

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

## **Pre-Match Psyching Up Your Players to Prepare for Their Match Play**

### **INTRODUCTION**

What you say or don't say to your players just before big meets can either make or break their training and your efforts as a coach. Follow these guidelines to maximize your athletes' potential and to increase your effectiveness as a coach.

### **STEP ONE**

#### **BEGIN PRE-MATCH PSYCHING THE FIRST DAY OF THE SEASON**

Mental toughness training should not be a crisis intervention thing. Teach your players to focus, block out distractions, rebound from mistakes and to handle pressure right from the start. You have coached them to prepare them for this match in your daily training session usually based on a scouting report so have them focus on the tactical approach for competition success.

### **STEP TWO**

#### **TEACH THE ATHLETE HOW TO CONCENTRATE**

Concentration is the heart of pre-game psyching and peak performance. It is the foundation of mental toughness. Concentration is the ability to focus in on what is important and block out everything else. You teach it by showing two mini-skills: Recognize when you are drifting from a proper focus. Catch yourself and quickly, and gently, bring yourself back to that performance center.

### **STEP THREE**

#### **DON'T ACCUSE YOUR ATHLETES OF NOT CONCENTRATING**

Every player concentrates before the performance. The issue is on what? If your players choke or fall apart, then they were concentrating, but on the wrong things. Don't tell your players, to focus unless you follow that by exactly what you want them to concentrate on during the match in their playing a role in attack and defense.

### **STEP FOUR**

#### **INTEGRATE CONCENTRATION PRACTICE INTO DAILY WORKOUTS**

Get your players to regularly practice developing an awareness of when they start to drift from a proper focus and getting themselves back. Throughout practice routinely call their awareness to this mental skill.

### **STEP FIVE**

#### **TEACH AN AWARENESS OF THE MIND/BODY CONNECTION**

Help your players understand that the main difference between their best and worst performances has to do with their pre-performance self-talk and thoughts. That what they think goes into their bodies and can tighten their muscles and rot them of their coordination, reflexes, and speed.

## **STEP SIX**

### **TEACH THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PRACTICE AND MATCH MENTALITY**

Peak performance is about trusting and letting the performance happen. The player is not thinking and is on automatic utilizing effortless effort. Poor performance is about doubting, over-thinking, analyzing, evaluating and trying too hard.

## **STEP SEVEN**

### **THE DAY OF THE MATCH REMIND YOUR PLAYERS THEY ARE READY, HAVE BEEN PREPARE, AND SHOULD JUST RELAX AND LET THEIR PERFORMANCE SPEAK FOR ITSELF**

You accomplish this by giving them one or two specific things to focus on for the event. By narrowing concentration is a task in attack and defense, providing the player to have better chance to slip into an automatic meet mentality.

## **STEP EIGHT**

### **ALERT WHAT YOUR PLAYERS MUST DO THEY HAVE TO DO AND NOT EMOTIONALLY SELF DESTRUCT**

This kind of self-talk will signal you, the coach, that your player is about to self-destruct into trying too hard rather than have a feeling of understanding what they need to do and not panic emotionally.

## **STEP NINE**

### **SHARE TWO MAIN CAUSES OF PLAYERS STRESS**

Players can self-talk about their match competition coming up, the crowd they play for or have to play against, the pressure of competition and their coaching staff or even a family member, etc. Focus on the uncontrollable for peace of mind and heart before the contest begins (i.e., past events, meets, winning, losing, opponents' skill level, parents, match conditions, etc.).

## **STEP TEN**

### **TEACH YOUR PLAYERS TO FOCUS PRE-MATCH ON THE ONE THING THEY CAN CONTROL**

Your players can always learn to control themselves when in reaction to all the other uncontrollable aspects of the way the game may go for 90 minutes against unknown opponents.

## **STEP ELEVEN**

### **TEACH THEYOUR PLAYERS THE HERE & NOW RULE FOR PEAK MATCH PERFORMANCE**

You will better handle stress and avoid psych-outs if you can mentally learn to stay in the here and now of the performance. Negative past thoughts will bring you down, and uncontrollable future thoughts of

the outcome will do the same. The player only has mental and physical power, speed, quickness and control in the here and now. What time is it when you compete? The now. What place is it? The here.

## **STEP TWELVE**

### **TEACH YOUR PLAYERS HOW TO CONTROL THEIR EYES AND EARS**

Focus visually only on those things that keep you calm, composed and confident. Listen only to those things that do the same for you. If a focus makes you uptight, deliberately switch to something neutral or calming.

## **STEP THIRTEEN**

### **ENCOURAGE YOUR PLAYERS TO HAVE PRE-MATCH RITUALS OR ROUTINE THEY DO**

Help the player develop a ritual that is controllable, easy to repeat and compact. The ritual can then help the player both control their eyes and ears and stay in the here and now of the performance. Rituals also help athletes bind anxiety because they are familiar and can be done no matter where the athlete competes.

## **STEP FOURTEEN**

### **ENCOURAGE YOUR PLAYERS TO COMPETE AGAINST THEMSELVES TO RISE TO A HIGHER LEVEL OF MATCH PERFORMANCE**

Focusing on having to beat another competitor (an uncontrollable) usually stresses the player out. Instead, focus the player on competing against themselves, or trying to do better than their best, no one else's.

## **STEP FIFTEEN**

### **ASSIST YOUR PLAYERS TO FOCUS ON WHAT THEY WANT TO HAVE HAPPEN IN THE MATCH IN THEIR PLAYING ROLES**

Winners see what they want to have happened before the performance; while losers have a tendency to pay attention to what they are afraid will happen. Encourage the player to change channels if their stress causes them to worry about the what-ifs. Have them practice seeing the outcome and performance that they want.