. Teach them to control their eyes and ears, to only look at, or listen to things that keep them composed and performing their best.