

GSM International Coaching Education Articles for Developing Your Players

THREE KEY POINTS FOR YOU THE COACH ARE CALLED 'ZONE' CATEGORIES YOUR PLAYERS ARE SUBJECT TOO

INTRODUCTION

The zone is an experienced player get when everything they do seems effortless. They allow themselves to be the player that performs well and allow their subconscious mind to go on auto pilot. The player goes through the moment of the game is not thinking what could go wrong, who's in the crowd, or will I get subbed from the match? Instead, they are in the game zone.

When players are in this zone, the match goes by quickly. They play so well that they may forget what happens during the match or the amount of time that has gone by. This is because the experience was almost unreal and perfect for them to perform. The best players do this often. They trust in their abilities and let things flow for them in the game. You see it at the professional level. If the player has to overthink about what they are doing, they cannot naturally react right and responsibility, and the zone cannot be achieved.

THREE MASTER KEYS TO ENTERING THE ZONE

Key #1 - Physiology

Physiology is how you use your body. How you breathe. How you move. How you warm up. Body created chemicals are released by the brain which is directly related to how you use your body. Your body position, how you breathe, will dictate the types of chemical your brain releases. This is important because when people are confident they have almost a sure walk or swagger. The shoulders are back, the head is up, with deep breathing. Taking this concept, we can then ask a soccer player, ***"How do you feel when you are playing your best, what does it feel like in your body?"***

In preparation to enter the zone the player must access those movements and positions, so that when they move in this way, they start firing off signals to their brain, saying, ***"Hey, today's the day, and I'm going to perform as I did when I was in the zone."*** The way player moves will in some respects, dictate whether or not a player performs or practices well.

Physiology and how you move is something that is beyond just game day. The player should feel confident all the time. When the player thinks about an upcoming match, they put themselves in a certain physiology. A player is asked, think of a team that you know you can beat. The player will have their shoulders back, their head nodding saying, ***"I know we can beat them!"***

Then the player is asked, ***"Think of the team that's number one in your conference."*** Their physiology will change. They may become nervous and show signs of anxiety. Their breathing may change. Become shallower and more rapid. The situation can be altered if the player has the confidence to know that they, the opponent, may be good, but we are going to find a way to beat them. This strategy can be used the week of the game.

I remember watching the end of a kickoff. Both teams scored four goals. So, it came down to the last two guys. One went up confidently and put his ball in the back of the net rather easily. The next guy

walked up, head down, and physically looking like he had already lost. To make a long story short, his attempt went wide left, not even close to being a goal. One thing to note is that his physiology then affected his thinking and his internal images which affected his performance.

Key #2-Positive Self-Talk

As you can see, these three keys are all interrelated. When the player places them in a negative physiology, the self-talk is usually negative. The statement may be, **"I hope we can win, we'll try and win today." Or they may ask, "Do you think I can cover my man? That player is fast enough!" Or, "I hope I don't blow the game for us today."** The words hope and try all negative suggestions to the mind because they bring up doubt and bring up things that the athlete doesn't want to happen.

The key is to replace the words like **"hope" and "try" with "know" and "will."** **The player should say, "I know I'll beat my man today." A goalie may say, "I am shutting down this team today!" "My defense is solid, and I anticipate everything!" A midfielder can say, "I have great control of the ball, and am controlling the game today."** Even though mistakes will occur, believe in what you can do by giving your body and mind these suggestions, allowing your body to respond the way you want rather than in a negative way.

In developing **self-talk**, the player must realize that they talk to themselves. Most players don't. The average player has 50 to 60 thousand thoughts a day. Research says that 90 percent of those occur the day before. If you do the same thing day after day, those feelings don't change. If they are negative, those ideas will continue the entire life of the person.

To change your thoughts, the first thing is to be aware of their inner dialogue. Notice the difference between when the player is happy and feeling good and what they say to themselves. The player should think about it. With the same concept, the player should be asked, **"What do you say to yourself when you make a mistake?"**

There will be major differences between the two. They need to be taught that when they start to say a negative phrase, they should stop and say, **"That's not true" and finish with a positive suggestion. An example would be when a defender lets the other team get behind them, and they score. Something might come into the defender's head may be, "man I am terrible." Or "I always cost us the game!" The defender needs to be taught to say, "forget it, I'm turning this game around right now." "I always bounce back stronger after making a mistake."** The next thing the defender needs to do immediately changes their body position (physiology). This is how the two works together.

Another thing that can be done is to write affirmations. Phrases that allow the player to start programming their mind and create focus importantly. Simple things like, **"I'm a great consistent striker, and I'm confident, positive and a team player."** These phrases can be put on a 3x5 card and put in a notebook, or placed in their room where they see it and repeat it day after day. It should be related to what they think about themselves and what they want to become.

Key #3-Visualization

This is the aspect of zone training that most players are familiar. We all as humans visualize throughout each day, and you may not even be aware of this process. Visualization is the best way to preprogram for success in actions in future events, and this can happen in soccer training and match results. The best

time to visualize is right before going to sleep. This is the time to play the scenario that the player wants to have happened in the game. It may include what the opponent will do in trying to win.

The player thinks of how they and their teammates should respond positively to the challenges of the games. If visualization is performed before the game, it should be done well before the game because when you put yourself into what is in a state necessary for viewing process to take place, the body becomes very relaxed. This in itself is good, but not if the player is not used to it before a competition. This is an individual thing that players must be aware could happen.

Another good time to visualize is upon waking up in the morning. This is the fastest way of changing any behavior and learning new strategies. An example is a player working on beating their man off the ball and scoring. The player should visualize the match experience go through their mind starting with ten times and keep repeating it until the skill is mastered.

Another situation is before the game and the images that a player might have, whether they are a negative or positive outcome. If the player is not confident about the chance of winning the game, this puts the player in a negative physiological state which will create negative self-talk which creates a negative outlook on the images of the game. This creates negative feelings, and until you change the self-talk, images or the physiology, the player's performance will suffer, and the opportunity of entering the zone will be lost. An additional negative factor is that the player will take the rest of the team down with them, depending on their leadership role. The good news is that if you change one factor, you change them all. A great place to start is self-talk. The player may feel that they are going to have a tough time, but if the player says, **"No way, we have the best staff and most difficult strikers in the league, we can find a way to pull this out."** This changes everything. This is the breakthrough that coaches should look for players to experience.